

CHAPTER ONE

THE MEANING OF PRAYER

Day 1

MATCHING PRAYER AND THE READING OF THE WORD

Psalms 119:147-148 says, “I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.”

John 15:7 says, “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall come to pass to you.”

Before we speak concerning the meaning of prayer, let us look at how prayer and reading the Word match one another. The two passages above clearly show us that these two matters—prayer and reading the Word—go hand in hand. In Psalm 119 there is a seeker of God who lives before Him. He matches his seeking for the Word of God with his calling, that is, his prayer, before God. In John 15, speaking of the promise of answers to prayers, the Lord shows us from another aspect how we should match our prayer with the reading of the Word. The Lord’s Word shows us that a prayer will be answered on the basis of two things: one is that we abide in Him, and the other is that His words must also abide in us. He promises that if these two basic conditions are present, we may ask whatever we will and it shall come to pass to us. Hence, here it speaks of matching prayer with the reading of the Word.

Brothers and sisters, to a normal Christian, these two things—reading the Word and praying—are the two aspects of his living; both are indispensable. We can see that in God’s ordination almost everything in the universe is two-sided. For example, above and below, left and right, yes and no, day and night, male and female—all are two-sided, or you may say they are counterparts for full and proper function.

Our human body gives us many examples of this. For instance, I have two legs which make it very convenient for me to either stand or walk. Suppose I had only one leg. Then I would not be able to stand well, and I would have even more trouble walking. Not only so, but our hands, ears, eyes, and nostrils are also in pairs and symmetrically arranged. The practical living of a Christian before the Lord also has two sides: one side is the reading of the Word, and the other side is prayer. When we walk, we must use both feet simultaneously in order to maintain our balance. We should not walk twenty steps with our right foot and only two steps with our left foot. As a Christian living before God, we also need to read the Word and pray simultaneously, thus keeping the balance.

Unfortunately, however, once God’s ordained laws get into our hands we often make them one-sided. God ordains that a Christian should give equal importance to both reading the Word and prayer. Nevertheless, some brothers and sisters enjoy only reading the Scriptures, but not praying. When they read the Bible, they may bury their head in it from morning to evening; the more they read it, the better it tastes. Every page of their Bible has been drawn with many lines—some heavy, some light, some red, and some blue; the whole book is nearly filled with lines. Some have marked two or three copies of the Bible, though they have been saved for only four years. But strangely, they pray very little, and sometimes even when they are moved by the Holy Spirit, they still will not pray. The enjoyment is unlimited when they read the Word, but when they pray it is like taking bitter medicine. On the other hand, there are some who just enjoy praying. The minute they kneel down they are moved to tears, and may sing spiritual songs. They feel so marvelous and energetic when they pray. But if you want them to read the Bible, they immediately doze off. They would rather pray daily than read the Word. You see, again, this is one-sided.

Brothers and sisters, if someone reads the Bible more than he prays he will often fall into letters and regulations which bring a dead, dry spiritual condition. But one who leans to the other side and prays more than he reads the Bible will become spiritually unbalanced. If we want to maintain a normal Christian life, we must give equal attention to both reading the Word and prayer. Just as we use both feet equally when we walk, we should always both read and pray, pray and read. Whenever we pray we must touch the Word of God, and whenever we read the Scriptures we must match it with prayer.

May we look at an illustration confirming this matter. In Ephesians 5, from verse 18 through verse 20, immediately after it says we should be filled with the Spirit, it tells us that we should speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with our heart to the Lord, and give thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord to God. Again, in Colossians 3:16 and 17, after it says we should let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, it goes on to tell us that we should sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with grace unto God and in all things give thanks to God in the name of the Lord. While both portions of the Word speak of how Christians praise and thank God, the reasons they do so are different. One is due to the infilling of the Spirit, while the other is due to the infilling of the Lord’s Word. By comparing these two portions of the Scriptures, you can see that both the reading of the Word

and prayer are something which men experience in the Spirit. You can never separate the Word from the Spirit. For the Word is the embodiment of the Spirit, and the Spirit is deposited in the Word.

Day 2

Ephesians 5:18b-19 “but be filled in spirit, Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord,”

Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.”

Under normal circumstances, whenever you have the infilling of the words of the Bible, you also have the infilling of the Spirit. And once you are filled with the Spirit, you cannot help but pray. There are various forms of prayer, such as giving thanks to God, blessing God, singing praises to God, weeping and calling before God, fasting and supplicating before God, etc. All these prayers are due to the Spirit's moving within man. When you touch the Word, you will surely know the presence of the Spirit within you. Once you realize the presence of the Spirit, you cannot help but pray; otherwise, you are one who quenches the Spirit. Hence, we must always match our reading with prayer.

