

PRAYERLIVING

The beautiful little church up on the hill had just caught fire and there is panic in the little village and the whole village run up the hill with buckets of water to put out the fire. The resident atheist also grabbed a bucket of water to help put the fire out. After the fire had been put out and everything had calmed down, one of the church elders said to the resident atheist: "This is the first time I have seen you in church." And he replied: "Yes, and this is the first time I have seen the church on fire."

The question is how, do we get the church to be on fire. The building is not the church as we all know, but, the individual members of the church make up the church. I am part of the church and you are part of the church and the whole congregation of all Christians is the church. 1 Corinthians 6:19 "What, Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own." To set the church on fire is to set myself on fire and for you to set yourself on fire and for the whole body of Christ to be set on fire. There is one thing about fire and that is, it spreads and then it becomes bigger and bigger and it is always noticed and then it attracts everyone else.

This morning, we are going to look at one of the major ways I believe that sets the church on fire and that is by prayer. I know we all pray but there have been times that I am aware that my prayer life is not as it should be. I believe that if we should take our prayer life more seriously and we engaged in a lifestyle of total prayer, then we could set ourselves on fire and then we could set the whole body of Christ, which is the church on fire.

I have titled this talk "PRAYERLIVING" and that is having a lifestyle of focused and persistent prayer. We are going to talk about the realities of the unseen world and then we are going to consider some questions about prayer together with some suggested answers, and then we shall end it all with some admonitions on the power of prayer.

I know that we all do pray and that we know how to pray but then I will like us to have a quick reminder of how to pray.

1. We must pray in the name of Jesus. Jesus said in John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me". When I Pray in the name of Jesus, I come through the main and only access route to the Father. John 14:13,14 "And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my Name, I will do it."
2. We must pray in the Spirit. Ephesians 6:18 "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." Zechariah 12:10 "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the house of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." God says there is a spirit who is the Spirit of grace and supplication. When you are spirit-filled, praise and praise flows out of you!! When you are spirit-filled, you are constantly praising God and constantly full of supplication and praying in the spirit. God says that one day He is going to pour out the Spirit of grace and supplication upon the Jews but He has already poured out the Spirit of grace and supplication upon you and upon me and therefore, you must pray in the Spirit.
3. We must pray in Obedience to God. You cannot expect God to answer your prayers when you have a lifestyle of disobedience to God's word. God will not bless you in your disobedience. Psalm 66:18 "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."
4. We must pray in the Will of God. 1 John 5:14 "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."

5. We must pray in fellowship with other believers
6. We must pray in Faith, which is one of the most essential ingredients to a successful prayer and we are going to dwell a little bit more on faith and by having a peep in to the unseen spiritual world.

The Bible teaches that there is a visible material world and there is an invisible spiritual world and these two, coexist side by side. Now, we often lose sight of the fact that there is an invisible spiritual world because we don't see it with our physical eyes. A blind man would not deny the radiant splendour of the sunset just because he can not see it. If you are to take my great grandfather and bring him back into this world, and tell him that this room is full of music and sports and drama and action and the Olympic games in china and news from all over the world, he'd say that it is not true and that you're telling a lie but we know that it is true. This hall is full of all of these things and some more. If we should put the right gadget here and tune into the right signals and the right channels, we will be able to draw all this images and sounds out of the air in this hall. They are here and they are in the air. Now because we cannot see them right now, simply means that we are not tuned into them, but we know that they are here. You see, we have right here in this room an illustration of another world, a privilege that my great grandfather never had.

There is more to life than what you can see, what you can touch, what you can smell and what you can hear. Hebrews 10:38 "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

Hebrews 11:1-3 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

That is the visible was made out of the invisible. God spoke and God made something out of nothing. The invisible was here before the visible. Before there was anything that you can touch or taste or hear or smell, there was the invisible Spirit of God and there was the word of God that brought all these things here. The invisible was here before the visible. The invisible world is going to outlast the visible world. 2 Corinthians 4:18 "While we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." Everything around us is changing, winding down and decaying. It is temporal. That is why I love to always look into the things that cannot be seen. The unseen world is the real world because it was here first and it the unseen world will be here last. If you put your trust in the things that are seen and looking for them and chasing after them, you are in for a big disappointment. God says that the real world is the unseen world so let us tap into the resources in the real world that God have provided for His sons and for His daughters. I love the unseen world because there are great vital resources that are wrapped up in the unseen world that can be ours. We are going to see how to tap into these resources right out of the word of God.

