"Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him." Acts 12:5

In the twelfth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we have the record of a most remarkable prayer, remarkable because of what was asked for and remarkable because of the results of the asking.

There seemed to be little hope for Peter, indeed no hope at all. He was in a secure dungeon, in an impregnable fortress, guarded by sixteen soldiers, and chained by each wrist to a soldier who slept on either side of him. There appeared to be no hope whatever for Peter. But the Christians in Jerusalem undertook to get Peter out of his perilous position, to completely deliver him. How did they go at it?

What did they do? They held a prayer meeting to pray Peter out of prison. Was anything apparently more futile and ridiculous ever undertaken by a company of fanatics? Praying a man so securely incarcerated, and so near his execution, out of prison?

If the enemies of Peter and the Church had known of that attempt they doubtless would have been greatly amused, and laughed at the thought of these fanatical Christians praying Peter out of prison; and would doubtless have said to one another, We'll see what become of the prayers of these fool Christians." But the attempt to pray Peter out of prison was entirely successful.

Now if we can find out how these people prayed, then we shall know just how we too can pray so as to get what we ask. In the fifth verse we are told exactly how they prayed. Let me read it to you. "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."

The whole secret of prevailing prayer, the prayer that gets what it asks, is found in four phrases in this brief description of their prayer. The first phrase is, "Without ceasing". The second "of the church" The third "Unto God." The fourth, "For him."

1. UNTO GOD

Let us take up these four phrases and study them. We take first the third phrase, for it is really the most important one, "Unto to God" But someone will say, "Is not all prayer unto God?" No! Comparatively few of the prayers that go up from this earth today are really unto God.

If there is to be any power in our prayer, if our prayer is to get anything the first thing to be sure of when we pray is that we have come into the presence of God, and are actually praying to Him.

Oh, let those two words, "Unto God," sink deep into your heart; and from this time on never pray, never utter one syllable of prayer, until you are sure that you have come into the presence of God and are really talking to Him.

A TRANSFORMED PRAYER LIFE

Some years ago in our church in Chicago, before we began the great Saturday night prayer meetings to pray for a world-wide revival, a little group of us used to meet every Saturday night for prayer, to pray for God's blessing upon the work of the morrow. Never more, than a handful of people came, but we had wonderful times of blessing.

One night after we had gathered together, I arose to open the meeting and said to those gathered there, "Now we are going to kneel in prayer and every one of you feel at perfect liberty to ask for what God puts into your heart to ask for but be sure you do not utter a word of prayer until you have really come into the presence of God, and know that you are talking to Him."

Then we knelt in prayer. A friend of mine, a business man, had come in just before I said that. One day the following week I met him and he said to me, **Mr.. Torrey, I ought to be ashamed to confess it,** but do you know that the thought you threw out last Saturday night just before we knelt in prayer, that not one of us should utter a syllable of prayer until we had really come into the presence of God, and knew that we were talking to Him , was an entirely new thought to me and it has transformed my prayer life?"

AN AUDIENCE WITH THE KING

The day came when I realized what real meant, realized that prayer was having an audience with God, actually coming into the presence



WHAT PRAYER CAN DO

R.A. Torrey

of God, and asking and getting things from Him. And the realization of that fact transformed my prayer life. Before that prayer had been a mere duty, and sometimes a very irksome duty, but from that time on prayer has been not merely a duty, but a privilege, one of the most highly esteemed privileges of life.

Before that the thought that I had was, **How much time must I spend in prayer?**" The thought that now possesses me is, "How much time may I spend in prayer without neglecting the other Privileges and duties of life?"

So let these two words, Unto God, sink deep into' your heart and govern your prayer life from this day on.

A NEW AND LIVING WAY

But at this point a question arises. How can we come into the presence of God, and how can we be sure that we have come into the presence of God, and, that we are really talking to Him?

You will find the first part of the answer in **the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter ten, verse nineteen,** "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus."

The best man or woman on earth cannot 'come into the presence of God on the ground of any merit of his own, not for one moment; nor get anything from God on the ground of his' own goodness, not even the smallest blessing.

