



PRAYER

AS NATURAL AS BREATHING

Miguel Díez

Editorial Remar

CONTENTS

Index

Dedication

Foreword

Prologue

Chapter 1: Prayer, What Does that Mean?

Chapter 2: Prayer, Why Would I Do That?

Chapter 3: Prayer, How Do I Do That?

Chapter 4: Prayer, But Who Is Listening?

Chapter 5: Prayer But When, How And For Who?

Chapter 6: Prayer Means Contrition And Confession.

Chapter 7: Prayer Works Best With A Lowered, Patient And Joyful Heart.

Chapter 8: Prayer As Intercession With Tears And Groans.

Chapter 9: Prayer To Lament, Complain And Find Relief.

Chapter 10: Prayer Is God's Appointed Way Of Asking.

Chapter 11: Prayer Like This Gets God's Personal Attention.

Chapter 12: Prayer As Warfare In The Highest Place.

Epilogue

© New International Version Bible - UK Version
Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicized, NIV® Copyright ©
1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®

© New Kings James Version

DEDICATION

As one who loves God with all his heart, I know that everything that I do in my life I must do for him. This being my continual desire, it gives me great joy to dedicate this book with all reverence and sincere devotion to the Master, Jesus. He alone is the perfect Rabbi or teacher, and he has given me a lifelong banquet of his presence, nourishing me with his own flesh and blood and working hard in my soul to make me more like him. He has allowed me to be his messenger and spokesman, and as such it is his own holy and altogether wise life that is filled these few pages, to make them part of his tree of life for mankind.

It would be quite wrong not to also dedicate the spiritual fruit which you will find generously spread throughout these studies of God's word, to the Holy Spirit. It has only been through His inspiration that I have been able to recognise and discern the Body of Christ on earth, and for this reason I want to honour Him as the giver of all the beautiful fragrances and tastes you will discover as you enjoy this book.

As in all my previous books, it gives me great pleasure to dedicate every one of them to the entire human race in the sincere hope that many people will be enriched in holiness as they read. The dedication of these words continues as an expression of my love and service to all my fellow servants in Remar and the network of churches known simply as The Body of Christ. Allow me to make mention of the many pastors who have faithfully remained at my side through an endless list of the joys and difficulties that we have lived through until this very day, to the glory of the Lord.

My hope is that we shall be together in the marriage supper of the Lamb as part of his bride. This will be my ongoing prayer until the very end of my days in this life, and in the meantime I live counting on the ever present help of God and the help of your prayers which I esteem very highly.

As an expression of my gratitude, may I take a moment to dedicate these pages of holy incense to my wife for the considerable effort she has made to turn my handwriting into type, and also to Ramón Ubillos, pastor and

my faith editor for the time that he has sacrificed putting these words together. Our two printers, Peter and John surely deserve an honourable mention because in the face of an imminent deadline, they pulled out all the stops to have the first Spanish version of this book ready on time. My prayer is that the Lord will cause his own fragrance to overflow into their lives as his reward for the sacrifices they have made.

Finally, how could I ever forget to pass on my thanks and dedicate this book to all of the many people who have strengthened my life by praying for me to have the grace to write these words. My prayers are also for you.

FOREWORD

By Dr Les Norman, the founder of the worldwide DCI Schools of Mission network in 1984, and the Chairman of The DCI Foundation in the UK.

One of the most frequently quoted verses of the Bible from pulpit and platform is when the disciples of Jesus ask him to teach them how to pray. Only they didn't say that.

Having overheard Jesus talking to his Father in heaven as if they were friends conversing face to face, and not long afterwards having listened to Jesus as he raised his voice and commanded death, demons and disease to leave which they promptly did, these awestruck friends of Jesus looked the Lord in the eye and said, "Teach us to pray."

As good and true as this book certainly is, at the end of the day you and I will learn to pray in one way alone and that is by asking for the help of the Holy Spirit, closing the door and praying. Then later on praying some more on the other side of the door where the people are, and then praying some more and some more, until suddenly you realise that prayer has become as instinctive and natural to you as breathing.

This book is no academic thesis on the matter of prayer and for sure, neither is it a dry Bible Study on the virtues of prayer. No-one writes a book like the one you have in your hands unless they have learned to pray by praying and have seen at first-hand all that comes about as a consequence.

Many years ago, when I had been a believer for no more than a week or so I was invited to a meeting for prayer which began at 10 o'clock in the evening, which I thought strange, but then again everything about Jesus was new to me so I went. After I had prayed for myself, my family, my work, the city and the whole world and could find no more words to say, I looked at my wristwatch and saw that only ten minutes had passed by. A

little while later as sleep beckoned, I whispered to my friend who was sat beside me and asked him what time the meeting finished. "Six o'clock," he whispered back. As the only six o'clock I could think of had gone by some five hours earlier, I deduced that he could only mean the six o'clock that would come the next morning in about seven hours time.

Let me tell you that by the time dawn streamed through the windows I had been changed forever. In fact, for all the time I spent in the atmosphere of prayer that night and in many others like it, God has returned to me and to my life a hundred-fold more than anything I could have reasonably asked for, expected or imagined.

It may be for you that the journey is only just starting and ten minutes in prayer feels like a really long time, just as it did for me on that Friday night in 1977. Here's my advice, don't worry about the 'how,' just say to the Lord, "Teach me to pray," and he will. By the time you say your final 'Amen' a lifetime later, your own life as well as your family, work, church, mission and the world will be a better place for ever.

And by the way, this book is one of the best. I translated it from the original Spanish and I couldn't wait to turn the next page and the next. I have known the author and his wife since 1984 and I can promise you this: What he says he has first lived and what he has prayed for has happened, and very much more as well.

Les Norman.

www.dci.org.uk

On Facebook: The DCI Page

PROLOGUE

it is not difficult to discover from the Scriptures that Jesus Christ gave no time to teaching his disciples how to preach, nor how to open churches or do many other things that we consider to be holy or important. It soon becomes clear that time and time again Jesus devoted considerable time to teaching about prayer, but not only that, he made prayer his own personal practice, his own life bearing testimony to the importance he attached to prayer.

For Jesus it was completely normal to pray with his followers as they face many different circumstances, and beyond that he often chose to be alone and far from everybody else in order to pray. We can read how he spent entire nights alone on the mountainsides, seeking that intimate relationship with his Father which only comes through prayer filled with

passionate love and devotion. His obedience found its source in the revelation that came through prayer.

It was through prayer that Christ engaged in the spiritual warfare against Satan and all the powers of darkness that serve their master, and through prayer Jesus always overcame their works and strategies. He was not afraid of using the authority that came through the word of God in prayer, nor did he hold back from interceding for all of his disciples, recognising them as his own. Jesus prayed for Israel and for all mankind.

From Christ's own teaching, we can easily see the priority and the tremendous relevance that he gave to prayer, which in fact is reflected throughout the Bible from start to finish. Before any display of the grace and blessing of God, there has always been prayer whether from kings, judges, prophets or from the people of God crying out for help. Many has been the time that people have had to suffer the consequences of their rebellion and their straying from the covering of the Almighty as they have gone off in pursuit of their own foolish lusts. In doing so men always reap a harvest of torment from the devil and this world.

Returning to the positive, if we are going to exult and to acclaim the greatness of our Father God for the greatness of his holiness in power, then prayer is absolutely indispensable. Likewise we have many reasons to be grateful for his infinite mercy and goodness, and for the displays of his glory which have been poured upon us in answer to our prayers. How many times has the world been blessed by the rivers of living water which, proceeding from God's own lips, have watered the dry lives of the people of God and his chosen nation.

Truthfully, if we were to love the Lord and were to be more intelligent and humble than we actually are, then we would have raised a permanent altar of prayer in our lives and offered ourselves on it day by day. If we are going to burn for Christ then let it be through the heat of prayer which produces smoke like incense, rising like a welcome fragrance to enter into the very heart of our Father.

Let it be through prayer that our lives speak to God and in return hear his sweet response in holy conversation, allowing us to praise him with joy and worship him in moments of glorious ecstasy. Through prayer we see that his beauty can be filled with the immense and unfailing love that he has for us. We breathe in his life-giving breath, we fly with his wings, we eat together with him at the same table and receive from his own hand. We rest in his arms in complete peace and with not a whisper of fear until he takes us on to participate shoulder to shoulder with him in the working

of just some of the infinite number of miraculous interventions that he regularly does.

As members of his glorious Body and as instrument set apart for his use, obedient to his will, he allows us to work together with him in delivering people out of their distresses, in healings, miracles and best of all in seeing many new illuminations of darkened souls. What a joy it is to experience a kind of maternity together with Christ, as if the new believers are born from our own innermost beings as precious spiritual babies, the newborns that Christ gives life to everyday to add them to the eternal family of God.

On the other hand, for those of us who pray we soon begin to experience a depth of pain which comes from understanding how Satan has seduced a whole multitude of followers. It is dreadful to see how many of them engage in frequent ritualistic prayer and go through the rites and ceremonies of a variety of ancient religions which have their origins in Babylon of old. Very many are the fanatics amongst them who persevere for a lifetime invoking and worshipping false gods bringing down upon their sacrifices a dreadful ancient fire which has led all too many into shedding their own blood even to the point of burning themselves alive. Worse still they may turn to the indiscriminate massacre of all others whom they consider to be unfaithful to the terrifying god they serve.

While all of this is happening and often reported in the press, it is sad to see how very few men and women dedicate themselves as real worshippers and intercessors before the one true living God. In this sad reality they fulfil the prophetic affirmation of Christ when he explained the parable of the great banquet when all of those who were invited to the occasion made their excuses and declined to attend. As we can read in Matthew 22:14, many are called but few are chosen.

And what about you, my dear reader? Will you allow yourself to be chosen by the Lord to be separated from this world and fully belong to him? Will you allow the Lord to fill you with his love and to grow into it, until you love him with all of your heart, all of your soul and all of your strength? Will you allow yourself to become a living "most holy place," because only then will you truly experience intimate communion with Christ? It is there that you will learn to pray, and you will pray and enormously enjoy yourself by doing so. Is this not many times better than considering prayer to be no more than a tiresome and boring religious practice?

When Jesus compared the different attitudes of Martha and Mary, he left us with a superb example that can be found in Luke 10:41-42. We meet Martha who is upset because of the amount of work that she thinks she

has to do to make the Lord comfortable and happy. In fact all that she is doing is trying to satisfy her own mind and earn her own merits, which is exactly what happens with all proud religious people. Every one of them endeavours through their own legalistic activities which of course are never sufficient, to increase their own dignity and renown, which inevitably leads to conceit.

On the other hand, Mary chooses to sit at the feet of Jesus, totally content to touch him and listen to him. She is in an idyll of pure romanticism and Jesus leaves us with the very clear idea that it is Mary that has chosen the better part. He wants us to seriously reflect upon where we are ourselves and face up to our continual tendency to be more of a Martha than a Mary, at least this is true in my own case.

It is not true that what we actually do seems to be more tangible, valuable and give us more satisfaction, in fact as banal and deceiving as it is, we may like to have the starring role. The work of the Lord is often a bit more mysterious, and in full contrast, sad though it is, our own works are only destined to be burned in the fire, receiving no more consideration from God than the contents of a rubbish bin. Outside of God the work of our hands only leads to loss whilst all the building up done by the Holy Spirit to bring the will of Christ to pass, is never less than glorious and indestructible.

Jesus himself confirms this when he says in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

To keep the balance, let me say that it is never advisable unless the Lord particularly instructs us in this, to adopt a life which is wholly mystical and leaves behind any practical works of love. If we do that we run the risk of killing our faith by which we are called to live in a spiritual balance between being a Martha and a Mary, yet through prayer we give clear priority to our communion with the Lord himself, first and foremost.

Having taken this fundamental principle on board, we then apply to all the different areas of service that the Lord calls us to give mankind. We have recovered, adopted and placed at the top of all of our rules for life and living, one of the most widely employed sayings of the first followers of Christ: "*Ora et labora.*" Having embraced this responsibility to pray and to work we now teach all of our believers that prayer is the principal subject to learn if we are going to grow spiritually and be of the greatest possible blessing to the people around us that God brings across our paths.

Apart from this, through our prayer and work we will bring the greatest possible amount of pleasure to our Lord. Beyond that, we may be completely sure that if only all the people who are engaged with evangelism would learn to pray and persevere in prayer, then the Lord would provide everything we and they need, however impossible this might seem to be.

Out of all the works of faith and love that we have to constantly do for each other, the best one of all is to pray, because our words become a highway for the Almighty and Merciful God to come to our help. It is the strength and illumination of God that will establish and prosper us, and provide us with the protection and continual blessing that we need, enabling us to live with joy in perfect freedom. Then we can bless the people around us and be a blessing to the Lord himself.

It is my continual request to our heavenly Father that he will give me more and more strength in prayer, and now this is my prayer for you as well, my dear reader. Let me also ask God to be always at your side and to allow you to become aware of his sweet presence as you sense the fragrance of the holiness that is Him. May God himself guide you into true communion with him through the prayers of the Holy Spirit as he moves in you, and makes you into one more of the golden incense carriers that our one and only high priest, Jesus Christ, has strategically placed in the middle of this world of pain and loss.

In this way you will be able to be fully part of the glorious cloud of incense that surrounds the throne of God, calling upon him for the day when his justice and anger with sin is poured upon this world. It will also be your privilege to work with Christ in bringing about spiritual victories against the rulers of this world and the powers of darkness behind them, as you weaken their conspiracies and arguments to bring freedom to a multitude of spiritually enslaved and oppressed peoples whom Satan has trapped in his horrendous prison houses. It will be your prayers that break different diabolical bondages into pieces and allow those who are escaping their grip to join the flock of the Good Shepherd. Through prayer, the kingdoms of darkness and deceit are ruined and instead the kingdom of God and his justice will be increasingly established across all the earth, according to Ephesians 3:14-19:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

In closing, join with me if you will, in taking prayer seriously and God will do the same with us as we pray.

Miguel Diez, the author.

CHAPTER ONE

Prayer, What Does that Mean?

The one true living God is personal, even to the point of identifying himself with us by becoming as human as we are. He took upon himself all of our disgrace and guilt as if it were his own, with the intention of protecting us from all the terrible consequences that should come our way. For all the evildoing that we have committed, it was God himself who chose to take the death penalty instead of us, and beyond that eternal death as the full and deserved punishment for our wilful disobedience to his revealed holy and divine justice.

In the stories of Greek mythology, it is said that the imaginary gods of Mount Olympus used to fight amongst themselves to gain the right to interact with the human race and even adopt human personality. The old stories tell of how they would have children with the women that they would choose, and these offspring would be born with the hybrid nature of a demigod. The fractious relationships that followed between father and sons have been the stuff of every kind of classical tragedy with stories of that belong in the realms of fantasy, yet find their place in any amount of rancid philosophy and absurd theology.

In this way and in many others too, the powers of darkness have managed to portray the gods as unreachable, impersonal and whimsical with the intention of robbing mankind of any hope of ever being able to identify or have free communication with them. Satan has never wanted to allow men and women to enjoy the benefits of widespread supernatural powers which might allow them to find an escape from their human and earthly miseries. Instead Satan has provided a substitute of religious incantations and false promises.

In sharp contrast, our Father God is so personal that his overwhelming desire is to be a part of our lives as Father, Mother, Brother and a perfect friend who longs to engage with us in an intimate communion at the deepest possible level. So that he can be one with us in his pure love, with all sincerity and plain speaking he has shown us a very simple way to be able to fulfil our own part in the relationship. In this family affair he wants to be close to us, strengthening and maturing us and shaping us into an unbreakable intimacy which in the end will make us one with Him for all eternity.

This very simple way is through living prayer to one who is called the Living Word and it is not difficult to become one with Christ as we pray. The beat of his heart becomes the heartbeat in our chest as we begin to share in his holy desires and begin a romance which is pure and never-ending between two people who become increasingly and passionately in love with each other. This is how Jesus deals with all of his beloved followers who together are known as the bride that he has chosen, otherwise known as the Church which is built and sanctified for him, to be his own family. We will be inseparable from him for all eternity and it will be to the Church that he grants the privilege of reigning together with him in the government of his Kingdom. Knowing this, how could we ever find a way of pleasing our beloved unless we talk with him through prayer, a sentiment that Proverbs 15:8 expresses very well:

*The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked,
but the prayer of the upright pleases him.*

So now we understand that prayer is a holy communication with God, and more than that it is a continual conversation as we speak to him and then listen to what he has to say to us. As we open our soul to him, he fills us with his own pure thoughts and the wisdom from his own mind having total confidence that we will take care of all that we hear. He keeps no secret from us and we consider him to be our perfect confidant, which makes it easy for us to be totally sincere and transparent before him. It would not just be absurd to hide things from him but also an impossibility because God cannot be deceived and nothing is hidden from his eyes. This however would never be our thinking because we have surrendered ourselves, our heart and our will to him without any conditions whatsoever, coming to him just as we are trusting in his perfect and eternal love that will never fail us.

You already know how two lovers burn with desire for each other as they talk and listen together, and this is just how it should be in our own engagement with the Lord. The truth is that he wants to hear our voice

and speak with us in return; there is so much to talk about with him and even more to hear from him. There are no known depths to his wisdom, but we must always remember that one of the fundamental purposes of prayer is the ongoing courtship of the two lovers, as both declare to each other their mutual admiration, gratitude and surrender. Both long to be spiritually hugged, kissed and caressed, and the word of God in Song of Songs 1:4 gives us the idea:

Take me away with you - let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers. We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine. How right they are to adore you!

Three verses later in Song of Songs 1:7, the bride asks:

Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep at midday. Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?

In our School of Discipleship in Madrid, we consider prayer to be the most important of all the subjects across all the different courses. We handle prayer as if it were a direct telephone line with God himself, a free call number that is open 24 hours a day with an infinite number of different connections which means there is never an engaged tone or a poor signal. In a manner of speaking, we can understand that through Jesus, God has given us the revelation of his own personal number because in the Hebrew language every letter has a numerical equivalent; just be aware that the writing is back to front.

For example, the word Yshvah-Jeshua has the following numerical values: 10-300-6-70, and if we add them together in a typical rabbinic style we have 386. Add 3, 8 and 6 together and you have 17, now add the 1 and 7 together to make 8, which is understood from ancient times to denote the forthcoming eighth day when God will bring into being his new and eternal world. Through prayer this is what we are working towards and on that day we shall be there together with Jesus. On that day prayer will be changed into the most wonderful conversation between a Father and his children, talking together as perfect friends. Prayer then, is the number that we need to dial every time we need to hear the Lord because only as we are one with Jesus do we gain the ear of our Father, as John 14:6 and 14:13 confirms:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Naturally, we are not talking about using his name as if it were a magic formula or religious ritual, if we were to do this it will only show that we have not yet understood the spirit of Christ's teaching. The whole idea is that we become one with the Lord in his own intercession which is an expression of his will, the only will which is worthy of being honoured by our Father God. When this happens God always gives a positive response to the prayer, as John 15:7 explains to us:

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

To pray then, is to release cascades of living water from our lips which first of all bring life to our own selves and then flow onwards to satisfy the thirst of mankind and even refresh the face of God. Christ for us is never less than a fresh spring of living water for our lives, and through his Holy Spirit he pours out a never-ending stream of God-given fruits and gifts, according to his own promise in John 7:38:

Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

Prayer is the pure incense of all the saints, a fragrance that rises and can never be stopped until the whole throne of God is bathed in our words, which then enter into God's own heart. By our words he is moved, stirred and motivated to display his mercy and power together with his infinite and many-sided grace. He brings about supernatural changes, resolves impossible situations and brings a revolutionary and fair wisdom to both heaven and earth. Through prayer God touches individuals and nations, he puts his finger upon governments and economies and brings them into line with his own perfect plan which in the end will accomplish its original design and bring in his eternal reign of justice.

He has chosen us to be part of his procession through history and his infinite love and overflowing generosity towards us is a continual confirmation of this. He sees us as his active co-workers and it pleases him to give us many a delegated divine responsibility, one of which is the priestly role. Only this time it is we ourselves who are the sacrifice and it is our lives that are altars upon which we burn for Christ and his Kingdom. You soon discover that intercession is a spiritual activity which can easily consume all of your energy and leave you exhausted, nevertheless in intercession you launch yourself into the heavens like a rising cloud of incense. Your prayer is a fragrance which is pleasing to the Lord and the most effective means of working together with him. As our lives sacrificially burn on the altar we become one with him in the outworking of his perfect will.

Exodus 30:34-38 says this:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take fragrant spices—gum resin, onycha and galbanum—and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the Ark of the Covenant in the tent of meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the Lord. Whoever makes incense like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from their people."

We can learn from these verses that our prayers have certain components which represent spiritual values. The priests in the Old Testament would minister to God in the physical temple using what was known as sacred incense which was made from various ingredients. Gum resin which is Nataph in the Hebrew language symbolises faith. The recipe only calls for a drop or a pinch of this spice, because that is all that is required to release the wonders of God, but nevertheless when it comes to prayer, faith, if only a drop, is absolutely indispensable.

Onycha from the Hebrew word Sh'helet is a mysterious ingredient whose name comes from the imagery of a claw that grips, which symbolises the courage that we need to be in the presence of God. The Bible tells us that not a few people have been stricken for entering God's immediacy wrongly, not least the 3000 that died at the foot of Mount Sinai when the Eternal God displayed his glory on the day that is known as the first Pentecost. They were told not to come close but they did, trying to imitate Moses who alone had permission.

Aromatic galbanum or Helb'nach in Hebrew, is a kind of medicinal balsam for the soul, giving us the idea that there is no greater inner healing for any of us than to be able to unburden ourselves in the presence of our merciful God. Galbanum is a kind of viscous liquid, something like teardrops which symbolises the pain that is always present in love. Suffering is never very far away and this ingredient soaks into the incense to make this holy ointment all the more precious.

Now it is time to add in an exact amount of pure incense, Lebonah in Hebrew, which is a white substance that is extracted from trees in Arabia and Africa. Frankincense symbolises the holiness of God which in this case is heard through the clean motivation behind the prayers which come from a soul that has been purified inside and out through genuine repentance. Once this has happened the heart of a man or a woman is clean, having been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ and instinctively

the person will now hate sin. The work of the Old Testament priests pointed towards this blessing purity because they would only burn the incense in the temple after having offered the sacrificial lamb each morning and evening. It was their job to sprinkle the blood of the lamb upon the altar to purify it.

Now that all these ingredients are mixed together we have the incense, known as Thumiamma in Hebrew, a word which carries the meaning of lips that are pure. This incense is now ready to be burned on the altar or in the golden incense carriers which were called Tumaterion, both instruments representing the work of all of us who include sacrifice in the fulfilment of our call to a holy priesthood, in obedience to the words that we find in 1 Peter 2:4-5:

As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Isn't this such a beautiful comparison? We are called to be living altars that in God's eyes are completely covered in pure gold reflecting his holiness. We are sacrificial altars that overflow with his mercy and reconciliation and where his *Shekinah* glory is displayed in loving response to the prayers that he welcomes as the pleasing fruit of our lips. Exodus 30:1, 3 and 6 explain it well:

Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold moulding around it. Put the altar in front of the curtain that shields the ark of the covenant law, before the atonement cover that is over the tablets of the covenant law, where I will meet with you.

However, the incense carriers are made from solid gold which symbolises the exclusive divinity of God's nature in clear representation of Christ himself, who is the one and only perfect intercessor. It is Jesus on behalf of his Father who receives all our prayer requests, because it is only Christ who is wholly pleasing to God. Nevertheless, this does show us that if we are completely one with the Lord, part of his Body on earth and having totally surrendered our will to his, that we also are a holy incense carrier together with Jesus before the Father. One with him, we participate in his own prayers in the Most Holy Place there in heaven, a spiritual replacement of what we read in Hebrews 9:3-4:

Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of

the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant.

To everything we say or do, if it is truly for the Lord, we need to add the presence of incense as an indispensable ingredient to ensure that our activities or words arrive before the presence of our Father in heaven. In this way he will accept them as good, put into practice spiritually speaking, the teaching of the word of God in Leviticus 24:5-7:

Take the finest flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. Arrange them in two stacks, six in each stack, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. By each stack put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be a food offering presented to the Lord.

Jesus frequently had a way of going up the mountainside to make his sacrifice of incense to his Father. According to what we read he would spend entire nights in guileless prayer, interceding for his bride-to-be in days to come, as Song of Solomon 4:6 reveals in spiritual words:

Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense.

When the church of Christ is snatched away in the rapture before the second coming of Jesus, it will be clothed in white without spot or blemish to display the holiness it has obtained during the long waiting period as a virgin waiting to be married. During this time the bride of Christ will have given herself fully to prayer, praise and the worship of the Lord and because of this dedication she will now be soaked in the perfume of incense and myrrh, according to the prophecy we can find in Song of Songs 3:6:

Who is this coming up from the wilderness like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant?

You might know the story of Zacharias, the husband of Elizabeth, the lady who had never given birth to any children, and how when he was administering to the Lord in the temple by offering incense, he received a very unexpected visit from an angel. You can read what happened in Luke 1:15-16. The angel stood at the right hand side of the altar and delivered the most wonderful news to Zacharias, saying that God had answered his prayers for children and announcing that before long he would be a father. In fact God granted him a son who would have a very far-reaching ministry as the one who went before Jesus himself. His name was to be John, later known as John the Baptist. In the same way we will all be able

to conceive many promises and answers to prayer and have some glorious experiences, when as living incense carriers we become one with Christ in his prayers.

Nevertheless, we need to be continually aware that this formula for making incense is unique and exclusive to the ownership of the Holy Spirit. He will never allow any imitations nor any man-made, intellectual or sentimental ingredients to be used, and certainly he will never admit anything that is from the powers of darkness. If people try to do any of these things they risk a devastating curse coming upon their heads, because as we have read earlier, what we are dealing with here is something beautifully holy before God. There is the story of how the sons of Aaron were reduced to ashes by divine fire for failing to respect the uniqueness of the priestly incense. Leviticus 10:1-2 records what happened:

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

So, let us take great care that we never take the name of the Lord in vain! Let us take even more care that we never tell lies, using the name of God by saying that the Lord had said this or that, when he has never said any such thing! Take great care as well in never trying to move close to the Most High whilst contaminated with any wrongdoing, because if you do you are more likely to receive a harvest of judgement instead of the grace you are hoping for.

This is exactly what happened with a king by the name of Uzziah who was blinded by his own vanity after receiving all the blessings of God that anyone could ever imagine, in the days when he was more humble and fearful of the Lord. The story is told in 2 Chronicles 26:3-5 and 16-19:

Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jekoliah; she was from Jerusalem. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success.

But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the Lord followed him in. They

confronted King Uzziah and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honoured by the Lord God." Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the Lord's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead.

In the book of Revelation, the Lamb of God opens the book that he alone is able to open. When he removes the apocalyptic seals, he uncovers the assigned judgements that mark the final victory of the Lord and as he does so the four living creatures which are probably cherubim together with the twenty-four elders of the high council of heaven raise cups of gold. We see that these cups are filled with incense which we are told is a representation of our prayers and their prayers, and these they present to God to bring about the opening of the book and all the judgements which are written beneath the sealed pages. This act initiates the greatest catastrophe in all human history and brings about the complete downfall of the kingdom of Satan and his followers, as is clearly prophesied in Revelation 5:8-10:

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

The final act which features the golden incense carrier in heaven, takes place after the Lord opens the seventh seal which completes the judgement of God upon this world and all the demonic powers. The seventh trumpet sounds and the seven bowls of divine wrath are poured out upon the earth as a final culmination of all the prayers of believers throughout the centuries and those of Christ himself. We can read the prophecy in Revelation 8:1-5:

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, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given

much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

It is true that faith without works is dead as the word of God through the apostle James declares, and we need to accept and engage with the fact that the most important work of all is a work of love towards God and mankind. That work is prayer; it is a work that we need to practice with a holy responsibility for the length of our earthly days in a continual priestly exercising of humility and patience as well as the power of God. This was a lifelong practice of David, the King, as we can read from his writings in Psalm 141:1-2:

I call to you, Lord, come quickly to me; hear me when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

Prayer is the very breath of faith and our everyday response to the call of God that we can see in Romans 10:17:

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of God.

Knowing this, we see that prayer gives vitality to faith and becomes a living breath. Only through prayer can we breathe out our sighs and joys, our sorrows and excitements, our forgiveness and hugs and then breathe in the very breath of the Lord to receive the holy wise and loving presence of his divine nature. It is he alone who can fill us to overflowing with himself as he gives us his blessed and timely answers, as it promises to do in Psalm 81:10:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

For sure, true prayer is the releasing of God's own breath of faith and love which emerges from our inner beings where *Ruach Hakodesh*, the Lord, dwells. His breath goes forth as an unstoppable wind driving back every opposing movement and all the evil minded powers behind them, tearing down thrones and walls to open the way for the true King. His Body on earth, the Church then advances behind him, treading down opposition and taking the territory which belongs to mankind.

I am convinced by these reasons and many others that prayer is the victory march of faith and love. We can even see how through prayer we

can struggle with God and persuade him, as Jacob did at Peniel and gained not only a blessing but also a beneficial change of identity as God baptised him with the glorious name of Israel. Jacob left behind his shabby past after he struggled in violent prayer through an entire night with the Angel of Jehovah, who is the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Moses and all the prophets had similar experiences, as did many of the ancient Kings of Israel going face to face with God to plead for mercy for their nation. These men gave their own lives as a substitute for their own people, seeking to make atonement for their sins, as later on the Lord himself did in fullness to bring us into his saving and forgiving grace. We can understand from these examples from the past that to pray means to put ourselves in the middle between God and his people, with a willingness to take upon ourselves every just and fair discipline that comes from the Shepherd's rod, rather than have God's anger fall upon the souls that shelter under our protection. Think about how a mother covers her children and protects them from any threatened severity from their father and you will see how the Almighty is moved when he sees the loving, noble and brave actions that intercessors perform to protect the people in their care.

Not surprisingly, the Bible says that God earnestly seeks out men and women like this, yet finds but few amongst the multitudes of humanity. Ezekiel 22:30-31 says this:

I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign Lord.

To pray is to be bathed in the glory of God as happened to Jesus on the mountainside before the very eyes of his own favourite disciples, when he turned to prayer. The story is found in Luke 9:28-31:

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem.

Moses had the same experience many centuries earlier on Mount Sinai, on the occasion when he was given the Torah, the law of God. As the glory of

God fell upon him his appearance changed so much that he had to cover his face with a veil so that the Israelites could not see what had happened. Had they seen the brightness behind the veil, there is no doubt that they would have begun to worship Moses and turned their eyes away from God. We have the story in Exodus 34:28-29 and in verse 35:

Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. They saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord.

In reality, this was a manifestation of the glory of God that the Lord wants to display in all of our lives. It was Jesus himself who asked the Father that these things should happen and that was more than 2000 years ago. Since then it has been reliably reported by people receiving prayer, that on occasions many of the anointed ministers of Christ were seen to be surrounded by a glowing light as they ministered. Clearly, God has a holy purpose in displaying his glory in such a way that it brings his people together as one, attracting them to the light that will illuminate their souls. We can read the words of Jesus about this, in John 17:22-24:

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

Before we end this chapter would you like to pray with me? Allow me to give you the words:

Blessed Father, guide me with your spirit in my prayers and be gracious to listen to them in your mercy. It is my deepest longing that all of my words might be pleasing to you and for this to happen I need your help, now in every moment of my life for should your breath ever be removed from me I would immediately suffocate and perish. Faithful Lord, my request is that you never cease to speak to me because were you to be silent my faith would wither and die. Speak to me every day that my faith

will be strong. Speak Lord, your servant is listening and by your word my soul will live. I give you my love and my total respect because I want to do your will knowing as I do that your commands are fair and wise, and these I will seek for my own good. Thank you that I can have total confidence in your good will towards me because it is infinite. Lord how I long to love you more and more every day, recognising as I do that there is still a tremendous gap between your love for me and the love that I return to you. Grant me the ability to love you with a burning passion because truly, my only desire is to belong to you in every possible way. Make me one of those golden incense carriers together with Christ. May my life be an altar of your worship upon which I may continually burn the incense of my prayers made through your Spirit. Be pleased to use me, holy God, to throw down evil powers of darkness and to pour out your grace upon my fellow man.