We look into the unseen world by faith through prayer. You look unto the unseen world when you are going through trouble. You fix your gaze into the unseen world when you face difficulties knowing that our God is right here with you and that he hears our cry. When you feel down and out, you better look fix your eyes into another world and know that God is going to give you supernatural strength. When you are afraid you need to look into the unseen world. Psalm 34:7 "The angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him, and delivers them." 2 Kings6:16 "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And it is true you know. There is an unseen army round about me as I stand here and there are great armies of angels around and sitting in our midst right now as we worship God.

Now if you know this for a fact, then you will realize that, a lifestyle of prayer is the most enjoyable privilege that God has blessed us with. When I lift up my voice a raise a song in worship to the Almighty, I am never alone. There are a great mass choir joining in with me. In fact that brings me to the very presence of the throne room of The Almighty Himself. I am joined in the chorus by the

twenty and four elders and by the four living beings who worship God day and night without resting. We are never alone in our prayers and that has encouraged me a lot in these last few weeks that I have taken this task to study and listen from God about prayer.

Prayer is our greatest Christian privilege and also our greatest Christian failure. We all need to learn to pray more and to learn to pray better.

One of the reasons that we do not pray better or pray more is that we have questions about prayer and these questions cause uncertainties and these uncertainties neutralize us and causes us some doubts about prayer.

God's word in Philippians 4:6 "Be careful for nothing (do not worry about anything) , but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep (literally guard) your hearts through Christ Jesus."

THE PROMISE: In everything, by PRAYER. Now you do not have to understand prayer in order to pray. We do not have to understand how a light switch works in order to use it. You can see how it works without necessarily understanding it. You do not sit in the dark just because you do not understand light. You can enjoy the light and you can see how electricity works. Now these are some very valid questions I came across about prayer.

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY WHEN GOD ALREADY KNOWS OUR NEEDS?

Why should I tell God what He already knows? Why should we tell God what He already wants to do anyway? In Mathew 6:7,8 "And when you pray, do not heap up phrases (multiply words, repeating the same ones over and over) as the gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their much speaking. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." So why do I have to tell God what He already knows?

- (I) We do not pray to impress God. Jesus said you are not heard for your much speaking. You do not need to search in the whole book of Psalms to present God with some impressive biblical language.
- (II) You do not pray to inform God. You cannot tell God what He does not already know. So you don't pray to impress God.

So if we don't pray to impress God and if we don't pray to inform God, then what do you pray for?

WE PRAY TO INVITE GOD. When we pray, we invite God we invite God into our lives. We are inviting God into our lives when we pray. Now why do we do that? We share fellowship with God when we invite God into our lives. 2 Corinthians 6:1 "Labouring together (as God's fellow workers), with Him then, then we beg of you not to receive the grace of God in vain." We are workers together with God. The Lord Jesus said: "My Father is always working and so do I." How pleasant to know that we are working shoulder to shoulder with The Almighty God, The Creator of all things and the One, who sustains everything by His own power. God gives us the joy and God gives us the privilege when we pray about administering His Kingdom, His affairs, working together with Him. I can also say with my Lord Jesus, that My Father is working all the time and I can join hands with Him in the field. He can do it without us, we cannot do it without Him, but what a glorious joy that the Father allows us to do it with Him. There is the fellowship factor.

And then there is the DEVELOPMENT factor: When we grow, God is growing us. Do you ever pray and you don't receive immediately what you asked for. What did you do? You kept on praying but not only did you keep on praying, you searched through your life to find out if there is something in your life that is hindering God from answering your prayer. And many times there is. You sorted it out and then you went back, down on your knees and pleaded and pleaded again until you got through to God. We grow when we pray a believing and sustaining prayer.

And then there is the DEPENDENCY factor. God never wants us to live lives that are independent of Him. Now if God did everything for us and we never had to ask, and we never had to pray, soon we'll begin to take things for granted and we will cease to depend upon God. Prayer binds us to God. You must always remember where your strength come from. In 2 Chronicles 26:5, it was said of King Uzziah that, as long as he sought God, he was made to prosper. You may want to read the whole story of King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26:1-21. That story reveals the importance of learning to depend on God.

And so we tell God what He already knows so that we might learn to have sweet fellowship with Him and to depend on Him so that we might grow.

SO FOR WHAT IS IT PROPER TO PRAY?