But on the ground of the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the vilest sinner who ever walked this earth, who has turned from his sin and accepted Jesus Christ, and trusts in the shed blood as the ground of his acceptance before God, can come into the presence of God any day of the year and any hour of the day or night, and with perfect boldness speak out every longing of his heart, and bet what be asks from God. Isn't that wonderful? Yes, and, thank God, it is true.

The second part of the answer to this question is found in Eph. 2.18, "For through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father."

Have you ever had this experience, that when you knelt to pray it seemed as if there were no one there, we as if you were just talking into the air, or into empty space? What shall do at such a time as that? Shall we stop praying and wait until some time when we least feel like praying, and when God is least real to us, that is the time we most need to pray.

2. PRAYER WITH INTENSE EARNESTNESS

Let us consider another phrase used in Acts 12:5; the two words, "without ceasing." The Greek word-here is ektenos and it means "stretched-out-edly." It represents the soul stretched out in earnestness towards God.

It is the intensely earnest prayer to which God pays attention, and which He answers. This thought comes out again and again in the Bible. In Jer. 29:13, "Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart."

Me with all your heart."

wrestle with God. No! Our wrestling is against the Devil and all his forces. There is no place where the devil so resists us as when we pray. What shall we do? Give up? No! A thousand times, No! Fight through on your knees to God, and win.

DAVID BRAINERD

The mighty men of God, who through the centuries have wrought great things by prayer, were men who had much painful toil in prayer. Take for example David Brainerd, that physically feeble, but spiritually mighty man of God.

Trembling for years on the verge of consumption, from which he ultimately died at an early age, David Brainerd felt led of God to labour among the North American Indians in the early days, in the primeval forests of Northern Pennsylvania, and sometimes of a winter night he would go out into the forest and kneel in the cold snow, when it was a foot deep, and so labour with God in prayer that he would be wringing wet with perspiration, even out in the cold winter night hours.

And God heard David Brainerd and sent such a mighty revival among the North American Indians as had never been heard of before, as indeed had never been dreamed of. And not only did God send in answer to David Brainerd's prayers this mighty revival among the North American Indians, but also in answer to David Brainerd's prayers he transformed David Brainerd's father-in-law, Jonathan Edwards, into Jonathan Edwards the flaming evangelist, who so preached on the subject of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in the church at Enfield, in the power of the Holy Spirit, that the strong men in the audience felt, as he preached, as if the very floor of the church were falling out, and they were sinking into hell, and they sprang to their feet, and threw their arms around the pillars of the church, and cried to God for mercy. Ah, that we had more men who could pray like David Brainerd, then we would have more men that could preach like Jonathan Edwards.

But there is a right way to obtain real, heart-stirring, heart-wringing, and God moving earnestness in prayer. What the right way is, the Bible tells us. It tells us in **Romans 8:26,27** And in like manner the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity, for we know not how to pray as we ought; but **the Spirit Himself- maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered;** and He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

CONFLICT AND ASSURANCE OF REVIVAL

I shall never forget a night in Chicago. After the general prayermeeting for a world-wide revival had been going on for some time, the man who most closely associated with me in the conduct of the meetings came over to my house one night after the meeting was over and said, "Brother Torrey, what do you say to our having a time alone with God every Saturday night after the other meetings are over? I do not mean," he continued, "that we will actually promise to come together every Saturday night; but let us have it tonight any way."

There were never more than a dozen persons present, usually about six or seven. One night when we met to pray, before kneeling in prayer we told one another the things we desired especially to ask of God that night, and then we knelt to pray, and a long silence followed: No one prayed. And one of the little company looked up and said, "I cannot pray, there seems to be something resisting me." Then another raised head and said, "Neither can I pray, something seems to be resisting me." Each one had the same story.

What did we do? Break up the prayer-meeting? No! If we ever felt-the need of prayer it was then, and **quietly we all bowed before God, and looked to Him to send His Holy Spirit to enable us to pray to victory.** And soon the Spirit of God came upon one and another and I have seldom heard such praying as I heard that night.