Beloved Father, make of me the kind of temple that Solomon built for you. The temple that was opened with the invocation of your glorious name and saw the outpouring of your blessing as we read with eyes of wonder in 2 Chronicles 7:1-2: "When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled it."

Beautiful Jesus, bathe me in your glory and fill me with your Holy Spirit. Amen.

A Closing Thought

To pray is to shake off all the dust of this world.

CHAPTER TWO

Prayer, Why Would I Do That?

One of the most persistent attacks of the devil against our minds happens when we hear this allegation, "if God really is Omnipotent, why does he need your prayers? If God really is love, why does not he do the necessary good works himself? If only the will of God is perfect, then what is the point of asking him for anything because he is only going to do what he wants?"

The list goes on and on, in fact it becomes a liturgy of malevolent reasoning that mixes fallacies with half-truths and lies, very effective and

deadly concoctions indeed. With these he managed to seduce Eve in the Garden of Eden, and through her all of her descendants, as well as seriously diverging and dethroning her husband Adam. By listening to Eve repeat what she was hearing, Adam lost the lordship over all creation that God had granted to him.

Sometimes we do not get the motivation behind our prayers quite right; not surprisingly we do not receive the answer that we were hoping for. At times like this is not difficult to lose patience and instead of persevering in prayer, people abandon the intercession. It is precisely at this point that the evil one throws even more poison darts into our mind, wounding our thoughts and causing our hearts to be downcast. He knows that if this happens there will soon be some distance between ourselves and the Lord and it may even be that some people will go and hide themselves in dead religion, finding it more manageable than living faith. In religion there is no requirement to continually humble yourself in complete dependence upon God and his divine help. The truth is that we are like children who are incapable of helping themselves, just as the apostle James explains in his chapter 4:2-3:

You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Fundamentally, we need to pray because God is not some kind of abstract entity, neither some kind of strange energy or force, rather he is the eternal joining together of three personalities in perfect unity. His nature is one of pure love and because of this he is always looking for and desiring to have a personal relationship with his children who are also his subjects and true friends. Prayer is no more and no less than the means of communication that he has chosen to enjoy communion with us and to be able to maintain an intimate friendship with the true affection that comes from a father towards his sons and daughters. The relationship that God offers us is one of sincere fraternity and genuine friendship in a wonderful engagement leading towards the eternal marriage of the Bride of Christ with Christ himself. God would have us to be always being filled and surrounded by the glory of his Holy Spirit and to give us all the guidance that we need as well as his continual protection, consolation and joy. When all of this comes together we sense genuine happiness and satisfaction with our lives, in clear fulfilment of God's Word in Ephesians 3:17-19:

May Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

We pray because we know, because of many previous experiences, that God is far from being deaf or unhearing, as Psalm 94:9 agrees:

*Does he who fashioned the ear not hear?
Does he who formed the eye not see?*

Once we have experience God's love in any of the many ways that he shows himself to us, we begin to pray as people convinced by our faith and also by the many intimate and extraordinary encounters that we have in our relationship with the Lord. We gain the conviction that he listens to us very attentively and displays an immense interest in our lives, simply because he is our perfect Father and always longing to bless us. It is typical of God to reveal his infinite compassion to us, coming as he does in a holy and timely manner to the rescue of everyone that seeks him, as Psalm 65:2 confirms in a concise yet convincing way:

You who answer prayer, to you all people will come.

The way God shows his Omnipotence and absolute control of everything leaves me filled with awe and wonder, but is only what he has already assured us of in Isaiah 65:24:

*Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.*

It is not a difficult thing to talk with our God, which is the same as prayer. As much as we love to hear what our own loved ones have to say to us, God desires to hear our voice many times more. We can be sure that he is as displeased as we are if we are ignored because the communication between people is fundamentally the most important part of living together in a beautiful and happy relationship. The book of Song of Solomon 2:14 expresses this thought very well:

My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.

Is it not sad to see how many believers deliberately limit their personal relationship with God, preferring instead to ask their pastors to be intermediaries for them. They seem unaware of the victory and freedom that Jesus Christ won for us when he tore through the veil that previously

closed off the Most Holy Place from God's people. By doing so Jesus made the presence of God accessible for all of us, even to the point of being able to enter and speak to God face-to-face, just as Moses did in his day. Sooner or later we come to understand and to accept just how powerless and impotent we are in the face of every attack from the devil, the world and our own lustful flesh. This will be the same for every man and woman whoever lives. Nevertheless, as the Lord gives us more humility and wisdom, we come to understand our continual need of his help and guidance to be able to walk through the everyday darkness without tripping up.

Without God's help will never be able to overcome every temptation and trial, but with his help we will manage to avoid the daily suffering that the devil would torture us with. Then there is a matter of the consequences of our own mistakes and those of other people, both of which may well be costly unless our heavenly Rescuer sets us free from them. It is Christ alone who will help us to overcome our own clumsiness and incapacity as we learn to live in close communion with him through that holy conversation we call prayer.

The beauty of this is that Jesus is always willing to take us by the hand, and if needs be to even carry us on his own shoulders to comfort us and bring us back into the safety of the sheep pen, which is his holy household, all this being the work of the Good Shepherd that he is. On the longest and most painful night of his life, Jesus as a man suffered the most profound distress and only came through by praying to his Father. At the same time he left us with a clear warning which would remain valid throughout the ages, that if we would be victorious through every trial then we must learn to be vigilant and engage with prayer as he did. At the time Jesus was speaking very forthrightly to his own apostles but nevertheless having every one of us in mind, all of us who would be overcomers of evil. We find his words in Matthew 26:41:

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak

There in the Garden of Gethsemane, a name that refers to an olive oil press, the apostles fell asleep and failed to stay with the Lord in this dreadful time of personal affliction, even though he asked them to stay awake. To pray is to press the olives of God so that the all-powerful oil of his Spirit might flow, but on this occasion they failed to work hard to extract God's anointing oil. It was not long before they suffered the consequences of their sleep, some being defeated as they were challenged to confess their friendship with Christ, and none of them

seemingly ready to participate in the same martyrdom that was facing Jesus. The Bible says that they all ran away in the cowardice of the flesh, following their selfish instincts to survive, instincts that we share with both animal and vegetable life. The fact is that we are all trapped in the earliest of curses and easily denied the freedom and divine love of our Creator, which alone casts out all fear.

"This has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Matthew 26:56

I wonder if it was not the same fear that affected the 500 people who came back to life all at the same time after the resurrection of the Lord, but before his ascension, an event that we can read about in 1 Corinthians 15:6. However, only a few days later the Bible says in Acts 1:15 that only 120 people have remained faithful and these continued persevering in prayer without leaving the upper room where they met together. Clearly, they were expecting a fulfilment of the promise that the Father had given and which Christ had passed on to them, that they would be given another Comforter. They were waiting to experience his fullness and to be clothed with the power from on high, which is another way of saying to be baptised in the Holy Spirit and with fire, as in fact happened on the day of Pentecost.

What does it take to once and for all convince mankind of the reality of God, of the respect that he deserves and of our unavoidable need of his love, forgiveness, protection and help? Can you imagine anything more effective to make people respond with gratitude, reverence, admiration and wisdom than having seen Christ die and later on seen him risen, triumphant and resurrected? Nevertheless, the Scriptures only confirm to us that the majority of those people who saw him risen from the dead gave way to their own foolishness and wrong ways of thinking and went backwards to their old ways of living just as a dog returns to its vomit, and a newly washed pig rolls in the mud again, as fast as it can.

One of the tragedies of these days is that because of the lack of prayer, we are seeing no small number of foolish virgins who prefer to live lazy and lukewarm lives rather than build on the passion of the first love of Christ that they felt. Is it really too much for them to keep their engagement with the Beloved alive and exciting, but no, without oil in their lamps it is not long before they are falling into the sins of omission and soon cease to do what is good and right towards the Lord and the people around them. James 4:17 has a word for this:

If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle said, "Hope is the dream of a man who is awake." Saying this, you can now see the difference between the fantasies of the imagination and the visions which can become solid reality if only an unbreakable faith would be applied to them. The more we do this the stronger the hope is within us of seeing a fulfilment, and so with this firm conviction we can pray using the words of Psalm 62:5-8:

Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honour depend on God, he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

When we pray it is not long before we are filled with hope, which is far more than a vain illusion because we know for certain that our hope will turn into solid reality, one way or another. This security comes from the confidence that we have in Jesus, and from the certainty we feel that once we give voice to all that God has put in our heart, we will see this fulfilled before our eyes. We do not give way to any doubts concerning the perfect faithfulness of our Benefactor.

In a sense we are pregnant with faith through the promises of God and we await the appointed time, knowing that on the right day we will give birth without any struggles. This is the assurance that we find through God's holy word in Psalm 40:1-3:

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him.

As we see more and more answers to prayer from the Lord, inevitably we grow spiritually and we spend more time in conversation with the Beloved of our souls, expressing our gratitude and loving expectation of whatever next the Lord will do, all the new gifts and greater revelations that will come our way. We look forward to facing different challenges together with God as he engages us in his work against the kingdom of darkness and to bless the people around us. The more we see this the more we cannot wait to intercede and struggle in prayer, in clear obedience to Psalm 31:24:

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.

One of the lessons that Jesus taught his disciples was through the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. Luke, who was an inspired writer of the gospel that carries his name tells us the point of the story in his chapter 18:1:

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

From this we can understand that prayer is a supreme and continual need that is common to every member of the human race if we are going to live under the shelter of Him who lives forever, nourished and guided by him. This is a very blessed dependency, because in this leaning upon him we find that the greatest good comes our way and the best possible use of the life that has been given to us by Him. People who pray enjoy a daily tranquillity which comes through knowing that God always keep his promises which makes it easy for us to rest in his arms, enjoying the magnificent assurance that we find in Psalm 91:1-6 and 9-16:

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. If you say, "The Lord is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Let us then pray more than ever before because things are getting worse in the world and the increase in satanic pressure is there to be seen. We need to understand that prayer is the greatest work that we can undertake in our earthly lives and through prayer we can build up our fellow believers and save the lost. To pray is to work the land and leave it prepared to receive the holy seed of the gospel. When we do this we have

great hope of enjoying a good harvest with an abundance of God-given fruits. For these reasons, keep on challenging yourself to intensify the sacrifice of your lips, and if you are not sure what to do why not follow the holy order given in 1 Timothy 2:1-4:

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people — 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 people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

If we can only grasp just how far-reaching is prayer and then be men and women who learn how to pray with great devotion in the spirit, then we will see the glory of God more than ever before. Through prayer we will experience his omnipotence and we ourselves will continually be bathed in his love and enriched overflowing by his extravagant grace. All the attributes of God will beautify our lives and work through us and in the end the very breath of our spiritual lives will be inseparable from our natural breathing, and both will be prayer.

With this belief deeply rooted in our souls it is not difficult to make the unchangeable decision that the greatest priority of our daily lives is to consecrate ourselves to the Lord and be the incense carriers that leave the fragrance of prayer and worship where ever we go.

If I give you the words would you like to pray with me right now?

“Dear Father in heaven, I ask your forgiveness for all the negligence that I have allowed to happen by not giving myself to prayer as fully as you desire and teach. I ask you to renew my life as an altar of incense, and release within me every day of my life, a spirit of prayer. Help me to seek your face and be as one with Christ in his continual intercession. I want to be forever grateful to you and useful in your hands to see your righteous purposes come to pass. Father, if you will grant me the holy privilege of working together with you I would feel immensely honoured, despite my clumsiness and many weaknesses, useless servant that I am. Holy Spirit, take the fullest possible control of my life because I do not want to get in your way and only desire to serve you. Use me in your own intercessions even though that may be with inner groans that cannot be heard, or in any other way that you might wish. I put my life into your hands and only ask that you will cause me to burn for Christ, and with a holy zeal for souls to be saved. Above all, in my love for you and your glorious name. Amen.”

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:9-14

There is an old saying which goes something like this, "If prayer does not overcome sin, it will be sin that overcomes prayer." Knowing this, let us give ourselves to prayer because a soul that does not pray is like a garden without water, or a blacksmith's anvil without fire, or a ship without a rudder. Centuries ago, it was Saint Teresa who said, "Give me one quarter of an hour of prayer and I will give you heaven."

A Closing Thought:

To pray is to overcome.

CHAPTER THREE

Prayer, How Do I Do That?

If we were to think that the question is about our physical posture when we pray, then you can be quite sure that the answer is that we have all the freedom that we want and we may choose whatever is most convenient for us. We can pray stretched out upon the floor with our mouth facing upwards or downwards or we can pray seated, standing up, on our knees and with our hands raised, lowered or crossed. We can pray quietly or with raised voices, even with a shout or perhaps a whisper, or no sound at all as we pray with our minds. No doubt the very best way is to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit; he will take us one way or another, dependent upon the kind of prayer that he is bringing out from us.

It is very sad to see the rituals that so many believers go through believing that this is the way you pray, and so they say and do the same thing over and over again as if they had to conform to a man-made religious law. Sometimes their church meetings have so many ups and downs that they are more like a gymnasium worship centre. Having said that, if I am visiting the congregation I will always try and adapt myself to them to avoid creating any misunderstandings. Nevertheless when it is time to speak, I will always try and share with them something of the life of freedom that we have in the Holy Spirit, and how following the letter of the law only brings spiritual death.

On the other hand, I cannot tell you anyone has the freedom to ask God for his forgiveness when he is slouching back in a chair or stood with his hands in his pockets. The truth is that genuine repentance will always leave us heartbroken and falling to our knees. Likewise, it is really bizarre and completely out of order to see someone jumping around and shrieking praises to God when the congregation is entering into a quiet moment of worship. Everything has a right place and time, the important thing is to follow the good order brought by the Holy Spirit, as 1 Corinthians 14:40 says:

But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

On many occasions Jesus taught his disciples how they should pray and the teaching that he left remains as valid today as it ever was, for everyone who is listening. Principally Jesus gave us the example of the prayer we call "Our Father," but never with the idea that we would fall into some kind of mechanical religious ritual and forever repeat the words from memory. We are not parrots, nor should we think that this prayer is some kind of magic formula reminiscent of religious chanting or the incantations of witchcraft and animism. From ancient times in Babylon which is the mother of all false religion, religious superstition has penetrated the human genome and still emerges today with the least provocation. This was never motivation behind the prayer that Jesus taught us which is more of a perfect model that is placed in our hands when we want to approach the Almighty. This is what Jesus had to say as recorded by Matthew 6:7-8:

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Jesus called all these vain repetitions - babbling, and no doubt what he had in mind was our great collection of litanies, liturgies, rosary prayers, penitential repetitions, endless and unchanging one line prayers, chanting

for the dead and a long, long list of religious or theatrical traditions and solemnities, none of which ever catch the ear of God and more than likely turn him away. He considers them to be no more than the works of the flesh and quite possibly originated by demons; empty, insipid and fatuous, totally worthy of the sentence that is passed upon them by God's word. The same word gives every believer a sight of a more acceptable attitude in prayer, far removed from all pharisaic religion as described for example in Isaiah 1:14-17:

Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals I hate with all my being. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood! Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

Many of the prayers that you hear in Christian circles are extremely similar to those constructed by the followers of all the different religions of the world. They may be merely intellectual expressions or pure formalities to suit the occasion or place, but either way the greater majority of them without any doubt at all emerge from fleshly or earthly needs. The aim is to find some kind of selfish satisfaction or feel-good factor which satisfies the emotion or the house religion. You hear people speaking them in boring, monotonous, theatrical voices which conjure up images of superstitious entreaties to idols, long dead saints or witches. Candles are often employed and offerings are frequently taken to engender favour which generally is not given by the deity, or if by any chance something is obtained then further losses to the bank account may be expected. The Bible makes a comparison with leeches which only know two words: Give me, give me!

One day Jesus found himself in the company of a Samaritan woman as both were standing by the well which Jacob had dug many centuries before. This particular well symbolises the religious water of the kind used in worship by the priests of those days. The Samaritan woman asked Jesus where people should worship, whether here on this mountain as the priests in Samaria would say or in the Temple of Jerusalem according to the Jews. We can read the answer that the Lord gave to her in John 4:21-24:

'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You

Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'

Worship is the highest level of prayer and praise and is ashamed that religious people have never learned to pray, praise or worship as God requires. This kind of worship only comes through the Holy Spirit known as *Ruach Hakodesh* in the Hebrew language, as he works through our attitudes of total surrender and absolute sincerity that express our complete devotion to God. God deserves nothing less and by his Spirit is the only way that we are ever going to be able to walk hand-in-hand with him in his nature of holiness and glory. Only those believers who have been born again can ever enjoy this holy metamorphosis from being no more than a human worm to becoming a heavenly dove as God works the creative miracle of salvation and regeneration that comes through Christ. When Nicodemus who was a good believer but still very religious asked Jesus about being born-again, this is the answer that he was given:

'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

John 3:5-8

Once we are born-again we see how the miracle of when Jesus changed water into wine has happened in us. Now our eyes are wide open with wonder as we live the word of God instead of simply reading it and understanding it from an intellectual point of view. It is no longer the law that condemns us, limits us and ultimately kills our spirit, rather the word now becomes flesh in us. We find ourselves becoming more and more like Christ himself, miniature living words as it were, and we soon understand the great difference between going to services at the temple and being ourselves a holy place where we encounter the living God. No longer do we need priests to be an intermediate between God and ourselves because now we are enjoying intimate communion with the Lord and learning how to depend totally upon him. Being born-again allows God to fill our hearts to overflowing with himself.

Under the Old Covenant of the law, the ancient temple of stone was from time to time filled with the glory of Yahweh, but under the New Covenant of the Spirit, God gives to us a new heart and it is we who are filled with Ruach Hakodesh, the Holy Spirit. God has converted us into his own temple and now we can say without hesitation the words that Jesus used in Luke 4:18-19:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

The change is like moving from night into day. Once upon a time the believer covered him or herself with a *tallit*, a symbolic linen cloth when that was worn for prayer or to serve, but now he or she feels that they are wrapped in God's own wings. Now, as born-again believers we feel that we are surrounded by a consuming fire which makes us feel impregnable and our inner being is filled with God's breath enough to make our hearts tremble. The Holy Spirit fills our thoughts, shapes our desires and takes us with him as happy and awestruck passengers in his journeys across the earth which always have the purpose of bringing glory to the Lamb of God. He allows us to work with him in the many tremendous activities that he is continually developing through love and suffering and he connects us to a permanent supply of holy oil. As if that were not enough he crowns our days by meeting our aspirations and needs until ultimately he rejoices in our complete happiness, as expressed by John 1:16-17:

Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

So we can see that in the same way that faith is clearly defined without any rambling or fuzzy understandings, so also our prayers need to be solid, clear and specific. There is no room for straw prayers or humanistic verbiage because through prayer we are here to declare God's purposes and struggle to see them come to pass. To pray is the principal everyday battle of the faith, first and foremost against our own self which can only be overcome as we present our bodies as living sacrifices. It is our old self that needs to be burned on the altar of intercession, calling upon God for his very real help so that we do not fall into temptation. We do not stop there; rather we move forward into God's purposes to conquer all of the kingdoms of the evil one and tear down his perverse plans, as Paul explains with humility in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27:

Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

The Bible gives us many different ways to pray, sufficient for every one of God's people. However, when it comes to ministering the grace of God to both new believers and establishing them in the faith, probably the most effective of all the ways is to pray for them with the laying on of hands. In this way God allows us to become channels for his divine anointing, as well as for his grace and power. Through the laying on of hands the fruits and the gifts of the Holy Spirit may be imparted directly to the person receiving prayer, and sometimes he or she might be shocked by the closeness of God and the personal experience of being touched by his mercy which is a tremendous blessing. The laying on of hands is particularly effective when it comes to ministering healing to the sick as Jesus made clear to his disciples, just before he returned to heaven. Immediately following his command to go into all the world to preach the gospel, a command known as the Great Commission, Jesus said the following, which is written in Mark 16:17-18:

These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on people who are ill, and they will get well.

I think that we would literally need tons of paper to be able to write down all the many thousands of testimonies, even by people who were sick but now have been healed in our ministry. In fact the number continues to rise by the day as more and more people receive prayer and are healed by Jesus. The problem is that far too many of the men and women who are healed, allow themselves to be distracted by their selfish interests and passions only to leave the Lord and the life of faith, sooner or later.

One of the remedies for this weakness is another prayerful use of the laying on of hands, only this time to administer the baptism of the Holy Spirit which is a blessing that is capable of radically transforming the life of the man or woman who is receiving this gift. Many a former coward has become a hero and people who lived only for themselves find that they become more generous than they ever thought possible after receiving the Holy Spirit. Others find it easier to leave old habits behind, or turn from a cold or lukewarm lifestyle to burning with the fire of holy zeal. People who have struggled for ages with the lusts of the flesh, the devil

and the world find themselves moving into a previously unknown continual victory over these things. Yet other people leave behind their own impotence and begin to live in the Omnipotence of God, becoming soldiers for Christ who by working for justice tread down snakes and scorpions. We can read about the laying on of hands with prayer, for example in Acts 8:17 and Acts 19:6:

Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

We know just how important it is that believers receive this deep and supernatural sealing from the Lord known as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Because of this we make a point of administering the blessing to every one of the new believers in Christ in the worship meetings held in our gatherings, which are known nationally and internationally as the Body of Christ churches. In the REMAR charity which cares for thousands of men and women, boys and girls off the streets in first, second and third phase homes for rehabilitation, we also emphasise the need to receive this superlative blessing from God. It is just the same in every one of our centres across more than 60 countries as well as in the many different discipleship schools, because we know just how fundamental this blessing is if people are going to be conquerors in life, soul winners and victors over the kingdoms of darkness. We have certainly lost count of how many thousands of men and women can now say that they have been baptised in water, in the Holy Spirit and in fire, and this would have been an unforgettable experience for every one of them.

Our own prayer before the Lord is that he would never cease to pour out this holy oil because our one desire, and that with all of our soul, is to continue filling millions of empty human vessels with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

in the Bible we can read how the patriarchs of old as well as the judges, prophets, kings and apostles laid their hands upon their children and grandchildren when they prayed for them. They also laid their hands upon their disciples and their successors to pass gifts and prophecies on to them, transferring their own anointing authority through the practice. We who are God's people today are called to the very same priestly role and this we do as frequently as we possibly can, particularly in our renewal meetings for pastors and workers, and the ladies amongst us. We want to bless the men who lead families as well as married couples and those who are engaged to be married in due course, never forgetting the many

singles. We want them all to become courageous men and women in the faith.

The fact is we look for every opportunity to impart this blessing but we take care knowing that the blessing is not ours but only flows through us, and can be contaminated by our own goodness or our own weaknesses. Nevertheless our heart is to only overflow with goodness which comes from the many-sided grace of God, and we never doubt that the Lord is with us to back up every prayer to pass on his gifts. It is he who causes the blessing to flow towards every one of our beloved fellow believers. Paul the apostle was just as convinced of this practice as he writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:14:

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

For more years than I can remember we have had this longing to see our fellow believers raised up spiritually, even though they may well overtake us in their spiritual stature. We keep asking the Lord to keep the fire of the zeal for the house of God which is his family on earth burning in us and we are forever looking for ways to say the same words that Paul wrote in Romans 1:11-12:

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

In every one of our annual conferences we make a lot of time for the pastors from the Body of Christ Churches to pray and lay their hands on new deacons, on dozens of new co-pastors and upon each other, in full belief that the Lord will confirm their callings and ministry. We do this with fear and trembling before the presence of the Lord because we have seen for ourselves just how much harm a badly instructed or false leader can cause. When a man who is not living for the Lord somehow manages to take charge of souls and resources, he causes many new or immature believers to fall away from what they see or hear, not to mention how he can bring about financial ruin and leave a bad testimony behind him wherever he goes. It is not surprising that Paul gave a very serious warning to young Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:22:

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

We have discovered how important it is that once a person has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and has begun to speak in tongues as a clear evidence of the work of the Spirit within him, to nourish that

experience on a daily basis. We do our best to pray with our new believers as often as possible to encourage them in the life of the Lord and to see them sharing it with others. If they only take the gift of God and leave it on the shelf so to speak and do little with the power of the Holy Spirit, then the gift tends to be forgotten and falls into weakness and disuse. Fresh waters need to flow if they are going to bring life to people, because otherwise the stream of life will soon become stationary and stagnant, which is a picture of how unwillingness and unbelief can quickly corrupt a soul even to the point of the person denying that he or she ever received the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul, the apostle, calls us to pray primarily in the Spirit without necessarily employing the rational understanding which we are normally accustomed to because it brings some partial benefits. When we pray in the Spirit our understanding may be lacking that God and others will be blessed. This is why Paul encourages us to pray both in our native language and also in the gift of tongues which may become understandable if God is pleased to release an interpretation of what is being prayed. Paul talks more about this in 1 Corinthians 14:2, 4-5 and in verses 13-15:

Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.

Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

I have had some really unforgettable and glorious experiences when praying in tongues. For example, on one occasion I became aware that I had come out of my own body, and it so happens that at the time I was driving my car with four companions who were travelling with me. It seemed to me that I suddenly appeared in the middle of the most beautiful celebration in heaven itself. I could see multitudes of people praising the Lord. I remained in this state of ecstasy until just as suddenly I returned to my normal life on earth, only to discover that no one had

noticed my absence yet we had covered more than 10 miles in that time. Logically, of course the experience was totally spiritual because my physical body stayed in place behind the wheel, and because of this nobody noticed what was happening.

On another occasion very early in the morning, my wife and I were praying together in tongues, when for no particular reason both of us simultaneously began to laugh and hug each other as God filled us with the most astonishing supernatural, overflowing, pure and glorious joy. This brought with it an amazing and powerful vibrant energy which lasted for most of the day and left us feeling incredibly strengthened.

One more experience is worth mentioning if only for the tremendous shock that it gave me. One day when I was praying in tongues it seemed to me that I was rising up from the floor and at the same time I had the sensation of my brain beginning to slowly revolve within my head. The speed increased until what I could see of myself was something like the blades of a fan on the maximum setting. By now I was in a state of shock and I began to shout, "Lord, stop this before I die!" Instantly, the phenomenon disappeared which was to my regret, so being at that time so inexperienced in the things of the Lord I asked him to repeat the same experience of the Holy Spirit. I said, "Lord, do it again and if I die, I die!" However, the strange happening has never happened again, and these days I understand that we should not go looking for supernatural phenomena as something to investigate or to entertain us. This would only display a great lack of maturity and respect for God, who I am sure completely forgave me for my ignorance.

I am convinced that the apostle John had some kind of similar experience of entering into a trance as he prayed in tongues alone, because he writes how he was taken into the presence of the Lord and given the book of Revelation. We can read about this in the first chapter and in verse 10:

On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.

Another very beautiful way of praying is by singing our prayer with or without music, and when it so happens that we are inspired by the Holy Spirit we will never sing out of tune which is important if other people are present. David, the King and his priestly choirs have left us many examples as they frequently used praise as a prayer of exaltation to the Lord with musical accompaniment to their words. For example we can read what the Psalmist says in Psalm 92:1-2:

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night.

The fact is that there are many different kinds of prayer and we should be studying some of them as these pages unfold. Fundamentally, it is important to underline that prayer has to be the outworking of God's grace in our lives so that we can leave all of our selfish ideas and desires to one side. The prayer that pleases God is produced in our innermost being by the Holy Spirit and this is something that Paul spoke about to his chosen disciple, young Timothy. He wanted to make it clear that all of our words, actions and activities have two expressions of the many sided grace of God, as we can read in 2 Timothy 2:1:

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

We need to be very clear that we stand guard in vain if God is not watching with us, and equally everything we build is just as vain if it is the man and not the Lord that is doing the building, this according to Psalm 127:1. We need to be absolutely sure that everything we do is done in the strength of the Holy Spirit, whose strength is infinite, and this is especially true in our prayer life. The Bible says that in Christ everything is possible but to reach this high and noble objective we need to be following the words of Paul in Philippians 2:13:

It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

As we yield to God in this way will find ourselves coming into line with the perfect intercession of Christ himself, who stands at the right hand of the Father and is forever the eternal High Priest who ministers in the temple of heaven where God dwells. This is what Hebrews 7:22-25 says:

Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

God's Word tells us that Jesus Christ is continually interceding for us to keep us strong in faith, in the same way that he prayed for Peter, as we can read in Luke 22:31-32 saying:

'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of 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.'

From this we can know that Christ is praying for you and for me every single day to bring us direction in life and to keep us safe, that we do not lose our way in our pilgrimage through this world. He prays for us in the same way that he prayed for his own disciples, as we can read in John 17:15:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

The Lord prays for every single one of his redeemed people to make us one with him. Just as he prayed for the disciples that he taught in his days on earth, so Jesus prays for all those whom he knew would believe by hearing his and the testimony of the many preachers who came after him. Jesus ended this particular prayer by calling upon his Father for all of us who would believe down the ages after hearing the gospel through the lips of any one of the many messengers of Christ. We can read more of this prayer in John 17:20-23:

'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 in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus goes on to ask his Father to allow people like you and I to be seated with Him on his throne and to have the privilege of reigning together with him over all creation. Can you really imagine what this means? Here is the prayer from John 17:24:

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

When I discovered these things it was as if I had found the most beautiful pearl. To know that the Lord engages in personal intercession for me is something so very special and intimate. On the day that the Lord gave me this revelation it was as if he was speaking face-to-face with me at the same time confessing my name before his Father. At times like this I have that most extraordinary sensation that the dove of the Holy Spirit takes flight in my chest and releases the perfume of heaven through my lips, something like Solomon is describing in Song 1:12:

While the king was at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance.

And when all these things are taken together, I can never doubt the faithfulness of the Lord in my own life. I am always asking him to take me out of this world and into his heavenly presence rather than allow me to lose my trust in Him. It is only through the faith that he gives me that I am sustained through every day and have the strength to keep on moving forward towards the goal. I keep hold of the robe of our High Priest and stay close to his feet, practising every day of my life the teaching that I find in Hebrews 4:14-16:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

We must never forget just how weak we are because knowing this we can always find our strength in the Lord and in the power of his might through the Holy Spirit. He is the only one who can put to death all the works of our flesh and take our mind captive through Christ. Through him alone we can overcome every trial and every attack that wicked people launch against us. The Bible says that only in our weakness can the power of God be seen to perfection, which is a lesson that Paul, the apostle learned all too well. In our own case, we must be always aware of how dependent we are upon the Lord, yet fully trusting in the power of his continual intercession for us and the giving of his timely help. Romans 8:26-27 confirms the idea to us:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

Shall we pray together?

"Beloved Father, we fall at your feet in total surrender to give you our willing submission and obedience. We want to do your perfect will but we recognise just how incapable we are of knowing and achieving this so we cry out to you for the guidance of your Holy Spirit through this prayer and every other prayer of our lives. We need your help in all of the activities that we are involved with today and every day, until we reach the end of this earthly race and arrive at the finishing line which is to enter into eternal life with you. God our Father, make us one with Christ in his

prayers! God our Saviour, melt our wills into the plans that Jesus has for us that we may become instruments in his hands and work together with him. Father, put your thoughts into our minds and your desires into our hearts. Speak the words that you want to say through our lips and use us as a living spring of your prayers, praises and teachings. Let your kingdom come to us even if it means that we shall be humbled by your coming, but please never ever take away from us your Spirit nor allow us to be cast away from your presence!"

A Closing Thought

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Jude 20-21.

CHAPTER FOUR

Prayer, But Who Is Listening?

Having visited many nations I have been able to see for myself just how Satan has triumphed over thousands of millions of men and women, totally blinding them to reality. He hides behind their religious masks and pulls the puppet strings of their lives using a multitude of ecclesiastical guide dogs who are just as blind as the people they are attempting to lead.