Let us look at Philippians 4:6. "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." In everything, in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanks giving we should make our request made known unto God. We must pray about everything! This means that there is nothing in life that is outside the reach of prayer. If it concerns you, it concerns God. Can you think of anything that is too big for God to handle? Can you think of anything that is too small to concern God? They are all small things to Him. When you are high up in an aeroplane and you look down, everything looks tiny, isn't it? You can not tell the difference between a four feet man and a nine feet giant. This reminds me of the story of the missionary who met a ferocious lion in the jungle and he prayed and asked God to deliver him and God saved his life from the jaws of that ferocious and wicked lion. He gave great thanks to God but that night when he tried to sleep he was kept awake all night by a little tiny mosquito. The mosquito kept him awake all night and in the morning, with dark circles under his eyes, the Holy Spirit whispered to him, "You asked God to deliver you from the ferocious lion but you thought you could handle the tiny mosquito all by yourself." Sometimes we wonder whether we could do certain things or not. A good test will be to ask this question: Can I pray about this thing? Can you say, Lord help me to do this thing to your glory? Lord, help me to drive this unlicensed car today to you glory. Lord, help me to cheat on my income tax to your glory. We must pray about everything. We must not divide our lives into two halves: the sacred and the spiritual. We pray about all things spiritual and then we handle the circular or natural, all by ourselves. No! My life must be singular and I must pray about everything. All natural things are spiritual and all spiritual things are natural. I was running late for my train last Tuesday and as I approached the platform, realizing the doors closing, I said: Lord please, help me to get on that train. The doors were shut but the lights were still on and so I pressed on the knob and I was able to get on the train. I gave great thanks to the Lord for an answered prayer. Pray about everything.

Does God Hear The Prayers Of The Unsaved? Let us read from Acts 10:1-4. In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was every one in his household. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. One afternoon about three o'clock, he

had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming towards him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! Yes God may out of His own mercy and benevolence, hear the prayers of an unsaved man. Yes God is sovereign and He can show mercy and kindness to the unsaved and hear their prayers but a child of God who prays in the name of Jesus, has absolute access to the throne room of God and when we plead on His own promises, we are sure to get the ear and hand of God. Of course, God is still sovereign and He will still make room for every single prayer that is prayed in the Name of Jesus. We have the great prayer promises and God will never go back on His own promises. (Isaiah 55:11)

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY IN THE NAME OF JESUS? John 14:13 and 14; "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask any thing in my Name, I will do it." Does this mean that we can sign the Name of Jesus to whatever we want? No. What does it mean to pray in the Name of Jesus? A name stands for approval. That is to say that, Jesus approves this thing. Basically, you can not ask anything in the name of Jesus without His approval. It is not a sort of magical formula that gets all prayers answered.

Secondly, to pray in the name of Jesus means that it is with His authority. It is like presenting a cheque at the bank. The cheque must be signed by the person issuing it. That signature simply says, I have authorised this transaction. To pray in the Name of Jesus means this is a cheque that Jesus has signed. You'll be surprised at the number of people who try to sign Jesus' name to certain requests. I want this and I want that, in the Name of Jesus. To pray in the Name of Jesus means it is something that He approves and it also means that it is something that He authorizes.

To pray in the Name of Jesus also means **ACCLAIM**. It is for His glory. To pray in the name of Jesus means, I want to honour you Jesus, so it is in your name. Now if you can come to a place where you can pray for something that Jesus approves, that Jesus authorizes and Jesus gets the acclaim and the glory for it, then you're really and truly praying in the Name of Jesus.

Now, as we can all see, not every prayer that is prayed with the words: "in the Name of Jesus is actually, (truly and really) in the Name of Jesus. There is an interesting story in Acts 19:13-16 that I will like us to consider. "A group of Jews were travelling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the Name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, "I command you in the Name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!" Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered." One man whipped seven strong men so badly that they had to run away leaving their clothes behind! What was wrong with the whole thing: "In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches!" Not in the Name of Jesus that I know. Whenever you pray, you'd better say, in the Name of Jesus that I know, the Jesus, who is the Lord, of my life. We must always bring our requests within His will and by the leadership of His Holy Spirit.

DOES GOD ALWAYS GIVE US WHAT WE ASK FOR?