On the contrary, if you pray but do not read the Scriptures or touch the Word of the Lord, your prayer will inevitably come out of your own idea, thought, view, opinion, and inclination. In order to pray out from the Spirit and not out from yourself, you must have the Lord's Word. Now, you can understand why in John 15:7 the Lord Jesus first says, “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you;” then He says, “Ask whatever you will, and it shall come to pass to you.” These words show us that if a man learns to always fellowship with the Lord and live in the Lord, His Word will abide in him. One who reads the Word properly is one who abides in the Lord. One who abides outside the Lord is definitely not able to read the Word spiritually; the best he can do is to exercise his mentality to understand; he can never use his spirit to touch the Word. One who abides in the Lord, however, can easily have the Lord's word abiding in him. Since the Lord's word thus abides in him, he cannot help but touch the Spirit, for the Lord's word is spirit. And once he is filled with the Spirit of the Lord, he cannot help but pray. The Lord promises that whatever such a one shall ask, it shall come to pass to him, for at this point, whatever he desires in his heart is not of himself but of the Lord's word and His Spirit—that is the Lord Himself. Hence, in order to have the proper prayer, you must first have the proper reading of the Word.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, proper reading of the Word is surely accompanied by prayer, and proper prayers will surely issue forth from the reading of the Word. Both matters are equally important; neither should be unduly stressed. Moreover, it is also not possible to decide which of the two should be first; they must go hand in hand. When we read the Lord's word in John 15:7, it seems that we should first read the Word and then pray. But in Psalm 119 it says, “I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.” That seems to indicate that prayer comes before reading the Word. Therefore, it is not necessary to make a rigid decision concerning these two matters; you just need to allow them to proceed in a spontaneous way.

People have often asked me, “Brother Lee, during morning watch, is it better to read the Bible first and then pray or pray first and then read the Bible?” This is hard to answer. I have been living many years, but to this day whenever I walk I am still not certain whether I should start with my right foot or with my left. May I ask you, are you certain? This morning when you rose up and started to walk, did you start with your right foot or with your left? If there is someone who whenever he starts walking would first consider whether to start with the right foot or the left, you would surely suspect that he is a mental case. Whenever we walk, we just do it naturally without caring whether the right or left foot goes first. Please remember, it is also unnecessary for you to decide every morning before the Lord whether to read first and then pray or vice versa. Just remain before the Lord in a normal way. Sometimes you may read the Word first and then pray, while other times you may pray first and then read the Word. You do not need to set up a dead regulation. Sometimes after rising in the morning, you may simply pray a few sentences first and then read the Bible. But other times you may have an inner desire to open the Word and read a few sentences; following the reading, the feelings may come and then you may start to pray. These two things usually occur the same number of times and occupy the same length of time. For the purpose of illustration, let us cite Brother Müller, who operated an orphanage in Great Britain. He was someone in the last century who prayed and read, read and prayed. In his autobiography he told us that every morning he spent some time to draw near to God. You cannot say that during that time he was only reading the Word, nor can you say that he was only praying. In his coming before the Lord every morning he gave equal attention to both reading and praying and kept both in balance. Hence, almost everyone acknowledges that, with regard to the practical aspect of reading and praying, during the last century Müller was the most normal example. He did not have the problem of being one-sided. He was one who used his mind to understand

the Bible and exercised his spirit to contact the Word. Furthermore, he was also one who matched his reading with praying. Therefore, he was very living and fresh, as well as steady and solid before the Lord. Brothers and sisters, I wish to ask you to first give attention to this matter before we go on to the lessons of prayer.

Day 3

Genesis 1:26 And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;

Genesis 2:7 Jehovah God formed man with the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

THE MEANING OF PRAYER

Now we may come to the first lesson of prayer—the meaning of prayer. May I ask you, brothers and sisters, what is prayer? What is prayer all about? What is the meaning of prayer? Many people, upon hearing the term prayer, immediately think that it means man coming before God to make supplication. Because man is in want and needs material supply, or is sick and needs healing, or has other problems and needs some solution, he goes before God asking Him to supply his needs, heal his sickness, and solve his problems. Men consider these as prayers. Apparently, there are examples of such prayers in the Bible. For example, the widow in Luke 18 continually went to the judge asking him to avenge her of her grievance. However, brothers and sisters, please remember that this is not the proper meaning of prayer as it is revealed in the Bible. We dare not say that such a definition is wrong, but it is too superficial and lacks both depth and accuracy. If we desire to know what real prayer is today, we must clearly realize that it is not man merely making supplications before God for his own needs.