You see people everywhere bowing before idols or worshipping long dead saints, or images of the Virgin Mary, statues of a dead Christ, Buddhas of stone as well as a wide circle of different images. Every one of them represents a false messiah who can offer no hope to anybody, some are the work of deceiving false prophets and behind them all are countless demon powers. People everywhere allow their lives to be guided by those who can allegedly interpret the stars, while over in India all manner of

animals have become objects of worship along with tens of millions of man-made gods.

I have seen and heard people fanatically repeating the same prayer over and over again to the point of absurdity, to which they add every kind of pleading and arm-twisting through the offering of every kind of gift or sacrifice. In fact many of the sacrifices are no less than macabre and involve the pouring out of animal or human blood upon altars. In total deception, devotees whip themselves, cut themselves and wear the latest fashions in hair shirts in the hope that they might be able to atone for their wrongdoings and the feelings of guilt that overwhelm their souls. Perhaps they are looking for god-given blessings upon their lives but the evidence of your eyes only tells you that they bring down even more curses upon themselves and face a future that is even more polluted rather than blessed.

The Bible says that we should seek the one true living God and to him alone should we pray, praise, worship and serve.

When Jesus himself was teaching his disciples to pray, this is how he instructed them to begin, by saying, "Our Father in heaven," as we can read in Matthew 6:9. In the entire Bible not one single example exists of prayer directed to anyone else, because if God is gracious enough to allow us into his presence, why would we ever feel the need to speak to any lesser personality, or worse still, to the dead?

Would you not think that for the Almighty who is infinite in his mercy, it would be despising to him and dishonouring his person if we went about looking for someone else to answer our prayers? The Bible says that God is a jealous God who loves justice and hates all idol worship, voodoo, animism, spirit worship and every other kind of superstitious religious servitude, simply because all of these gatherings are guided by demons behind the scenes. People who engage with these forms of worship are frequently enemies of God himself, to the point of only having one possibility of being redeemed through genuine repentance from what they are bringing upon themselves. That repentance needs to be seen through a changed life and the intentional abandoning of all the abominable and foolish habits that they have followed, possibly for a lifetime, followed by the practice of genuine, true prayer exclusively directed towards God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now let me ask the question about how we could ever possibly draw close to God with any kind of confidence, opening our hearts to him through our prayers, if we do not love him?

Could anyone truly trust his life to someone, if he doubts that person's love for him? In normal family life, it is sad to see how many children lose the communication with their own parents and vice versa when they no longer have love for each other and neither respect nor value each other anymore. In some cases, one side or the other may even go as far as asking the devil for help rather than humbling his or her heart to find help from the family. When love is lost, it is not long before children become prodigal sons and daughters, just as lost as the Prodigal in the Bible and possibly worse because if they do not know God for themselves, how are they ever going to be able to love him and find their way home to him?

Can we ever love somebody if we not sure he exists? God is love, and because this is his nature he longs to establish and perpetuate the closest possible loving relationship with his family on earth. Before that can happen every one of us needs to be born again spiritually into the fatherhood of God which can only happen by faith in Jesus Christ, but when it does happen our hearts fall head over heels in love with God as he first pours his pure love into us.

God offers us a new covenant which is very different to the one that he gave to the people of antiquity, because this time he offers us complete forgiveness, perfect peace and a holy freedom, all of this as an act of pure undeserved grace on his part. He signs the covenant with the ink of the precious blood of his son Jesus Christ, and all he wants in return is a simple but sincere and total amen from our side. With this light yet glorious yoke upon our shoulders, we enter into a most wonderful romance with Jesus Christ, sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit who brings all of his fruits and gifts into our lives. This is but the first fruits in the relationship, yet at the same time a trustworthy guarantee that God will carry us through until the day of consummation of our marriage to Jesus as the bride of Christ. In the meantime, we can offer him a dowry of our lives, just as we are and with all that we possess. We can serve him and be found always at his feet as a living and continual sacrifice of worship and obedience that rejoices his eyes and excites his being. When we touch God's loving sensitivity how quickly he responds to us with wise and powerful words which fill our hearts with joy and hope, something like the experience that we read about in Psalm 91:14-16:

'Because he loves me,' says the Lord, 'I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.'

Reading this truth compels us to continually ask the Lord to come to our help because he is God and we are the fragile and delicate bride of Christ, who needs to be surrounded by his holy embrace, sheltered by the fiery shield of the Holy Spirit and the ever present vigilance of our guardian angels. We are always conscious of the risks that we run especially the ones we take with the permission of our own heart which is always trying to recover its selfish lordship and indulge itself in the lusts that it enjoys. We know that it is absolutely indispensable for us to be tied to Christ with the bonds of love that we find in the gospel and the only way we will do this is through constant watchfulness and prayer.

We have complete confidence in the way Christ watches over us and cares for us knowing that he will never allow us to get lost. He intends to lead us to the goal that is set for our lives even if that means doing so in the face of our reluctance to go his way. In Christ we get through every opposition and our falls along the way, as he continually raises us up and renews our faith. All this taken together, produces feelings of invincible security and a depth of peace which enables us to say with all sincerity and certainty, the same words that we find in this prayer of David, in Psalm 18:1-2:

I love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

In the daily friendship that we enjoy with Christ as his Bride, why would we ever not give him our promises and compliment him on his beauty? Is it not time to do away with all religiosity, formalities and prejudices as well as all false modesty and begin to learn the freedom that is ours in the Holy Spirit? How good it is to be natural and transparent like children, sincere and simple in the way that we speak to the one we love with all of our heart. The worst thing we can do is to approach him with an ecclesiastical or intellectual vocabulary which is cold and calculating, although people of this disposition might consider us to be childish and naïve in our spontaneity. Well, as I see it is much better to be accused of being childlike because children have a way of making us smile and making our hardened hearts to be tender again. We might well be jealous of children with a holy envy and pay much less attention to imitating the characteristic vague and reticent, dry empty and hypocritical expression of the Pharisees of today. You can be sure that the prayers of men and women like this are never pleasing to God, however many times they repeat them to the total boredom of their listeners. How much better it is

to be able to pass on holy compliments to our Beloved, as the writer of Song 1:16 does:

How handsome you are, my beloved! Oh, how charming! And our bed is verdant.

This very beautiful loving affirmation comes from the lips of the one engaged to be married, part of a living and romantic conversation that they are having. This is her reply to an equally beautiful compliment that he gives her in the previous verse 1:15:

How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves.

Do not you think that this is a very delightful ongoing conversation filled with beautiful descriptions and God-blessed intentions? Can you sense the fragrance of the perfume that flows from lips that are in love with words that perfectly express the heartbeat of romance in a joyful and passionate friendship?

To my mind and without any doubt the most poetic prayers that we will find are those which are given expression by the holy dove in the book, Song of Songs, who represents God's chosen people, the Church of Christ. For me these words have been a tremendous source of inspiration both as prayer and for poetry, in fact, why do not we pause for a moment and pray together taking the words of Song 2:3-6 to form our own prayer:

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. Let him lead me to the banquet hall, and let his banner over me be love. Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me.

There is an old Spanish refrain which says, "The attitude of well brought up children is one of gratitude," and how true this is. No doubt it has its roots in the word of God because it teaches all of us to always live with gratitude in our hearts and words, especially in our friendship with the Lord. We can never call it prayer if we draw close to him with a sullen or ungrateful attitude as this would surely be seen as unfair and offensive, in the same way that nine of the ten lepers behaved after Jesus healed all ten of them. Only one of them returned to give him thanks for such an immense and undeserved gift.

The writer Cervantes, a wise man who feared God, said, "Un-gratefulness is the daughter of arrogance," knowing that to be thankful for something

or to somebody demands a measure of humility. Considering for a moment how God resists the proud it is surely better to humble ourselves before we are humbled by God. Ungrateful people inevitably bring down tragic consequences upon their own heads but only as forewarned by the divine Judge that he sees ungratefulness as one of the lowest and most loathsome behaviours of the flesh. We can read the consequences of man's ingratitude to God in Romans 1:21, 24 and 26-27:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

There is no doubt in my mind that ungratefulness is the very opposite of having a noble heart, a thought which was perfectly expressed by the ancient Roman writer Ausonio when he said, "No land has ever produced a worse plant than ungratefulness." Another very clear-sighted but anonymous writer said, "Gratitude is the way that the heart expresses its memories."

So, let us be grateful people, always leaving a trail of thanks behind us to both God and men because the truth is that we have received an enormous amount of favours from the Lord in spite of the fact that once we were his enemies. Once upon a time we offended him in more ways than we can remember and now it is time for us to live in humble submission at the feet of Christ. He deserves our kisses of worship and the sound of our voices saying over and over again, millions of times, "Thank you." There is an old Aramaic proverb which contains considerable wisdom by saying, "Never throw stones into the spring which has given you water to drink." If this saying makes perfect sense then how much less should we throw stones into the very source of living water that has given us eternal life? It would be pure sacrilege and bring about our complete ruin, much worse than throwing boulders onto the very roof that protects us, to quote a wise and popular Spanish warning not to be so foolish as to do such a thing.

Gratitude is the quintessential expression of love and must be an essential part of opening our conversation before the throne of God. Thanksgiving is a very important ingredient of prayer, very much in line with the words we find in Psalm 100:4-5:

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

So we can understand that offering God our thanksgiving has to be an indispensable part of our daily conversation with him. Let gratitude be our first thoughts and words every morning, and the same at the end of each day before we go to sleep, simply because if we are still alive it is only through his pure grace. If we take a moment to remember all the blessings we have received throughout the day and who has given them to us, then a few words of gratitude are more than appropriate. If we truly love God, gratitude will come easy to us as a never-ending stream of words encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we can pray with similar words to the ones David used in Psalm 26:6-7:

I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, Lord, proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds.

How could we ever not be grateful to the Lord knowing that everything good and pure in our lives has come from him? Who is it that passes by our souls to clean us up from all the rubbish that we pick up in life, showing a maternal love and patience with us as the spiritual babies that we are? He does not leave us in the filth of our sins which only make us feel unclean but instead he comes every day to wash our feet, seeing us as pilgrims that tread the dusty path of this world. Worse still, some days we fall into the mud of evil-doing at the side of the road. In the light of this, it cannot be difficult for us to obey God's word which encourages us to have an attitude of continual gratitude, as we can read in 1 Thessalonians 5:18:

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

"Oh give thanks to the Lord," is a title of a song which we often sing in our meetings for worship. Firstly because we see ourselves as a flock of sheep who once upon a time were far more like goats and have been forgiven many things. Because of this we who are forgiven much love much. Secondly we give thanks because being a congregation of some of

the most ordinary and despised peoples of this world, God has nevertheless chosen to use us to shame the wise. He has granted to us the revelation of many of his secrets and has allowed us to share in his divine wisdom through which we have been able to overcome all of the obstacles that have faced us in this world. More than a few pride filled academics have fallen on the same road of life.

Thirdly, we are immensely grateful for having been given the highest privilege of being made into the children of God, and beyond this raised up to be kings and priests in his Kingdom. Christ has given to us his own authority and called us to govern multitudes and bring his gracious influence to bear and be displayed in many nations. Finally, we give endless thanks because we never even dreamed that God would use us to be his instruments to heal the sick, work miracles and set people free from the cruel grip and oppression of demons and the power of the evil one. Not only that, but God has enabled us to see a great multiplication of resources for which we continually give thanks for this manifestation of the Lord's infinite generosity. He takes us into his own hands and allows us to share in his works of power; we can add an interminable list of reasons to raise our voices and pray, "We give you thanks Blessed Father, many, many thanks."

We just love to do this every day of our lives and hold nothing back in our shouts of joy and praise, and are certain that we shall continue throughout the length of eternity as we fall on our knees and worship God before his throne. So, it will be good for us all to persevere in prayer which reflects our gratitude, and allow nothing to get in the way as we follow the words of Colossians 4:2:

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

In the same way, as a genuine family of God we need to assume everything in our lives which is good, wise and successful has come through the love, strength and inspiration of God himself. It is he who has poured out his many-sided grace upon us and our response in prayer is only a fair exchange and something that we must be involved in continually. When we look at the blessings in our lives then prayer is the expression of our sincere attitude and a means of avoiding any vanity or self claim because we do not want to rob God of all the honour and glory which is owing to him. The words of Colossians 3:17 say something very similar:

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

It is amazing that God does work through us by his Holy Spirit to see souls converted, the sick healed and set free from demons, and we do see signs, wonders and miracles. It would be very wrong to be complacent about these things as if we were the authors of the divine interventions instead of the vehicle for them. It is always good to remember that we are only the means chosen by the only Superstar of all the ages, the sum total of every holy and miraculous divine intervention, right across the universe and beyond is only one more reason for us to display our immense appreciation of him. Out of his grace alone, God has granted to us the honourable privilege of sharing in his glorious works and it would be very wrong of us to try and take some of that glory for ourselves. Again, let us continually be giving thanks to the Lord for allowing us to see the way he overcomes every obstacle and allows us to be his ambassadors and those of his eternal kingdom.

Thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

2 Corinthians 2:14

The same question applies if we have been obedient and now have many disciples around us and a large number of souls attending our gatherings, which in any event is only what we have been asked to do. Do we dare to behave as if these men and women are our own property and consider them to be under our ownership? Does the flock of church members as well as all the different people who take care of the sheep and minister to them really belong to the shepherd? It seems to me that a lot of men have never yet understood that Jesus never told Peter to be in charge of the grazing of his sheep, but rather he entrusted them to Peter's care on behalf of their one and only owner, who is the Lord himself.

For this very clear reason and with simplicity of heart, let us always be grateful to Christ for allowing us to represent him in front of his followers, and for giving us the visible multiplication of souls and servants in the gatherings. In many ways this is the visible imagery of the miracle of the multiplication of bread and fish, which gives us one more reason to be thankful to God, according to 2 Thessalonians 1:3:

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing.

When I look for ways to bless the spiritual children under my care, I only do so on behalf of our Father in heaven as his representative and no

more. The Bible says that there is only one Father of all, who is God himself, and to him we must give thanks for the growth of his people and his Kingdom. We can follow the example of Paul, found in 1 Corinthians 1:4-7:

I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way – with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge – God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

Another prayer which is absolutely crucial is our intercession for the people we work together with in serving the Lord. We need to be asking God to impart more anointing upon them and grant an increase of revelation with all the accompanying wisdom and understanding that they need. My prayer is that our co-workers grow in maturity and move towards perfection, being well-equipped with all the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is my greatest wish that they do better than I have ever done and that the Lord considers them worthy to be in charge of many people. For this reason they have been chosen and separated by God to turn these new believers into disciples, and my prayer for them often takes the form of Paul's words to the Ephesians in chapter 1:15-19:

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength.

Let us bring this chapter to an end by praying together and giving thanks to God with sincere and heartfelt gratitude.

Pray with me, "Holy and most loving Father, we dare not even think of trying to pay you back for all the immeasurable good that you have poured upon us through your infinite love and the manifestation of your overflowing grace. However we can and sincerely want to give you all the thanks that our hearts can find within them, and do this not once but constantly, with an abundance of smiles and tears as heartfelt expressions of our gratitude to you. We want our lives to forever display

this passionate emotion of thankfulness, being always attentive to you and diligent to obey you, so demonstrating our complete devotion and eternal gratitude. Once again and forever, Jesus, we give you thanks. Amen.

Dear Lord, you never fail to respond when we call upon your name and not a day goes by without you filling the cup of our hearts to overflowing with the oil and the wine of your Holy Spirit. We give ourselves to continue in insistent prayer, coming before you every single day as did David in Psalm 51:8: "Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice and be renewed."

CHAPTER FIVE

Prayer But When, How And For Who?

The enemy of our souls, and may God rebuke him, has managed to persuade mankind to enclose prayer and all of its associated spiritual activities within four walls. He likes the idea of prayer taking place in a temple or any one place where faith can be suffocated and any thought of doing something as a result of prayer can be eliminated. The devil takes full advantage of the human tendency to want to control everything, have the matter understood and in its right place under the pretext of wanting everything tidy and in order.

The devil has long since captivated us with the idea of having everything comfortable and in order, and so we separate the issues of living into themes and subject matters, dividing life up into different areas each of

which is independent of the other. Strangely enough, all the areas inherit their full share of traditions, superstitions, rituals and rules all of which are taken as the final truth without any further thought. No one really wants to be the one that thinks things through and causes a mess because that would destabilise the castle of self worship that man has been building for as long as he has been on the earth.

For reasons like this is always a tragedy to see clumps of salt pressed together in the salt cellars of the churches, which are now no use to God or man because the salt has lost its flavour, its purity and the power of the Holy Spirit. It is only fit to be continually trampled by wild animals on the rubbish dumps of life, just as the Master warned us would happen in Matthew 5:13. In the same way this is what happens to all the Christians who never do more than say a closing *amen* to religious Sunday prayers and then when they come out of their pharisaic caves, they reap a harvest of painful failures when faced with the temptations and lusts brought against them by demonic powers.

On the other hand, once we have begun to walk in the light of Christ and our lives are guided by the Holy Spirit, it is very easy to notice how He moves us to pray wherever we are, and not in one particular place. The end result is that we pray many times more often than we would do when we are sat in the local place of worship, and this is in agreement with the instruction that Paul gave to his young disciple Timothy, in 1 Timothy 2:8:

I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

Jesus himself made a regular habit of praying on the mountainsides of Israel engaging in the intercession that we call spiritual warfare. We can also read how he would pray in valleys, on the coast, on board boats as well as when he was walking along the road and in the streets. Jesus prayed in homes and in palaces, in gardens and of course, in the synagogues of those days. Paul and all the other apostles followed in the same ways as the Master and their prayer life was a same as His, frequently praying wherever they found themselves.

Their goal was to be always guided by the Holy Spirit to speak out the most appropriate words in prayer and hit the bull's-eye every time, allowing the prayer to achieve its objectives through the intervention of the Almighty. In our own ministry, we are often compelled by the pressing needs of the day as well as our holy zeal in the Lord to pray wherever we find ourselves. In fact, we find ourselves praying all the more when we are engaged in evangelistic campaigns or visiting prisons, hospitals and government offices. Like Jesus, we also pray on mountain

tops and as much as anywhere else we pray in our homes as well as in our worship meetings. Through seeing so many miraculous answers we have proven to our total satisfaction just how this kind of prayer life pleases the Lord.

It is as if our words are written in ink which is freshly flowing from the inkwells of the heart to form the most beautiful words. This is exactly what happens when we bring prayer out of the stuffy atmosphere of the congregations and spread the fragrance of it like incense which perfumes the air around those praying. In this atmosphere, demons flee yet many souls come to the feet of Christ which sends its own perfume to surround the throne of God.

Many believers and in particular many pastors and ministers, write a daily time in their diary when they choose to be undisturbed so that they can pray. As a discipline this would seem to be positive because it underlines the importance that these spiritual exercises deserve, yet the problem is that all too many people end up following the clock and going through spiritual gymnastics to get finished on time. What happens is that they themselves take control of their prayer time and frequently risk extinguishing the freedom of the Holy Spirit which is not something that pleases him. In the end when he feels pressured and squeezed, like any other bird, this holy dove will fly away to another human temple where he is given the first place to flutter his wings and make his sweet voice heard to the glory of Christ, and the doing of his will.

While it is perfectly true that we should pray as much as we possibly can every day, this does need to be inspired and impelled by the wind of the Holy Spirit. It pleases him in a very special way when we are awakened by the very first light of the morning and our first thoughts are to give glory to Christ who is the bringer of the dawn, a thought which is reflected in 2 Peter 1:19:

We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

One day Jesus Christ will return to Israel at first light in fulfilment of the name he is given as the light of the world. As creator, he put the sun in its place as a symbol of this truth and we want to recognise that with each dawn the mercies of God are made new to us, as we can read in Lamentations 3:22-23. It is a good thing when the early morning light passes through our closed eyelids to wake us up as we wake up our own

hearts into morning prayer. We know this is especially delightful in the eyes of the Lord as we can read in Proverbs 8:17:

I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.

It goes without saying that there is no better way to start every day than in prayer, just as soon as we can get out of bed, although if needs be there is no reason why we should not pray lying down. The fact is that the more time we dedicate to prayer in the early morning, the more positive results we will see throughout the day, as well as enjoying our first communion of the day with the Lord.

However, what normally happens to so many believers is that they get out of bed at the last possible minute either because laziness has kept them between the sheets or they went to bed very late because they were either watching a film on the television or they did not know when to stop in some other kind of leisure activity. So now they have got to get to work as fast as they possibly can and the first casualty of their hurry is the honour, gratitude and worship that is owed to the Lord. Neither do they have time to ask for his help for the day which is something that is absolutely indispensable if they are going to do things properly and come through the daily battle of faith in any measure of victory. The truth is that every day brings its own problems and many a believer ends up being crushed by the trials and attacks that our enemies launch against us. How many finish the day in failure or facing losses instead of thanking God for his victory and gains?

What I am trying to say is that as much as is possible, we all need to learn to pray as early as we can each morning so that we can echo these words that David, the songwriter, directed towards the Lord in Psalm 143:8-10:

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life. Rescue me from my enemies, Lord, for I hide myself in you. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

Whenever I come across people who have a tendency towards melancholy, sadness, depression and bitterness with life, the first thing I do is to encourage them to truly forgive everybody that has offended them. Then I point them towards the birds that sing to each other in the garden and ask, "Who do you think they are singing to?" The greater majority of people if they have any faith at all say that they are singing for God to hear their chorus. So I recommend that they follow the

example of the songbirds by getting out of bed as early as possible to sing the praise of God with the assurance that if they do they will be bathed in the joy of the Most High. Not only that, but they will soon forget about their pains and all the grey, bitter shadows that wrap themselves around their minds from the break of day onwards. We all need to imitate that anointed singer, songbird and songwriter, David, who never ceased to trill his praises to the Lord. It is very easy to pick up one of his beautiful Psalms to which we can add our own music and sing away. In fact I will choose one for you, one that we often sing with great joy in our meetings, with words from Psalm 92:1-2:

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night.

It is very life changing to realise that in order to discover the will of God for our lives and to face the realities of our own everyday needs brings the responsibility of knowing how to pray without ceasing, just as we breathe without interruption. In one way every moment can hide a danger or bring a struggle, and if we were able to overhear in the spirit, then we would pick up a multitude of human cries in every minute of time, coming from all over the world, as men and women ask God for help. In his name we can help them very powerfully by praying for them and to this we have been called as partners who work together with the Lord. He has delegated this part of his work to us; as we do our part he will do his later on. When Jesus was teaching his disciples about prayer he gave them the parable of the widow and the unjust judge, saying this as written in Luke 18:1:

Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

You will know that there are some trees which give their fruit on a continual basis and there are plants which we call perennials. No sooner do you harvest trees like this than new fruit begins to appear, and this is exactly what God wants for us. He is listening for the fruit of our lips as a blessing for God and for all the people around us, as Paul very concisely says in just three words, from 1 Thessalonians 5:17:

Pray without ceasing.

Paul, the apostle, had something very similar to say to the believers in Rome, just as he continues saying the same words to all the followers of Christ in these last days before the Lord returns. We live in a time which is not far away from what is called the rapture when the Church will be

snatched away from the earth to become the Bride of Christ. However in the meantime God has given us both spiritual and natural duties to perform and he expects to see us doing these everyday as faithful students of the Lord. One of these responsibilities which the Bible continually underlines is to pray without ceasing, as we can read in these words from Romans 12:11-12:

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Let us never forget for a moment that prayer is a continual act of sacrifice. Some people say that they pray even in their dreams, hearing their own voice speaking either in their own native language or in tongues. I do believe that this is possible as the Holy Spirit chooses the moments that please him to break through us with groans that cannot be heard, something like the experience we read in Song of Songs 5:2:

I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking: 'Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night.'

In the same way, on occasions by the whistling of the wind of God may well awaken us and compel us to pray, sometimes in ways which we simply do not understand at least at that moment in time. However, we can be sure that these prayers are effective and a modern manifestation of Paul's teaching to the Ephesians concerning the armour of God. We need to put his words into practice if we are going to be more than conquerors in the face of all the wiles of the evil one.

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Ephesians 6:17-18

This is how the first followers of Christ fervently gave themselves to prayer, knowing themselves to be chosen instruments of divine power. They felt the walls shake where they prayed and they also knew that through their prayers both governments and the kingdoms of Satan were also shaken. They became accustomed to seeing a multitude of signs, wonders and miracles which pushed forward the Kingdom of God and his justice to the ends of the earth, even as far as releasing God's answers into the world of today. The Bible tells us that as far as prayer was concerned, the early believers followed four fundamental principles which

for them were not negotiable, yet sad to say have been sadly diluted by the majority of believers down the ages. The church that we see today is very far removed from the original gathering of believers, particularly in the first principle which is to persevere in prayer, as we read in Acts 2:42:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Because we are inclined to follow the leading of our own hearts which are never less than sentimental and selfish, we have picked up this tendency to pray only for ourselves or for God's blessing upon our loved ones. This of course is a total abuse of prayer, it is not right that people should be like leeches that only know two words, "Give me, give me," in a regrettable confirmation of Proverbs 30:15. Far too many believers have either forgotten or never even known about the other purposes of prayer amongst which the first and foremost is to minister to the Lord himself. In the prayer that Jesus gave us, known as the "Our Father," the very first thing that we learn is that prayer is for God alone as we speak to him. Our prayer life needs to open with recognising God for who he is, our sovereign Father who reigns from his position at the heights of heaven. The prayer continues as we are encouraged to call upon his name for the fulfilment of his purposes in the earth, as we can read in Matthew 6:9-10:

'This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Did you know that praise and worship are different kinds of very special prayers which we as his admirers, subjects, worshippers and those who wish to exalt him, minister to God? Beyond our praise and worship we can then pray to the Lord, to bless him and to advance his purposes, administering to him personally through our love, and expressions of gratitude and submission. This is very much in line with the prophetic words concerning the coming Messiah, the only perfect King, that we can see in Psalm 72:15:

Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given to him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long.

To give honour and glory to our God through an intimate prayer life is a lovely expression of the fruit of our lips, that testifies to the exclusive and personal communion that we have with the Lord. With every day that goes by we have the opportunity to renew our romance with Him, and our prayer is only the natural and continuous conversation between lovers. No one gets in the way and interferes in this romance because it happens

alone out of sight, in our secret corners and in our upper rooms. Very much as Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:6:

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.

Of course, it is very clear that we must pray for our families, both our loved ones and our fellow believers in the faith, and do so as often as possible. This is the very best gift that we can ever give to them and through our prayer we are giving God good reason to bless them, heal them, set them free from all that oppresses them and above all save them eternally. We cover them with the fragrance of our prayers as incense, and bring them into the shadow of the Almighty, hiding them under the cloak of his divine grace. Let me share with you one of the Bible passages that I use when I pray for you, my esteemed reader, and for all the people whom I love and care about, from Psalm 20:1-5:

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion. May he remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings. May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. May we shout for joy over your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God. May the Lord grant all your requests.

When prayer abounds, whether it is our own or the prayers for us that many of our fellow believers speak out, the enrichment that comes into our lives is beyond words. There is no doubt whatsoever that we are able to strengthen each other and protect each other by calling down the fire of God to surround each other's lives, and by giving thanks for the unseen angels who minister to us. Paul, the apostle, understood this very clearly and frequently asked both his own disciples and the churches to pray for him, particularly that he might receive revelation from God and a holy boldness to preach effectively. This is what he was saying in Ephesians 6:18-19:

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

Paul was so convinced of the help that would come his way from other brothers and sisters in the faith that for example he asked the believers in Rome to pray for him. He was particularly concerned to escape from the many persecutions which came through the hands of the many untiring fanatics, especially the Jews of Jerusalem, who wanted to see him dead. He asked the people in Rome to help him in prayer so that he could have a safe journey to deliver offerings for the poor as well as power to minister the word of God that he had received through the Holy Spirit, as we can read in Romans 15:30-31:

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favourably received by the Lord's people there.

In the very same way, when my friends and fellow believers ask how to bless me, I always tell them that the very best way to do that is to pray more and more for my life, my family and ministry. Equally when I am speaking to my own fellow believers and co-workers, I tell them that I can do nothing better for them than to pray for them and their individual causes. This is the finest possible way to bless them, comfort them, strengthen them and renew them in the grace of God, in fact, it is what I am going to do right now taking my words from Colossians 1:9-12:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

Sometimes during our annual conferences, when we have been praying for the new pastors who are being sent into our ministry, the Holy Spirit reminds us to bless them using the very wonderful prayer that I am going to repeat in just a moment. These words are an expression of our sincere and deep love for all the pastors and workers in both Remar and the Body of Christ churches, and we speak these words over them with the hope and certainty that it will not be long before they receive the outworking of these beautiful blessings, which originally come from Numbers 6:24-26:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

When we pray for the people who are not yet believers, what we are doing is asking for God's grace to fall upon their lives and families. We ask the Lord to show his favour to them so they may know what it means to be free, healed and blessed through the help of God. We know that God can solve all their problems and bring them into that atmosphere of love which is found throughout the world wherever our Creator is honoured. He causes the sun to shine upon the just and the unjust as well.

Neither should we forget to pray for the authorities in our nations, and all the nations, because the Bible says they have been put in place by the Most High as a blessing, or to be a channel for God's judgement or his breaking down of a gospel resistant society. The Bible says all authority is delegated from Him as we can read in Romans 13:1 and also in John 19:11. More specifically we have the words that the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1-4:

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – 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 people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Perhaps the noblest and most difficult of all prayer which can only come about through attaining a depth of spirituality and freedom, as well as displaying a certain compassion and love of peace, is to pray for our human enemies. It takes a lot to pray for those who curse us and unjustly persecute us without any just cause, yet they stand in very great need of our compassion and the forgiveness of the Lord, more so than most of the other people that we know with whom we have cordial relationships. By praying for our enemies we put into practice the teaching of our Saviour through the new command that he gave us which are superior to the law of Moses. What I am thinking about here is the Sermon on the Mount, which we can study in Matthew 5:43-48:

'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax

collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

In conclusion then, I think we have understood that we both can and must pray for mankind everywhere, those who are alive but never for those that have already died, or worse pray to those who are dead. The Bible tells us that even in death people are still concerned for those who are still alive, and we have the example that Jesus gave us of the rich man who from Hades who called upon Abraham for help for his family. The only time we should be praying for the dead is to see them raised back to life, should we have the necessary level of faith to see this miracle take place. Usually their days have already been decided and there is no coming back, which only increases the responsibility to pray for those who yet live, and especially for those who are our loved ones. The sad fact is that when they die we can do no more for them.

Do not even think about praying to demons because not only would this be grotesque, absurd and macabre it would also be very offensive to the Holy Spirit, because God's sentence against them can never be revoked.

As you pray, do not be surprised if you feel the promptings of the Lord to ask him to return soon. This would only be a clear expression of how much we long for him and how much we are truly head over heels in love with him. And from the depths of our hearts we want him to establish his kingdom and justice in this world, once and for all, as the fiancé of the bridegroom declares at the end of Song of Songs 8:14:

Come away, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains.

How about praying together right now in line with these teachings?

Dearly beloved Father in heaven, in this moment that you have granted to us life, myself and the readers of this book, we want to enter into an agreement together and declare that we intend to love you more and more every day. Nevertheless we recognise how small our hearts are, but we are sincere when we say to you that we want to increase the measure of our love for you. With our hearts wide open in your presence, we ask you to help us with this, and also that you would breathe your holy fire of love into our beings to stretch our ability to love like you do. You and you alone, we will worship for ever, O God, and you alone will we serve because there is no one like you: holy, all knowing, all-powerful and ever present. You and you alone are worthy of our worship and praise, and so I fall at your feet and I surrender my entire being to you. I make you the

owner and the only Lord of my life! May your kingdom come to me and do with me according to your will. Behold, your servant, do with me according to your word.

Lord Jesus, I give you thanks for the immeasurable and incomparable sacrifice that you have made. Thank you and thank you again Lord for your everlasting mercy, protection and provision as well as the many glorious promises which you have granted to me.

