

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

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TO PRAY OR NOT TO PRAY THAT IS THE QUESTION.

POINTS TO PONDER. “The mission of Jesus is unsafe in the hands of a prayer less church. The Devil fears nothing less than he fears people who play at religion but do not pray.....” William McCumber. Paul recognizes this and writes “We do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” 1 Corinthians 10:3-4. Demolishing strongholds is contingent on an aggressive prayer life. The victory of the Christian/church rests on a prayer.

What place should prayer have in the life of the Christian and in the

church? Is it that important? Does the New Testament present this discipline as an elective in the dimensions of the Christian living? To answer this question we are driven back to see what the Lord Jesus Christ had to say about it. Jesus told His disciples in Luke 18:1. “That they should always pray and not give up.” This exhortation in itself is extremely important, but it must be seen in a new light when you realize who gave it. This fact by itself, should cause us to stop and consider why it is, Jesus set down prayer as of supreme importance. In this brief phrase Jesus gives us three truths to ponder.

PRAYER IS A PRIORITY

Note that He begins by emphasizing the priority of prayer. He says that His disciples “should always pray.” Jesus does not propose that prayer might be a possibility. He does not suggest that we pray. Prayer is not an option in the mind of Jesus. It is a discipline set down as indispensable to the spiritual health and life of His disciples. We ought always to pray.

While Jesus considers prayer to be an obligation, it is the obligation rooted in His concern for their spiritual welfare. It is a compulsion born of necessity. He knows that without Him they could do nothing and prayer is the power link to Him. He is the only source of spiritual power. We know that the Son of God Himself found it necessary to pray. It is not without significance that the gospel writers made note of the fact that Jesus took time out of His busy schedule to pray. Mark notes that that "very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed." Mark 1:35. Luke informs us that "...Jesus went out into the hills to pray and spent the night praying to God." Luke 6:12. (See also Luke 5:15, 9:18, 22:41). If Jesus the Son of God felt it necessary to pray, how much more should we finite beings spend time in prayer. Prayer is the spiritual breathe of the Christian. James Montgomery wrote about this in a beautiful hymn. One of the verses

pinpoints the indispensable nature of prayer to the child of God.

"Prayer is the Christian's vital breathe,

The Christian's native air:

His watchword at the gates of death,
He enters heaven with prayer."

Is this not why Jesus says that we "should pray and not give up?"

PRAYER AND PERSEVERANCE

Jesus does not only underline the priority of prayer, He points out the need for **perseverance in prayer**... One of the essential ingredients of this persistence is consistency in prayer. Jesus told His disciples that "they should always pray and not give up." Luke 18:1. The key word here is "**ALWAYS**." These disciples have just heard about the second coming of the Lord and it was to them that this exhortation was given, but as N Crawford points out, "we must understand that it has a general application to prayer." Ritchie Commentary - Luke P. 291). One has said that the emphasis is on the word "always," literally means "at all seasons." Paul supports this truth

when he writes “.....pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” Ephesians 6:18. And again he writes, “pray continually...” 1 Thessalonians 5:16. (See also 1 Timothy 2:8.). Great men down through the centuries have discovered the necessity of consistent and persevering prayer. Martin Luther once said, “I am so busy now that if I did not spend two or three hours in prayer I could not get through the day. If I should neglect prayer a single day, I should lose the fire of faith.” Abraham Lincoln confessed, “I have been driven to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. MY wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for the day.” _ Jesus said that we “should always pray and not give up.”

PRAYER AND ITS PURPOSE

There is something that also filters through this exhortation. It may not be so obvious at first, but it brings to

light one of the fundamental purposes of prayer. The King James Version has Luke 18:1 saying we “Ought always to pray and not to faint.” There is a correlation between a constant perseverance in prayer and courage to go on. W. Hendrickson has translated this verse “that they should always pray and NOT LOOSE HEART.” or as J Rotherham has it “that they should not to be fainthearted.” Prayer is indispensable to endurance. The scripture makes clear that those who endure to the end will be saved. The Divine answer to fainted heartedness so often due to the onslaughts of temptation to give up on our walk with God, is contingent on a consistent persevering prayer life.