We know that we should not judge any truth of the Bible merely on the basis of a single passage or aspect. In the same way, you cannot tell what a house looks like simply by one of its corners or rooms. You need to view it from various sides as a whole, and then you will be able to make an accurate judgment. In the same principle, if we collect all the Bible passages concerning prayer and view them as a whole, we will see that prayer is not just a matter of man making supplication to God because he has some needs. This may be partially the meaning of prayer but not entirely. If we have the time, we should gather all the specific examples of prayer in the Bible. For example, in the Old Testament there are the prayers of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Nehemiah, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, and others, while in the New Testament there are the prayers of the Lord Jesus and of the disciples. If we study every one of these prayers and look at them as a composite, we will be able to see clearly what prayer is all about. It is not the intention of this writing to study them in such a detailed way; we will only use a simple word to speak concerning the meaning of prayer.

I. PRAYER IS THE MUTUAL CONTACT BETWEEN MAN AND GOD

Prayer is not just man contacting God; it is the mutual contact between man and God. This matter of the contact between God and man is a very great subject in the Bible. We have often said that the purpose of man's living is to be God's vessel. In the universe God is man's content, and man is God's container. Without man, God has no place to put Himself—He becomes a homeless God. I do not understand why this is so, but I know that it is a fact. In the universe God's greatest need is man. God as an entity in Himself is complete, but as far as His operation in the universe is concerned, He still needs man to fulfill that operation.

By this you can understand the last sentence of Ephesians 1, which says that the church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of Christ. The term fullness is very hard to translate. It not only denotes the fullness of Christ, but also implies the completeness of Christ. Hence, the church is, on the one hand, the fullness of Christ, and on the other hand, the completeness of Christ. In other words, without the church it seems that Christ is not at all complete. We all must be very careful in understanding this word, for it can stir up vehement arguments in theology. I do not mean that God is incomplete and that He needs man to make Him complete. What I mean is that God in Himself is perfectly complete, but without man He is not complete in the universe according to His plan. Oh, brothers and sisters, this matter is too glorious.

In His eternal plan, God has ordained man to be His vessel, or, in other words, to be His completion. Hence, Genesis chapters one and two show us that when God created man He made two preparations concerning man. The first preparation was that He created man in His image and according to His likeness. As man was created according to God, he resembles God in many aspects. The various aspects of man's expression such as his pleasure, anger,

sorrow, joy, preference, choice, etc.—whether it be his emotion, will, or disposition—express God to a certain degree and are miniatures of all that is in God.

Another preparation was that God created for man a spirit in the depths of his being. Of the countless varieties of living things in the universe, only man has a spirit. The angels are spirits, but that is a different matter. In the whole creation there is one kind of created being that is not spirit yet has a spirit, and that is man. Why did God create a spirit for man in the depths of his being? We all know it was because God wants man to receive Him, Who is Spirit. In the same way He created a stomach for man because He wants man to take in food. Consider this: suppose God did not create a stomach for man—how could we take in food? Because we have a stomach, we can receive food into us, enjoy it, digest it, and assimilate it into our being, making it our constituent. In the same manner, since we have a spirit within us, we can receive God into us and assimilate Him, making Him our very constituent.

In the first two chapters of Genesis, when God created man to be His vessel, He made these two steps of preparation: one step was to create man to be like Him, and the other was to put a spirit within man that man might receive Him. After He had made these two preparations He placed Himself before man in the form of the tree of life in order that man might receive Him and obtain Him as life. Brothers and sisters, it is in man's spirit that the contact between God and man is made. Once there is such a contact between God and man, God enters into man to be his content, and man becomes God's vessel to express Him outwardly. Thus God's eternal intention is fulfilled in man.

Please remember, a real prayer is the mutual contact between God and man. Prayer is not just man contacting God, but also God contacting man. If in prayer man does not touch or contact God, and God does not touch or contact man, that prayer is below the proper standard. Every prayer that is up to the standard is one which is a mutual flow and contact between God and man. God and man are just like electric currents flowing into one another. It is hard for you to say that prayer is solely God in man or solely man in God. According to the fact and experience, prayer is the flowing between God and man. Every prayer that is truly up to the standard surely will have a condition of mutual flowing between God and man so that man may actually touch God and God may actually touch man; thus, man is united with God, and God with man. Therefore, the highest and most accurate meaning of prayer is that it is the mutual contact between God and man.

