

You're of no earthly value unless you're...

Heavenly Minded

Vol 4 Iss 11



Cover: *Descent to the Valley* by William Jacob

In this issue...

Can You Hear Me Now? Foundations of Faith Armed for Prayer

Dear Friends,

Generally speaking, there is no comparison to be made between the value of a diamond and that of a grain of corn, yet it all depends on the disposition you make of the corn. Put both of them away, and at the end of a hundred years the grain of corn will still have no monetary value, while the diamond's value, will be undiminished. At the end of a thousand years the same thing will be true. But suppose, instead, we bury the grain in the warm, moist earth, and year after year throughout the centuries let it go on producing and reproducing. In that time it will have produced a store that the whole earth could hardly contain. Its production represents a monetary value that makes the diamond's insignificant by comparison. To have saved the grain of corn would have been to lose all it was

capable of producing. In like manner, to bury our life in Christ may look to some like a tragedy. The world says, "Preserve your life – set it safely on our shelf." But that's not what God made you for – sitting there, you'll never make a difference. But in dieing to yourself, you'll produce much, much good fruit.

In Christ's Love,

John and Darlene Dickey



Accolade

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work... Col 1:9,10

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by E. Blair Leighton

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Can You Hear Me Now??

And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Thus Jesus ended His teaching. But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. ...And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"

You all are familiar with the parable of which Jesus spoke – it concerned a sower and seed. Of particular note is that He clearly indicated that it was a key lesson leading to the understanding of all the parables. This wasn't because other parables were 'built' upon it, but simply because it addressed the fundamental issue of how you hear the Lord. Jesus was saying, 'If you can't hear the message on hearing, how will you hear any other?'

The old adage, 'Seeing is believing' is patently false. On the other hand, to say 'Hearing is believing' is a basic truth of the scripture when it is applied to hearing from God. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing the word of God."

Consequently, let's examine this important parable (Mk 4:3-20) in more detail for so much depends upon what and how we hear.

"Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow." Jesus clued them in to what the lesson was about with the first word – Listen! Or Harken! He used this exclamation with only two parables and each time added, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

In this case, He addressed hearing and in the second, speaking (Mk 7:14-16); that is, what goes into the heart and what comes out of it.

He explained that the sower sows the Word of God. Clearly, this pertains to all of us who share the Word whether pastor or pedestrian – anywhere, anytime. But perhaps even more importantly, it speaks of God Himself as the ultimate Sower.

And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Jesus later said, "... these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts."

At another time, He also admonished, "Therefore take heed how you hear." (Luke 8:18) This is relevant to the parable because how one hears God's Word is directly related to the condition of the heart. In this first instance, the seed fell by the wayside or literally, "a traveled way or road". This isn't where seed is normally sown for it is hard-packed from myriad travelers. As a consequence, it has no chance to germinate for it never gets below the surface. The old saying is 'in one ear and out the other'. Not only that, but Satan himself is instrumental on stealing it away "immediately" through distraction, doubt and/or disputation. It's the ole 'harden and heist' ploy he has found so effective.

Hardened hearts cannot hear. That's why the scripture says, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground." (Hosea 10:12). Hard

hearts are fallow ground and unreceptive to the seed that is sown upon it. Jesus said of the people of His day, "...the hearts of this people have grown dull (literally, thick).

Their ears are hard of hearing," (Mat 13:15)

So how is such soil broken up? It's plowed. "For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that plows should plow in hope," (1 Cor 9:10) Of course, many a missionary has held this hope. But pertaining to the heart, the important question is has God been plowing in your field? You know, many difficulties, trials and breakings come our way for this express purpose.

We need to remember that we cannot train ourselves to be Christians; we cannot discipline ourselves to be saints; we cannot bend ourselves to the will of God: we have to be broken to the will of God. (Oswald Chambers)

It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to produce rain, broken grain to give bread and broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume. It is the broken Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever.