Thank you blessed Father, for my wife, children, grandchildren and their marriage partners, as well as for all my brothers and co-workers. You brought us together and made us one in your enduring love, helping us to see the heavenly vision through your eyes. I ask you to strengthen every one of them in your Spirit, both physically, emotionally and spiritually. Fill them all with your joy and pour out your overflowing grace in their lives, families and ministries. Keep them from all evil, Holy God, and destroy every evil plan which has been made against them!

Be pleased to renew them in your faith and love everyday and never allow them to wander far from you. Anoint them with a double portion of the oil of your Holy Spirit so that they may serve you as courageous watchmen and overcomers. Give them your wisdom and authority so that they may govern their homes well and care for the flocks of sheep and lambs that you have trusted into their hands so they may take care of your people in your name.

Lord of all mercy, my prayer is that you will bless every person who has hurt themselves by being jealous of me or fighting against your purposes in my life. Bless everyone who has spoken badly about me and all those who have cursed me and made life difficult for all of us. Father, they urgently need your help so as not to harvest the consequences allowing evil seeds to be sown in their lives. I ask you, Father, with all sincerity to forgive them as I do right now in your love, I ask you to rescue them from the bitterness of the situation that they are in. Would you also keep my heart safe and soaked in your holy oil and do not allow me to be affected by any attack of my enemies, or allow any bitterness to take root in my soul.

Almighty God, bless the Royal family and the government of my country as well as all the local government officials. Inspire them with your holy purposes to bring about changes to disgraceful behaviour wherever it is happening and to end all legalised abominations, abuses and injustices. May your kingdom come to my nation, to Spain and to all the world.

Lord of all holiness, how we long to see your return and how excited we will be for the day you come to collect us, although we know from your prophetic word that we still have to wait a little while longer. Nevertheless, we say to you in prayer, "Do not delay, Maranatha, come soon Lord Jesus!"

The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

Revelation 22:17

Yes Lord Jesus, hurry to us and come soon, because we want to raise our voices in welcome, shouting with the elation that we will feel as your Bride, in just the same way that young lady says with such excitement in Song 2:8-10:

Listen! My beloved! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. My beloved spoke and said to me, 'Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me.

CHAPTER SIX

Prayer Means Contrition And Confession

How can we ever endeavour to speak with God about anything that is on our mind without having previously made ourselves presentable in his presence? It is not just a question of having clean lips, but of being clean from head to toe, our body as well as our soul. Going one step further, will we actually want to be clean if we have never recognised that we are dirty? Therefore, the very first step for drawing close to God must be to repent of our uncleanness, according to the command we find in his holy word through Acts 17:30-31:

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.'

God announces his arrival in our hearts by the voice of his Holy Spirit calling us to repentance, as Jesus explained in John 16:8. This serves to awaken our conscience which accuses and condemns us by clearly presenting the evildoing of our activities, which have been born out of the congenital perversion of our souls. The soul is what God desires to possess and to be at one with as he infuses his personality into ours. Nevertheless, when he comes he finds in us, as he finds in every member of the human race, a nest of lust reining in the heart of our being and taking full advantage of our body to express and satisfy its degenerative passions.

When God illuminates our hearts our first moral reaction is to sense the conviction of sin and the consequent judgement that is produced by the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we draw close to Christ. By this time it is likely that we have heard the good news of how God offers us forgiveness and we may well have accepted his call to receive this free gift. As we decide to continue on this journey towards our Father, God now grants to us the first spiritual fruit of our commitment which is the gift of repentance, without which there is no possibility of enjoying the salvation that he offers us.

Those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.'

Luke 13:4-5

The truth is that God in his infinite mercy calls out to all who are lost so that they may be saved, as we can see very clearly in 2 Peter 3:9:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The Bible says that it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance, as we can read in Romans 2:4:

Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realising that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

When Jesus sees us so broken-hearted by the sight of our sin, he looks upon us with a compassion that pains our hearts for the depth of its unexpected and deserved love. It is this kindness that draws us into repentance and we may well suffer very real grief for having offended in the way that we have. It is very normal to sense a pain deep within our

souls and to feel incredibly sad and indignant with ourselves, even to the point of hating what we have done now that we recognise it for the sin that it is. Deep within we understand that we are the author of our own evil ways, and now that the light of Christ has shone upon them they are out of the darkness and on display in all their nakedness and shame. What was previously hidden or considered to be of no importance is now seen as the horror story that it is, and although we were never bothered at the time nor had any fear of God, everything has now changed. Listen to what Paul had to say to the Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians 7:10:

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

In the Bible there are many examples of genuine repentance, such as the story of the sinful woman, but no more sinful than any one of us. In her case she had probably been involved in a number of affairs or perhaps she was a prostitute, but either way she slipped into the house of Simon the Pharisee and fell at the feet of Jesus. She washed his feet with her tears and then used her long hair to dry them, before she kissed his feet in an act of total reverence and submission. Finally she poured a very expensive perfume over the feet of Jesus which might well have been her most treasured possession, and in doing so she gained the Lord's forgiveness for all of her sins. It was evident to Jesus that she was displaying the very convincing fruit of having truly repented, through her acts of humiliation, painful contrition and confession leading to a wholehearted submission to God. After that she would never return to her former sins.

In the same way as John the Baptist began his ministry, Jesus did the same by saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is close to you," as we can read in Matthew 3:2. Later on at the end of his ministry, Jesus entrusted his own disciples with the responsibility of preaching the same message. Before he said his final goodbye to them as he was about to ascend through the clouds to sit down on the throne at the right hand of his Father, Jesus commanded his disciples to begin the fulfilment of the Great Commission, which in effect is a call to evangelise the whole world through the preaching of this gift of repentance, as we can read in Luke 24:46-47:

He told them, 'This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'

Then there is the parable of the Pharisee and the publican which very graphically shows us the difference between two attitudes of heart. The publican knowing that he was a sinner fell to his knees in a corner of the room and beat his chest, crying out for the forgiveness of God. This man very clearly had a heart that was humbled and broken. The other man, the Pharisee, was arrogant and displayed a heart was filled with the worst of religious pride which had been fermented with the yeast of hypocrisy. His chanting of selfish prayer and theatrical monologues only incurred the hatred of God whilst the publican with his broken heart of repentance found grace and God's forgiveness. The publican went on his way in peace because God who is the all powerful Judge of everyone who humbles their hearts, chooses to exalt that man or woman but he resists the proud and high-minded.

The consequence of all true repentance accompanied by a sincere humbling of heart is forgiveness, peace and joy because that person receives the full redemptive and restorative work of God in his or her life. He recovers the position that Adam had before his fall, and gains even more maturity and spiritual capacity through his attitude of brokenness. This is because the Holy Spirit goes to work continually in his heart imparting inspiration and teaching to make sure that he does not fall back into sin. Listen to what the writer of Psalm 119:71 has to say about this:

It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

When any man or woman is truly born again, this has only happened after a genuine repentance which has come through either one or many prayers. At this time the person recognises his or her guilt and feels the authentic pains of a spiritual birth deep within, but even so we must never forget that once we have this new life, very similar prayers continue to be necessary. There is not a day that we do not fall into some kind of sin, some serious and many less so, either through the things that we do or the things that we fail to do. It is very important that we recognise what is happening and live a life of ongoing repentance, confession of our wrongdoings and making compensation for the grievances that we have caused. Such actions always bring further forgiveness from God.

The parable of the prodigal son is another call to repentance for everyone who has once enjoyed the perfect fatherhood of God, but has then turned his back on the Lord. When people go backwards like this they inevitably end up following their old nature and by choosing to renounce their heavenly citizenship, it is not long before they return to the ways of this

world and fall into the swamp of sin. When Jesus through John wrote to five of the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation, he had to warn them to repent or be lost. Back in the Old Testament we have the story of how the King, Hezekiah, truly repented and immediately found grace in the eyes of the Lord, who healed him and granted him a further fifteen years of life.

The very climax of the Old Testament story of Job who all through his many afflictions remained righteous before God and men, comes when Job himself needed to be forgiven for his own sense of imperfect righteousness. When he understood this, his heart was broken and he said in Job 42:5-6:

*My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.
Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.*

If we are going to enjoy a daily renewal of our relationship with God, and especially if we have had a serious fall away from God's ways, then every one of us is going to have to go through a time of humbling himself and dealing with the shame that we hate, as well as the pain of the failure and the offence that were given to the Lord and to our fellow man. It is for this very reason that Jesus taught his disciples through the prayer that we call, "Our Father," saying:

*Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those
who have sinned against us.*

Once we have expressed our sincere repentance through prayer and brought all of our sins before God in humble confession, we can rejoice because once our sins are in the light they will be washed by the blood of the Lamb of God, and our souls will become as white as snow. Let us read this very precious promise from God's word in 1 John 1:6-9:

If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Every sin that we hide behaves like a tumour in the soul, giving great advantage to the devil who delights to torment us with guilt as well as making us spiritually, emotionally or physically sick. He works hard with the continual effort to rob us of our strength, joy, peace and enthusiasm and in doing so makes us very poor channels of God's love to the people

around us. The Lord is far better able to use a people who are filled with holiness to be his signpost towards Christ, something that we are called to be, but it is always a shame if people drink of our lives and are not satisfied or worse still pick up the contamination of our own souls. This will inevitably happen if we stop drinking of the living water of heaven and only pour out bitter waters that poison the people we come into contact with. When David wrote Psalm 32:1-6 he expressed this thought very well through his own prayer of repentance:

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

Even the best of saints need to pray like this sometimes because how often do we make mistakes. It is very important that we do not ignore our failures however small they may be, because if we relax at the level of our conscience it will not be long before we start to lose the fear of God. Do that and a man will inevitably end up in the worst and deepest swamp that this world has got to offer, in fact the greater majority of people who fall away from grace including some of the most anointed preachers, have done precisely this by taking one small step downwards at a time. Most would say that they knew what they were doing.

Quite the contrary, we are called upon to move forward and upwards without looking back because the narrow road to heaven is something of a hilly climb, according to Proverbs 15:24. If we're going on this climb then we need to clear the way with a frequent confession of our failures and defects, knowing that every confession takes us one rung higher on the upward slope towards the perfection of our holiness. You will notice that the sins that we scarcely perceived beforehand which all seemed hardly worth bothering with, now appear to be far more serious. This is a very natural consequence of drawing closer to the Lord and walking in a greater measure of his light. As we do our conscience becomes all the more scrupulous, sensitive and more in line with the ways of the Lord. We should not be surprised if we sense an inner sadness for all the hidden sins that we have pushed out of the way, yet it is the easiest thing to ask

for God's forgiveness for every one of them. How well do we know that our memories are somewhat selective and fragile, so it will certainly help us to follow the prayer of David in Psalm 19:12-13:

*But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from wilful sins; may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.*

You probably know the story of how David got involved in adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, and later on to cover over the consequences, ordered the death of her husband in a contrived battle situation. After this had happened, David had a visit from Nathan, the prophet, who was sent by the Holy Spirit. With an amazing shrewdness Nathan told David a parable which revealed a cruel injustice and awakened David's conscience to face up to his own guilt. The purpose of God was to lead David into an opportunity to confess his sin and embrace a sincere repentance, which he did, we can still read his words to this day in Psalm 51:1-4 and also in verses 7 and 9:

*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. For I know
my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you,
you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you
are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall
be whiter than snow. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all
my iniquity.*

This tragic fall of David's was only the beginning of many similar prayers of confession. We know this because the Spirit of the Lord never left David's side after this, but worked constantly in the process of purifying his heart and life, as we can read in Psalm 130:3-4:

*If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with
you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.*

When our offences have left people with a bad impression of us, then it would not be long before the Holy Spirit leads us into a prayer of confession, it may well be the sacrifice of our lips to God. We will also need to do something to restore the relationships that we have spoiled, and it may be that we do this in public in the attempt to take away any stumbling block that we have placed in front of others. The Lord will help us to give clear evidence of a change in our behaviour and by his grace will help us to regain the lost friendships. This is all the work of the Holy

Spirit, which we can read about when he touched the lives of many believers after Paul had ministered in Ephesus doing extraordinary miracles in the sight of the people. We can read about the consequence in Acts 19:18:

Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done.

In the same way, when we have offended someone in particular, it is not quite enough to confess our failure in a prayer to the Lord; rather we should be ready to shoulder the responsibility of confessing our mistake in the presence of the people we have offended. We need to ask for their forgiveness which may go some way to mending the damage that we have caused, although this is rarely totally achievable. Let us hear what the apostle James has to say in James 5:16:

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

If all we do is to repent and confess our sins this will not bring about the fullness of our redemption, because we need to add a prayer asking for forgiveness. Let us read the example that the priest, Asaph, left us in Psalm 79:9:

Help us, God our Saviour, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.

The Berber people of North Africa have a proverb which says, "If God were not to forgive sins then his paradise would be empty." Empty it would be, least of men and women because all of us are sinners, yet we have the certainty that God will fulfil his many promises which assure us of his forgiveness. Of course, these promises are given for the benefit of all those who genuinely repent, confess their sins and ask for his forgiveness. We need to remember with immense gratitude and trust, this most wonderful verse which I never get tired of preaching or applying to my own life, and I refer to 2 Chronicles 7:14:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Many of the servants of the Lord in earlier days have left us a legacy of their prayers asking forgiveness for the sins of their nation and people, as if they were asking for the forgiveness of their own sins. In this case they had not been personally involved but as an act of priestly responsibility

and in complete identification with the sinners concerned, they prayed for them. For sure they had committed other different sins given that every one of us sins, but nevertheless they chose to stand in the gap before the Lord and volunteered to be the scapegoats for the people as Christ would do for us much later on. Whatever atonement was required for their sins we can be sure that the Lord took care of it.

Moses was a great figure who was uniquely blessed to contemplate the divine glory of God when he was given two tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments written upon them by the finger of God. Yet before long he too was having to humble himself and asking for forgiveness for the people as he worshipped God, as we can read in Exodus 34:8-9:

Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshipped. 'Lord,' he said, 'if I have found favour in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.'

Later on at a time when Israel rebelled again against the Lord, God's patience reached its limits and he decided to wipe the nation out and save only Moses. God said that he would start all over again with a new people, and his words are found in Numbers 14:12:

I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they.

In both cases Moses bravely struggled with the Lord by reminding him of his own words and promises in the past, and then crying out to God for his forgiveness for the people. The story continues in Numbers 14:17-19:

Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: "The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.

Many years later on the prophet Daniel left us with a very beautiful testimony of his love for his people Israel. Daniel deeply humbled himself before God to plead for the forgiveness of the nation's sins as if they were his very own. As you read the story in Daniel 9:3-9, you will probably join me in being tremendously astonished and filled with a deep admiration of this man:

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:

'Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

'Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame – the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;

If we ask God for forgiveness but then do not forgive the people who have sinned against us, then we fail to offer the required sacrifice of lips and heart. For forgiveness to be complete our prayer of confession must be accompanied by contrition and a prayer for our sins not to be counted against us. What we are looking for is for our hearts to be circumcised by the work of the Holy Surgeon who comes to us with the scalpel of his word. Through prayer we cancel the debts that we feel that people owe to us through their mistakes and we grant them our unconditional forgiveness, because to do anything less than this will render all of our other prayers to be ineffective before the throne of God's mercy. To not forgive others means that we will not be forgiven ourselves as the Lord Jesus clearly explained to us when teaching the prayer we know as Our Father:

If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matthew 6:14-15

Later on Jesus talked to his disciples about the infinite power of the prayer of faith which he declared would move mountains and uproot trees and cast them into the depths of the sea. Such things are impossible for men and very rarely would be considered necessary, but through the symbolism Jesus was explaining the glorious victories which are possible

over the powers of darkness and perverse men and women. Returning to his earlier teaching, Jesus made it clear that giving forgiveness to every offence against us is absolutely indispensable if we are going to see fruit that is possible in our prayer life. We can read his words in Mark 11:25-26:

When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Let us always be mindful that our God wants our lives to be a house of prayer and not a cave of robbers. This reason we need to keep our lives clean, washed and all the dust of this world swept out daily through the kind of prayer that we have been talking about. We always need to be in good shape with the Lord and in complete peace with everyone around us, neither owing anything to anybody nor demanding that our debtors pay up in full and now. This is the way to live in holiness and freedom in a lifestyle that never allows our enemy to gain any advantage over us, nor brings any sadness to the heart of our beloved Saviour. It will be good for us to daily practice this blessed washing of our soul in ongoing obedience to the word of God which makes his necessity very clear to us in some straight talking which is found in Isaiah 1:16-20:

Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. 'Come now, let us settle the matter,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.' For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

So, at the end of this chapter would you like to pray with me again, and will work our way through the prayers we have been talking about together.

"Merciful Father, I know that I let you down every day by not loving you as you so deserve and not seeking your face with the ardour and gratitude that your goodness demands. I am very aware that I do not pray in a way that always pleases you, neither do I always find the right way of approaching you. I know that I can speak too soon and my words spill over into vain thoughts, clumsy words and selfish activities which have more to do with my human feelings and own strength than anything else. Holy Lord, please forgive me, strengthen me and change me.

Beloved God, I ask your forgiveness because I have not loved the people around me as I have loved myself, and I have not sufficiently spent my life in trying to help them and show them the way of your salvation. I have not tried as hard as I can to set them free from their sins and dangerous ways of living, from their misery and poverty by the power of your Holy Spirit that you so undeservedly have given to me.

I cry out to you for your forgiveness, my King and my God for all the sins of my nation, and the nations. We have lost our way and perverted your way through abominations such as abortion and the celebration of sexual debauchery which has left our nation unclean. I am as guilty as any for these things for not having prayed as I ought, nor sufficiently, and neither have I confessed your word with the insistence and the holy zeal that is required.

Lord, please forgive me and raise me up to where I should be.”

Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings.

Proverbs 1:23

CHAPTER SEVEN

Prayer Works Best With A Lowered, Patient And Joyful Heart.

In James 4:6, the Bible says that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble, and this being the case how can we ever come close to him with a high and haughty attitude? It is a dreadful scandal to hear how some of the vain, world-famous, television super-preachers dare to pray in public, before the cameras and probably in the sight of millions of people, saying, “I command you God, to pour out your anointing and manifest your power right now.”

They would defend themselves with a very selfish and petulant use of the text found in Isaiah 45:11, which is more correctly interpreted as a request or a question to the Lord. They are not alone, given time you will hear many other prayers which are way out of order from reverend personalities who ooze arrogance and are quite different persons offstage. A good many of these men have built their ministry into a pyramid only to

enthroned themselves on the highest point in sharp contrast to the biblical model which expects every one of us to become part of either the trunk or the branches of God's tree of life.

God is looking for our humble service to both him and to his people, and our prayer life should be one of simplicity, humility and reverence before the very presence of the Most High. It is always good for us to recognise our own smallness with the same attitude that David had, even though he was a divinely anointed king. Listen to his prayer in Psalm 39:4-6:

'Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure. Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom; in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be.'

Truth of the matter is that this yeast of apostate prayer which is infected with a self-love whose origins are in Satan himself, has spread widely in our days especially in the United States. Wherever it happens, the doctrinal loaf that comes out of the oven is both diabolical and humanistic, yet it is seen as the latest bizarre evangelical fashion. What this kind of prayer is really saying is that God no longer has any authority in this world because he has given complete dominion over his creation to a select number of mankind. Some even give the impression that God would seek to ask our permission before he intervenes in earthly affairs!

This is a dreadful state of affairs, but even more horrendous than this is to see how many pastors are applauding this false doctrine and making it their own to satisfy their ambitious hearts. However, let us be very aware that the same thing could happen to me and to you if we were ever to lose the fear of God, which is the beginning of all wisdom. Should this happen it is certain that we will harvest disgrace because as the Bible says pride goes before, as we can read in Proverbs 16:18. Only dishonour awaits the man who crashes down from the diabolical heights of Mount Olympus only to fall into the fetid dust to be the food of snakes, in plain fulfilment of Proverbs 11:2 and Proverbs 29:23.

If we are going to pray with humility, then we need to hear the teaching of Christ who would have us be as little children. In fact there is no other way that we will be able to enter heaven which is precisely the purpose of prayer. Prayer is the journey we take to appear before God and in return to receive his revelations and many ways of helping us, very much in line with the words of Jesus when he was praying with his disciples, in Luke 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. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

When we pray with a clean and humble heart with not a trace of malice in it, then we have the heart of a little child and this in turn stirs the heart of God himself. Our God is a tender-hearted father with maternal as well as paternal instincts and when we approach him as a little child he is quickly moved to provide a loving response. He will never allow any demonic accuser to get in the way of his answers, and he makes sure that Satan remains silent in the face of innocence with never a finger raised against us or pointing at us in accusation. When our hearts are those of a little child, Satan can never find any opportunity to come against us because he can only see the purity of our lips and the cleanliness of our hands. The prayer of David in Psalm 8:1-2 underlines this truth very well:

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

It is only when we appear before God with a humble and reverent attitude of desiring to serve him that we can consequently do something good. Nevertheless we should never forget that at our best we are only useless servants and anything that we do achieve is only through his grace. The Bible gives us a number of examples of the right steps to take if we are to be welcomed by the Lord. For example, Mary humbled herself at the feet of Jesus, and in the Old Testament Ruth placed herself at the feet of Boaz and in both cases the ladies received abundant blessings. They show us how to gain the admirable and precious attention of the Lord who when approached correctly is always ready to listen to us and respond to us in the most loving and responsive way. We will never be less than satisfied, so when we pray let us adopt the same attitude as David, and you may wish to use his words in Psalm 138:6-8 as a model:

Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly; though lofty, he sees them from afar. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes; with your right hand you save me. The Lord will vindicate me; your love, Lord, endures for ever – do not abandon the works of your hands.

It is not at all unusual for God to test us by making us wait for some time before granting the prayers that we have placed before him, even if our

requests are perfectly reasonable. The reason is that God is always looking for ways to bring us to greater maturity and into spiritual growth. He is always concerned to increase our ability to demonstrate patience, because without this will we always tend to rush into making wrong decisions and end up by falling into the ditches of this world. On the other hand, with an ample supply of this fruit of the Holy Spirit we can win souls for Jesus, as we can read in Luke 21:19. With patience we will harvest all of what we have asked and hoped for through maintaining the faith that we have been given in the promises of the Lord, which are found in great measure all through the Bible. Hebrews 6:11-12 reminds us of this truth:

We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

There is an old saying that, "Rome will never fall in an hour," which gives us the idea that everything has its right time, in fact this is one of the main teachings of the book of Ecclesiastes. Every one of us needs to learn to be patient and to wait in quietness of spirit, without worrying when the promises the Lord might be fulfilled with a favourable answer to our prayers. We do not want to lose any of the good hope that we have and fall into the trap of any sadness which might rob us of our confidence in God, as well as causing us to feel as dry and spiritually languid, like one of those foolish virgins in the New Testament who could not be bothered keeping her lamp alight. When people lose hope they are soon living under a dark and cloudy sky and need to take great care not to fall into the deep pit of depression.

Prayer will always go better if our souls are saturated with patience because without patience when facing the inevitable hard times which come the way of everybody, we so very easily end up losing all hope and then fall into a blind alley of not knowing what is going to happen. This is when people get upset with God, followed by blaming him for all of our problems and then worst of all they think that he has abandoned them. Better then that we follow the example of Jeremiah who was known as the weeping prophet for the way that he responded after witnessing the total ruin of Israel in his day. He saw the nightmarish massacres which preceded the complete devastation of Solomon's glorious temple which was probably the greatest wonder of the world in that age. The example that I am talking about is that despite this desperate situation, Jeremiah still prayed out loud to express the greatest of hope. Hope of course is the

younger sister of patience and her disciple. Here are some of Jeremiah's words from Lamentations 3:24-26:

I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Hope itself is a daughter of faith and of love, and perhaps has the appearance of the emerald of the Urim and Thummin, which were precious stones set into the breastplate of the High Priest. However, hope is totally dependent upon the unbreakable faithfulness which is demonstrated through patience to the point of being something of a guarantee of the greatest possible help that is on its way from God. Hope is going to be a very important ingredient as we move into the evil times which indicate that the end is close and which will see the greatest exodus in all history. This will be the final flight of the believing church into a safe and secret place already prepared by God in the deserts of Moab- but now we are moving into eschatology. Suffice it to say that in the end times the Antichrist will be on centre stage with all the events that will precede his coming and accompany his activities, as the words of Revelation 3:10 begin to be fulfilled:

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

Knowing what is ahead, it will be good to stop for a moment and to pray, to ask our Father in Heaven to increase his divine fruit of patience in us.

Merciful God, we come to you in great need of your help and forgiveness, because many times we are so terribly impatient and get upset without any real reason. We have displayed too much selfish anger and left a bad testimony the sight of other people as well as wounding your holy sensitivity. In your infinite patience through which you always bear with us and persevere in love, never for one moment abandoning your miraculous purposes to make us perfect, will you please tame our tongues and put the brakes on our selfish insistence. Teach us to persevere both in prayer and in knowing how to wait for your answers. Grant us the gift of your patience because only you can produce this virtue in our lives, and we confess that we stand in great need of this patience. With all of our hearts we receive your promises and continue faithfully towards the goal that you have set for us. Amen.

Without any doubt at all, patience is a fundamental ingredient of peace and the most important contributor towards hope. When we pray let us always pray with a living hope in our hearts because by doing this we will never be embarrassed, or fall into the kind of hopelessness which precedes failure and quite possibly being ridiculed by others. It is important that every day we grab hold of the promises of God and pray with wholehearted affirmations that God will be faithful to us, following in the footsteps of David in Psalm 25:3:

No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.

Changing the subject, you know what happens when a man and a woman who are very much in love with each other spend time together. For certain, you will easily detect the atmosphere of happiness around them, and this is exactly how our God wants to cover us using the *Talit* or mantle of his Holy Spirit. He wants to see us dripping with the joy of heaven when we are in his presence, spellbound by his beauty to the point of feeling totally flustered by the rising adrenaline in our bloodstream. Our hearts beat faster and our breathing becomes excited, something like the experience that David describes in Psalm 16:11:

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

To understand the importance of the fruit of the Holy Spirit known as joy, begin by understanding that this is something which never goes away but is a continuation of faith and love. Together they form an indispensable triad which is impossible for circumstances to overcome, so for this reason we want to be giving joy a place of high priority in the list of what is important in our lives. We should never forget the command of Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians where we can read these words:

Rejoice always

Paul say something very similar in Philippians 4:4 only this time he defines who is the object and the source of our joy, saying:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Now let us take into consideration by being wise and responsible, just what it means to be able to live victoriously. The Bible says that our spiritual strength is very directly related to this same fruit of joy given by the Holy Spirit, as we can read in Nehemiah 8:10:

Nehemiah said, 'Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'

It is when we pray with this joy, that we see our prayer turned into singing and our words become instruments of a great celebration, as we exalt the goodness and the wonders of our God. We turn to praise him, sending him the bouquets of our gratitude and admiration, filling his presence with our shouts of elation and excitement, just as happened in Psalm 30:11-12:

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.

There is never a day that we do not have more than enough reasons to be happy and grateful to the Lord, and this being so we must never allow ourselves to fall into the ashes of sadness or the poison of bitterness. Either of these will extinguish the fire of the Lord and this is why reading the Bible every day will remind us to open a fresh bottle of the wine of his holy gladness. Let our hearts be cups that are overflowing with Jesus and let us love him as our Heavenly Father loves us and let the quantity, the quality and the depth of his love be our example to love him in return. This is the way that we will enter into his joy and find our own gladness in doing so, in confirmation of the words of the apostle in John 15:9 and 11; we find our obedience to the encouragement in Psalm 5:11-12:

But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favour as with a shield.

If sadness insists on hanging over us like a black cloud we need to recognise this and deal with it urgently by calling out to the Lord, asking him to draw close. It is his loving ministry towards us that will raise us up from the ash heap of all grief and every expression of anguish in the depths of our hearts. Jesus takes these things away and in return he leaves behind the presence of his glory, the oil of joy and a covering of gladness, this being the promise we find in Isaiah 61:3. This is a good reason to follow the encouragement that we find in James 5:13:

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.

What do we do then when the Lord says 'No' to our prayers, perhaps because our requests were too biased towards ourselves or right now is not the best time? The refusal or delay might be because God sees that what we are asking would not bring any true blessing to either our own

lives or those of the people around us, or quite simply what we have asked does not fit in with the will of God which is always perfect.

When this happens we have to learn to respond like Jesus did after he prayed three times in the garden of Gethsemane, on each occasion asking his Father that if it were possible he would not have to drink from this horrifying cup that was about to come his way. It must be that Jesus could see that this cup was overflowing with our uncleanness for which he was going to have to pay the price of his own blood by taking all of our sin and wickedness upon his own holy life. Jesus must have known that the only way that our souls would be purified and that we would gain eternal life would be through his own sacrifice. Not surprisingly then he prayed three times, and three times he sensed that the answer was no.

The truth of the matter is that if God had granted his request, then not one human being would ever have been able to escape from a hellish destiny, as becomes very clear when we read Matthew 26:39, 42 and 44, which are repeated in Mark 14:36. In seeing how Jesus accepted the will of God and persevered his way forward, we ourselves learn a very important lesson because sooner or later and probably many times throughout our lives, we are also going to experience the refusal of God. I know this can be very painful for any one of us, but nevertheless we must follow the example that the suffering Messiah gave to us as like a lamb and without a murmur he gave himself into the hands of those who would torture him to death. This was his total obedience to God.

The apostle Paul also heard the word 'no' three times from the Lord and the particular suffering that had come his way continued. He brought the same prayer to the Lord on three occasions asking to be set free from the never-ending pain of a thorn in his flesh, whatever that might have been. Many people think that he was being continually tormented by a demon power, and Paul tells the story himself in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

As Paul says, it is wholly sufficient for us to be able to live each day with joy and in the many sided and overflowing, abundant grace of God which is given to us in Christ Jesus. That alone is the most perfect reason for prayer and for having a song in our hearts every day. If we will only do that we will soon be radiating a glorious happiness and the sadness, confusion or discouragement that comes through whatever is going on around us in our earthly life will be overcome. Some difficult things do happen but if we will keep a tight grip on the hand of Christ, dancing with him to the music of his smiles and enjoying the beautiful poetic words of him who is called the Word of God then we will find that his love is better than wine. The comfort of his embrace and the kisses of his Holy Spirit

are like a sublime balsam which will cure all of our wounds, all we have to do is to keep on praying at all times and never stop. Be encouraged with these words from Habakkuk 3:17-19:

Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the sheepfold and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.

Shall we crown this chapter by praying together as one, to put into practice some of the teaching that we have just been reading?

"Our wonderful, genial and loving Father, we humble our hearts before your magnificence and fall to our knees, recognising our weaknesses. We are no more than tiny worms on the face of the earth, living in the dust, and we tell you just how much we need you in every moment of our days. We could never survive separated from your love and if you ever did stop breathing your life into us we would die at once. If you would ever forget to protect us then we would be trampled into the ground, devoured by Satan's birds of the air, drowned in rivers of unclean waters, burned in the fiery offerings that were given to Molech or just withered by the thirst and hunger that is everywhere in this spiritually lifeless desert where darkness reigns.

You and you alone Lord, can make us shine with your light although even the best of us will never be more than tiny specks of starlight that twinkle for you. Nevertheless Lord, we want to give you a sight of our joy and our gratitude; only by being illuminated by your light can we ourselves give testimony to your name. Like lighthouses in the middle of storms we want to shine with a warning to all mankind, most of whom live without any brilliance of hope in their lives because they have not yet come to know you.

We pray for all those whose light has gone out because they have walked away from you and are now no more than human vessels of clay that are filled with nests in which dwell every kind of worldly lust. We want to send your light into these caves that hide no end of demonic vermin and in your name call these people out of the darkness and into your most beautiful light. Let their eyes be anointed with the ointment of the Holy Spirit so that in seeing they may share in your joy and also in ours, and together we may come to be an uncountable number of tiny lights

walking together as the radiant sun which is your glorious and splendid Church.