Let me expand these thoughts in order to give a broader application of the necessity of a dynamic prayer ministry in the church. What is true of the individual is also true of the church. The church will not be the authentic church unless its life pulsates with the presence of God the Holy Spirit. There is an inseparable correlation between the

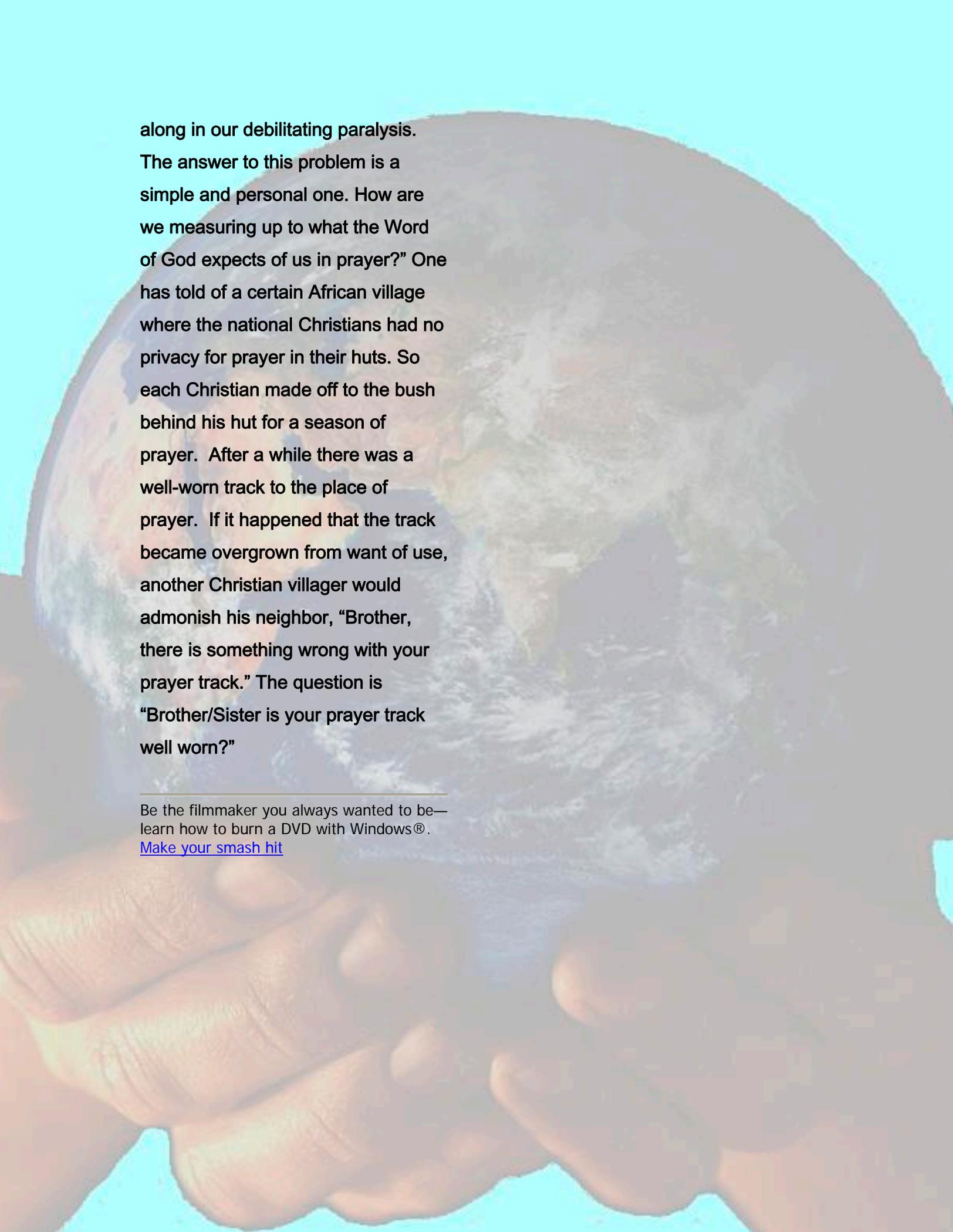
dynamic of the Holy Spirit and a vital dynamic prayer life. Prayer is the secret of maintaining the power of God's presence in the church. This is vital because as William McCumber pointedly tells us that, "The mission of the church is unsafe in the hands of a prayer less church....." The forces of darkness do not fear the prayer less church. The church on its knees is a powerhouse and demonic powers cannot withstand a praying church. In much of modern church life we are being seduced into believing those great finely tuned programs, certain kinds of music, different approaches to worship or social programs or the latest fads are the answer to church growth. Any study of church history will reveal these kinds of activities have never been the answer to the authentic growth of the church. There may some place for these activities, but fads are never the permanent answer to church advancement. Fads are like the tides of the sea, they come and they go. Furthermore it is becoming more and more evident that we are trying to