Dwight L. Moody said that one of the happiest men he ever knew was a man in Dundee, Scotland, who had fallen and broken his back when a boy of fifteen. He had lain on his bed for forty years and could not be moved without a good deal of pain. Probably not a day had passed in all those years without acute suffering. But day after day the grace of God had been granted him, and when Mr. Moody was in his

room it seemed as if he was as near heaven as he could get on earth. When Mr. Moody saw him, he thought he must be beyond the reach of the tempter, and he asked him, "Doesn't Satan ever tempt you to doubt God and to think that He is a hard master?" "Oh, yes," he said, "he does try to tempt me. I lie here and see my old schoolmates driving along, and Satan says, 'If God is so good, why has He kept you here all these years? You might have been a rich man, riding in your carriage.' Then I see a man, who was young when I was, walk by in perfect health, and Satan whispers, 'If God loved you, couldn't He have kept you from breaking your back?' " "And what do you do when Satan tempts you?" "Ah, I just take him to Calvary, and I show him Christ, and I point out those wounds in His hands and feet and side, and say, 'Doesn't He love me?' The fact is Satan got such a scare there nineteen hundred years ago that he cannot stand it; he leaves me every time." That bedridden saint of God did not have much trouble with doubts; he was too full of the grace of God.

Some things are ruined when broken, but the heart that God will use, is at its best when broken. (Mark Roper)

Jesus continued the parable, "Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away."

Through the course of gardening, I've noticed that plants in shallow

soil will put the energy of growth into their visible parts versus the roots just as Jesus said. At least, in this case there is some soil and a place for the Word of God to germinate. But a shallow heart is a fickle one.

The Lord continued, *“These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble.”* Often, when a plant has adequate soil conditions, environmental ‘persecution’ will cause it to generate more root growth and thus a more stable situation. However, when the soil is thin or shallow because it’s sitting on a bed of rock, the plant will wither under ‘tribulation’.

Isn’t it interesting how He characterized these as “immediately” receiving the Word with gladness. Visible receptivity of an audience is not a dependable measure of the effectiveness of teaching. The wise pastor/teacher knows that the length of the line at the tape booth after the sermon is not as important as the depth of the hearts that heard it. The rise of so much Christian celebrity in churches, denominations and in society at large is a testimony to the shallowness of our spiritual lives.

Popularity can be like a spiritual ‘narcotic’ if you would; among the pastorate, it is a plague that can blind the shepherds to the true condition of the sheep. Sadly, in these last days, it has skyrocketed even in movements that were once

very focused on the Word and obedience to the Spirit. And so, a lot of our churches are filled with folks that have a good display ‘above ground’ but not much root.

For believers, in pew or pulpit, seeking popularity among the congregation is very dangerous. Fundamentally, it is me-focused rather than Christ-focused. Now, most if not all of us naturally enjoy the ‘strokes’ of being popular. However, it is not the same as being loved, though on the surface it can appear that way. Popularity is a nice word for what is basically a subtle form of worship. Some Bible teachers think that the desire for it was the sin that toppled Satan (see Isa 14:12-17). Entertainers live for it – the ‘all eyes on ME’ desire.

Paul wrote to an immature Corinthian church caught up in the divisive cult of popularity, *“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal?”* 1Cor 3:1-4

In the parable of the sower, you can consider the roots which come from the good seed as a picture of faith. Shallow, rocky heart soil responds almost too quickly to the seed because it’s a mostly visible, carnal, popular response. It does not result in true faith.

And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. Oh, those thorns! Many a good sermon has dealt with this. Jesus explained, “Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

Let’s consider two things herein – cause and effect. The soil is good, the seed is sown, but the story is sad. This is because of three thorny issues – cares of this world, deceitful riches and lust.

We can recall from another parable that the sower of bad seed or tares is Satan. And though he is instrumental in fostering thorny thistles, he is not the sole culprit. Our own sin nature can do plenty of damage so to speak.

The “cares of this world” is literally anxiety and specifically pertains to eternal issues. That is, it isn’t simply your late mortgage payment or stress on the job. Perhaps more importantly, it points to insecurity and thus angst about the truly big issues – everlasting issues. Christians who are insecure in this way will not bear fruit. As people living in this world, we face all the extremities of daily life like everyone else. We aren’t exempt from them. As believers, we learn to deal with those difficulties and cares by faith and patience. If, however, we are anxious about eternal issues, those MUST be weeded out – such insecurities are not a part of God’s planting. They are founded upon lies and doubts. Paul wrote, “Be

anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;” (Phil 4:6)

“Deceitful riches” is also translated beguiling abundance. We are quite quick in this country to assume that all abundance is the blessing of God and that any lack of satiation is related to being out of His will. Wrong. Simply wrong. In fact, the scripture clearly shows that the fundamental problem in Sodom which led to its judgment was not immorality. Speaking to Jerusalem, the prophet Ezekiel declared, *“Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.”* This abundance led to iniquity – *“And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.”* Eze 16:49, 50