Holy Father, we always want to draw close to you with great joy as people who are passionately head over heels in love with you, and possessed by the fire of your great love which no one and nothing can ever extinguish. For these reasons, beloved Jesus, we want to say to you with our hearts overflowing with holy passion that in all truth we love you and our greatest longing is to always make you happy. We offer you our total respect and complete obedience only asking in return with a childlike persistence that goes together with a mature patience, that you would never allow us to lose the glory of living in your most excellent gladness, because should it happen we would surely die of grief. Amen.

To finish, how much I want to pray and pass on to the Lord the words that I find written in Song of Songs 1:4:

Take me away with you – let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers. We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine. How right they are to adore you!

CHAPTER EIGHT

Prayer As Intercession With Tears And Groans.

it is clear from many parts of the Bible that tears are the very best possible irrigation for our prayers. Tears cause the seed of our prayers to grow almost like the silent yet visible effect of yeast upon dough, I do believe that prayers that are soaked in tears have the greatest possible effect on the father heart of God. So it was that with sobs from deep within that David wrote Psalm 42:3:

My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'

Despite his many dreadful sins, David did pray through a flood of tears, and as we can read in Psalm 6:6-7 he found the grace of God.

I am worn out from my groaning. All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes.

The Spanish writer, Lope de Vega, would have understood what David was saying when he wrote, "The tears of our children are like arrows in the hearts of the parents." Through all of his anguish, David knew what it was like to open his deepest, innermost being before the Lord and from there he found the words for his prayers, which he then soaked with his tears. Psalm 102:8-9 tells us the story of one of his days:

All day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my name as a curse. For I eat ashes as my food and mingle my drink with tears.

Who of us has never gone through a few days of feeling really down and discouraged from the inside out? Perhaps you had to go through a time when all you could hear was criticism, possibly even slanderous remarks and you felt despised, let down and persecuted by people? When it happens, because it does, we need to remember Job because in circumstances which were far worse than the ones we have just mentioned, he left us a very dramatic example to follow. These are his words from Job 16:20:

My friends treat me with scorn, but my eyes pour out tears to God.

We might think that we are the only ones going through a stressful situation but the truth is that many of the followers of the Lord in past days and even today are suffering in exactly the same way. The stories they tell encourage us to pay the price of overwhelming afflictions if necessary, in order to honour Christ and the gospel. David describes his own situation in Psalm 102:4-5:

My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. In my distress I groan aloud and am reduced to skin and bones.

Who indeed does not feel heartbroken at seeing bad things and the work of the enemy of our souls happening in increasing measure across the world? It distresses us to see how evil has managed to drag away so many of our brothers and sisters in the faith, including more than a few who once upon a time were moving in a very blessed ministry. Seeing these things makes tears to be our daily bread and we only find comfort in words such as those filled with anguish and deepest pain that Asaph the priest wrote in Psalm 80:3-7:

Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. How long, Lord God Almighty, will your anger smoulder against the prayers of your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. You have made us an object of derision to our neighbours, and our enemies mock us. Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

It seems clear to me that if we do not cry like little children, will not be able to suck the divine milk that is our nourishment and consolation. A broken heart is something that every one of us has to experience and we will never be able to avoid it forever. When the waters that surround the heart are broken for the first time, we are born again and receive the fullest forgiveness from the Lord, which is what happened to me on the day of my spiritual resurrection. I was so broken-hearted at the sight of my sin and the grace of God that I fell to the floor asking for forgiveness, filling the air with loud cries and wailing, as I unconditionally surrendered myself at the feet of Christ.

For me this was a very far-reaching experience, no doubt just as it was for the sinful woman described in the Gospels, who quietly slid into the house of Simon the Pharisee and threw herself at the feet of Jesus. Before anyone could say anything, there she was washing his feet with her tears, kissing them and displaying an immense gratitude because Jesus was accepting and not rejecting her. The gospel of Luke 7:37-38 tells us the story, which goes on to say in verse 48 that Jesus forgave all of her sins. Just as he did for me, soaking me with God's forgiveness until I felt like a completely new man, clean inside and out.

Once we have understood through our genuine faith that God is love, we can perfectly understand and put our confidence in the profound truth that God desires to save all men, not wanting even one human being to be lost. God wants every single one of us to return to him with a genuine repentance, which is a verse from 2 Peter 3:9. For this reason, Jesus never stops calling out to a whole world of men and women, inviting every single person to come to him with tear-soaked mourning for their sins, as the prophetic book of Joel 2:12-13 explains:

'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Every one of us whom the New Testament calls priests, have God's unceasing command to weep at the altar of prayer, which is the altar of incense as we call out to him for his help and forgiveness both for ourselves and for our people. You could say that this is the first and foremost work that we are called to as we share in the priesthood that Christ gives to us. Joel 2:17 continues to remind us of this call:

Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare your people, Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, "Where is their God?"'

If it has been a good while since I last shed tears of compassion and intercession, my soul begins to sense the need to ask the Holy Spirit to massage my heart and renew the simplicity that belongs there. It is never long before he begins to work by restoring in me a maternal and merciful tenderness for lost souls, and then for all those who are suffering the torture that the devil and this world produces. We are called to weep with those that weep and by the help of the Holy Spirit we can almost get to the same place that Jeremiah, the weeping prophet found himself in when he wrote in Jeremiah 9:1:

Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.

Indeed, as a grief stricken man or woman is beyond comfort, we need to rend our hearts and plead for lost souls before him who is the Resurrection and the Life, who alone can raise people out of spiritual death, and ask him to have mercy on all those who have turned their back upon God. Weeping is a very special kind of music that moves the heart like no other and breaks down every barrier, even as far as persuading God to change his mind. Such a thing happened when Hezekiah, the king of Israel became ill and God refused to heal him because the many blessings he had received had increased his vanity even as far as trying to take the glory of the Lord for himself. However, when faced with an imminent death, he broke his heart, dressed himself in sackcloth and with considerable weeping for the presence of God, such a compassion overcame the Lord that he cancelled the death sentence and extended Hezekiah's life by fifteen years. Here is an important part of the story from Isaiah 38:5:

'Go and tell Hezekiah, "This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.'

Tears are salty to the taste because they have the strong flavour of suffering and the fundamental ingredient of true love contained in them. When we beseech God through intercession, what we are really doing is irrigating the plantation of the Lord which is the true Church of Christ, his beloved and eternal family. The tears of the people of God go to the very throne of God which is a source of all of his grace and supreme authority, overflowing into the heart of the Trinity which beats as one in perfect and holy harmony. It is the Holy Spirit who compels us to intercede through him and encourages us to take full advantage of our position, which is seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father, as Paul explains to us in Romans 8:22-23 and 26:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to Sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Where you see the word "groan" in these verses, the original meaning from the Greek language is "longings with sighs," which speaks of the way that the Lord breathes out his holy zeal for the souls of all men, to bring them into his chosen household of faith.

One of the ingredients of aromatic incense is one that symbolises the perfect prayer of the saints of God. It is called *Helb'nach* in the Hebrew language and we know it as aromatic galbanum which is a kind of resin that takes the natural shape of a teardrop. The image it conveys is that weeping is a medicine for the soul because holy tears are well known to bring about the very best in a healing that we can ever receive, all the more so when we are crying out of love. This is especially so when a man or woman weeps for the sheer joy of being loved or being in love, and you probably noticed how many times this happens to believers in the middle of a time of praise, prayer or worship.

Without any doubt, this is the way that the apostle Paul lived, or it might be better said that this was his normal intensive lifestyle, loving both God and mankind, and especially the Jewish people and those Gentiles who had come to faith in Christ. In the book of Acts 20:18-19 Paul talks about his service for the Lord and how he has had to live through every kind of humbling experience. He mentions the many tears that he has shed

because of the snares that were laid in his path by the jealous religious fanatics of his day.

No one would ever dream of laughing at a child who has tears streaming down his face, and even less so would our Heavenly Father laugh at the sight of our weeping brought about by the touch of the Holy Spirit. While it is true that Christ could never shed any more blood because every drop has already been poured out for us, he is perfectly able to weep with us with a waterfall of tears that falls from his eyes. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus lives to continue intercede for all humanity and it would no doubt please him to see us behaving like crying babies at the sight of all the suffering that not only our loved ones go through, but all mankind one way or another.

When we ourselves even begin to enter into the pain that the Lord feels, which was and continues to be greater than all human suffering put together, we can perhaps understand to some limited extent what it means to sweat blood as Jesus did. Even then it will be impossible for us to truly understand the infinite depths that contain the emotions of God, although we know that when this happened to Jesus he was as human as any one of us. It was in the garden of Gethsemane on that tragic night before Jesus was to sacrifice his life on the cross that more than sweating blood, Jesus wept his blood as he sensed the immense responsibility of having to drink a cup of suffering filled with all the evildoing and uncleanness of mankind past, present and future.

The Bible says that Jesus became a curse that we might be freed from all curses, and then he suffered the reality of being rejected by his Father for the first time in all of eternity so that we might be accepted as the children of God. All in all, the suffering that Jesus endured must have been not only heart rendering but deeper than anything we can imagine or describe. We only get a tiny glimpse through Hebrews 5:7:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

I have one very special memory of a message that the Lord gave me to share with the ladies who had come together for one of our "Esther" retreat days. This in fact is one of the ministries of my wife, and that day I had the privilege of talking to the ladies on the theme of "Holy Weeping." It seems to me that because of their greater sensitivity, the ladies have a superior ability to release the compassionate streams that flow from their eyes, probably because of their natural maternal

tenderness. This virtue is probably the nearest feeling to the love of God itself.

Many times my wife and I have wept together, and then separately. The same is true for my children and for the men and women who work together with me in the ministry as we have found reason to shed tears. We have had the wonderful experience of feeling how the Lord has dried our tears using his robe as a towel and then touching us with the feathers of his wings, coming to us as he has in the form of the holy Dove of God. We have felt the touch of his healing fingertips and known his consolation and joy in our hearts, as for a moment he has allowed us to participate in his glory through the power of the Holy Spirit. After moments like this we have risen in total victory to live out the words of Psalm 84:5-7:

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

And now our prayer together, "Holy Father, I know very well that our tears are like pearls offered at your feet, counted by yourself and considered by you to be a very special treasure- the place in your heart. For this reason I want to ask you never to allow the springs in my eyes to dry up for as long as you allow me to be a pilgrim through the valleys and mountains of this world. Grant me the ability to water your land and grant me the joy of seeing how might it produce both abundant life and growth in your vineyard. Allow this to be my privilege and to take me to be with yourself on your holy mountain, where never again will I weep, for there you will welcome me into your eternal Sabbath and allow me to share forever in your perfect Shalom."

It will be then that without any shadow of doubt, I will be able to say the same words that David declared in Psalm 116:7-8:

Return to your rest, my soul, for the Lord has been good to you. For you, Lord, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

CHAPTER NINE

Prayer To Lament, Complain And Find Relief.

Over the years I have come across many failures of justice, observing the judges of this world declaring innocent people to be guilty and setting the guilty free and unpunished. I have heard magistrates declaring what is obviously bad to be good, and asserting that which is clearly unclean to be worthy of attention. This makes one ask, "When cruel and perverse enemies multiply on all sides and have the backing of governments and the legal systems of this world, who then can we go to for help when we need a defender?"

If any of us will take time to search the prophetic Scriptures then will soon come to realise that the accelerated growth of evil-doing in all the world is no more than what has been predicted for thousands of years. Furthermore, it may be a shock to discover that the day is not far away when the people who love God will be considered to be public enemy number one. At a time like this we can understand how urgent it is to learn how to pour out our feelings before the Lord and to be continually asking for his help. In this we can follow the example of David who said in Psalm 142:2:

I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble.

It can be very painful to see or to suffer the havoc that evil causes either to our own lives or in the lives of others close to us. When our souls burn within indignation and a holy anger begins to rise, it is not long before we are ready to shout our complaints and heartrending cries throne of JHVH TSIDKENU, our God of all justice. We are there to implore his intervention and to ask for a display of perfect justice that honours his name, and when our words are at an end the Holy Spirit together with Christ is the perfect intercessor, continuing to pray through us with groans that cannot be heard by our ears. Romans 8:26 takes up the theme:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Let me tell you that the result of such violent prayers when they are accompanied by such inner groaning, is as often as not an extraordinary move forward in the establishing of God's Kingdom and his justice, in fulfilment of the command given by our King in Matthew 6:33:

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

This then is what we do with our sighs, anguish and complaints, launching our grievances towards the God of all justice, in a deep and straightforward denunciation of the wrongdoing that has touched our

lives. In this we find a holy relief for our minds and souls; we get it off our chest. Way beyond our own situations, we can hear the far greater complaint of the martyrs down through all the ages as they cry out to God for justice and holy vengeance. Their just complaint only serves to increase the heat of the consuming fire that is God and he responds with a holy loathing of what has happened, eventually pouring out his cup of wrath upon the nations, as we can read in Revelation 6:9-10:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?'

It will be to save them from his punishing fury that God himself calls out to his people to leave Babylon before he repays this treacherous harlot for all that she has done on the earth. God sees her as the mother of all the abominations in the world and all the evil and suffering that she has caused, he commands double punishment as we can read in Revelation 18:4-6:

Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people," so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup.

It is for certain that the most plaintive prophet of all and the author of a whole book of holy lamentation was Jeremiah, otherwise known as the weeping intercessor. He had a way of moving the very heart of the Lord who perhaps had never heard such tear-soaked groans before, yet they kept coming with strident and heartrending sighs. For example we can read the following in Jeremiah 8:21-22:

Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?

From his watchtower, this faithful martyr of the Lord fulfilled the painful ministry of prophesying on repeated occasions that God intended to punish his beloved people, Israel. Jeremiah seemed able to sense the suffering in God's heart knowing that the Lord's punishment was liable to be very severe because of the persistent rebellion against him in Israel.

This was causing tremendous havoc in the land, so much so that Jeremiah grieved from the very depths of his being as he walked through deserts and crossed mountains, giving voice to the laments of *Ruach Hakodesh*, God the Holy Spirit in his heart. Anyone passing by might have mistaken his wailing for that of a mother bear that has lost her cubs, but read Jeremiah's words for yourself in Jeremiah 9:9-10:

Should I not punish them for this?' declares the Lord. 'Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?'

I will weep and wail for the mountains and take up a lament concerning the wilderness grasslands. They are desolate and untraveled, and the lowing of cattle is not heard. The birds have all fled and the animals are gone.

Another well-known, brave and long-suffering prophet, Isaiah, also knew what it was to mourn before God, in fact he broke his heart for the imminent tragedy of divine punishment upon Israel. Here are his words from Isaiah 16:9:

So I weep, as Jazer weeps, for the vines of Sibmah. Heshbon and Elealeh, I drench you with tears! The shouts of joy over your ripened fruit and over your harvests have been stilled.

I am sure that you already know that we who are following the Lord find ourselves incapable of not breathing complaints, either spoken or unspoken, in the presence of the Lord. All it takes is for us to see the misery, hunger, evildoing and ethnic cleansing that happens through visible injustice, particularly towards the weakest of peoples, the children of the world. Then the brakes come off and we cannot stop ourselves complaining and pleading before our Merciful God, just as Jeremiah did when faced with the sight of the massacre that took place in Israel by the orders of Nebuchadnezzar. Hear his voice in Lamentations 2:19-20:

Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at every street corner. 'Look, Lord, and consider: whom have you ever treated like this? Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?'

Another particularly tragic and hair-raising lament came from the prophet Micah when he glimpsed the imminent divine punishment that was declared upon both Samaria and Jerusalem:

'Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations. All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used.' Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl.

Micah 1:6-8

Nevertheless, the most shocking and deepest moving prayer of complaint of all time has to be found in the words of Jesus Christ just before he died, as remembered by Mark in Mark 15:34:

And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')

Let us not forget that the Lord himself expects us to break our hearts before him and in the presence of his people, giving expression to sincere laments of shame and horror at the sight of our own sins and those of our people. Take the words of Joel 2:12-13 for example:

'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

In reading this part of the word of God, we can understand how God defines the authentic circumcision of heart that he calls for. When we tear our hearts open as we would rip a piece of cloth then this is received as genuine repentance, in sharp contrast to the religious acts of tearing garments that take place in certain faiths. This is no more than an operetta starring Pharisees, filled with hypocritical drama. In a similar vein the apostle James commands all those believers who are double minded to go away and break their hearts before God. What he means is that he wants them to destroy all their worldly thoughts and turn their backs on every earthly and fleshly desire, so that in doing so they may be rescued, renewed and accepted by the Lord. Here are his words from James 4:8-10:

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve,

mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

When it comes to being double minded, Jesus also took his generation of Israelites to task. Society of those days was overflowing with Pharisees, legalists and phonies who had neither the sensitivity to be joyful nor to mourn as required, in other words they were double minded. Jesus called them to be set free from this schizophrenia by calling upon God to take his sharp double-edged sword to their indecision and indifference. The same words that we have just read from James 4:8-10 would be equally appropriate here.

Many people are called give voice to laments such as these which purify the soul, but all too few actually obey the command. The trouble is that later on they will truly lament and mourn in anger and desperation, finding themselves terribly alone. The Bible talks about some women who were particularly indifferent to the drought and hunger that come upon the people of God as a divine punishment, and Isaiah 32:9-12 brings them the word of the Lord in no uncertain terms:

You women who are so complacent, rise up and listen to me; you daughters who feel secure, hear what I have to say! In little more than a year you who feel secure will tremble; the grape harvest will fail, and the harvest of fruit will not come. Tremble, you complacent women; shudder, you daughters who feel secure! Strip off your fine clothes and wrap yourselves in rags. Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vines.

Then we have the words of Christ spoken against similarly indifferent wealthy people, when he prophesied to them through his woes of tragedy, as recorded in Luke 6:24-25:

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

For as many as refuse the call, yet others will take it into their own hearts, and in the end filled with contrition and humiliation, they will bring about the loving and saving forgiveness of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 7:1-2 we have the story of what happened when the Israelites went to recover the Ark of the Testimony which in earlier years had been snatched away by the Philistines. In fact it was a divinely permitted consequence because of the rebellion of Israel's peoples.

So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord. They brought it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated

Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the Lord. The ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time – twenty years in all. Then all the people of Israel turned back to the Lord.

Right down through history the chosen people of Israel have been known for their prayers of lament as well as their own selfish complaints, just as has happened in the family of God including every one of us up to this very day, and in more than abundant measure. Even the most anointed ones have their moments. When, for example, the prophet Elijah was exhausted after facing down and eventually executing all the false prophets of Baal and Asherah, the Bible says that he fell into a deep depression and ran for his life to escape Jezebel. This particular Queen of the day had sworn to have him killed, yet she need not have bothered because before long the prophet himself was asking the Lord to take his life, as we can read in 1 Kings 19:4:

Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, LORD,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.'

God's response was to send an angel to strengthen him with some freshly baked bread, water and the gift of a long sleep. Refreshed by the therapy, Elijah walked on for a further forty days and nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God where he hid himself in a cave. Despite all the distance from Jezebel, Elijah was still filled with fear and complaints which he repeated over and over again from his innermost being. However, it was the Lord's doing to make him get all these things off his chest and eventually in response to the Lord's quiet whispers, Elijah presented his very mistaken diagnosis of the situation. We can read the story in 1 Kings 19:12-14:

After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

Now notice this: In spite of the fact that Elijah unburdened his heart before the Lord and not in an entirely holy way because of his emotional depression and a growing root of bitterness, the Lord answered him. In

fact, God entrusted into his hands several new missions and gave Elijah the confidence that they would be fulfilled by the Lord's own hand, together with his grace and power. Elijah was not the only one left, in fact God was at work raising a small army who would be faithful to the Lord, as the story goes on in 1 Kings 19:18:

I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.

Turning now to Job who went through the most terrible test and afflictions, we can read just how we mix up both fair and unjust complaints towards God, and in particular towards his less than comforting friends. This is what he had to say in Job 6:1-4:

'If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas – no wonder my words have been impetuous. The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God's terrors are marshalled against me.

Can you imagine what is going on here? We can actually hear Job trying to blame the Lord for all the poisoned arrows which were in his flesh! Later on he recognises that he is speaking before thinking, yet he continues struggling with God as we can read in Job 7:11, 13 and 16-19:

Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint . . . I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning. 'What is mankind that you make so much of them, that you give them so much attention, that you examine them every morning and test them every moment? Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant?

We can never say that Job was lacking legitimate reasons for his complaints both before God and his very doubtful friends, but it seems that that the Lord was giving him permission to pour out his heart for right or for wrong. It was as if the Lord recognised the mourning that was in the heart of Job as he uttered a continual prayer of lamentation and complaint. Could it even be that Yahweh in a sense felt honoured by the words of Job despite all the improprieties that he was hearing? Whether this is true or not the fact is that Job never denied the name of the Lord, and even in the middle of all of his anguish he proclaimed out loud with a far-reaching certainty, the words that we read in Job 19:25:

I know that my Redeemer lives.

This may be a simple declaration of faith from Job, but it is an immense measure of his faith and confession, particularly as he was going through one of the most painful tests ever known to man, in fact no one with the exception of Christ has suffered as much ever since. With one lament after another and complaint following complaint, Job was breaking his heart in the presence of the Most High. Let's spend a moment to read his words in Job 10:1-8:

'I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. I say to God: do not declare me guilty, but tell me what charges you have against me. Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the plans of the wicked? Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as a mortal sees? Are your days like those of a mortal or your years like those of a strong man, that you must search out my faults and probe after my sin – though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand? Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me?

By all means, keep on reading the book of Job for all the teaching that you will receive about his afflictions, and particularly in chapter 16 and 17 there is perhaps the most astonishing complaint ever written. At this point Job begins to denounce God himself and claims that he is the author of all the bad things that have fallen upon him. Later on however, his own words bring him into a place of total capitulation before the Almighty where at last he is comforted by the faithful mercy of El Shaddai and receives a full restoration of all that he had lost and even more. The next part of his life was filled with close communion with the Most High and he was blessed more than any other man has ever experienced in this world. Nevertheless, if we ever indulge in selfish complaints, let us be aware that this is a dreadful criticism of God himself and he greatly resists our words and diagnosis of the situation. In the book of Exodus, the people of God of those days made a habit of repeating their protests until eventually the Lord was provoked to holy anger on more than one occasion. Asaph the priest came to a very similar conclusion when he wrote in Psalm 77:3:

I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.

Here is the truth of the matter: selfish complaints only served to depress our souls and impoverish our spirits and more than that they make the Lord sad. Jeremiah came to understand this after his many perfectly justified laments concerning the well-deserved and just punishment that

God had poured out on the nation. Jeremiah's conclusion is a clear warning to all of his readers that every single one of us will do far better to lament our own sins instead of complaining about God. His words are recorded for all eternity in the book of Lamentations 3:37-39:

Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, When the Lord has not commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That woe and well-being proceed? Why should a living man complain, A man for the punishment of his sins?

So what shall we say? We will always do well if we unburden our hearts before the Lord but always with fear and trembling and with the greatest possible reverence and respect for him. We need to put all of our trust in his infinite mercy and try to understand that he is also a God of judgement and holy revenge. Speak if we must but never with a tongue that is running away with itself that might eventually spit out all manner of unforgivable blasphemies which are vomited out by our wounded pride. It is never good let our feelings get out of control or to give way to demon inspired opinions, better by far to recognise our own wrong ways and confess the human impotence that we all suffer with. We will never want to be alone to face the many different trials and tests that are await us on the pathway of life so it is always to our advantage to continually humble our hearts before the Lord and be asking for his help. He asks us to cast all of our cares and anguish upon him and then wait patiently for all these painful trials to be overcome through his infinite love and power. This is what the apostle Peter is trying to say to us in his letter 1 Peter 5:6-7:

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

It is a very wonderful feeling to live every day knowing that we can have total confidence in the stamina of the Lord and the strength of his shoulders to carry us. Only the Lord is able to bear the weight of humanity without limits, and from time to time every one of us will experience his work of restoration in us as he lifts us up and put us on his shoulders in just the same way that parents and older brothers do with small children who get tired of walking. Perhaps this is what is behind the words that we read in Psalm 55:22:

Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

As we reach the end of this chapter, shall we once again pour out our hearts before the Lord and present our complaints before him in a holy way?

Blessed are you most merciful God, we come into your presence to say to you with the deepest of pain in our souls that we are unspeakably tired of so much perversion, violence and injustice in the earth. Our glorious and holy Father, the stench of this world is suffocating us and we are weary of being surrounded by so much that is sacrilegious blasphemy of your name. For this reason we call upon you to say: This is enough!

Compassionate Jesus, you see just how we are weary to the depth of our beings by seeing so many millions of children dying of hunger, sicknesses and life in the streets. Is it not you, Holy Spirit, who is filling us with all of these heartaches? Will you not take a stand in the midst of all humanity, and do so soon! O Jehovah Nissi, we ask you to raise your holy flag and draw to yourself all those who are predestined to salvation and take away the disgrace that is upon the earth. May your kingdom come, Christ, to the very furthest corners of the world! Amen.

From the Bible, it is very clear how Jesus responds when we call upon him in this way. He invites us to come to him and to lay all of our burdens upon his shoulders, saying to us in Matthew 11:28:

Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

CHAPTER TEN

Prayer Is God's Appointed Way Of Asking.

Not too long ago most of the newspapers were featuring the results of a survey which had been done by asking children if they had any solution to the recent economic crisis, and what they thought their government should do to resolve the problems. I think that most of us were surprised to see how many children said they would ask Harry Potter for help, because in their eyes he had extraordinary powers to do what was necessary. Others added that the Prime Ministers and Chancellors of the Exchequer would do well to learn magic, and that would solve all the problems. My question is- how on earth have so many families allowed

their children to become dreamers rather than learners, and in truth no more than cannon fodder for demons.

So then, to whom should we go when we find ourselves in difficulties, problems and pains? A lot of people would say that we have inherited all the human foolishness of the past century with the result that we now rely upon a collection of rickety crutches to get us through this world with any kind of dignity and happiness. By crutches I mean psychology, psychiatry, transcendental meditation, yoga, hypnosis and every other kind of alternative therapy which have but one thing in common, which is to move any thought of God out to the margins.

The thoughts of the past century focused on efforts to convince man that he is totally self-sufficient, yet there is little admission of the wholesale failure of these ideologies in all of their different environments. The truth of the matter is that apart from having the help of the Lord, we can do nothing, as Jesus himself said in John 15:5. As true as that is, the opposite of making things far worse is perfectly achievable as is patently obvious all around us. Whenever demons manage to get mankind to cooperate with them the end result can only be theft, loss of life and destruction.

Did we not learn from our very earliest childhood to ask our fathers for all the things that we thought that we needed? Was not this the most natural thing to do? Of course it was, so why is it that we have not learned as we have grown into adults to uncover the reasoning and the origin of our own existence? Then, once we understand that we have a Creator and a God who calls himself our Father, should it not be the easiest thing in the world to ask him for what we need?

Can we think of approaching anyone better than our perfect Father who is also the Almighty when we feel weak, impotent and facing failure, in childlike hope of receiving his help? Would this not be the most intelligent and effective thing to do in every in any kind of failure that comes our way, without having to go looking anywhere else or to anyone else beforehand? Better still, we could go to him before the problem ever happens and ask for his wisdom to prevent things going wrong rather than having to fix the problem afterwards.

There is a golden rule which Jesus revealed to us which means so very much to me personally. In fact, on many occasions when I am preaching the gospel in the open air I take time to share this golden rule with the people, and as often as not I also mention it in the churches. Here it is, and if you will hear the words of the Lord and put them into practice you

also will receive the blessings of our Heavenly Father, as written in Matthew 7:7-11, in the words of Jesus:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Even if we can only find just a little faith in the beginning, as soon as we put this word into practice we will start to see the faithfulness of God as it works to get us out of the mess we have got ourselves into. From then onwards we will soon be trusting him more and more through this spiritual discipline of prayer. It will become almost second nature to ask our merciful Father for the help we need, without even thinking about consulting anyone else. This will be especially true on the occasions that we find ourselves faced with some kind of conflict which has no earthly solution, yet with God's help we soon discover how satisfactorily he manages to solve everything.

It may be that we kneel before the Lord in total defeat in discouragement only to find that shortly afterwards our Good Shepherd has come to the rescue and pulled us out of the pit into which we have fallen. We feel his care and soon come to understand the beautiful way in which he is continually watching over our lives, day and night. This greatly encourages us to ask him again and again and as many times as we need him throughout life, and we never find ourselves disappointed. I simply cannot count how many times a day I come to the Lord asking for his help, following the well-known example of David in Psalm 23:1-6:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It is the most wonderful thing to live under the shelter of the shadow of the Almighty! No other person or place can ever produce the same

security and perfect tranquillity that comes from trusting in the love of God, because he has a way of absolutely convincing us in the depths of our own hearts that he is on continual alert to protect us and provide for us. The promise of God is that he will guide us with his holy and wise thoughts which will help us to walk down the pathways of Christ without stumbling, with the certainty that God will take care of us until we reach the heavenly goal.

I cannot do better than repeat the words that David, the writer of many of the Psalms, wrote, saying, "To whom will I go, if not to the Lord? From where else will come my help? My help comes from him who made the heavens and the earth."

I cannot even begin to remember just how many times people have launched their attacks against me personally, or against my family, or against my fellow workers. The attacks have come through both believers and unbelievers, as well as through many government departments and different institutions all of whom seem to have been inspired by strategies from that dark kingdom which is ever present. Yet our Lord and Saviour has delivered me out of the hands of every single one of them, so you will not be surprised that I continue asking him day by day for his help. I discovered that this is what David, the King, also did and sometimes I find it best to use the same words, for example the ones that we can find in Psalm 25:1-2; 15-18:

To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me.

My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net. Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have enlarged; bring me out of my distresses! Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins.

One of the most important prayers is when we ask the Lord for his protection, particularly from the many powers of darkness which as our enemies are forever lurking in the shadows, and not to mention from the dangers within our own hearts which the Bible says are deceitful in their original state and beyond healing. They need to be changed by Christ. Between the works of the world, the flesh and the devil it is not difficult for us to fall in the many traps which are laid for us by the hunter of our souls and we need God's help to deliver us out of his torments and claws. Only the protection of God can prevent the devil from robbing us and destroying the valuable blessings which God has given to us through the generous hands of our Good Shepherd, Jesus. We will do well to follow

the example of David and make his prayer requests our own. The Bible has kept an abundance of his words for us to place upon our own lips, and every one of us will find the prayers of David to be perfectly adequate, written as they were in the face of the same dangers that we face today.

For example let us take a look at Psalm 17:5-9:

Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip. I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God; Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech. Show Your marvellous lovingkindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You from those who rise up against them. Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings, From the wicked who oppress me, From my deadly enemies who surround me.

Moving on, another really key prayer in our collection is one which will be good for us personally, that is to be asking the Lord to increase our faith. This is something that the first disciples knew to do having discovered that there are different levels of faith, as Paul explains in Romans 12:3:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

As we grow in the workings of this gift, which is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit, we will find that we are praying with more authority and it will not be long before our lives are a channel for even greater blessing being poured out upon the people around us. You will see yourself becoming a more effective instrument in the hands of God than ever before and as your faith increases, you will find yourself being used to push forward the Church of Christ and strengthen her people. This will be a very good moment to have a short break and pray along these lines with me:

"Lord Jesus, you who are the author and finisher of our faith, be pleased to increase mine because my heart's desire is to live trusting you to the fullest measure of my ability. I do not want any of my doubts and fears to be an offence in your sight. Enlarge the shield of faith over my life that it may protect me from all the fiery and poisonous arrows of the evil powers of darkness. Blessed God, I pray that you will multiply my faith and bring me to that point when I can tear down the mountain that has been erected against me by the powers of darkness, these barracks of Satan's evil armies."

When the disciples of Jesus asked the Lord to increase their faith, his response might have been considered vague, and his ear perhaps a deaf

one. One could be forgiven for thinking this because in reply Jesus told them the parable of the useless servant. By the way, we teach the principles of this parable to our own disciples knowing that what Jesus was trying to communicate is absolutely fundamental. When we have a sort of graduation day for our new workers, this is the title that we give to them, perhaps not what they were expecting in the beginning!