And then the Spirit of God came upon me and led me out in such a prayer, as I never dreamed of praying. I was led to ask God that He would send me around the world preaching the Gospel; and give me to see thousands saved in China, in Japan, in Australia, in New Zealand, in Tasmania, in India, England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, France and Switzerland; and when I had finished praying, that night, I knew I was going, and I knew what I would see, as well as I knew I was going.

I knew what I would see as well as I knew afterward when the actual report came of the mighty things that God had wrought. That prayer meeting sent me around the world preaching the Gospel. Oh,

that is how we must pray, if we would get what we ask it prayer—pray with the intense earnestness that the Holy Ghost alone can inspire.

3. "OF THE CHURCH"

Now let us look briefly at another one of the four phrases, the phrase "of the church." The prayer that God particularly delights to answer is united prayer. 'There is power in the prayer of a single individual, and the prayer of individuals has wrought great things, but there is far greater power in united prayer.

Our Lord Jesus taught this same great truth in Matt. 8: 19,20 "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father who is in heaven."

When God, by His Holy Spirit, puts the same burden on two hearts, and they thus in the unity of the Spirit pray for the same thing, there is not power enough on earth, or in hell to keep them from getting it. Our Heavenly Father will do for them the thing that they ask.

4. "FOR HIM"

Now let us look at the fourth phrase, "for him." The prayer was definite prayer for a definite person; and that is the kind of prayer God answers, **Definite Prayer.** Oh, how general and vague many of our prayers are. They are very pretty, they sound nicely, they are charmingly phrased, but they ask no definite specific thing, and they get no definite, specific answer.

When you pray to God, have a very definite clear-cut idea of just exactly what it is you want of God; and ask Him for that definite and specific thing. And, if you meet the other conditions of prevailing prayer, you will get that definite, specific thing which you asked. God's answer will be just as definite as your prayer.

To sum it all up, the prayer that God answers is the prayer that is to God the Father, that is on the ground of the atoning blood of God the Son, and that is under the direction, and in the power of God the Holy Spirit.

You will find the text on which, all we have to say is based in Jas. 5:16: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." These words of God set forth prayer as a working force, as something that brings things to pass that would not come to pass if it were not for prayer.

Yes, prayer certainly does work. A contrast is often drawn by many between praying and working. I knew a man once who was an officer in a Sunday School, and the Superintendent one day called on him to pray. He arose and said, "I am not a praying Christian, I am a working Christian." But praying is work. It is the most effective work that anyone can do, that is, we can often bring more to pass by praying than we can by any other form of effort we might put forth.

HE PUT THE KEY IN HIS POCKET

Then in the verses that immediately follow we are told of **the astounding things Elijah brought to pass by his prayers**, how he shut up heaven for three years and six months so that there was not a drop of rain for that long period; and the Old Testament account tells us that not only was there not a drop of rain, but furthermore, not a drop of dew (1 Kings 17:2).

And then when the proper time had come **Elijah "prayed again, and heaven gave rain,** and the earth brought forth her fruit. Or, as Mr.. Moody used to put it in his graphic way, "Elijah locked up heaven for three years and six months, and put the key in his pocket."

PRAYER WILL SAVE OTHERS

Turn to the first Epistle of John, chapter five, verse 16: "If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and God will give him life-for them that sin not unto death."

This is one of the most remarkable statements in the whole Bible on the subject of prayer and its amazing power. The statement of this verse is not only, most remarkable, it is also most cheering and most gladdening. God here tells us that prayer will not only bring blessing to the one who prays, but that it will bring the greatest of all blessings, even the blessing of eternal life, to others, to those for whom we pray.

Yes, yes "the supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working" and if we would only pray more and be more sure that we had met the conditions of prevailing prayer, we would see multitudes more of men and women flocking to Jesus Christ.

PRAYER AND REVIVALS

The history of the Church of Jesus Christ on earth has been largely a history of revivals. Humanly speaking the Church of Jesus Christ owes its very existence today to revivals. Time and time again the Church has seemed to be on the verge of utter shipwreck; but just then God has sent a great revival and saved it. There have been revivals without much preaching: there have been revivals with absolutely no organization; but there has never been a mighty revival without mighty praying.