run the church like a large corporation. There is nothing wrong with good planning and efficient organization, but they are like ashes on a rusty altar unless the church is anointed by the presence and power of the Spirit of God. The tragedy is that so often we spend more time planning than we do praying. Any increase in the church that is not God inspired and God given is suspect. As I reflect on the inspired word of God, glimpses of truth leap out at me from the scriptures. "Unless the LORD builds the house, its' builders build in vain," Psalm 127:1 or the words of Jesus "I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Matthew 16:18. Or in the words of Paul it is "God who makes things grow." 1 Corinthians 3:7. The redemptive presence and dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit in His church are dependent on a praying church. God blesses and uses those who seek His face in prayer. It appears however, that we have become so enamored by ecclesiastical mechanics that we have sadly

neglected spiritual dynamics. The “arm of flesh” is becoming more and more predominant in the operation of the church and the “arm of flesh” will fail us.

It is sad that very little interest is being shown in payer ministries. Corporate prayer and personal prayer are vital and indispensable to the survival and effectiveness of the Church of Jesus Christ. Jesus said it clearly “without me you can do nothing.” Prayerlessness is really a declaration of independence from God. It was Owen Carr who said that “a day without prayer is a boast against God.” We need the fire of the Holy Spirit and renewed vision for the lost and a burning passion for souls. The spiritual apathy and superficiality among God’s people needs a mighty move of God in revival power. We cannot program or plan the moving of the Spirit of God, however, we can prepare for it. These supernatural activities do not happen in this way, “this kind can come out only by prayer.” Mark 9:29.

I fully recognize that this discussion may not be popular, but diagnosis never is. They are observations I have made as pastor for many years. One of the biggest struggles is to get people to give themselves to prayer. Prayer meetings are the worst attended services in the church, and yet they are the most needed. It is only remnant that will gather to pray in an intercessory way. The question stands “Are we praying as we ought?” Generally in the western world there is an obvious and alarming powerlessness about the church. We are looking for power in human resources and man’s technology, but it is evident that we are falling short of New Testament power. The exciting move of the Holy Spirit in parts of Africa have been traced to what has been called “extraordinary praying,” a term which was part of the “great awakening.” Nights of prayer are a common occurrence. Should we not take account of this and give ourselves to correcting the failure to pray? IF WE DO NOT we will continue to stumble

A pair of hands, one from the left and one from the right, are shown holding a globe of the Earth. The hands are positioned as if they are supporting the globe from underneath. The globe shows the continents of North and South America. The background is a solid light blue color.

along in our debilitating paralysis.
The answer to this problem is a simple and personal one. How are we measuring up to what the Word of God expects of us in prayer?" One has told of a certain African village where the national Christians had no privacy for prayer in their huts. So each Christian made off to the bush behind his hut for a season of prayer. After a while there was a well-worn track to the place of prayer. If it happened that the track became overgrown from want of use, another Christian villager would admonish his neighbor, "Brother, there is something wrong with your prayer track." The question is "Brother/Sister is your prayer track well worn?"

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