Day 4

John 7:37-38 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, **If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.**

Psalms 36: 8 -9 They are saturated with the fatness of Your house, And You cause them to drink of the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.

II. PRAYER IS MAN BREATHING GOD, OBTAINING GOD, AND BEING OBTAINED BY GOD

A real prayer is also man breathing in God just as he breathes in air. While you are thus breathing in God, spontaneously you are obtaining God, just as when you breathe in air you receive air. Consequently, not only is God obtained by you and becomes your enjoyment, but also your whole being surrenders to God, turns unto God, and is wholly gained by God. The more you pray, the more you will be filled with God, and the more you will surrender yourself to God and be gained by Him. If you do not pray for a week or, even worse, a month, then you will be quite far from God. What does it mean to be quite far from God? It means that you cannot obtain God and be obtained by Him. The only remedy for this situation is to pray. And it is not enough to pray for only two or three minutes; you must pray again and again until you have actually breathed God and are actually obtained by God, and God by you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, real prayer is of great importance to a Christian's spiritual life.

Brothers and sisters, never think that prayer is merely asking God for something. For example, you need a house and you ask God to prepare one for you. After praying, you receive a word from the Lord saying that what you have asked shall come to pass unto you. The next day a brother comes and says to you, "Do you need a house? My neighbor has two houses for rent; the location is convenient and the rent is cheap." So, you immediately thank and praise the Lord, saying, "Hallelujah, the Lord is really the true and living God; He has answered my prayer." I would not say that this is not prayer, but this is not adequate prayer. Brothers and sisters, if you have really learned the lesson of prayer, whether you can find a house is actually secondary; the primary thing you should be concerned about is whether you have obtained more of God and whether you have been gained more by God through such a prayer. If the result of a prayer is only the accomplishment of a particular matter, without obtaining God or being obtained by God, then such a prayer is a failure, a miscarriage. The ultimate result of a prayer should be that the

intercessor gains more of God and is gained more by God, though the thing which he has asked of God may also be fulfilled.

Please consider, are your experiences of prayer like this? Although many times we may not know such a meaning of prayer and may still pray to God concerning certain affairs, God still brings us into Himself through our prayers for those matters. For example, a sister who is a mother loves her child dearly but loves the Lord very little. Regardless how much you help her, she would not seek the Lord. However, one day her child becomes ill. After numerous visits to physicians, the child remains sick. She becomes helpless and has no alternative other than to put her trust in the Lord. When she comes to pray, she only asks the Lord to heal her child. She does not have the slightest intention of seeking the Lord Himself. Who would imagine that through such a prayer she would be able to actually meet Him, touch Him, and enjoy Him? Because of such a prayer, this one, who for many years refused to be gained by the Lord, has spontaneously entered into God and, at the same time, has been gained by God. But still she does not understand what has happened. After three days her child is actually healed, so she comes to the fellowship meeting and testifies how faithful God is, how He has answered her prayer, and how her child has been healed. Although she has obtained the reality in prayer, she still does not realize it. Many times we are just like that ourselves. When we see the desolation of the church and go to the Lord to pray, we feel that we are praying for the church's condition, but in God's view the purpose of our prayer is to cause us to touch Him, inhale Him, obtain Him, and allow Him to obtain us.

I believe in the remaining years God will cause every one of His children to become more and more clear that real prayer is not to pray concerning affairs, ask for things, or intercede for people. Real prayer is to inhale God Himself, to obtain God, and to be obtained by God. All those prayers for people, affairs, and things that are outside God are not the essence of prayer but are merely the outer skin or accessories of prayer. A real prayer, a prayer of essence, is one in which you actually contact God, breathe Him, enjoy Him, obtain Him, are filled with Him, and allow Him to gain your being. If the children of God can see this point they will have a better understanding of the real meaning of prayer.

Day 5

Romans 8:26-27 Moreover, in like manner the Spirit also joins in to help us in our weakness, for we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. But He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to God.

James 5:17-18 Elijah was a man of like feeling with us, and he earnestly prayed that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth sprouted forth with its fruit.