Take the great revival that so marvelously blessed our whole nation in 1857. How did that revival come about? A humble city missionary in the City of New York, named Landfear, became greatly burdened because of the state of the Church, and he got hold of two other men who were like-minded and they three began to pray for a revival. Then they opened a daily noon-meeting for prayer and invited others.

These meetings were very poorly attended at first. On one occasion, if I remember correctly, there were only two persons present, and I think that on one occasion there was only one person present, this humble city missionary himself.

But soon the interest began to deepen and large crowds began to flock to the meetings for prayer. Such throngs came that it became necessary to appoint other prayer-meetings, and have been told, and I think correctly told, that after a while prayer-meetings were held every hour of the day and night in New York city, and not only the churches were used for prayer-meetings but theatres and other places of public resort, and these places were crowded with praying men and praying women.

THE '59 REVIVAL IN IRELAND

The news of what God was doing in 1857 in America spread to the North of Ireland, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland sent a Commission to America to study the work and to come back and report. When they came back they gave to the next General Assembly a very glowing report of what was being done in America. People began to pray that Ireland might also have a similar visitation from God.

Four young men in the little town of Kells, in the North of Ireland, banded themselves together and met every Saturday night for prayer for a revival. They were humble men, one of them was a farmer, one was a blacksmith, one was a school teacher, and I do not recall what the fourth was, but I know he was in some humble sphere of life.

When Mr. Alexander and I were holding meetings in London, and God was working there in great power, one of these four men, at that time living in Glasgow, sent his grandson down to London to consult with Mr. Alexander and myself and to observe the work and bring back a report to him as to whether it was a real work of God or not.

Let me tell you how the revival came to Coleraine. I know something about that, because when Mr.. Alexander and I were in Belfast, Ireland in 1903, they were about to celebrate at Coleraine the forty-third anniversary of how the revival came to Coleraine, and they sent a committee down to Belfast to invite Mr.. Alexander and myself to go up and celebrate the anniversary of the coming of the revival, as it was given by Rev. William Gibson, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland for 1860, in his book, "The Year of Grace." It was reported on a certain day in Coleraine, that three young men were coming to Coleraine that evening to hold an open-air meeting in the market-place.

15,000 IN OPEN AIR MEETINGS

At the appointed hour the ministers of the city went down to the market—place of curiosity to see what was done. To their amazement the saw the people pouring into the market-place from every quarter until there were no less than fifteen thousand people gathered together in the market-place. The ministers looked at one another inbewilderment and dismay and said, "We must preach, these young men can never deal with a vast crowd like this."

So they put up four pulpits at the four comers of the market place and a preacher ascended each pulpit. They had not been preaching long when a very solemn awe fell upon the entire throng, and soon in one section of the market-place there was a loud cry, and a man fell to the ground under such overwhelming conviction of sin that he could not stand on his feet. He was carried to the Town Hall that was not ye completed.

Soon a cry arose from another part of the market-place and another man fell under the power of conviction of sin, and he too was taken to the Town Hall; then another, and then another, and then another fell in different parts of the market-place until conviction became so general that the meeting broke up and the ministers adjourned to the Town Hall to deal individually with stricken souls. The Presbyterian minister who tells the incident says, that he was in the Town Hall all night dealing with souls overwhelmed with deep conviction of sin.

When the morning dawned, this minister tells us, he started for his home, but as he went up the street he found people standing on their doorsteps waiting for him to pass, because there were people under conviction of sin in their homes, and they wanted to invite him in to deal with them. He went into one home after another, and there were so many to deal with that **the sun had set before he reached his own home.** The whole town of Coleraine was so transformed and so impressed that in completing the Town Hall they put in an inscribed tablet dedicating the hall to the memory of the revival.

PRAYING THROUGH

I think it was at the close of the week of prayer in January, 1901, that Miss Strong, Superintendent of Women of the Bible Institute of Chicago, came to me and said, "Why not keep up these prayer meetings at least once a week after the week of prayer is over, and pray for a world-wide revival?"