I’ve got friends who have loved the Lord who landed that ‘great job’ and just disappeared spiritually. The Lord says, *“If riches increase, Do not set your heart on them.”* Psa 62:10 In fact, I’ll submit that one of the greatest perils in the affluent Laodicean church of today is the deadness of abundance (Rev 3:17). Of course, this is completely counter to what you hear in the so called Christian media. The Bible, however, is clear that although abundance CAN be God’s blessing, riches are inherently deceitful and beguiling. They choke the good seed and thus cheat you out of much, much more than they ever deliver. Christians are naïve to

believe every enhancement to their 'quality of life' in the carnal sense is heaven sent.

"Lust for other things" is simply the desire for everything else, i.e., what you don't have – perfect job, home, spouse, things, power, position, prestige... When you focus on what you don't have and thus lust for it, your 'achievements' are inevitably fruitless from a spiritual standpoint. On the other hand, when thankfulness fills your heart soil, spiritual fruit grows and flourishes.

Thus, these three things are thorns in your heart. They are the cause of unfruitfulness in the life of the believer. Now, for the 'effect'. Lack of fruit is the end result for sure but what we should note is the process – Jesus said that these things, "*entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*" To choke, in the Greek, is 'to press round or throng one so as almost to suffocate him'. It's a cutting off of the air supply, the pneuma. This clearly points to the quenching of the work of God's Spirit which the Word says is indeed fruit (see Gal 5:22,23 and Eph 5:9).

The sobering part though is that this choking leads the heart soil to become unfruitful which, by definition, implies that it once did bear fruit or at least began to bear. Individuals, churches, movements and denominations are all at risk. Usually, this 'becoming' is so gradual that it goes unnoticed. People, churches and organizations that were once spiritually vital and fruitful often become only the superficial image of what they once were and they don't even realize it.

"But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." Finally, the good ground – it is broken up with enough depth to support hearty root growth. It is also free from thorns and thistles. As a result, "...*these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.*"

Three things are put forth – to hear, to receive or accept and to be fruitful. The first group in the parable represented those who never really heard the word. The second group heard but didn't receive it, that is, take it to heart. The third group heard and accepted but stumbled in fruit-bearing. This last group goes the whole distance.

Now, fruit glorifies God and more is better. Jesus said, "*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*" (John 15:8) However, there is no comparison given by the Lord between the fruit-bearers. He doesn't say or ever indicate that those who bear 100 fold should celebrate over those who bear 30 fold. In a similar parable about 'talents', the Lord gave to each servant a set amount of resources, to one, five talents, to another, two talents and to the last one talent. You know the story. (Mat 25:14-30) Apart from the doubtful sluggard who hid his one talent, the others gained an additional amount exactly proportional to what they had been given. Both were commended and rewarded.

In addition, we should comment on the fruit. First, it is always brought forth with patience (see Luke 8:15) and it comes in its season. Culturally, we are conditioned to expect quick fixes and 'McFruit' but spiritual fruit takes time.

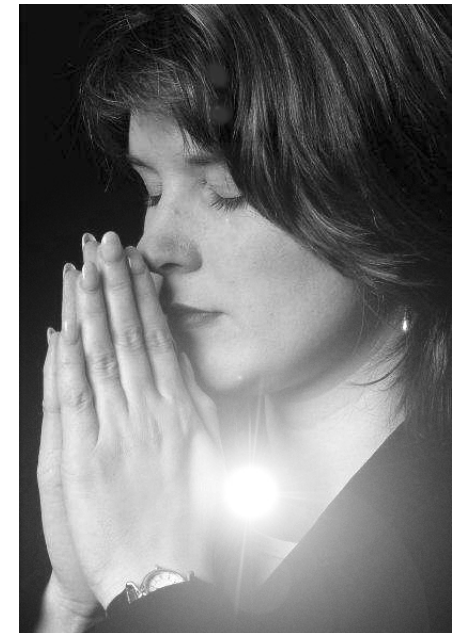
Next, we must discern what's fruit and what's phoney. True fruit is the result of grace. In Leviticus 19, we see a picture of this principle – the law instructed the Jews who planted trees to wait until the fifth year to eat the fruit thereof. Five is commonly understood to be the number of grace in the Bible. In other words, the fruit God is looking for in your life is not the result of your own efforts – it is not a work of the flesh. If you don't believe me, find an apple tree and put your ear near it's trunk. (You can pretend you're inspecting it if anyone sees you.) Now, listen closely. What do you hear? Nothing! No grunts or groans. And it isn't even sweating! Yet, in due time, out pops the sweetest fruit. It's the sap. No, not you,... the tree! Ha! It's the tree's sap. Seriously, in like manner, it's the Holy Spirit in you that brings forth divine fruit.