No! And thank God for unanswered prayers. In the book of Numbers 11:11-15, Moses prayed for God to kill him. He was frustrated so he thought the best way out was to end it all, so he prayed to God. Please God, I want to die. Was his prayer answered? No. Moses was just feeling sorry for himself and got his focus off God. You see, sometimes, we ask God for the wrong things and that is why God does not answer our prayers and we've got to thank Him for that. We ask for things that we think will be good and right, but we just don't know and that's the reason why the Holy Spirit has to make intercession for us, with groaning that can not be expressed in words (Romans 8:26). Sometimes we ask for the wrong things and sometimes we ask for the right things but our prayers are not answered. My prayers did not get answered because of the sin in my life. Isaiah 59:2 "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you and He will not hear." This is also one of the great prayer promises you know? Because of my sins, God has promised not to hear my prayer. Sin will cause God to turn His face against me and against you and your prayers will not be heard. Psalm 66:18 "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Here, it does not say that if I have sinned, the Lord will not hear me. David says that if I harbour sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. If there is a particular sin in my life that is so precious and enjoyable to me, a sin that I consider, as something that I will not or cannot do without. A sin that I defend all the time, and protect and will not let go of, If, I have such sins in my heart, then God has promised not to hear my prayers. If God should answer the prayers of some one like this, then He will definitely be encouraging him to sin some more. The reason why God does not answer our prayers in such circumstances is actually, for Him to get our attention. God loves us so much and he is glorified when he grants our requests. There is nothing that He cannot do or will not do for His beloved children, if all is done right. If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me. What about the problem of harbouring grudges in our heart. Jesus said that, if someone has offended you and you bring your offering before the Lord, you must go back and reconcile with the person before your prayers will be answered. 1 Peter 3:7 "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." Maybe you have a grudge, nursing a feeling of bitterness and you are asking God to do something for you and Jesus clearly says in Mathew 6:14 "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you don't forgive, your heavenly Father will not forgive you. Now if you are holding a grudge, it is no big secret why your prayers may not be answered.

DOES PRAYER CHANGE THE MIND OF GOD? No, prayer does not change the mind of God. Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. Prayer is laying hold of God's will. 1 John 5:14 "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask Him anything according to His will, He hears us." The only thing that lies outside the reach of prayer is that which lies outside the will of God. You see, God is a changeless God and you cannot change Him with your prayers. 1 Samuel 15:29 "And also the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man that He should repent." That means God will not change. Malachi 3:6 "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above and comes down from the Father of lights in whom there is no variableness, nor a shadow of turning." God does not change you see, so prayer is not me trying to overcome God's reluctance. Prayer is laying hold of His will but, God will do things when we pray that He will not do if we do not pray. Prayer does not change God's character but it does affect what God does and the Bible states plainly and clearly that we have not because we ask not.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOUR PRAYERS ARE NOT ANSWERED? Well, if you pray and your prayers are not answered, you keep on praying. There is a time to keep on praying. Daniel 10:2 “In those days, I Daniel was mourning three full weeks.” Daniel prayed for three full weeks about a particular matter. He persisted in prayer for twenty one solid days and he didn’t give up. Well was God hearing that prayer? Let us look in Daniel 10:12 “Then said he unto me (that is the Angel), fear not Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.” Now Daniel has been praying for 21 days and it will look like God was not doing anything about his concerns, but there was a cosmic war going on and the angels of God and demonic spirits, the prince of Persia, were wrestling in the cosmic arena. The Angel of the Lord comes and says, Daniel your prayers were heard when you began to pray three weeks ago. Luke 18:1 “And He (Jesus) spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought to pray, and not to faint.” That is to say that we should pray all the time and not to give up. There is a time to persist in prayer and there is a time when you quit praying about a particular request. An example of this is the Apostle Paul. Paul prayed three times. This means that he had three specific periods of prayer. He had a thorn in his flesh and he prayed for God to take away that thorn. We are not told exactly what the thorn was but then it was something that he obviously detested and he pleaded with God to remove it. The Lord did not do it but then He answered his prayer in a different way: “He said unto me: My grace is sufficient for thee for my strength is made perfect in thy weakness.” Paul said, most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Paul did not say what can’t be cured must be endured. He said, I’ll just glory in it, I’ll thank God for it. God did not give Paul what he asked for but God gave him something better. Sometimes we pray and there are delays and that does not mean that God is withholding His love from us. We just have to persist and wait and pray some more.

My God is a mighty God and there is nothing that He cannot do. Jeremiah 32:17 “O sovereign Lord, You made the heavens and earth by your strong hand and powerful arm. Nothing is too hard for you.” There is nothing that is too hard for my God to do.

CONCLCLUSION

We have looked at the realities of the unseen world and also considered some vital questions about prayer and now I would like to finish this talk by looking at the main benefit and also the central to successful prayer which is a firm faith in God. You see, prayer is the grandest of resources in the unseen world. When we exercise faith in God and we believe that God has heard our prayer and that he will answer us in accordance with his will, then we shall really be on fire for God and for the whole body of Christ. Let us therefore take up the challenge and be serious with God. The Bible says that without faith, it is impossible to please God and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. By faith we please God.