This suggestion approved itself to the Faculty and we appointed a prayer-meeting every Saturday night from nine to ten o'clock (after the popular Bible Class was over) at which people could gather to pray for just one thing - a world-wide revival. Three or four hundred gathered every Saturday night for that purpose, and God gave to us great liberty and great expectation in prayer.

Soon we began to hear of the working of God in Japan and other lands, and yet the work was not as general as we wanted to see. People would come to me and to my colleague who was most intimately associated with me in the conduct of the meetings, and ask, "Has the revival come?" We replied, "No, not as far as we know." "When is it coming?" "We do not know." "How long are you going to keep praying?" "Until it comes."

TWO MEN FROM AUSTRALIA

After we had been praying for some months two men from far away Australia appeared in our lecture room. After they had been attending the lectures for some time, they asked for a private conversation with me. They told me that in leaving Australia they had been commissioned to go to England, to Keswick and other places and to other gatherings in America, and select someone to invite to Australia to conduct an evangelistic campaign.

They said further that they had both agreed upon me: would I go? I replied, "I do not see how I can leave Chicago. I have the Bible Institute to look after, and also the Chicago Avenue Church (the Moody Church), and I do not see how I can possibly get away from Chicago. "Well," they said, "you are coming to Australia."

Some months passed by and I was in a Bible Conference in St. Louis and I received a letter from Australia asking me to cable' my acceptance of their invitation, and that they would at once cable me the money to come. I laid the matter before the Conference and asked them to pray over it, and withdrew from the Conference in order to be alone in prayer. And God made it clear that I should go, and I so cabled them.

When Mr.. Alexander and I reached Australia we found that there was a group of about ten or twelve men who had been praying for years for a great revival in Australia. They had banded together to pray for "the big revival," as they called it in their prayers, to pray for the revival no matter how long it took.

The group was led by the **Rev: John McNeil.** The author of "*The Spirit-Filled Life,*" but he had died-before we reached Australia. A second member of the group, **Rev. "Allan Webb,** died the first week of our meetings in Melbourne: He had come to Melbourne to assist in the meetings, and died on his knees in prayer.

THE BIG REVIVAL

A third member of the group, even before we had been invited to Australia, had been given a vision of great crowds flocking to the Exposition Hall, people hanging on to the loaded street cars wherever they could; and when that vision was fulfilled he came a long distance to Melbourne just to see with his own eyes what God had revealed to him before.

We also found that a lady in Melbourne had read a book on Prayer and had been very deeply impressed by one short sentence in the book, "pray through," and that she had gone to work and had organized prayer-meetings all over the city before we reached the place; indeed, we found when we reached Melbourne that there were seventeen hundred neighborhood prayer-meetings being held every week in Melbourne. We remained in that city four Weeks.

The first two weeks the meetings were held by many different pastors and evangelists in some forty or fifty different centres throughout the city, though meetings for the whole city were held at one o' clock, two o'clock and three o'clock each day in the Town Hall.

In the four weeks, eight thousand, six hundred and forty two persons made a definite profession of having accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. And when we went back to Melbourne some months later and held a meeting of the converts, six thousand of them were present at that meeting; most of whom had ahead y joined the Church; and almost all those who had not united with the Church as yet, promised to do so at once.

The report of what God had done in Melbourne spread not only all over Australia; but to India, and England and Scotland and Ireland, and resulted in a wonderful work of God in the leading cities of England, Scotland and Ireland, and the whole world-wide work was the outcome of the prayer-meetings held in Chicago, and of the prayers of the little group of men in Australia.

THE WELSH REVIVAL

The great Welsh revival in 1904, of the beginning of which I was an eye-witness, came in a similar way. Mr. Alexander and I had been invited to Cardiff, Wales for a month's mission. The announcement that we were going there was made about a year before we went, and prayer began to go up all over England, Scotland and Wales, that God would send a revival not only to Cardiff, but to all Wales.

When we reached Cardiff we found that for almost a year they had been holding a prayer-meeting from six to seven every morning in Penarth, a suburb of Cardiff, praying for a great revival. For the first two weeks or so things dragged.