The Word identifies the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. You can think of it as primarily being love which is manifested in joy, peace, patience, etc. Also, you can consider it simply as a fruit with multiple attributes. Think of say a watermelon – it's green and red and it has seeds (usually) and it's watery and sweet (usually)... it's one fruit with many descriptors. Such is the

fruit of the Spirit. Now, the scripture has much to say about fruit, so I recommend that you do your own study on it. Just remember, the fruit that glorifies God is the work of His Spirit.

So how do you hear? What is the condition of your heart soil? Recall, Jesus said, "*Take heed how you hear.*" And the prophet proclaimed, "*Break up your fallow ground.*" In other words, it's our responsibility – the receptivity of our heart or how we hear. Like Mary, we should sit at His feet, so to speak, to hear Him (Luke 10:39). When we do, we'll follow as sheep with their Shepherd (John 8:47a, 10:27). May God give us wisdom to listen, to submit to the work of His Spirit when our field is being plowed, to be faithful in weeding out the thorns and to be patient in bearing much good fruit.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"



Foundations of Faith

The conclusion of the Old Testament is actually found in the New. The Baptist was preaching repentance upon the shores of the Jordan and multitudes came to hear his message. A new testament was closing in on the horizon; with it, a new message and a new beginning. But John prepared the way before our Lord as a moral firebrand -- attitudes and behavior acceptable to God were the foci of his forceful proclamations.

Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ... every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"

He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."

Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?"

So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages." Luke 8:7-14

The vast majority of what the people understood relative to

pleasing Jehovah was 'do-oriented'. The greatest misunderstanding of the people, having been schooled by the law of Moses, was that heaven was reserved for those who **lived** righteously meaning they **did** the 'right things', **made** the 'right moves'.

Enter Jesus. And...

...they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." John 6:28,29

A new day had dawned and with it came a new message.

...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Heb 11:6

In fact, you will only find 101 mentions of faith or belief and their related words in the Old Testament compared to some 582 mentions in the New. Nevertheless, there is arguably no other foundational issue in the contemporary church that is so misunderstood, contentious and unfortunately used so inappropriately as faith. Knowing this, Jesus posed the question to those living in the last days before His return, "...when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8

Let's examine some of what the scriptures have to say about faith and we will note 12 foundational aspects of it. This will be much too brief and much less than the subject demands. In Berean fashion, see if these things be so through your own study!

1. Saving Faith: We are saved by faith in the finished work of the Lord on Calvary's cross. Eph 2:8,9 For nearly 2000 years, the gospel has proclaimed this loudly and yet there are multitudes attending church who are still trying to work their way up to heaven, to earn God's grace.

Even father Abraham was deemed righteous by God because of **belief** – see Gen 15:6.

There's clearly a time for faith initiated works but they have nothing to do with 'meriting' eternal life.

2. Binary and Analog Faith: Faith is a bit like pregnancy – you are or you aren't. With faith, you have it or you don't. However, beyond that, there are definitely degrees in strength of faith. The scripture uses such descriptors as great, strong, weak and lacking regarding believers' faith. Rom 14:23; Mat 21:21; Mark 4:40; Mat 6:30; Mat 8:26; Mat 8:10; Mat 14:31; Acts 6:5; 1 Cor 13:2; Rom 12:3, 6; Rom 14:1

3. Growing Faith: Faith can increase or decrease. The deeper the roots of God's planting grow in your heart-soil, the stronger your spiritual life will be. These roots tap into reservoirs not seen on the surface to feed and strengthen the plant even in times of distress. 2 Thes 1:3 Luke 22:32; Heb 10:23; Jam 1:6; 1 Cor 10:15;

4. Gracious Faith: Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is also described as part of His fruit. It is fundamental to understand that this applies to both the initial saving faith and all points of faith thereafter. 1 Cor 12:9; Gal 5:22