III. PRAYER IS MAN COOPERATING AND CO-WORKING WITH GOD, ALLOWING GOD TO EXPRESS HIMSELF AND HIS DESIRE THROUGH MAN, AND THUS ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSE

If a brother or sister has really learned the secret of prayer covered in the preceding two points, spontaneously there will be the following result: such a praying one will certainly cooperate with God, work together with God, and allow God to express Himself and His desire from within him and through him, ultimately accomplishing God's purpose. This is according to Romans 8:26 and 27, which tell us that we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Holy Spirit intercedes in us according to God's purpose. Actually, we do not know how to pray. We know what people ordinarily call supplication, but we know little about the prayer which is spoken of in the Scriptures. The first time I read these two verses in Romans 8, I questioned their meaning. When I was sick, I thought, did I not pray to God asking him to heal me? When I was in want, did I not pray to God asking Him to send me provision? How could the Scriptures say that we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting? Gradually, the Lord showed me that we really do not know anything about the kind of prayer that God desires. We know those prayers which people generally consider to be prayers but which are below the standard. We do not know those prayers that touch God's desire and are up to the standard. This is our weakness. Thank God, in this matter of our weakness, the Spirit Himself joins in to help us and intercede for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Brothers, real prayers are the Holy Spirit within man expressing God's desire through man. In other words, real prayers are prayers involving two parties. They are not simply man alone praying to God, but they are the Spirit mingling with man, putting on man, and joining with man in prayer. Outwardly it is man praying, but inwardly it is the Spirit praying. This means two parties express the same prayer at the same time. Please remember that this alone is the prayer which is spoken of in the Scriptures.

We often speak of Elijah's prayer. James 5:17 says, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." "Prayed earnestly" in Greek means prayed with prayer, or prayed in prayer. This is a very peculiar expression in the Bible. Please remember, this is what we mean by prayer of two parties. When Elijah was praying, he was praying with or in a prayer. In other words, he prayed with the prayer of the Spirit within him. Thus we can say that Elijah's prayer was God praying to Himself in Elijah. Andrew Murray once said that a real prayer is Christ Who indwells us praying to Christ Who is sitting on the throne. That Christ would be praying to Christ Himself sounds strange, but in our experience this is really the case.

Let us look again at Romans 8:27. There is a clause which says, "the Spirit...intercedes...according to God." This means that the Holy Spirit prays in us according to God; that is, God prays in us through His Spirit. Thus, such a prayer certainly expresses God's intention as well as God Himself.

By these illustrations we can see that real prayers will certainly cause our being to be wholly mingled with God. We will become a person of two parties, i.e. God mingled with man. When you pray it is He praying, and when He prays it is also you praying. When He prays within you, then you express the prayer outwardly. He and you are altogether one, inside and outside; He and you both pray at the same time. At that time you and God cannot be separated, being mingled as one. Consequently, you not only cooperate with God but also work together with God that God Himself and His desire may be expressed through you; thus ultimately accomplishing God's purpose. This is the real prayer which is required of us in the Bible.

Hence, Jude verse 20 says, "praying in the Holy Spirit." This means you should not pray in yourself. In other words, it means your prayer should be the expression of two parties, you and the Holy Spirit, praying as one. Ephesians 6:18 says, "By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit." It is hard to say that the spirit here refers solely to the Holy Spirit. All those who read the Bible from an orthodox viewpoint admit that the spirit here does not refer solely to the Holy Spirit; rather, it also includes our human spirit. When we pray we must pray in such a mingled spirit.

From our fellowship in this chapter we can see that the Bible is God breathing out Himself, while prayer is our breathing in God. Bible reading and prayer are our breathing before God and thus our breathing in of God. Hence, we should not be those who only read the Bible and fail to pray. If we only read the Word, we do allow God to breathe out Himself, but we still do not breathe in God. Thus we still need to pray. However, in our prayer our supplications for people, happenings, and things are but the outer skin, the framework. Real prayer always matches the Scriptures; it is an exhaling and inhaling before God, causing us and God, God and us, to contact one another and to obtain one another. Consequently, we wholly cooperate and work with God, and God expresses Himself and His desire through us, ultimately accomplishing His purpose. This is a fundamental meaning of prayer in the Bible.

Day 6

Ephesians 6:18 By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints,

Psalms 36: 8 -9 They are saturated with the fatness of Your house, And You cause them to drink of the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.

Exercise to pray in spirit for 15 minutes:

1. Call on the name of the Lord with voice for 3 minutes
2. According to the inner leading to confess, open to Him, and pray
3. Pray read today's verses
4. Pray for the salvation for family members, gospel friends and saints,
5. Pray for Lord's move on the earth – the spreading of the church and establish golden lambstands in all North America major cities.