Returning to the teaching, let me explain that this parable reveals the virtues of total, diligent and joyful obedience together with humility which please God and move his hand to bless us with more faith. We can find the words of Jesus in Luke 17:5-10:

The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' He replied, 'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it will obey you. 'Suppose one of you has a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, "Come along now and sit down to eat"? Won't he rather say, "Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink"? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."'

Consider for a moment how we live in a world which is contaminated from pole to pole and not one of us has ever had the wisdom to be able to live in perfect health with the right kind of diet, and sufficient physical exercise and rest. When we fail to live in prudence and perseverance in doing what is right, as well as damaging ourselves on a daily basis we also fall into sin of one kind or another, even though we belong to Jesus. Even the best of us becomes ill far more often than should ever happen now that we are blessed with a new nature. However if we were to live with more fear of God and better self-control, not forgetting to watch and pray without relaxing our attention then I am quite sure that our life on earth would be a lot healthier and sicknesses would be only infrequent visitors, if they come at all.

As it happens though, we need the help of doctors and medicines which many times bring us back to health and relieve our pains, although not always of course. On too many occasions people find themselves beyond the help of medical science and have to return home from the clinics knowing that their condition is irreversible and their lives have only a short distance left to travel. At times like this, there is not one member of the family of faith who will not encourage the seriously ill person to seek

the Lord with all urgency and ask him for healing. We have discovered that Jesus is the finest Doctor and specialist in every disease that afflicts mankind. His consulting room is open all 24 hours of the day and there is never a charge for his time or his skills. This consultant never fails to display a loving and caring attitude, and there is never a moment's delay to enter into His presence. If we will be sensitive enough to listen we will hear him prescribing the exact measures of the specific treatment that we need, from his storehouse of wise and effective medicine. Jesus has thousands of years of experience in healing our sicknesses and removing every pain from us, leaving us with the same testimony as we find in Psalm 107:19-20:

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.

The Bible paints a picture of the wounds of the Lord Jesus and calls us to believe that endless benefits for the people of God flow from his finished work upon the cross. We have the unchanging promises of God that encourage us to reach out to Jesus to receive healing for our bodies and souls, for example in these words from Isaiah 53:4-5. These prophetic Scriptures present a portrait of the suffering Messiah, the Lamb of God who died to pay the price for our sins and guilt and to redeem us from the eternal consequences of the same, as well as setting us free from our sicknesses and pains.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

For this reason on the basis of these words, whenever we ourselves are ill, or perhaps it is our loved ones or our neighbours who are down with sickness, in the first place we must go to the Lord. To the throne of the Grace of God where our Healer is seated we send our appeals, asking for the healing that Christ won for us and presenting the sight of his wounds before his Father and ours. This in my experience will move the finger of God to send the Holy Spirit to remove our sicknesses and pains from us as he ministers his Almighty gifts into our physical bodies. We do well to take notice of the divine call which is written in Hosea 6:1:

Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.

Let us learn to pray then, to ask for the healing of our sicknesses and for those that our friends and neighbours suffer. It is time to get hold of God's promises with the full certainty of faith, knowing that we will be sheltered by the infinite sensitivity of the mercy of God. Our God is a God who knows what it means to suffer with us when we suffer, I do believe that he weeps as we weep and moves quicker than our own blood to bring healing to our wounds of body and soul. On one occasion David knew what it was to receive this kind of blessing and before God restored and healed him he left us this testimony written in Psalm 6:1-4:

Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord, how long? Turn, Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.

Psalm 30:1-2 underlines all that we are talking about in a very specific and concise way:

I will exalt you, LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. LORD my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.

Way back in the Old Testament when Abraham prayed, the Lord heard him and healed Abimelech the king of Gerar, and his wife and all their servants. The problem they had was that earlier on Abimelech had tried to take Abraham's wife Sarah to be part of his harem and this had brought down God's curse upon his entire household, in this case in the form of all the women becoming sterile. You can read the story yourself in Genesis 20:17-18.

Restoring fertility is one of God's specialities and we can read throughout the Bible just how he has blessed a good number of ladies who could not conceive, after they were prayed for. People asked the Giver of life for his help, they prayed to the one who when he opens whatever that may be, nobody can close it, and vice versa of course. We have the case of Hannah, the wife of a man named Elkanah who cried out to God in a flood of tears asking him to grant fertility to her womb, and God was pleased to grant her request. It was not long before she gave birth to her firstborn who became one of the most important prophets in all of Israel, Samuel. Later on she gave birth to three sons and two more daughters, and you can read the story in 1 Samuel 1:10-20.

We have already mentioned Sarah, the wife of Abraham, who had also been unable to bear children and was now very elderly. God gave her the

promise of a son and despite every opposing circumstance she soon gave birth to Isaac, who later on married Rebecca. In an amazing repetition of misery, Rebecca was also sterile but by the word of the Lord she conceived and gave birth to Esau and Jacob, the latter becoming the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. In fact his name was changed from Jacob to Israel on the day that he struggled with the Lord in the Peniel; his new name means, "God struggles."

According to the biblical record, many other women were also infertile and we can read how they found God's grace as an answer to their requests in prayer; they gave birth to children would serve the Lord. We have seen this happen hundreds of times in our own ministry lifetime and can count hundreds of married couples who have been set free from the pain of barrenness, and now they have beautiful children sat at their feet. In every case it has been the Lord who has blessed them with these miraculous gifts in answer to prayer.

When Hezekiah, the king, was shaken with a terminal diagnosis following the arrival of an incurable sickness, the first thing he did was to profoundly humble himself and call out to God for divine healing. Hearing his prayer, God's heart was just as deeply moved and he granted Hezekiah an extension of fifteen years to his life, as we can read in Isaiah 38:1-5. The truth of the matter is that every kind of illness was healed by Jesus Christ or through his earthly ministry, and if you read the scriptures you know that he healed everyone who came to him, as for example it is written in Matthew 12:15 and 4:23. Many other biblical texts confirm the testimony of Matthew and throughout the gospels we can find a large number of examples of how prayer from either sick people or their families was answered.

Moving to the pages of the New Testament you will hear how lepers, blind men, disabled people and the deaf and dumb cried out to the Lord Jesus, and one particular story which is really quite special is the testimony of the Roman centurion. This military officer from another country came to Jesus and asked him to heal his servant and by doing so he displayed his own good heart and the great measure of faith that was in it. So great was his trust and confidence in Christ that he said that if only the Lord would speak out a word of healing from where he was, then there would be no need for him to travel to the centurion's home. The officer went on to say that he did not consider himself worthy of being visited by the Master, not just because he was a Gentile rather than a Jew, but because he recognised his own sinfulness and despite his rank, how insignificant

he was before the holiness of the Son of God. This wonderful testimony of true faith in Christ remains with us through the writings of Luke 7:1-10.

We ourselves through faith and obedience have taken full advantage of these gifts which are given by the Lord, and we have prayed for thousands of sick people. This always happens in the evangelistic campaigns in the public eye, but also as part of church worship services and in private. It is a beautiful thing to see how Christ pours his healing into the sick and has been a continual privilege to confirm that supernatural answers from God have actually taken place. The truth is that we have seen a multitude of healings from every kind of sickness, and it is worth making special mention of how the Lord has healed a great many people from epilepsy; they have remained free until this day.

The Lord has administered his miraculous help to an uncountable number of drug addicts whom we have taken into care. Very typically every single one of them has come with a really mixed-up mind having previously messed around with demons and different powers of darkness. One of the most famous demonic so-called gods of ancient times was known as Pan, sometimes Moloch and to this day his speciality is to twist and pervert minds and nervous systems by injecting his poison of panic which leaves his drug crazed victims in a state of terror.

It is also widely known that throughout our ministry in Remar, we will often pray by laying our hands upon handkerchiefs which are then carried back by family members or friends to where the sick loved one is lying. As often as not in these cases, we cannot actually visit the person because they may be either far away in restricted parts of the different hospitals, yet we have heard on so many occasions how people who were in a coma have come out of it as the handkerchief was laid upon them. Others who have been struggling with different diseases have also been healed as and when the Holy Spirit has inspired us to pray in this way, following the example of the apostle Paul, which we find in the book of Acts 19:11-12:

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to those who were ill, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

Knowing this, you will no doubt agree that to pray like this is very important. We should never neglect asking the Lord for healing whenever we see the necessity either in our own bodies or when any of our natural or spiritual families are in distress. Wherever possible bring them to someone who knows how to minister healing to them. Our confidence is that through these requests to the Lord made in faith and in love, and

through the merits of the finished work of Jesus Christ and particularly through his blessed wounds, the Almighty will respond. All we have to do is obey the message given by God which the apostle brought to us in James 5:14-16 and leave what happens in God's hands:

Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Now moving on, without any doubt it is absolutely fundamental to know how to pray to the owner of all the gold and all the silver in the world, to ask him for our daily bread. It is perfectly in line with the teaching of Jesus who left us the exemplary prayer we call the Our Father. This prayer is given to us as a model by the one who understands that we need food, clothing, a roof over our heads and many other material things in order to work effectively and provide for our families. Not to mention the innumerable necessities of all the people around us because God has given us the responsibility of seeking him for the well-being of this world that is plagued with selfishness and injustice. We are very aware that the powers of darkness have mined every road towards the doing of good with all manner of devil inspired traps and difficulties, every one of which must move us to put into practice these prayers for God's provision. Not a day should go by that we are not calling upon the name of *Jehovah Jireh* which in Hebrew means the God who sees and provides, equally knowing that according to Psalm 23:1 the Lord is our Shepherd and we shall lack nothing. God calls upon us to trust him to supply all that we need to satisfy the demands of every day, and all he requires of us is that we should pray every day, along the lines that we find in Matthew 6:11:

Give us this day our daily bread.

However, let us take great care to correctly apply this teaching and not for example ask to be supplied with that which we think we might need tomorrow. The promises that the needs of every day will be met and the example of the Old Testament is that God supplied his people with *manna* for food on a daily basis, except for weekends when there was twice as much given. Although every day brings its own problems, we have no need to be worried about the future or even tomorrow, according to the Lord's own words in Matthew 6:34.

In the ministry of Remar we have thousands of people who depend upon the grace of God coming through us in order to live each day at a time. In most cases they came with absolutely nothing of their own and since then they have found shelter under our care as if they were our own children. In fact we have tens of thousands of children, sick people, elderly men and women and prisoners who would have died of hunger or for the lack of healthcare had not one of our leaders crossed their path. If you dare to think about the economic facts and figures that are necessary to cover the costs of taking care of all these people, with more coming all the time which only multiplies the expenditure, you will not be surprised that we fall to our knees and seek God with a humbled heart.

As you would imagine, we never stop asking him for his provision and shelter, and we often take as our example Elijah and Elisha, the two prophets of old Israel who prayed and asked God to supply food and other resources for living to two desperate widows. These two ladies were at the point of dying of hunger or in one case having no choice but to hand over her sons as slaves, as we can read in 1 Kings 17:12 and 2 Kings 4:1. Both ladies saw the miraculous and grace-filled provision of God who multiplied their remains of flour and oil until it overflowed with enough for themselves and a great deal more to sell to others.

This story is God's way of reminding us of his permanent and total dominion over the material world and it gives an insight into the immense understanding that is in his heart. He reveals himself as an inexhaustible fountain of all spiritual and material wealth, and gives ample evidence of his generosity as he allows us to share in all that he owns and possesses. Even to this day he grants to his people manifestations of his power to multiply the little that we have. Hear the word of the Lord that comes to us through Deuteronomy 8:11-14 and 18:

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery

Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

Just as newborn baby birds open their tiny beaks before they can even open their eyes, so we have a partial picture of what we must look like. Not because the human child is born physically blind, rather that when we enter the life of faith we have to learn to expect the provision of what we cannot yet see. Like those utterly dependent newborn birds we too have to learn to open our mouths and hungrily tweet until our Holy Father brings to us what we need to grow and to live. God our Father is also the perfect mother towards all of his newborn chicks who can only wait for the faithfulness of his care, yet with full confidence in the unfailing fulfilment of his word and promises. By trusting in the Lord and waiting for him, we shall be filled with all the necessary nourishment that we need to leave satisfied in everyday. We might even find the temerity to ask God for the same prosperity that David asked him for, when he wrote Psalm 144:12-15:

Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace. Our barns will be filled with every kind of provision. Our sheep will increase by thousands, by tens of thousands in our fields; our oxen will draw heavy loads. There will be no breaching of walls, no going into captivity, no cry of distress in our streets. Blessed is the people of whom this is true; blessed is the people whose God is the Lord.

After twenty-eight years in this ministry we have an uncountable number of testimonies of how God has miraculously provided for us. I can tell you about money as well as warehouses full of food, houses, motor vehicles, machinery, clothing and to cut the long list short, he has always covered every single one of our needs even to the point of extravagance. He has answered our prayers a million times over and above any realistic expectation, in fact I have written a whole book titled, "The Kingdom Economy," which tells some of the stories. I am not going to take your time by repeating the stories here, but just let me say that this very day I am forever calling out to the Lord with open hands to receive his provision. I have an absolute certainty that he will always come to help and grant all that is necessary for these thousands of people to live in a dignified way and so fulfil the calling that he has given to us. If it is true, and it is, that it is God who has given us this vision which he has called us to establish across the world, then will he not give us all that we need to see it through to a glorious conclusion?

For all these years it has given me tremendous pleasure to see the never failing financial help from Heaven's Banker, and this has allowed me to live without any fear that we shall face lack or scarcity in the future. I am

confident that God will continue to bless us in this way until we reach the goal that he has given us, and whilst we yet live in this world we continue to push forward expecting God to fulfil his own promises, for example and very especially the one mentioned in Ecclesiastes 2:26:

To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

We can and we should be daring with God, bold enough to ask him that he works miracles in answer to our prayers. When Jesus was getting close to his day of returning to heaven he promised the disciples, which includes ourselves, that we would do the same things that he had been doing and even greater ones, because he was returning to the Father. We can read his exact words in John 14:12.

We have the example of the prophets and the apostles to follow, knowing that all of these men were never reluctant to ask the Lord for signs and wonders. It is worth making special mention of Elijah, Elisha, Peter and Paul because all four of these men raised the dead by passionately calling out to the One who is the resurrection and the life, that is Jesus. On one occasion before some five hundred people who are gathered together for an evangelistic campaign in Lisbon, I had the unexpected opportunity to do just the same. Apparently a man had fallen down and upon further examination he was quite clearly deceased. As I ran across to see what was happening, I felt the prodding of the Holy Spirit to pray for his resurrection. It was as if I was hearing Christ speaking into my mind with an unusual clarity, telling me to kiss him on the lips but not in any attempt at artificial respiration, rather as an act of rebuking death and proclaiming the life of Christ.

At the same time I remembered how Elisha had brought the daughter of the Shulammite woman back to life, and I began to almost relive the Bible story from 2 Kings 4:34. As I obeyed what I felt I had to do, I experienced the greatest miracle I have ever seen in my ministry because the man immediately came back to life and was very shortly completely restored to health and strength.

I have also had the honour to see God's glory displayed through many other different miracles worked by the Holy Spirit throughout all the years of my serving the Lord. Nevertheless, I am always longing to see very much more, I live in a continual expectancy of participating in an extravagantly abundant outpouring of the grace and power of God in these, our days. This is something I pray for and will always ask for until

my eyes see the glory of God, by his grace may be that I am one of the many instruments of Christ that he uses. I do believe that this is a prayer that he will answer.

In the Old Testament Gideon and many other servants of God never failed to ask the Lord for miraculous signs, and here is something else that we have to learn to do ourselves. The word of God in Isaiah 7:11 encourages all of us who are working for the Lord to do the following:

Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.

I have lost count of how many times I have needed to ask the Lord for such miraculous signs, for example at the time when my children were considering marriage. In every case I have always ask the Lord for his confirmation that they should be joined together with the right people, according to the perfect will of the Lord. My view is that this is the only thing that really matters, and through prayer and humility we received some very surprising and supernatural answers from God which brought the fullness of his blessing.

When we have to take decisions which demand a considerable responsibility, it is only reasonable that we ought to pray beforehand and ask the Lord to display some very clear signposts for us. We want to have the will of the Lord illuminated in our eyes and to hit the target every time, with victories and blessings to enjoy in ways small and great. This is infinitely preferable to making decisions by ourselves which lead us into a painful mistake and failure.

For this very reason, making a practice of asking the Lord for wisdom is something of tremendous importance if we are going to fulfil the responsibilities that he has given to us. Every one of us exercises different roles in our lives, whether as husbands or wives, fathers, mothers, children, brothers, or perhaps as economists in the Kingdom of Heaven. To be a minister of the gospel carries its own weight of responsibility, but whatever and whoever we are called to be we will do well to follow the example of Solomon who greatly pleased God by asking him for wisdom. We can read the divine response in 1 Kings 9:3:

The Lord said to him: 'I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.'

We are all living in days which are increasingly filled with evildoing and the deceivers and criminals are ever more sophisticated in their activities.

There is widespread corruption amongst the political and ecclesiastical authorities and we are forever reading the press reports about fraud in high places and bad behaviour in society. To live through a time like this we need considerable wisdom from on high to avoid the very many dangers which are hidden in the shadows around us in this Babylonian world which becomes more cruel with every year that goes by. In particular, life is becoming measurably more difficult for the followers of God with many an attack aimed at us with the full intention of extinguishing our faith. Many of our spiritual and human enemies enjoy substantial resources and manpower, so perhaps we should not be surprised to see a multitude of believers including not a few preachers of the gospel succumbing to these attacks and discouragements.

This is a time for humility to recognise our ignorance and not to be wise in our own opinion, but rather to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit as he speaks to us through the wisdom of the Proverbs and many other similar texts in the Bible. One of the key themes of the word of God is a necessity to ask our All-knowing Master to impart his wisdom to us, for example in the words of James 1:5:

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Most people would say that the prayers of David are very beautiful, yet it is worth remembering that they were written down in the middle of the very real conflicts and sufferings that he was going through. Quite apart from his own personal issues, David would continually seek divine help to be able to handle the enormous responsibility that he had been given of being the king over God's chosen nation. It was David's everyday discipline to ask for wise guidance to come from the Most High, for example whether to go to war or to withdraw from military activity. David had to face conspiracies and govern both his own family and a nation of people many of whom were very obstinate and hardhearted. Some of them were quick to draw their swords which they kept very sharp in case any opportunity came along to revenge themselves on people they had in mind.

We can read some of David's prayers in Psalm 25:1-2, 4-5, 8-9 and 12:

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. 9 He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

Who, then, are those who fear the Lord? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose.

Now, here is one more crucial prayer that we need to have in our personal collection, and this time it is to ask the Lord to give us compassion for the multitudes of men and women who have lost their way in life and strayed from God's best for them. This is a prayer that was clearly a personal favourite of the Lord Jesus, who made a point of giving voice to it by asking his Father to send workers into the harvest fields for this very reason. Jesus then asked his own disciples by which he means us, to do the same, as we can read in Matthew 9:36-38:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'

Undoubtedly, it is going to be very difficult to see this prayer fulfilled because whilst we have so many believers who have no interest in being workers for Christ, there is very little possibility of them obeying the call of the Lord that he sends out in answer to this prayer. In fact how are they ever going to pray and ask the Lord to send out workers if they themselves refuse to be part of the answer?

Without erecting more columns, the temple of God can never become more spacious, and in the same way unless there is a great multiplication of people who are willing to serve the Lord, His work is never going to grow in any kind of healthy, spiritual way. This will be true in any family as well as in the Church and amongst the holy people that God has chosen and wants to train in his ways. As I have travelled across the world I have noticed how God has the same problem in every nation, despite him being the owner of all and having absolute power over everything. In many ways and in my opinion God is all too chivalrous in the way he gives total respect to all of his human creatures, although every one of us is his and we owe him everything. Nevertheless he respects our decisions, but especially those that many of us have taken to accept his call and to belong to him. He allows every individual to have his or her own free will, I can imagine that this causes him to greatly suffer as he sees so many, in fact let me say the majority of all believers, refusing to respond to the desires of the divine heart.

Not a lot of people seem to want to participate in God's holy work in the earth, despite knowing that God has committed himself to act almost exclusively through his followers. This is the fruit of his infinite love which forever seeks perfect unity with the ones that he loves. However, the sad reality is that far too many people know that God calls but they would rather not be chosen. In the face of this reluctance, the Lord displays an incredible amount of patience and seems to prefer to redraw his plans to work around these missing workers, rather than oblige any one of us or them to serve him. The truth is that God only desire to see followers whose hearts are given to him gladly and voluntarily.

So then, I suspect it is time for us to pray together for a moment:

Our wonderful and blessed Father, we join together with Christ who stands at your right hand, to ask you in prayer to send workers into the harvest fields of the world. So many of these fields are now ripe for harvest and we want to be a channel for the desires of our Saviour, your beloved Son. We know that he maintains this prayer request before you at all times because his heart burns with compassion for the many thousands of millions of human beings who are walking along the path towards condemnation. We want to pray for them, that they may enjoy the terribly costly redemption that Christ has gained for them by paying the ultimate price with joy whilst thinking of the glorious future fruit of being able to bless all humanity. Here I am, Lord! Allow me to say to you that I am ready to obey you in everything and allow you to fulfil your holy purposes in my life! Send me, Lord, where ever you wish, for I desire no other thing in life than to serve you! May your will be done in my life, but always give me your strength so that I may always be faithful to you. Never let there be a day when your anointing is lacking in my life, and I ask all of this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

We can and we must make a habit of asking the Lord to speak about all the things that we do not know. However many questions we ask him he will never get tired of hearing our voice, after all he is our Master and we are his students, in fact will do well to be as insistent as the most patient man in all of history certainly was. Hear his words in Job 42:4:

Listen now, and I will speak;

I will question you, and you shall answer me.

There is an old Chinese saying along the lines of:- if we were to ask a question of a wise man, we would demonstrate our ignorance at that moment in time, but if we were not to ask him, we would remain ignorant for the rest of our lives. It is when we have an overpowering hunger to know wisdom and to gain some precise directions for life that we will find

it easy to humble our hearts and ask our perfect Professor of the University of Heaven, all that we need to know. The beautiful thing is that He knows absolutely everything and is more than willing to share his wisdom with us, in agreement with the great advice that we find in Deuteronomy 32:7:

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.

One particular Bible text has been a great inspiration to me because it speaks so clearly about how much the Lord welcomes our questions. This from Jeremiah 6:16:

This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.

For a moment then, let us consider something which is very far-reaching, which is the original plan of God, and we may be absolutely certain that it is as unchanging as always has been. It was perfect from beginning and has no need of being improved, therefore it must be a great priority in our lives and in the life of all the Church of Christ to continually return to the source of everything that is life. For example in nature, take the brave salmons which every year return to their own source of life to spawn and later to die, not that all of them by any means make it that far.

Curiously though it seems that we human beings have an innate tendency to forget all about our beginnings, and how easily we allow ourselves to be pulled every way by the latest novelties of this world. We make the mistake of putting distance between ourselves and our beginnings, and inevitably we end up following clumsy and inferior imitations which are a mixture of earthly clay and the ideas of our selfish and deceitful hearts. In the end what we have is completely different to God's original perfect model, the one that he gave to the first man, Adam, and later to all the men that he chose to be his, like Noah, Abraham, Moses and many others. God's greatest gift to us of course, was his own son Jesus Christ, the only one who has totally fulfilled the plan of the Father in heaven. Thankfully Jesus has left us with his very clear teachings which give us the opportunity to see them fulfilled in our lives today, always counting on his faithful and all-powerful help to do so.

More than ever before, this is the time to sound the loud trumpet and call the universal church of Christ back to God's sacred book, the Holy Bible and to walk in the light of the Holy Spirit. This is precisely what King

Josiah felt was necessary to do, and what he did before all of his priests and the princes of his court, as we can read in 2 Kings 22:13:

Go and enquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us.

When we read the Scriptures of the Bible, I wonder how many times we fail to remember that we shall only ever understand the word of God and discover the divine wisdom within the Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit when he opens the meaning to us? Knowing this and remembering it will motivate us to pray before we begin to read, to ask the Lord to grant us revelation in the Scriptures and to take away the veil from in front of our eyes, which in fact he himself has placed there to prevent his words entering into the mind of the proud. If we will only pray this way often and with reverence then we will soon give the Lord reason to be greatly pleased with us, because he will see just how much hunger and thirst we have to know him better. It pleases God when he hears that we want to learn his teachings and he will call us a people who are blessed. This was the promise of Jesus himself when he gave the fourth "Blessed are you who . ." in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, which we can read in Matthew 5:6.

When the Lord sees us desiring to know him better, he allows the Holy Spirit to bring us near as his preferred students and as we sit at his feet he will dedicate more time to us rather than to others. Jesus is more than willing to grant many wonderful discoveries to his people and to reveal his infinite wisdom which is truly an eternal treasure house, and quite rightly referred to by the ancient sages of the Torah as pearls of divine knowledge. When we ask the Lord to open his word to us, we should not be surprised when he reveals his secrets and mysteries to our innermost beings, and begins to explain his designs and the plans that he has for the future of mankind. Only by the help of the Holy Spirit will we ever understand and be enlightened by what is called eschatology, which is the study of the prophetic words concerning the end times. Psalm 119:18 says this:

I will open my eyes to see the wonders in your law.

I remember how I was praying along these lines once upon a time at the very end of my day, already in bed and ready to fall asleep. And by the way, to finish your day with prayer is the very best way of falling into the arms of our Good Shepherd and being surrounded by his peace and

perfect rest. The same prayer will save us from being wrapped in the arms of Morpheus which is the name of the demon prince who is behind all evil dreams and tormenting nightmares. Anyway, I was praying and asking the Lord for revelation particularly about what he would have me to preach in the Conference which was due to open the following day. In this attitude of prayer it was not long before I was sound asleep, nevertheless having gained an awesome sense of God's affirmation through the words of 1 John 2:20 which came into my mind:

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

Next morning before I even woke up, the Lord gave me a very vivid vision, one that was tremendous and far-reaching doctrinally and of strategic importance. This helped me to understand the global plan that the Lord has and I saw that before any laws were given way back in ancient times, how impossible it was for God to pass judgement on Satan and all of the angels that rebelled with him against God. I saw how jealous they were of the Divine Word of God, his only Son, and in total arrogance the pride in Satan formed the crazy idea of taking the throne from him.

Then I saw how God created the world and in it set a trap for Satan. God gave life to the first Adam and the first Eve as the first primal human family whose descendants would eventually form God's eternal family, not made up of angels but of legitimate sons and daughters. He gave them just one command- to obey, and that was precisely not to repeat the same transgression that Lucifer committed, because the Bible says that the law was given for the transgressor and therefore came after the arrival of sin, as we can read in 1 Timothy 1:9.

The only thing that they were forbidden to do was to eat the fruit of one particular tree, only one out of the very many others in the original paradise which God had given to them as their home. This one tree was called the tree of the knowledge of good and of evil, and it represented the fall that had happened at the hands of the evil one. Lucifer, as he was originally known, had abundantly feasted upon God's goodness and seems to have become God's favourite angel who had been granted immense responsibility and the delegated heavenly authority of the Supreme Being. However, his heart had become swollen with vanity and his eyes blinded by pride, until he reached the point when he believed that he could overcome God himself. This no doubt is the origin of the

divine warning that knowledge only swells a man's head but love builds him up.

Filled with pride, Lucifer now known as Satan, could never resist the further ambition to take a look at this world and enter into it, which he did in the same way that a snake works its way into an egg to devour the contents. If you think about it the entire cosmos and closer to home, the earth itself have the appearance of gigantic balloons. As Satan wormed his way into the affairs of the earth he immediately infringed the established law of God and became the moral and intellectual author of the trespass that was committed by Eve, followed by Adam. In doing so they became the accomplices of Satan who nevertheless remains in the background as the guilty culprit and will be judged in God's *Kairos* time.

It was through this visionary dream that I better understood the cosmic warfare that is always happening between the Kingdom of Christ which is the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness under the control of the Prince of this world. Satan is called that because he wrenched control of it by dethroning mankind who had been created in the image and similitude of God himself. By doing so he took the lordship of Creation which had been delegated to mankind by the Creator.

Now that we know just how much our Lord, our loving Master, is desirous to impart his wisdom to us, and what we might come to understand, let us resolve right now to pray with all frequency and ask the Lord all the questions that come into our hearts. The truth is that even the best of us knows so very little and we need to learn so very much in the quickest possible way because time is short and the days that we live in are ever more dangerous. Our same Almighty Father says to us through Isaiah 45:11:

Thus says the Lord, The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hands, you command Me.

This holy zeal has been growing within me almost to the point of being like a volcano in eruption. By this I mean the longing that I have for prophetic revelation and this compels me to pray all the more often as I insist on pouring out all of my questions upon the Lord. I frequently ask about the spiritual times in which we live and particular the terrible darkness which is upon the earth. I tend to emphasise, and sometimes with great intensity, just how much we need to have his revelation about the future both in the short and medium term, but not so much about the long term because we do not expect to be kept waiting so long before we see the fulfilment of all the biblical prophecies. With all certainty I know

that the Lord will never do anything without first revealing his plans and purposes to his servants the prophets, as he committed himself to do in Amos 3:6-7:

When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.

On another occasion it happened that I was again in bed at the time, as I do believe that the moment just before you fall asleep with the world of people silent all around you is a very opportune time to ask questions of the Lord. So I turned to prayer and asked if God would allow me to receive prophetic revelations concerning the signs which will point towards the coming apocalypse and give us a clearly understandable warning of the events that must take place. I must have been asleep for some hours, yet around 4 o'clock in the morning I suddenly had a dream which made a great impression upon me.

I saw myself in heaven surrounded by many angels who were identical to men although they were considerably taller with a much more splendid appearance. They were dressed in white and were going about their business as if they could not see me, and then they all began to move in one direction shouting to each other, "The Lamb of God is about to undo the seals!" They seem to form a glorious choir as they repeatedly sang the same words until I awakened with a shock, yet sensing the excitement inside of me. I majorly reached my Bible to read the book of Revelation which speaks of this coming event, and to my mind I understood that this final stage in the history of mankind has been initiated. My heart was beating with an inspiration that has never diminished and in fact I have spent years following up on this glorious experience by engaging in a study of eschatology which has borne the fruit of several prophetic books.

So right now, I hope to continue doing the same on future occasions, I pray to Him who uncovers all mysteries, asking him through his Holy Spirit to grant me an abundance of light and a spirit of revelation so I can bless all who read this book, and especially all those who serve the Lord and look forward to his coming. As often as not I base my prayer on the biblical text from Ephesians 1:15-19:

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you

the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

I think it is time to pause again and pray together, to ask God for more prophetic revelation and the greater insight into his divine personalities of being Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that in the end will be able to know him much better and have a greater understanding of his plans.

Almighty God, we dare to pass through all the curtains trusting in the merits of your Son Jesus Christ and the holy redemption of our lives. Through this redemption you have justified us and made us worthy to be called your sons and daughters, giving us the grace to come near to your throne and to rejoice in your presence, listening to your wonderful pure and wise teaching. For this reason, beloved Jesus, we urgently pray that you will speak to your servants because we long to listen to you and give you our fullest attention. Speak to us and we will have more faith!

Speak to us about yourself so that we may come to know you better every day, because only your love can ever satisfy the thirst within us. Intimacy with you is the greatest banquet of our lives. Explain to us, Lord, what is the present work of your hands so that we may participate in it with diligence and burning hearts. Speak to us, Holy Father, about your sons and daughters, and concerning your people because our hearts desire to have a perfect close communion with them, always seeking their good and how to help them be faithful citizens of your kingdom.

Never cease to speak into our lives, merciful Holy Spirit, revealing to us the machinations and conspiracies of the evil one so that we may be forewarned and strengthened in you. We do not want that he should ever take us by surprise in any treacherous manner and we ask you that will help us to be fully armed at all times to overcome him. All-knowing Lord, it is also our prayer that you would speak to us about the things to come to bring glory to your name and so that we might be watchtowers placed on the walls like observation posts in the sight of your people. We want to be in the forefront of the battle, yet knowing that in this spiritual warfare no quarter is given to us and no ceasefire is ever offered. May you help us with the people who sound the prophetic trumpets to warn the people of the imminent massacres planned by the evil one. Blessed God, please do

not be silent because if you were to be so, we would surely die of hunger for your word! Amen.