5. Audible Faith: Faith comes from hearing God's Word. This may be in the course of prayer, study of the written Word, from preaching, teaching or by revelation. The point is – it's God speaking to you. It was God's speaking that formed all of creation and is the agency, if you would, by which faith exerts divine power over it. Rom 10:17; Gal 3:2

6. Touch-point Faith: Faith can indeed be 'triggered'. For some, this may appear superstitious but we should not dismiss it. Faith cannot exist apart from the working of the Holy Spirit. Clearly, the Lord does not seem to prefer such means but we see it in the gospels, in the book of Acts and many of us have witnessed it. Unfortunately, deceivers have often used faith tricks to beguile the weak for the purposes of power, prestige and monetary gain. Mat 9:20-22; Acts 5:15,16; Acts 19:11,12

7. Honest Faith: Faith has an object. Faith in faith is meaningless. Faith in yourself or some other person is a recipe for eventual disappointment. God is always the object of true faith – it is He in whom we trust. Many charlatans are selling schemes to succeeding in faith none of which keep God Himself as the object. Even when you are honestly trusting in what He has said, you are fundamentally trusting Him. Trusting Him leads to knowing Him leads to trusting Him leads to knowing Him leads to ... Mar 11:22; Rom 4:19,20; 1 Cor 2:5; Heb 10:23

8. Pleasing Faith: There are two specific kinds of faith required to please God. You must believe that He is or more accurately WHO He is

and you must believe that He rewards your sincere search for Him. This Who He is cannot be overstated. Even the devils believe THAT He is, however Who He is implies the knowledge of intimate acquaintance. All the way from the Garden of Eden, Satan has sought to corrupt our trust in Who He is. In the original language, seeking diligently carries with it the underlying motive of desiring or craving. To believe that your deep desire and dogged search for Him will be rewarded is faith that pleases God. Heb 11:6

9. Unfeigned Faith: Real faith always leads to a response. It may be work or it may be wait. When faith motivates work, it will inevitably be opposed by evil. The same is true when faith says, "wait". However, both working and waiting can mask an absence of faith and/or an abundance of fear. Spiritual opposition and good spiritual fruit are indications of faith in either event. 1 Thes 1:3; Heb 11:13; Heb 11:8,9,11, 17, 20,21, 22,23, 30, 39; Jam 2:17

10. Defending/Overcoming Faith: Faith is the most important part of the Christian's spiritual armor. Faith quenches the enemy's attacks upon us. Satan has no power to overcome true faith. In fact, it is our faith that overcomes him and the evil in this world. Eph 6:16; 1 John 4:4; 5:4; Rom 12:2; Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5,12

11. Glorifying Faith: "All things are possible" to the one who has specific faith. 'All things possible' faith however never glorifies the receiver. It always glorifies the Giver – God. We see this in the

Man who said it – Jesus. Check it out – every time He did a miracle, people glorified God.

Now, Jesus wasn't exaggerating. His declaration wasn't some rabbinical teaching allegory. ALL things are absolutely possible to the one who has faith. The emphasis however is not upon the 'all things' but rather upon believing. Though they are sometimes enormous in our limited view, from God's perspective, the 'all things' are insignificant because they are generally temporal at best. Faith though trains up the soul of the believer and that lasts forever. Mat 9:29; Mark 11:23,24; Num 20:12, 1 Cor 13:13

12. Humble Faith: Faith is not presumptuous of God's will but rather submitted to it. Material 'blessings' are never an accurate indicator of faith. In fact, the Bible says that it is the poor who are rich in faith. The Father said to the Son, "Concerning the works of My hands, command me." However, Jesus' heart was, "...not my will but yours be done." Jam 2:5; Isa 45:11-13; Luke 22:42

When Jesus comes, will He really find faith on the earth? If we will sit like Mary at His feet to listen and then like Martha take action, the answer can be, "YES". May we cease all the silly church games and religious rigmarole in which it is absent or feigned and get serious about faith – true, effective, God-glorifying, loving, humble faith. John prepared the way with moral imperatives. Jesus is the Way and He told us to believe. God bless you with faith!