Great crowds came and there was - great enthusiasm in the singing, but we could not get the people to do personal work. Then we appointed a day of fasting and prayer, and the day was observed in other parts of Wales as well as in Cardiff.

In one place **Seth Joshua**, who was afterwards so greatly used in the revival, was the leading figure and had charge of the meeting, and wrote me a most glowing and cheering account of what God had done in that place on that day. I think it was on that very day that he was kneeling beside Evan Roberts, and as he prayed the power of God fell upon Evan Roberts.

The power of God came down in Cardiff in such a wonderful way that when Mr. Alexander and I were compelled to leave at the end of the month in order to keep an engagement in Liverpool, the meetings went right on without us and they went on for one whole year meetings every night for a whole year, and multitudes were converted. From Cardiff the fire spread up and down the valleys of Wales.

THE POWER OF GOD FELL

Soon after we had reached Liverpool, the next city that we visited, I received a letter from the minister who was Secretary of our mission in

Cardiff, in which he said that his assistant had gone out the preceding Sunday night up one of the valleys of Wales and that **as he preached the power of God fell on him and one hundred persons were converted while he was preaching.** The fire spread over the entire country under Evan Roberts and others , and **it is said that over one hundred thousand souls were converted in twelve months.**

Oh, that is what we need more than anything else today, in our own land and in all lands, a real mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God. The most fundamental trouble with most of our present –day so called revivals is that they are man-made and not God sent. They are worked up by man's cunningly devised machinery - not prayed down.

Oh, for an old-time revival, a revival that is really of the Pentecostal pattern; for that revival was born of a fourteen days prayer meeting. But let us not merely sigh for it; let us cry for it, cry to God, cry long and cry loud if need be, and then it will surely come.

"YE HAVE NOT, BECAUSE YE ASK NOT"

These seven words contain the secret of the poverty and powerlessness of the average Christian, of the average minister, and of the average Church. "Why is it," many a Christian is asking, "that I make such poor progress in my Christian life? Why do I have so little victory over sin? Why do I win so few souls to Christ? Why do I grow so slowly into the likeness of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?" And God answers in the words of our text —"Neglect of prayer. You have not, because you ask not."

"Why is it," many a minister is asking, "that I see so little fruit from my ministry? Why are there so few conversions? Why does my church grow so slowly? Why are the members of my church so little helped by my ministry, and built up so little in Christian knowledge and life?" Again God replies. "Neglect of prayer. You have not, because you ask not."

"Why is it," both ministers and churches are asking, "that the Church of Jesus Christ is making such slow progress in the world today? Why does it make so little headway against sin, against unbelief against error in all its forms? Why does it have so little victory over the world, the flesh, and the Devil? Why is the average Church member living on such a low plane of Christian living? Why does the Lord Jesus Christ get so little honour from the state of the Church today?" And, again, God replies: "Neglect of prayer. You have not, because you ask not."

When we read the only inspired church history that 'was ever written, the history of the Church in the days of the Apostles as it is recorded by Luke (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) in the Acts of the Apostles, what do we find? We find a story of constant victory, a story of perpetual progress.

20,000 CHRISTIANS IN PRAYER GROUPS

Mr. George T.B. Davies says, "It was nothing less than a great volume of prayer that sent Dr. R.A. Torrey and Mr. C. M. Alexander sweeping round the world like a gale from heaven." Their meetings in Melbourne, Australia, were preceded by 1,700 cottage prayer meetings. No wonder multitudes were saved. For three years they held meetings in Great Britain and again the cities were shaken by the power of God as in the days of Moody and Sankey. The very atmosphere of heaven was in the meetings.

"And what was the secret of it all? Dr. Torrey told me that during their three years of meetings **20,000 people were banded together in Prayer Groups praying for their meetings."**

A FINAL THOUGHT

Leonard Ravenhill said, "The man that can get people praying will usher in the greatest revival the world has ever seen." I pray what you just read will light your heart on fire to be a man or woman that stands in the gap and says, "Here am I Lord." Let us Pray!