If we will pray like this every day we will have the answers that satisfy our souls from the One who loves us with an eternal love as He loves his own Son, Jesus Christ. I believe that we will feel as blessed as Jabez did after he called upon the name of the God of Israel in 1 Chronicles 4:10:

Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, 'Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.' And God granted his request.

Because there are so many different ways that men and women have laid their requests before God it is impossible to list them all in this one chapter, but let me begin to close with one more which is the prayer of dedication of our babies before the true Father of their lives. By offering our children back to the Lord we are asking God to take care of them and to always watch over them with an abundance of his grace and wisdom. Our heartfelt prayer is for them to know God's guidance that leads them into a holy and divinely-given fear of God that will last a lifetime, and through which they will gain a place in heaven.

Take this prayer one step further, let me encourage you to never cease praying to the Lord asking him to yoke all of his followers together, so that the Body of Christ can be more united than ever before. Let our prayer be that every one of us is joined to the next, as all of us might be watered with the same anointing and unbreakably glued together by God's love. This is the kind of prayer that surely will be answers because it was for exactly this purpose of forming one eternal family that Jesus sacrificed his life. Never forget that we are a holy and chosen people, the pure bride of Christ that he has known before the beginning of this world and destined to live forever in his infinite presence.

Although, it would only be fair to say that at this moment in time Christ is greatly suffering for the sight of seeing his future bride so divided and scattered across the earth, deceived by leaders who love religious stardom and live in ecclesiastical pride. Far too many have attained positions of leadership despite being blinded by the worst of ambitions to gain power, honour and glory as well as earthly wealth for themselves. In doing this they rob the one and only unique Son of God who alone deserves such praise and loyalty.

Finally, there is one heartfelt prayer request that the Lord makes of us rather than we of him, which is not only important but is actually a Biblical command to be obeyed. This we find in Psalm 122:6:

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

'May those who love you be secure.

Indeed, we need to pray for the people who brought both the *Torah*, the holy Gospels and our Jewish Saviour, Jesus, because these are our elder brothers in the faith. It is true however, that the greater majority of them would go no further than saying that their relationship with us is no more than any other human relationship and only a few of the Jewish people would agree that we have the same blood and faith flowing in our veins. Nevertheless, I do believe that it will not be long before we see one third of the present Jewish people opening their hearts to receive the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in doing so he will return them to a place within his very ribs and in his heart. The very same place where he shelters all of us *Gentiles* who have been redeemed.

So here we are at the end of this chapter, and by now you will be expecting to spend a moment in prayer together to express our gratefulness and joy before the Lord. To begin with let us make the very beautiful words of Psalm 103:1-6 our own:

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, 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. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

Yes Lord, you are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, he who is everything for us! Thank you, blessed and holy Father, thank you Jesus our faithful and perfect friend, thank you precious Holy Spirit for being our comforter and the healer of our souls! We give you our most sincere gratitude, our God for making us complete in you and if that were not enough in itself you have filled us with your Spirit! Keep your strongest grip upon us and please, never let us go! Amen.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Prayer Like This Gets God's Personal Attention

Normally we pray quietly, sedately and with thoughtfully constructed sentences, but if we ever find ourselves in imminent danger or faced with a tragic emergency and can see no way out of either, I do not think it would occur to anybody to pray in the same genteel way. If only because of the fast increasing adrenaline in our bloodstream, we will be inevitably compelled to call out to God, even shouting out for his help. When a man or a woman is between the devil and the deep blue sea, as they say, they are likely going to scream like an animal that is wounded or surrounded by its predators, simply because just like the animals, we human beings also have an inescapable survival instinct.

If we are walking in the light of Christ and therefore have our foundations deep down into the Holy Spirit, when danger threatens it will be that same Holy Spirit in us that compels us to cry out to God in prayer. Not so much in a selfish desire for self-preservation but rather sounding the trumpet as a general alarm to heaven and to earth. We want our cries to catch the attention of the Lord in the hope that he will give the relevant orders and get us out of the imminent disaster that is upon us. We are looking to him to send help our way by moving his angels in our direction and sweeping the powers of darkness away from our presence, or all that may simply be required is for him to raise his all-powerful finger and point in our direction.

God has a way of taking charge of any situation and transforming it into a place of great blessing for us, as happened many times for David who lived through many dangerous circumstances including wars, mutinies and conspiracies to assassinate him. David knew what it was like to be found in prayer every morning raising his voice to God with great cries, something like the words that we read in Psalm 5:1-2:

Listen to my words, Lord, consider my lament. Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.

One of the most difficult tests that we have to face in our lives is one that is common to all men and women, and that is the experience of falling victim to a serious illness or perhaps worse still to see how one of our loved ones suffers through a painful disease. Either way, it is very likely that we will be heartbroken and pressed to our knees as we call out to God with tears, groanings and raised voices imploring him to release the healing that is in Christ. You will know the Bible story of the two blind

men who could not be silenced as they raised their voices knowing that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. They knew that this was their one chance to receive their eyesight and nothing was going to restrain them from asking for the mercy of Jesus, who stopped in his tracks, touched their eyes and in a moment they could see.

There is a similar story of the many sick people in Genesaret who thought nothing of shouting to catch the attention of Jesus when he was visiting where they lived. They felt no shame in appealing to his mercy and asked only to be allowed to touch his robe, whereupon all were healed. I do not know how many times we have had no alternative except to lie on the ground before the Lord, praying with an intensity of cries to God on behalf of our loved ones when they have been struck down with serious illnesses. We have spent hours beyond number in the hospital pacing up and down the corridors, walking around the beds and unable to rest because of the overwhelming inner need to pray and call upon the Lord. We have interceded for the release of his healing until it seemed that the veins and arteries in our necks and heads would burst with the pressure inside, and on very many occasions we have probably seen the perfect help sent by Christ. In the end people have been discharged in good health, although during the first few years of our ministry there was hardly a day went by when we did not have to bury one of our dearly beloved brothers and sisters who had succumbed to AIDS.

I have the fondest memories of some of our first pastors and men and women who work together with us, yet left behind a beautiful testimony. It was an extended time of deep sadness which often found us crying out to God to make the very first medicines available to us which eventually did arrive and since then have given thousands of our brothers, sisters and co-workers considerable extension to their lives. They may still be tested positive for the disease, but its advance has been paralysed by the development of even more effective new medical treatments, which we believe have been inspired by the Lord and his grace. Many of us can say the same words that David wrote in Psalm 30:2:

Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.

What would you think if we did not waste one more moment without crying out to our loving and perfect Father in heaven on behalf of anyone that you might know who is gravely ill? Perhaps you too have received an intimidating diagnosis or find yourself in a difficult situation right now? Let us pray together with faith and expect to receive a timely and beneficial answer to our need of healing. Let us do what David did in Psalm 3:4:

I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain.

"Dearly beloved Father, merciful God, you know very well just how painful and tragic sickness is to every one of us. Blessed heavenly Doctor, will you please heal my family members and my brothers and sisters in the faith! How will you not move your hand of compassion to help your children who suffer so much? Come to our help, Holy God! Remember and give honour to the wounds of Christ and grant to us the healing grace that is found in them! If it would please you, how quickly we would beat our chests to ask for your forgiveness, and we would tear our own souls to pieces if we could only reach your help! Although we know that you will never do this for any of us because of our own merits and achievements, yet you will surely never deny yourself before the merits of Jesus and all of his intercessions for the help that we need? Indeed you will never deny yourself or us in this way because you have promised your help to us by your own word and you have never spoken one single untruth! Have mercy upon us for we are the weakest lambs of your flock and we stand in very great need of your healing. Glorify your beloved Son in hearing our prayer, and for this we give you our thanks, Holy Spirit for having heard us and taken our prayer into the heart of our Heavenly Father, in whom we hope and before whom we wait. Amen."

Having prayed, let us now trust in the fulfilment of the words of the Lord which we find written in Psalm 34:6, 15 and 17:

This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry. The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

Should it ever happen that we see one of our family, close friends or a brother or sister in the faith falling into the hands of demons and being cruelly tormented by them or worse still being possessed by the powers of darkness, how could we ever remain silent? I suspect that our prayers will be loud and insistent!

This is the kind of prayer that came from the lips of the Canaanite woman when she followed the Lord and his entourage, persistently crying out behind their backs. For as much noise as all the travelling crowds and hangers-on were making, she only increased her own decibels yet failed to catch the attention of Jesus who in fact was deliberately ignoring her as a test. She was about to be put on display as a wonderful example of the meaning of true faith, although to begin with the Master's followers were

determined to silence her interruptions. She, on the other hand, was desperate to obtain the help of the Son of God to set free her daughter, who was being seriously tormented by a demon, and by her persistence she received the fullest possible answer from Jesus, and to this day we can read the story in Matthew 15:21-28.

Another very similar story is the one about the deeply disturbed young man who was continually being buffeted by the devil even to the point of being thrown into either the fire or nearby water. Swinging from one mortal danger to another this boy had to be kept under observation night and day, until his father heard that Jesus was passing by and threw himself down before the Lord. The father was already terribly disheartened because the Lord's disciples had already tried to help and had failed, yet there he was asking Jesus for mercy. By the end of the story he was enjoying the timely help of the Holy Messiah who set his son completely free, and who also took full advantage of the moment to give his disciples a gentle telling-off for not having the necessary faith to deal with situations like this one.

Jesus then began to teach them with the revelation of how to drive out this kind of evil spirit, leaving them and us with a written spiritual prescription to employ prayer and fasting together if we want to see these cruel and perverse unwanted tenants removed from their occupation of human beings. We can read the full story in Matthew 17:14-21, and it is important that we do so more than ever before: multiplied millions of men and women have given way to the powers of darkness are now possessed by them. Every psychiatric clinic on the planet is full to overflowing with just as many other suffering people still unattended in the towns and villages of the world, which only confirms that age-old saying that there is not a town anywhere without its share of foolish people and turned upside down by those who are mad as well!

The next question that we must turn to is what we might do if it ever becomes our turn to walk through the valley of shame, slander and unjust, dishonouring accusations? The Lord allows these things to happen as part of our own discipleship and to give us something of a personal understanding of the sufferings that he himself, our perfect model, had to go through.

The answer should be that we will do just what David did when he found himself in a very similar situation. What he said to the Lord is one way that we too may express our indignation, knowing that the divine blessing he received as an answer can also be ours as well. Let us read his words from Psalm 120:1-2:

I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me. Save me, Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues.

From my own experience I am very aware that this is one of the most difficult tests that will come our way on this, our pilgrimage through this world. On the other hand it is a very common test which the Lord allows to fall upon all those who will follow him with a genuine desire to serve his purposes. Our reaction, and there needs to be a prompt response from us, should be to cry out to the Lord of all justice yet without taking God to task but rather asking for his urgent help. Our first thought should be that none of the new believers or the people who are weak in their faith should stumble by what they may be hearing. These little children in the faith who are still drinking the milk of the word and have no teeth of their own are very easily distressed and fearful, and of course we do not want to bring any stain upon the testimony of Christ.

All of us who follow Jesus represent him, and when criticisms and accusations come our way, we need to be asking the Lord to declare our innocence. It will be a time to examine our own hearts and should we find a crown resting upon our heads, now would be the best possible moment to throw it down at the feet of Christ, sincerely renouncing everything that is not under his lordship and if needs be leaving us with a loss if that would please the Lord and release his help. It will be perfectly understandable if any one of us when faced with this situation would seriously raise their voices and cry out to the Lord asking him to deliver us from every diabolical plan to discredit us. David, the King, had considerable experience of these kind of evil-inspired attacks and the frequency of them must have been behind his words in Psalm 57:2-3:

I cry out to God Most High, to God, who vindicates me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me – God sends forth his love and his faithfulness.

Unfortunately, the evil powers of darkness who are our sworn enemies have many other ways of trying to rob, destroy or kill us. We must distinguish between the fact that these are works of the devil and not of men, although it is a sad fact that the majority of them will be launched at us through fellow men and women. Against all of these we must become accomplished in using the full armour of God yet first and foremost remembering to be constantly engaged in prayer, especially the kind which involves serious crying out to God. You will find that this is the most effective way of moving the heart of our Father and at the same time because prayer is made in the hearing of the powers of Satan's dark Kingdom, they also tremble. Again we can learn much from David whose

words have been kept for us to use as miniature lessons in how to cry out to God, and it may well be that the Holy Spirit will lead us to make his prayers our own as we seek to be set free from the grip of our enemies. For example, here is Psalm 55:16-19:

As for me, I call to God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He rescues me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me. God, who is enthroned from of old, who does not change – he will hear them and humble them, because they have no fear of God.

If it has never happened to you, you will find it difficult to imagine what it feels like to be unjustly sent to prison, declared guilty of crimes that you have never committed. During all the thirty years of our ministry we have visited hundreds of prisons to preach the gospel to tens of thousands of prisoners, and prayed for them. There is no doubt that the majority of the inmates are guilty of the crimes to which they have been imprisoned, but nevertheless we have come across a small percentage of people who have been wrongly removed from society. Knowing their innocence of any crime has almost inevitably provoked either a deep depression in their souls or a frantic rebellion against everybody and everything, and especially against the God they do not know but certainly reject.

Men and women like this have no confidence in God whatsoever and because they have never been convinced of the reality of the Lord's existence, let alone his infinite mercy, these unhappy victims have no way of knowing how they can seek God for his divine help. They have no idea how to cry out to God for his justice and deliverance and have no imagination as to how God might intervene and bring about his divine justice. Nevertheless, the truth is that our God has absolute power over all the judges of the earth and he is perfectly capable of granting them unconditional freedom as he did for David when he was forced to hide in a cave to avoid the death penalty that Saul had declared upon him.

Saul had mobilised his army and sent them out to bring David in dead or alive, and David's experience of being trapped in a cave and unable to come out must be very similar to how it feels to be falsely imprisoned. David's response was to call out to God with cries filled with passion, and some of his words have been preserved for us in Psalm 142:1-7:

I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way. In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me.

Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. I cry to you, Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.' Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

There was one occasion when the authorities put me in the cells for an alleged verbal attack upon someone, although they only kept me in the police station for a few hours and did not even bother to handcuff me because of the favour that the Lord showed to me. You can imagine however, I spent those few hours crying out to God asking first of all for his forgiveness for those who had accused me, and then calling upon him to restore my freedom. I was in fact far more concerned for God to take care of a young girl that we had taken into our community for women because she had been abandoned by her mother who was an alcoholic as well as a drug addict and a prostitute.

The lady in question had voluntarily come into our Remar Ministry for the rehabilitation that she needed, but she began to use our facilities as no more than an excuse to come and to go, as soon as she began to feel physically better. The first time that this happened she was actually in our own home and try as we might, there was never any way of persuading her not to leave for the streets. She would always come home not too long afterwards having wallowed in the mud and filth of the bad areas of town until she finally disappeared and we did not see her for several months. When she did eventually return it was to collect her child, and she had already reported us to the authorities and accused us of having kidnapped the girl.

Later on we discovered that this woman who shared all the personality traits of Jezebel in the Bible, had been living with some nuns and once she had gained their confidence, she had managed to convince them to support her accusation. It was not too difficult to understand why they had gone along with her because in those days the Catholic Church considered us to be a wayward sect, and the matter had gone as far as the office of the local Bishop who had given his encouragement to take the girl out of our care. In the end the woman managed to persuade the authorities to give her custody and promptly dragged the child into our own insane way of life in the hell-inspired depths of this world.

Remembering this situation invites me to return one more time to read another of David's stronger prayers, because in this day and age our

contemporary enemies seem to be multiplying against us just as they did for David in his time in history. Let me share Psalm 69:1-4: with you:

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me. I am forced to restore what I did not steal.

Our situations were vaguely similar, although when we read about the suffering that Joseph had to go through in Egypt, and later Daniel in the lion's den, we can understand that any comparison would be ridiculous because these men faced far more serious situations and dangers, yet the Lord rescued them both when they cried out to him.

We suffered another ferocious attack of slander in the nation of El Salvador when some local corrupt judges and equally corrupt local government officials tried to use us as a scapegoat for their own activities over which they put a strong smokescreen. It turned out that they had been trafficking orphans from the recent war and selling these children to foreigners for more than twenty thousand dollars per child. People had reported them to the United Nations which began to investigate the case only to have their attention diverted towards us and before long they were accusing our charity of being the actual kidnappers of the children and benefiting from their sale.

Ten of our volunteer workers were immediately put into prison and no sooner than the news reached our ears than we fell to our knees to cry out to the Lord with a good measure of insistence, and asking that he will bring honour to his name of Jehovah Tsidkenu which means, "God is our justice." His answer came quickly and the prison doors were opened and our men were set free and completely exonerated of all charges. Even the press published a retraction of all that they had written and in fact the publicity that they gave to us spread throughout the entire country and was used by God to put his seal upon our work, so much so that the government gave us a lifelong promise of safe conduct. They have never bothered us again.

Similar situations have come about in many other nations but on every occasion our invincible Protector has come to our aid leaving us with so many stories that I have actually been able to write a book about how he has helped us. Living through the situations was not that easy of course, and we went through the kind of anguish that David writes about time

and time again in his Psalms. The story of the widow and the unjust judge which was told by Jesus and recorded in Luke 18:1-7 was a continual inspiration to us and we saw how the vociferous and persistent insistence of this lady brought about her deliverance. The story shows us how seriously our Father is committed to justice and how he will quickly come to the side of his people with the help that we need, in fulfilment of Psalm 56:9:

Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me.

May God never find any need to personally reproach us because he has seen any indifference or laziness in us when it comes to praying into the all too frequent and cruel injustices that we see taking place in this world, including in our own nations. Isaiah the prophet knew how reticent the people of God could be, and this is what he wrote in Isaiah 59:4:

No one calls for justice; no one pleads a case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments, they utter lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil.

There is one very special intensive prayer which perhaps feels a little peculiar, you can rest assured that it is produced by the Holy Spirit deep down within our souls. You might think it feels like an inner thirst which can never be satisfied but actually it is a call to be what the Bible describes as a watchtower for the Lord, that is someone who is looking out for the safekeeping of the people of God. That would have been an actual responsibility in Jerusalem in the time when the Old Testament was being written. This kind of prayer is called for by the Lord when he wants to warn his people about an imminent and very real danger and generally speaking it is an invitation to ask him for prophetic revelation and wisdom so that the people under our care as well as ourselves can be saved from the impending tragedy.

God would far prefer it to see us living in total victory rather than under a total disaster, in line with the loving purposes that he has for every one of his followers and citizens of his kingdom. The kind of intercession that we are talking about will almost certainly compel you to call upon him with a voice that is raised in alarm, perhaps similar to the cries of a woman who is about to give birth. Jeremiah 33:3 has a good way of putting it across to us:

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.

The same Holy Spirit also has a way of imparting into us the holy zeal of the Lord for the salvation of souls, that is provided we are walking in close company with Him. Never be surprised if our Heavenly Father draws a prayer out of your innermost being causing you to cry out to him for an outpouring of the grace of his Holy Spirit to drive back the powers of darkness and the removal of every kind of prejudice, untruth, betrayal and every other sort of devilish stronghold. All of these are obstacles to people who would otherwise open their hearts to the living and vibrant word of God and welcome his love.

As an example let us take the greatest evangelist of all times after Jesus himself, who was John the Baptist. We will go to the occasion when John was verbally sparring with the priests and Levites who had been sent to find out if his evangelistic success was likely to threaten the dominance of their ancient religious system. In John 1:19-23, we can read that when they questioned him about who he was, he replied that he was the voice of one who cries out in the desert to make straight the way of the Lord. John was a man who knew what it was to overcome the demons that inhabit the desert places which are also full of snakes and scorpions, but now he had emerged from the solitude to fish for souls and to hand them over to Jesus, as a divine fulfilment of the prophetic command written in Isaiah 40:1-5.

This is a tremendous prophetic word which was fulfilled in John the Baptist and also by Jesus Christ, although it's final fulfilment is still waiting to be accomplished through us whilst Jesus waits, seated at the right hand of the Father for the day to come. The underlying meaning of these words is that we are expected to continue preparing the way for Christ to receive the harvest of human souls ready for the day when the harvesters receive God's order to go in and reap. We prepare that way through the power of crying out to God in prayer and binding the evil armies of Satan in the name of Jesus, commanding them to be removed and leave the way open and clear for the presence of the Spirit of the Lord to march down. Through prayer we raise up valleys which is a picture of how the Lord will exalt those who are humble, meanwhile by the same prayer we lower the mountains and hills which is another illustration, this time of how God intends to humble the proud. All in all, we are expecting to see the glory of God and the light of his salvation spreading over many people.

When the people of God pray like this with cries of burning passion, asking the Lord to save, heal and set his people free, as well as shouting out our indignation against every kind of unclean spirit, then the next

step is for the people of God to go out and be the voice of the Lord to the people in the streets. The way should have been cleared through prayer and it should be no surprise to see men and women turn away from their sin and walk towards the Lord to be saved, as we obey the words given by God through Isaiah 58:1:

Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

Going back to the Old Testament days, when God saw how the prosperity in Egypt only served to harden the heart of Israel, his people, he allowed them to be overwhelmed by the Pharaoh and taken as his slaves. This was such a terrible humiliation for the house of Jacob that God allowed it to move them forward into a place of repentance. In a way, the suffering was as if God was pushing them forward with his shepherd's rod towards the place where they would willingly return to him. This eventually happened when they reached the very end of their own strength and with broken hearts and bodies they called out to God asking him to rescue them which he gladly did, setting them free through the messiah Moses, who was a precursor of the saviour, Jesus who was to come. The story is found in Exodus 2:23-25:

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

Is it not true that God is the same today as he was then? Through his word he assures us that his love has not diminished in any way, neither his strength to save us from every danger. He only waits to hear our cries, quite possibly as evidence that we have responded well to his loving discipleship in us. It may well be that he has imposed a test or discipline, even a punishment upon us with the purpose of humbling our hearts and words and bringing us to a place of having greater respect for him and his people. Wrong attitudes have a very definite way of keeping us distant from God's help, and knowing this God will always work to bring us to a place of greater spiritual maturity and give us the encouragement that we need to make progress towards the goals he has set for our lives.

The Bible tells us that God was thinking about us and designing our lives before he created the world, and he made us in his own image and similarity. Knowing this, it is perhaps not unusual to find the urge growing

within us to call out to God, rending our hearts and raising our voices in the face of any impending serious problem that might be facing us or any of our beloved families, friends or the people we know in the faith. Go one step further and just for a moment imagine the horrendous eternal future that waits for all the souls who will be lost for not having embraced God's salvation, and then you will know how we must really get down to prayer and true intercession to open the way for God's rescue mission. Let us hear David put this heartfelt cry into words through Psalm 42:1:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.

The words sound very gentle and poetic but what is happening here is that the deer is snorting, bellowing and braying which is what they do when they are overwhelmed by the heat and dying of thirst. On the other hand they make similar noises when they can no longer stand the scent of a distant female in the mating season and they have to stop everything else and go and find the lady in question. This is the way God wants us to cry out to him to get through the desert places of this life and through the ever present crises of faith, discouragement and loneliness that come upon all men and women from time to time. Perhaps it might be that we are filled with an inexpressible yet burning longing to see growth in our ministry, with many souls coming to know God's salvation? Then again, there are never enough men and women offering themselves to help with the call of Christ and if all the work is upon your shoulders, it will not be long before you start snorting, bellowing and braying before the Lord as well, and quite rightly so.

One of the things that never fails to shock me to the core is how some church leaders react when they lose one of their sheep or one of their goats from the human flock which is in place under their care. It can even happen that one of their fellow workers walked away from serving God. Far too many of these men remain passive in the face of these sad situations or worse still they start complaining and telling tales about the people that have gone on their way. I have heard them treating their former members and co-workers as if they were deserters, instead of falling on their faces before the Lord and crying out loud to him on behalf of these wandering souls, until their former leader has no more voice to pray with.

At this point, our prayer for the Lord of all souls has to be to ask him to return these missing familiar faces to the family sheep pen, before going out in person to look for them. It may be that we have to go looking far and wide, going to and fro like a runaway donkey that will never be

stopped by any obstacle until it finds what it wants. Then, when the good shepherd finds his lost sheep he immediately helps it out of whatever mess it has got itself into, and brings it home upon his shoulders, in this case to the house of the Lord which is the church. One of the best examples we can find to stimulate our imagination in this matter is the mooing of a cow or the roaring of a female bear when someone has taken away their offspring. That is the kind of prayer we are talking about, and how much have we got to learn to cry like this, splitting the skies and opening the heavens to prevent the world dragging our spiritual offspring away.

When Jesus himself cried out to his Father, his prayers from the Cross could not have come from deeper within nor have been uttered with any stronger fervour. Twice he prayed; twice he was heard both across the universe and in the heaven of God which is outside of the visible creation. His prayers must have echoed like thunder, the first one as he reached the very limit of the pain he could bear, and the second was a prayer to release his Spirit to his Father, as is recorded for all time in Matthew 27:46 and 50:

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

Now it is time to take a look at another kind of prayer which makes everyone raise their voice to God. This is the prayer of rejoicing that comes about when we see how the victory has been won by the Lord, and what joy it gives us to honour him and with great joy to give him the glory. We join in the celebration to acclaim the one and only undefeated One, just as the people of Israel did when they saw the Arc of the Covenant, the symbol of God amongst them just as Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. You can almost hear the shouting in the words of 1 Samuel 4:5-7:

When the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, 'What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?' When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. 'A god has come into the camp,' they said. 'Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before.'

Later on in history something very similar occurred when Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the story has been kept for us in Luke 19:37-40:

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' 'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

Can you ever imagine the shame that we would feel if the Lord enabled the stones to cry out in praise because we have remained silent and not given the Lord the acclamation that he so deserves? Somehow it must be possible that God can cause stones to speak and that being so it must be equally possible to hear what they have to say. It may well be that they are the faithful witnesses who appear in the final judgement and repeat before all present the very words spoken by all those people who have lived in pride and with hard hearts towards God. Let us take this one little step forward in our imagination, because as you may know the magnetic tape that we used to record with and listen to before the invention of CDs, is manufactured with powdered stone. Play the tape and you will hear an echo of what was said maybe years before as the soundtrack reproduces our words, and even if they were whispered at the time the volume can now be greatly increased. Either way, one of these days our words are going to bounce back upon us like boomerangs as a definite confirmation of the universal law of causality which categorically affirms that there is no effect without a previous cause.

The truth of the matter is that we may be certain that we are going to harvest everything that we have said and done, whether that is for good or for evil, and it will return upon our heads either in our favour or to our disgrace. Unless of course, all of our wrongdoings have already been deleted and wiped out by the blood of Christ poured out on the Cross. Now that we know this let us be encouraged to only speak the good and the truthful, but now it is time for us to decide once and for all that our lives are going to be a means of giving God the glory through thunderous acclamations of praise, filled with rejoicing.

When God gives a warning, he knows how to make it beautiful, for example through the words of Matthew 25:1-13 we have the parable of the ten virgins or bridesmaids. Quite late on in the celebrations of the day, they had all given in to tiredness and fallen asleep because the

groom was taking a long time in returning from wherever he had gone to, when suddenly close to the middle of the night the cry went up, "Here he comes, time to get up and welcome him! "It is a great story but it also contains a prophetic cry for anyone today who will put the same words on his or her lips.

I have no doubt that the men and women who watch over the people of God in intercession throughout long nights of prayer will recognise the coming of the Lord. So too will the good shepherds who pastor and care for the flocks of God, in the same way that the shepherds of Bethlehem understood that Jesus had been born in their vicinity. Better still, both you and I along with many others can also take on the role of announcing the coming of Christ and do so with voices that are raised. In fact this is no time at all for sleeping because very little time remains before the Lord's coming, and his immediate call is for the people of God to watch and to pray with all the passion they can muster for the love of God and the souls of men. We want to be found worthy of this very special calling.

Now before we finish this chapter, let us take a look at the prayer of invocation. This consists of incessantly crying out to God to catch his attention by approaching him through his many different names and asking him to respond by honouring the meaning of each one of them. When he does answer he leaves us with a testimony of the merciful and glorious qualities which are implied in the different ways that he describes his nature through his names. Every one of God's names contains the promise of personalised benefits and each name contains the possibility of its meaning being fulfilled in us or in the men and women around us who we pray for. We can approach God and cry out to him according to his name which is the most appropriate to get us out of the mess or drama that we or others have fallen into, and with this in mind it might be good for you to do a search on Google or on the bookshelf for a list of the names of God in the Bible. It will be longer than you think!

Blind Bartimaeus shouted out to the Lord three times in a row to find mercy and have his sight restored, as we can read in Mark 10:46-52. You might also know the story of the ten lepers which is written in Luke 17:11-14, I mention these accounts because each story should encourage us to know how to pray in a loud voice when necessary and by invoking the name of Jesus, which means Saviour and Healer.

We can be sure that God is not at all pleased when his people are not sufficiently bothered to call upon his name despite the fact that his name is an implicit expression of all of his abundant and widely differing forms of grace. It is a fact that God had as many names as there are dangers

which lurk along the path of our lives, and bearing this in mind if we fail to invoke his name and nature then we are really saying that through our passivity we are content to remain in permanent defeat. On the other hand it could be that we consider ourselves to be self-sufficient and have little need of the help of the Lord which was the attitude that prevailed in the church of Laodicea. It is worth noting that Jesus Christ was highly critical of this gathering, as we can read through his words in the book of Revelation 3:17:

You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

The indifference of the people of Israel also managed to greatly upset God, and on one occasion the fact that nobody bothered to call upon his name provoked these words in Isaiah 64:7 from Isaiah himself who gave clear warning of the consequences:

No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have given us over to our sins.

It has probably never happened to you and I hope that it never will, but sometimes we unexpectedly find ourselves staring death in the face and believe me this causes a tremendous anxiety deep inside. The first time this dramatic situation came my way the doctors gave me no more than six months of life, having investigated a black tumour which had appeared on my side. The other occasion happened in the sea when I nearly drowned trying to rescue some of our brothers in the faith who were actually drowning after taking a swim following their baptism. You can be absolutely certain that on both of these imminently tragic occasions I felt violently compelled to call upon the name of the Lord and there was no question about thinking about it first or going through a process of questioning whether it was reasonable or not. Thankfully, the Healer of our bodies and the Rescuer of our lives was immediately there to help.

In the Bible you can become familiar with the similar experience that Peter had when he was drowning, and on another occasion it was all the disciples who were in similar danger when a furious storm fell upon the small boat that they were navigating across the Sea of Galilee. As they began to be tossed to and fro by the wild tempest with waves rising high above their heads, you will not find it difficult to imagine they called out with very loud voices and invoked the name of Jesus Christ, the name which is above every other name. Only in the name of Jesus is there

salvation and eternal life and they were not disappointed because the Lord came to their side and they were saved from the impending peril.

We may not like the situations that we fall into or the experiences that come our way, but through them all we discover that Jesus really is our Good Shepherd who knows how to perfectly care for every one of us. Being convinced of this we have no reason to fear, in fact on the contrary we have every encouragement to call upon the Lord whenever it is appropriate and we will become immediately aware of his companionship and protection. This will be all the more true when we have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death but even there Psalm 23:4 assures us that we will not be alone for the Lord will be with us. Let us remember that when unwelcome situations come our way, many other believers have been that way before, including David who wrote many of the Psalms that put the perfect words in our mouth for prayer.

When in danger or distress or needing to be rescued from the grip of the powers of darkness, and especially if we are threatened by imminent death, it will always be a good thing to immediately invoke the name of Jesus. Perhaps the words of Psalm 18:3-6 will guide your words:

I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies. The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.