ARMED FOR PRAYER

Excerpts from "Advice When Attacked" by Ray C. Stedman available online at: www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/ephesians/0106.html

There is a very strong and powerful relationship between putting on the armor of God and praying. These two things belong together; in fact, one grows out of the other. It is not enough to put on the armor of God; you must also pray. It is not enough to pray; you must also have put on the armor of God. It is impossible to divide these two. As we have been attempting to see, putting on the armor of God is not something merely figurative, it is an actual thing you do. It is remembering what Christ is to you, and thinking through the implications of it in terms of your present struggle and experience. Putting on the armor is essentially something that is done in the realm of your thought life. We have been trying to make that clear. It is an adjustment of the attitude of your heart to reality, to things as they really are. It is thinking through the implications of the fact which revelation discloses. This is always the necessary thing to do in trying to face life.

Our problem with life is that we do not see it as it is. We are so deluded by it, we suffer from such strange illusions. It looks to us to be quite different than it is and this is why we desperately need and must have the revelation of the facts of Scripture.

Life is what God has declared it to be. When we face it on that basis, we discover the revelation is right, it is accurate, it does describe what is happening. And more, it tells us why things happen and what lies behind them. All this is part of putting on this armor, appropriating Christ to your life in terms of your present situation. It is all done in the realm of the thought life.

What do you do when you put on the breastplate of righteousness? You think of Christ and what his righteousness means to you as imparted to you. What do you do when you take up the sword of the Spirit? You give heed, as we saw, to those flashes of Scripture, those portions of the Word of God that come to your mind that have immediate application to the situation you are facing. But again, this all is done in the realm of the thought life. At first it takes time to work all this through. This is something we have to learn how to do. As we learn how to do it, the process becomes much more rapid. Almost instantaneously we can think through this line of approach to the problems we are facing. This is what Paul calls, in the second letter to the Corinthians, "*bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*," (2 Cor 10:5 KJV).

I stress that this is done in the realm of the thought life because this is very important, for it is dangerous to think and not to do. It is a violation of our basic humanity merely to think and not have that thought result at last in some activity. This is where many Christians go astray. They are content to think about doctrinal

matters, think through these great facts revealed about the gospel and about life, but never make a practical application in any way. As I have suggested, this is very dangerous because we human beings are made both to think and to do, and it must be in that order. We receive information first, we assimilate it, correlate it, and think it through. This is the first thing. And then we act upon that which we have both thought and felt. Our emotions and our mind, working upon our will, bring us at last to activity. This is the normal and proper procedure for human living.

Notice the order of this. This is extremely important. The apostle does not reverse this and say, first pray and then put on the armor of God. This is what we try to do, and this is why our prayer life is so feeble, so impotent. There is great practical help here if we follow carefully the designated order of Scripture. I think most Christians, if they were honest, would confess that they are dissatisfied with their prayer life. They feel it is inadequate and perhaps infrequent. All of us at times struggle to improve ourselves. Sometimes we struggle to improve the quality as well as the quantity of our prayer lives. Sometimes we adopt schedules we attempt to maintain, or long lists of names and projects and places we try to remember in prayer, or we attempt to discipline ourselves in some way to a greater ministry in this realm. In other words, we begin with the doing, but when we do this we are starting at the wrong place. We are violating our basic human nature in doing it this way. The place to start

is not with the doing, but with the thinking.

This is always the place to start in motivating human life, and this is what the apostle suggests. Prayer follows putting on the armor of God. It is a natural, normal outgrowth. Now, I am not suggesting that there is no place for Christian discipline; there is. I am not suggesting that we will not need to take our wills and put them to a task and follow through. There is this need. But the place where discipline should come in is not, first, in prayer, but in doing what is involved in "putting on the armor of God." First, think through the implications of our faith, and then prayer will follow naturally much more easily. When it comes in that order it will be thoughtful prayer, prayer which has meaning and significance. It will be relevant prayer.

Now, basically, what is prayer? We are talking about this great theme as the apostle has brought it to our attention, but what, basically, is prayer? Is it a mere superstition, as some people think -- a mumbling, a talking to yourself under the deluded dream that you are addressing a deity? Or is it a form of black magic by which some heavenly genie is expected to manipulate life to our desire, a kind of ecclesiastical Aladdin's lamp that we rub and things are supposed to happen? I am afraid many have that concept of prayer. Or is it, as certain groups tell us, self-communion -- a psychological form of talking to yourself in which you discover depths in your being that were there all the time, but you did not realize it until you prayed? All of these ideas

of prayer are quite dissimilar to what is mentioned in Scripture.