Finally let us remember to teach all of our companions in life how to pray. Wherever possible teach people how to invoke and call upon the different names of God, above all the name of our Lord Jesus Christ so that they may experience themselves what it means to be saved and to enjoy all of the promised blessings of God. The apostle Paul wrote these words in Romans 10:12-13:

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

So here we are at the end of one more chapter; do not you think that right now would be a really good time to call upon the different names of the Lord and cry out to him for his rescue and comfort to come streaming into our lives, or perhaps you will have some loved ones who are in even greater need of receiving the Lord's care.

"Father of all goodness, we appeal to your infinite mercy and cry out to you with all of our souls, raising our voices to you in desperate need to receive your help. Continue to rescue our lives from the holes that we fall into because you are our one and only deliverer, Lord Jesus!

We invoke your name of Jehovah Rhafah, God our healer. In our distress we call out to you, asking that you would grant us the benefit of the wounds that Christ suffered on the cross to heal our loved ones and all our brothers and sisters in the faith from their dreadfully painful and serious illnesses, and in doing so bringing honour to your name.

Jehovah Jireh, owner and Lord of all that exists, we call upon you, invoking your name through intercession and cries from our heart, pleading for your provision to reach all of the orphans and widows in this world, and especially to help those which are in grave danger of dying of hunger this day. Honour your own name and provide for them, we ask in the name of Jesus.

Holy God, more than ever before, today we invoke your name of Jehovah Shalom to ask you to pour out your peace upon all those brothers and ministers who are having difficulty with each other, and for all those family members who are filled with resentment and make life difficult for everyone else. May your peace come upon those who are considering separation or who have crossed the line into animosity and division. Send your peace into our cities and towns, and be pleased to extinguish the fire of war between nations, above all the violence between Palestine and Israel. Bring glory to your name and send your Shalom throughout our world and into our lives. Amen."

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfils the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

Psalm 145:18-19.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Behind the Scenes Prayer of Spiritual Warfare

Did you ever wonder why the mountains were formed after the worldwide flood and have you noticed how gigantic some of them are? Have you noticed how frequently Jesus climbed the mountains to pray, and if you

read your Old Testament you will know how the prophets, judges and kings of Israel did just the same.

It is easy enough to answer the first question by affirming that it was God who raised them up, yet somehow they have become the thrones of different principalities and evil minded powers of darkness under the delegated authority of Satan who took control over the whole world. This happened when he snatched away the lordship that was given to Adam, who was left defeated after falling into sin against God, who then had no choice but to pour out divine punishment and leave the entire earth in a state of curse.

Knowing this makes it easy to find the right answer to the second question which is a consequence of the first. Following in the ways of his servants in centuries gone by, our Saviour climbed up to the heights of the mountains to engage in spiritual warfare against those invisible powers who dominated all within their realm. Jesus made it his practice to engage in prayer warfare knowing that in doing so he was entering into the almightiness of God who can never be defeated. Jesus was clearly and firmly convinced that after spending time in this kind of overcoming prayer, that he could go back down into the valleys and towns with the certainty of seeing an abundant harvest of souls in response to his preaching about the Kingdom of God and his justice.

We have also discovered that if we will struggle in the same kind of prayer warfare, then we shall see the same results that Jesus did. Micah 6:1-2 is a very convincing Scripture:

Listen to what the Lord says: 'Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. 'Hear, you mountains, the Lord's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.

From the valleys up to the mountains and back down into the valleys was the regular journey that Jesus made throughout his ministry, culminating in his triumph on the cross in Golgotha on the hillside known as Calvary. This is part of the greater mountain range upon which Jerusalem is built, in fact the city is crowned by seven mountains peaks which stand out on the horizon. Curiously enough you see this geographical phenomenon repeated in various cities around the world, amongst them some of the world's most important centres which gives you the idea that behind the scenes they are something of an invisible castle and army barracks for the kingdom of Satan in this world.

Spiritually speaking, there is no doubt at all that the cities are governed by unseen but very real evil princes who have been placed at the head of the devil's most preferred locations, Babylon for example, Rome and of course Jerusalem. It is certain that Satan would consider Jerusalem to be his most important possession and where he is unceasingly confronted by its legitimate king, who is the Son of David, whose advance he equally unceasingly resists.

It was probably on one of Israel's highest mountains, Mount Hermon, that Jesus overcame all the temptations of Satan, just as he also walked away from the temptations that came his way in the desert and on the highest pinnacle of the temple. The latter is a clear symbol of the ecclesiastical throne that the devil offered to Jesus in a temptation to take power through religion, but Jesus had the upper hand on every occasion. No doubt at all that Jesus had all the backing of heaven itself, but equally the Lord had become spiritually strong through spending forty days and nights in prayer and fasting which is a very important kind of spiritual warfare. Once Jesus had overcome in prayer he had no hesitation whatsoever in facing up to Lucifer's temptations and overcoming every one of them.

Although the Bible does not give the name of the actual place, most of the people who understand these things are certain that Jesus also prayed on Mount Tabor. Mark 9:2 is one place where we find Jesus at prayer presumably on Mount Tabor and also in Matthew 17:2 where he was transfigured by being filled with the glory of God and clothed with the power of heaven. Very shortly afterwards Jesus came face-to-face with one particular lunatic who was so diabolically possessed that he resisted every attempt to help him, and those that tried found it very difficult to overcome the power that was in him. The Bible gives us the idea that the demon within him had taken full control of the man, and both the mind and the will of his victim were in the grip of this power of darkness. The demon did its best to prevent its host from hearing any word from God that would set him free and plainly refused to come out from the body of the man he possessed. However this was Jesus that the demon was challenging, and the end result was certain. Jesus took advantage of the situation to teach his disciples that some powers of darkness can only be defeated by the prayer of spiritual warfare and fasting, a revelation that is kept for us in the verses I have mentioned.

On a different occasion the Master climbed another mountain near to the Sea of Galilee to spend some time alone in prayer warfare. After the struggle was over Jesus found his way down the mountainside only to

continue walking across the Sea of Galilee which at that particular moment was in the grip of a raging storm. The howling winds that came against Jesus were driven by the local diabolical powers of darkness who never cease to look for opportunities to kill and destroy, although the extent of their activities is strictly controlled by the permissions granted by God himself.

When you read the story you see that Jesus rebuked the wind and overcame it, speaking to it as if it had a name and a personality which is in fact a tremendous revelation of the reality of how evil powers are invisibly behind many catastrophic acts of nature. The command of Jesus instantly brought a dead calm to the lake as recorded in Matthew 14:22-23, similar to what had happened to another very similar storm which we can read about in Matthew 8:23-27.

Immediately afterwards Jesus had to deal with two seriously demon-possessed men from Gadara, known in the Bible as the Gadarene demoniacs. These two deeply disturbed men were possessed by a quantity of unclean spirits which express themselves through violence and cruelty, yet with a few words from Jesus both men were completely set free. The Lord allowed the demons to enter into some pigs which happened to be feeding nearby upon which the herd promptly hurled itself off the cliff and fell into the water beneath. You can read the story for yourself in Matthew 8:28-34.

Let me just underline this understanding of the importance of mountains with the verses from Matthew 15:29-31, where the Lord again prays on a mountaintop and then descends to sea level in Galilee where the Bible tells us that he healed many sick people and did a great number of miracles.

The Bible tells us how Elijah challenged all the false gods of Baal in an astonishing encounter which took place on the top of Mount Carmel. It was here that he challenged all the unseen armies of the powers of darkness, after gaining the confidence through prayer that he had the backing of the one true living God. By the end of the conflict all the human representatives of Baal, proven now to be false prophets had lost their lives, as we can read in 1 Kings 18:20-40.

Every time I visit this historic site on Mount Carmel I sense a spiritual excitement that this conflict is going to be repeated one of these days when one of the witnesses who is revealed in the book of Revelation chapter 11, returns to this world and brings with him the same destructive judgement as before. The truth of the matter is that the same demonic representatives of the satanic power that gives its name as Bel

have returned and quite likely it is the same crowd of unclean dogs as in days of old, albeit wearing different colours and more than likely bringing other even more powerful unclean spirits with them.

If you visit Mount Carmel you will know what I am trying to describe, because you will see an enormous demon-inspired temple belonging to the Babylonian Baha'i faith, which if nothing else is a tremendous tourist attraction because of the fabulous gardens which surround the building. Quite apart from the architectural magnificence, the grounds are frequently used to celebrate Satan-inspired worship, no doubt directed by that invisible diabolical Prince that worked through Jezebel as his priestly assassin to kill the servants of God in Old Testament days. That event in itself was a satanic repetition of the day that the first woman proclaimed herself to be the goddess of heaven. Her name was Semiramis and she adopted the moon for herself as her personal symbol, and lest we think she is just part of ancient history, be prepared to see her reappearing with even greater power in Satan's plans for these last days.

When she returns she will be the Satan's lieutenant and his right hand on the earth, indeed the Bible talks about a Great Prostitute who raises herself up over all of the world and calls the nations to what she will call a holy war, both within themselves and against each other. You can see this beginning to happen through the extremist madness of every kind of nationalism which grows ever more prevalent and powerful, filled as it is with pride and expanding with a ruthless yeast throughout the nations. In the middle of all these horrors that we see on the television news and all those that have yet to come, it is a wonderful thing to be able to say these words in line with Psalm 60:12:

With God we shall gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.

Once that we have overcome through prayer warfare in the heights of heaven, we can count upon the help of the Lord as we go down into the towns and cities to gather in the booty of war which principally are the souls of men and women. They may well bring their own properties and wealth with them for the purposes of Christ, but what will give us the greatest possible satisfaction will be to see them being snatched out of the hands of that evil tyrant who kept their souls in oppression and slavery all their lives. Psalm 72:16 speaks to us both metaphorically and prophetically about the return of the enormous quantity of earthly riches that Satan has robbed, saying in these words:

There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.

It was John Bunyan who said, "Prayer is a shield for the soul, a sacrifice for God and a scourge for Satan." Would you like to cause our real enemies to tremble? By the words 'real enemies' I mean those spiritual powers who are led by Satan and not any of the men and women around us. If you are saying yes, then declare with me these words which come from Psalm 144:1-2:

Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me.

Many people would think that the most important strategy to gain the victory spiritually is to preach the word of God, but they are wrong because the most important strategy is to pray. In prayer we bravely move forward to the frontline of the battle and take our place in the trenches facing the evil armies of the powers of darkness. Many years ago it was prophetically declared before it happened that the Eternal King would come to this world to challenge and totally overcome the usurper Prince of darkness. It gives Christ great pleasure to organise his army of holy angels as well as his disciples on earth, all of whom are captained by Christ himself and move under the invincible authority of the Father in heaven. All of us under the command of Christ enjoy the unceasing support of the Holy Spirit as we move forward into the irreversible confrontation which is revealed through Matthew 11:12:

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.

Another saying which is worthy of being remembered is the legacy left behind by the wise and God-fearing John Newton, who said, "Satan trembles when he sees even the weakest of all the saints down upon their knees." Equally from our own experience we can agree with the words of 1 Samuel 2:4:

The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

Having this conviction, let me pause for a moment to remind you, my dear reader, that you should never look at yourself nor measure yourself by your own strength because if we are truly humble and spiritual people,

before now we will have come to understand our very real impotence and impossibilities. Instead, we should fix our eyes upon Christ and ask him to teach us how to fight our way forward in the power of his Spirit, and in this way we will come to be more than conquerors because the battle and the victory is always his. He is the only glorious one, and for this reason we can say as David said in Psalm 18:29 and 32-34:

With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.

It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

Yes, it is true that our enemies are like giants and give the appearance of being undefeatable, yet we must not be afraid of grabbing hold of them by faith and making them face up to the reality of the total defeat that they experienced through Christ on the cross. They have already been publicly exposed and ridiculed before the faithful angels and all the inhabitants of heavenly places in a parade of overflowing humiliation and shame. The Son of God himself has trampled them under his feet as a hunter who has captured wild animals; it would only remain for us to take on board the spiritual significance of this expression and use our own legs and other parts of our bodies to be the body of Christ. Indeed, together we all form the Body of Christ and as such we can tread upon every demonic beast and especially those described in the Bible as snakes and scorpions. Jesus Christ has delegated his divine authority for us to use whenever we receive his personal instructions, which will always be in agreement with what he said in Luke 10:19 for the people of those days and for us who are alive today:

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

I find it very sad to see how many Christian believers live unguarded lives in almost total ignorance of the reality of the spiritual war that is going on around them. They worship in congregations where divine revelation is not particularly welcome, even though God's word would truly open their eyes to see the many awful horrors that lie in wait for them and lurk in the darkness. Behind the scenes there are a multitude of demonic machinations in constant movement, yet multitudes of believers are not even aware that they have the spiritual authority to confront the outworking of Satan's plots when they come their way.

Every one of us has our fair share of tests and trials, but not everyone believes in the baptism of power or in the reality of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are absolutely indispensable when it comes to winning the battles of faith, yet how many sermons declare with a clumsy interpretation of the Bible, that such power and gifting has long since vanished. The apostle Paul was very forthright when he declared the existence of the reality of serious Satan-inspired dangers, and in doing so he left us with a clear warning that believers need to wear the full armour of God. Human armour in itself will never be sufficient to win the day in this war that we face where our enemies give no quarter, and we should take a moment to read Paul's words in Ephesians 6:12-13:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

There is a lot more to be discovered about how we must engage in the struggle by fighting in the trenches for our families, congregations and in the social, political and financial environments. All of these are continually kept under siege by the armies of the powers of darkness, and it should be no surprise to us to know that these evil powers have the majority of the front lines under their control. Nevertheless, we can continue learning from the apostle who after Christ had received the greatest revelation and instruction of any man. Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians and in chapter 10, versus 3 to 4:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Jesus attached a lot of importance to prayer warfare, for example this was his theme when he taught his disciples that the most important sign that had to be fulfilled before the kingdom of God could be established on the earth would be the expulsion of its illegitimate occupant. It was at the time when he was being accused by the Pharisees of casting out demons and setting their victims free by the power of Beelzebub which is another name for the satanic Lord of The Flies. A dreadful name indeed but it accurately describes the nature of flies which corrupt everything they land upon or touch with their lips. You can read the actual words of Jesus in Matthew 12:27-28:

If I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

We can understand from this conversation that the sons of some of the Pharisees were already casting out demons in the name of the Lord, and therefore they could be a better judge of the Pharisees criticism. In any event, this is no more than the seventy disciples of Christ had to report when they returned from a mission trip to announce the forthcoming visit of the Master. We can read what they said in Luke 10:17:

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'

The very same scripture goes on to make it extremely clear that it is only by the finger of God that demons can be expelled, the finger of God being a Bible expression for the Holy Spirit. We can see the Lord Jesus moving in the power of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, and as he does he gives us a very practical God-given key for moving forward in these battles of faith, one that we must grab hold of with all of our strength. Jesus talks to us about using this key to open doors that no one can close, and to close doors and cover them with such an unbreakable, supernatural armour plating that only God could ever open them again should he ever wish to. Listen for a moment to what Jesus continued to say, in Matthew 12:29:

Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.

The key that Jesus is revealing is to bind the oppressive demons and to loose all the slaves that they have taken captive, breaking away all of their chains of sins, curses, spells, witchcraft, idolatry, pacts with the devil and a seemingly endless list of what people have got themselves into. All of these have served to shackle men and women with Satan's irons and Jesus shows us that the most efficient way of bring about their release is through prayer warfare, using the keys of the kingdom of heaven that have been given to us by the King in person.

With these keys of binding and loosing we can enclose evil spirits behind God-given supernatural padlocks, and diminish the numbers in Satan's forces by making prisoners of these evil powers of darkness. In consequence we can fling the doors of their horrendous spiritual prisons

wide open and release those who have been condemned to a lifetime there. They come out with their chains removed, in full divine confirmation of all that the Lord says in Matthew 18:18-19:

'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 'Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

In all of history there has never been greater festivity and celebration than when nations remember their most important victories in war. The dates are engraved like memorials on the national calendar with days set aside on an annual basis to commemorate the events with the maximum possible pomp and ceremony. You will see great military parades with marching bands and very popular speeches and events to crown the day.

Perhaps Israel leads the way with its annual list of celebratory festivities, of which the Passover is almost certainly the most important of all. The day is a reminder of many important teachings but above all it keeps alive the memory of the day when God set "the people of the book" free from their slavery and shame in Egypt, having chosen them to be transformed into his earthly family.

The festival of Purim is another very noisy occasion which celebrates the ancient memory of how Haman and his plans to totally exterminate the Israelites were totally defeated. Haman had persuaded King Xerxes to issue an imperial decree declaring the death sentence and signed by the majesty himself, yet by the moving of God even this was annulled and the Jewish people throughout the empire were saved. Behind the scenes of course, it is very easy to see the delirious obsession of Satan at work to destroy the nation of Israel, something that he has been dedicated to since its very beginnings.

Nevertheless, Israel is a holy nation set apart by the Lord and for the Lord, and because of this, even to this very day Satan never ceases to intensify his rabid attacks with a frenetic hysteria, presently using Islam as one of his principal weapons. Yet history records that through it all and against every enemy God has raised up fearless prophets, judges and Kings whom he has transformed into outstanding servants of the Almighty, and who have never held back from declaring his victory, as for example in 2 Samuel 22:30:

With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.

We also remember and celebrate the dates when the Lord gave us a particular spiritual victory, but not with the fanfares of the world but rather with praise to the Lion of Judah, who was the unmistakable victor on all the occasions that we mark. We fill the day with prayer and praise, with songs of joy and worship for all the same reasons that David wrote about in Psalm 18:37-42:

I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. I crushed them so that they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet. You armed me with strength for battle; you humbled my adversaries before me. You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes. They cried for help, but there was no one to save them – to the Lord, but he did not answer. I beat them as fine as windblown dust; I trampled them like mud in the streets.

In all of this teaching about prayer warfare it is very important to underline that the battles can go on for a long time. This is what happened to Moses when he and the people of Israel were engaged in a crucial struggle against the Amalekites. On this occasion Moses took to using the most powerful weapon of all by climbing up to the top of a hill which overlooks the actual fighting and giving himself to prayer. When he raised his hands towards heaven the army of Israel gained an immediate advantage and advanced, however, whenever he lowered his tired arms the struggle went the other way and the enemies recovered their lost ground. Recognising the spiritual significance of what was happening, Moses moved a large stone into place which was a symbol of Christ, and he sat upon it. He instructed his two priests, Aaron and Hur to support his raised arms, one on either side, which gives us an unmistakable testimony of just how important it is to pray together as a team because if we will do so we will harvest one particular promise that the Lord gave to all his disciples saying,

Truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

Matthew 18:19.

The Bible tells us that the three men remained in this position until Israel won an overwhelming victory which they celebrated by building an altar and giving it the name of Jehovah Nissi which means the Lord is my flag. This altar indicated the territory which had been newly conquered both on the earth and in heavenly places through prayer. It was a remembrance of the way the Lord opened a great doorway into heaven itself, according to what we can read for ourselves in Exodus 17:8-16.

So then, let us learn through these wise teachings that it is never a good idea to leave the spiritual warfare until the victory is truly complete. If we cease to fight before the enemies are completely defeated then you can be quite sure that they return before long and continue with their sniping against us to inflict the same or even worse damage than they did beforehand. It is always good to remember the words of the apostle James in James 4:7:

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

If we will learn this lesson learn it well then we will never make the same mistake as Jehoash, one of the kings of Israel, who considered that he had done enough to win the Lord's victory against the Arameans. When the king went to visit Elisha who was in his final days, the prophet instructed him to go to the east-facing window and then placing his hands on the king's hands he prophetically told Jehoash to fire an arrow in the direction of Syria who in those days was the terribly ferocious, major enemy of the land, just as it still is today. As the king shot the arrow Elisha prophetically proclaimed it to be the arrow of the Lord's victory over Aram and their imminent destruction. Immediately, Elisha then commanded the king to take the arrows and to strike the ground with them. Jehoash did so but only three times and then he stopped, thinking he had done all that was necessary, yet in the eyes of the prophet and of God this was only a short display of insipid enthusiasm. As a consequence, Elisha prophesied over him that he would only defeat his enemy three times and added that if he had continued to strike the ground, say five or six times, then he would have destroyed the Syrian forces forever, leaving not one of them alive. You can read the story of yourself in 2 Kings 13:10-20.

I wonder if you know which founders of the world's great religions have had miracles ascribed to them by reliable eye-witnesses? You might say Mohammed, Buddha, Krishna and quite possibly find one or two more to add to the list yet you would be wrong because not one of them has left any kind of God-given supernatural footprint behind them. There are legends and fantasies but every one of them is so contradictory and ridiculous that they defy belief. For example we have the extravagantly outrageous story of the way Mohammed ascended to heaven on a white horse from the grounds of the Great Mosque in Jerusalem.

On the other hand the founder of the Jewish religion, Christ himself in ancient times, worked in perfect unity and agreement with the Father and the Holy Spirit to give the Torah to mankind. The law of God is the only

one true religion although it has never saved anybody because its role is to pronounce sentence and condemn the whole of mankind which perpetually failed to reach its standards. It was the same Jesus Christ that came to establish a better covenant with the human race by giving his own life in full and final payment for the sins of every man and woman, only then to retake his life through resurrection.

The resurrection of Christ is without any doubt at all the most meaningful and unique miracle ever witnessed in the history of humanity, and of course he is the author of very many others as recognised by all the biblical books, and even the Koran of the Muslims would say very much the same when it speaks about Jesus.

Perhaps the most wonderful thing is that Jesus continues to pour out his miraculous intervention quite possibly thousands of times every single day right across the whole earth, and has been doing so since his ministry began some two thousand years ago. Even then, this is only a continuation of what he had always been doing since before the creation of the world, and then through the actual act of creation and for all time afterwards until this very day. Until Jesus was made flesh like any one of us he was known in eternity by other names which sometimes slip into the biblical record, and in this day and age we can only imagine how many millions of people would happily declare themselves to be eyewitnesses of the abundance and diversity of his same miracle working power.

The truth is that since the Lord returned to heaven he has trusted his divine power to those of us down all the ages who have chosen to serve him and his purposes. We can read in the Bible how Christ delegated his power to many different men and women who have long since been taken into his presence, right through the many stages of Israel's rich history, a nation that was formed out of the descendants of Jacob with the later addition of the Gentiles who were grafted into God's family by Jesus. History only serves to confirm that which was spoken by Jesus in John 14:12-14:

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

It seems to me that the major obstacle that we have got to overcome to put these words into practice and begin to do these greater things that Jesus has promised, is that we tend to walk past these promises and

choose to believe our prejudices and feelings of inferiority. We would never dare to say that Jesus Christ was telling us lies but we do have this unhelpful way of preferring to believe our minds or our intellect or feelings when we come to judge what he was saying. We perhaps feel that the Lord has given these gifts to a very limited number of incredibly talented or gifted men and women and we leave the responsibility in their hands only to find out that by doing so we have been deceived by the enemy of our souls.

The truth of the matter is that in the eyes of God, all of our abilities, religiosity, intelligence or knowledge matters but very little and in fact could be far more of an impediment than a help. The word of God mentions one and one only unique and indispensable condition for any one of us to receive this altogether sufficient divine empowering, and that is to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Personally I understand this very clearly from my own memories of having once upon a time being an evildoer until the day came when I was born again to the work of Christ. From that day until now I have proven to my entire satisfaction and beyond just how many times the Holy Spirit has worked through me to do miracles, healings and to give signs and wonders. You already know that I have great hopes of seeing more and more of the glory of the Lord and my prayer is a continual expression of asking God for his increase. Through everything that I have seen, I give the glory only to the Lord knowing full well that nothing has been achieved through my negligible personal merits, nor am I any particular rare species of humankind. What has been seen has been done only through having confidence in our Saviour Jesus, as I have been given the grace to trust his promises- although I have always been willing to fulfil the required conditions of staying in the new covenant that God has made with me and with all of us who believe.

I have known what it is to walk closely with the Holy Spirit and to enjoy his permanent and ever available help. Not only does he keep me from falling into sin but he also pours out his many blessings into my life and produces in me the desire to serve God, and then he makes it possible to do so. The Holy Spirit strengthens me with his own strength as I devour God's powerful words in the Scriptures which resound within me like spiritual atomic bombs with a heat that causes far-reaching damage to the evil kingdom of Satan and his strategies. This is very much in line with the words that Jesus gave to us as recorded in John 15:7:

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

One of the miracles that we read about in the Bible that had a major impact upon me is the one that the Lord did through Joshua who had been a captain in Israel's army. Following the death of Moses he was promoted to being the commander-in-chief over all the people of Israel and began to receive his instructions and strategies directly from God. On one particular occasion God instructed him to fight against the Amorites and came to his help with some heavenly artillery which dropped enormous hailstones from the skies upon the opposing army, causing a tremendous massacre in the enemy camp. After this astonishing divine intervention had taken place something else happened which is so awesome that it is hard to believe unless you embrace the certainty of God's almightiness. Here is the story from Joshua 10:12-13:

On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: 'Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.' So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.

Throughout the Bible there are many examples of prayer warfare that we can find, usually with surprising and totally supernatural manifestations following. However it is far more important that we learn to get involved in the actual spiritual warfare that is going on all around us today. We have a permanent invitation from the Lord to take part, through his timeless and infallible words. It is of very little value if we only continue as timid and easily shocked spectators of what other people are doing yet complain of the terrible inroads that the enemy of the Lord and of the souls of man is making. How long will we complain at the sights of the devastation he is causing around the world? With his unnatural Babylonian behaviour he goes about his work of corrupting a multitude of nations by filling them with perversions that would relegate Sodom and Gomorrah to the amateur league.

If we are ever going to drive down this historical peak of unbridled immorality which has already perverted the great majority of the population of planet earth, then we are going to have to be aggressive when we pray to God and ask him for a call to battle that no one can fail to hear! It is time to honour the word of God in Exodus 15:3 which tells us that our God is a man of war. Let us cry out to this Creator who is the absolute owner of everything that exists and who reigns forever, asking him to raise us up and direct us in the fight for the souls of men and for the return of dignity to this world. We will do well to pray with the words

of David when he felt it was right to challenge the Lord through these words in Psalm 9:19-20:

Arise, Lord, do not let mortals triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. Strike them with terror, Lord; let the nations know they are only mortal.

Is it not time to implacably demolish the walls of the Jerichos of this day and age and give our attention to the altars dedicated to the false Baal gods of all religion? Let me include all those altars that have been raised up by the hypocritical Pharisees of today, and all those lovers of money who have turned the church of Jesus Christ into their marketplace? If you agree with this then now is the time to begin an unceasing prayer of spiritual warfare!

We have a marvellous example in the prayer experience that Peter had when he was on the rooftop of the house where he was staying for a while in Joppa, which turned out to be a history changing new direction for both him and for the onward march of the early church. What he decided to do at that point tore down the greatest prejudice that characterised the Jewish people, which was their insistence that Israel was the one and only people that had been called by God to be holy and his eternal family. Peter's experience in prayer cause him to reject all the fanaticism of the worst kind of racism which is the religious variety, and to reach out to the Gentiles which is another way of saying to all the rest of us in the human race. The story has been kept for us in Acts 10:9-35. Having reached the end of this chapter, you will know what we should do before we turn the page, which is to pray together as the prayer warriors of the Lord.

"Elohim, Adonai, Jehovah Tsidkenu, Jehovah Shama, Jehovah Shalom y Jehovah Nishi, Emmanuel, Yeshua, we call upon your glorious names, our Almighty God and we ask you to give glory and honour to every one of them. Bare your holy arm before the eyes of all the nations and show us your power today as you have done in the past. Rend the heavens and crush the mountains with your searing heat as you descend to trample upon the evil thrones of this world. Make your name famous before your enemies and cause every one of your faithful believers to tremble before your presence. You and you alone are the Commander-in-chief of all the armies, the human Armed Forces as well as the heavenly ones! Amen.

In your name Jesus Christ, we who are the readers of this book and the writer of the same agree together as one in faith, about the teaching and the Bible passages that we have read in this chapter. As the Body of

Christ and in the name of Jesus we bind every spirit of abortion, euthanasia, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, paedophilia, idolatry, witchcraft, spiritism, Satanism and every evil spirit behind lies, greed, theft, violence, crime, schizophrenia, depression, bitterness and every other evil work of the devil. By your grace we intend to continue struggling in prayer as you give us revelation and direct our words and we ask that you will give us a holy zeal to do so and to motivate us to intensify an increase our commitment to spiritual warfare in prayer.

In obedience to your command to go into all the world, I dare to ask you for your backing to fulfil this order, and together we pray to you Lord Jesus Christ, asking that you will give to us many nations and peoples and increase the already great number of the redeemed of the Lord, as well as an abundance of new workers for the gospel. Confirm through us your people, your own word as spoken in Psalm 2:8:

*Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.*

EPILOGUE

I am aptly certain that many more books about prayer can be written without coming anywhere near to the end of the wealth of fragrance that this would mean for the world in the plan of God. However, it has greatly pleased me to have received the grace of the Lord to present this, my textbook on prayer. As time goes by, I am certain that it will be seen to be the greatest legacy from my life and ministry I do believe that these words will be a blessing and a benefit to many thousands of believers and Christian workers who eat the bread of life and drink from the living water of the Spirit.

The bread comes from the ovens and the wellsprings of our lives passing through our lips because we who are the pastors of Remar and the group of churches known as the Body of Christ are both preachers, bakers and water carriers all at the same time. Of course the same is true for the many other ministers of the gospel who will be able to follow this teaching and pass it on to others without ever meeting me personally, and in time I will be called into the presence of the Lord in the third heaven where we will be together forever.

Many of our brothers and sisters in the faith in Christ are scattered across the world, in fact that would be the greater majority. I do hope and pray that this book travels far and wide as soon as it is published, and in fact I

will be very happy to send digital copies, known as e-books, completely free of charge as a download or by email.

Having said that our own Council of Pastors has decided to make it obligatory for all of our workers and students in the Schools of Discipleship to read through these teachings on a regular basis. As I have said a number of times in the text, if they will only learn to pray then they have already learned the most important lesson both for their own lives and the lives of their family members and the flock which has come into their care. They will do very well to pass on the revelations that they have received as they have studied these pages, knowing that every one of them will help them live and do well in the heavenly dimension of prayer. I am sure that we have all understood by now that the more time we spend upon our knees the more stable and safe we will feel upon our feet. As an extra benefit we all experience just how much more we love people when we regularly pray for them, in fact nothing else will bring both us and them the same blessing.

I am more convinced than ever before that the Holy Spirit is sent by Christ following his intercession to the Father to bring revival. If this revival is to happen anywhere in the world then beforehand the Holy Spirit will restore the altar of prayer in that place and will surely raise up a faithful group of golden incense carriers whose hearts are burning for Christ, his kingdom and the souls of men and women. Christ will choose people for this responsibility and pour into them his inexhaustible supply of red-hot coals from the fires of his holy zeal, constraining them to tirelessly pray with boldness and unstoppable fervour. Their intercession will cause the evil powers of darkness to shake with terror; at the same time they will touch the very heart of the Father in heaven, who responds by sending cascades of his holy oil upon the earth.

In closing let me ask for your forgiveness for all the mistakes that you might find in this treatise upon prayer and you must feel absolutely free to point them out to me so that we can improve the future editions of this book. Through all that is good and true I give the honour and all the glory to the living Word of God and to the Holy Spirit who have inspired me through the words of the Bible, which are given to all men.



Are we a House of Prayer for God or a religious den of robbers?

Can you imagine any better fruit of our lips than prayer ?

Is it possible to sow the holy seed of the word of God without fertilising and watering the land beforehand through prayer and tears?

Who will ever be able to enlighten souls for Christ without first going through the pains of childbirth with groans of intercession and having the waters break through weeping?

How can we ever get free from being swallowed by the appetites of the world?

Would you like to know how to make demons tremble and demolish their strongholds?

Have you ever tasted the most beautiful and pure of all romances that Jesus offers to you?

Wouldn't you like to fly under the wings of the dove of the Holy Spirit?

Have you heard that the family who prays together around the altar in their home, also stays together?

Do you know God's personal telephone number, his direct line? If you do, ring him now and if not I can give it to you.

Have you discovered how to pray as if tomorrow were your last day on earth?

Miguel Díez.