If you take the whole range of Bible teaching on this great subject of prayer you will find that underlying all the biblical presentation is the idea that prayer is conversation with God. This is all it is. Prayer is simply conversing with God. As we understand the position of a Christian, a believer, he is in the family of God. Therefore, prayer is family talk. It is friendly, intimate, frank, unrestricted talking with God, and it is into this close and intimate relationship that every individual is brought by faith in Jesus Christ. By faith in Christ we pass out of the realm of being strangers to God and aliens to the family of God and into the intimate family circle of the children of God. It is easy to talk within a family circle, but think what harm is done to that intimacy if people refuse to talk. Prayer, basically then, is simply carrying on a conversation with God.

But supplication is asking some specific request. James says, "*You have not because you ask not,*" (cf, Jas 4:2 KJV). In our conversation with God it is perfectly proper to ask, because we are children and he is a father. What the apostle is saying is, "After you have put on the armor of God, after you have thought through the implications of your faith in the ways which have been suggested previously, then talk to God about it. Tell him the whole thing. Tell him your reactions, tell him how you feel, describe your relationship to life around you and your reactions to them, and ask him for what you need.

Prayer is often considered to be so high and holy that it has to be carried on in some artificial language or tone of voice. You hear this so frequently from pulpits. Pastors adopt what has well been called a "stained glass voice," and pray in some artificial manner as though God were far off in some distant corner of the universe. Prayer is a simple conversation with the Father. It is what the apostle describes so beautifully in the Epistle to the Philippians:

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7 RSV)

...perhaps the fact most hotly contested by the devil and his forces, is that our prayers play a direct and essential part in bringing God's invisible power to bear on visible life. In other words, God answers prayer. Prayer is purposeful and powerful. It is not pitiful and pathetic pleading with only a rare chance that it might be answered. No, it is powerful. God answers! Prayer is an essential link in the working of God in the world today. Without it he does not often work; with it he certainly does.

But now we must immediately add that God answers prayer according to his promises. This is so necessary to say today, for there is a very vague and undefined but widespread concept that God answers any kind of prayer, that no matter what you want or how you ask for it, he commits himself to give

it. This, of course, results frequently in disappointments and gives rise to the widespread belief that prayer is ineffectual. The truth is, God answers every prayer which is based upon a promise.

Prayer does not start with us; it starts with God. God must say he will do something before we are free to ask him to do it. This is the point. This is how it works with a father and his children. No parent commits himself to give his children everything they want, anything they ask for. He makes it clear to them that he will do certain things and not do other things. In the realm of those limits, the father commits himself to answer his children's requests. So it is with God. God has given promises and they form the only proper basis for supplication.

This is what Paul means by his reminder that we are to pray at all times in the Spirit. In the Spirit! Here again is a great area of misunderstanding about prayer. Many take this phrase, "in the Spirit," as though it were descriptive of the emotions we should have when we pray. They think it is necessary to be greatly moved before prayer can be effectual, that we must pray with deep earnestness of words. Now, this is possible at times, but it is not essential or necessary to the effectiveness of prayer. And it is certainly not what is meant by this phrase, "in the Spirit."

To judge by the expression of many, one would perhaps feel that this phrase means to pray with a loud voice. But it does not mean that. It has no relationship to the emotions that we feel in prayer.

Praying in the Spirit is not descriptive of some kind of religious hydrophobia. Well, what is it then? It means to pray according to the promises which the Spirit has given, and the character of God which the Spirit has made known. This is praying in the Spirit. God has never promised to answer just any prayer, but he does promise to answer prayer in a way that he has carefully outlined for us. He does so invariably and without partiality. He is no respecter of persons in this matter of prayer. In the realm of our personal needs (those needs which call forth most of our prayers), the need for wisdom, perhaps, or power, or patience, or grace, or strength -- in this realm God's promise, specifically and definitely, is to answer immediately. He always immediately answers this type of prayer.

When you grow in your prayer life you will discover that God is very serious about prayer, and that, through it, he makes his omnipotence and omniscience available to us in terms of specific promises.

When you learn to pray on this basis you will discover that exciting and otherwise unexpected things are constantly happening, that there is a quiet but mighty power at work upon which you can rely. And as you learn to pray in this way you find there is put at your disposal a tremendous weapon, a mighty power to influence your own life and the lives of others.



King of Kings by Greg Olsen

*Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.
Jeremiah 23:5*