THE PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER

Ezekiel 36:37 says, "Thus says the Lord Jehovah, Moreover for this I will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock."

Jeremiah 29:10-14 says, "Thus says Jehovah, When seventy years are fulfilled for Babylon, I will visit you and establish My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think about you, declares Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not for evil, to give you a latter end and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you; and you will seek Me and find Me if you search for Me with all your heart; and I will be found by you, declares Jehovah. And I will turn your captivity and gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, declares Jehovah, and bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile."

We have seen the meaning of prayer; now we come to the principles of prayer. We will point out ten most important principles of prayer. Any good prayer, any prayer of worth, any prayer that is up to the standard, must be in accordance with these principles.

PRAYER NEEDING TO BE INITIATED BY GOD, NOT BY MAN

Concerning the principles of prayer, we must first see that prayer should not be initiated by man but by God. Any prayer, even our confession of sins before God, should be the result of God's working within us. When we pray to confess our sins before God, apparently we are confessing our sins to God according to ourselves, but actually it is God within us initiating such a prayer. Unless the Holy Spirit works within us, we can never go before God to confess our sins. Whenever a person goes before God to confess his sins, it is because the Spirit has initiated this matter in him—urging him, moving him, and causing him to sense his offenses and his need to confess them. In fact, every kind of prayer that we pray should be initiated by the Spirit of God.

If you search through all the experiences of prayer, you will discover that every such experience that can be counted as prayer before God is never initiated by man according to himself but by the Holy Spirit within man. Any prayer that is started by man on his own is not in accordance with this principle. This is a very serious matter. Unless our prayers are initiated by God from within us, you and I can never have a prayer before God that is acceptable to Him or that touches His intent and even touches His throne. Thus, strictly speaking, any prayer that is not initiated by God within man but is merely of man's own initiation cannot be counted as prayer before God. If we bear this principle in mind, we will be greatly corrected and trained in the matter of prayer.

PRAYER BEING GOD PASSING THROUGH MAN AND THROUGH HIS PRAYER

A prayer that measures up to the standard is surely one in which God passes through it. Prayer is not only initiated by God, but God also passes through it. While you are praying, God passes through you and also through your prayer.

This is somewhat like a person speaking in front of a microphone. Electricity passes through the words he speaks. The sound that is heard by those who sit afar has the passing through of the electricity. If he did not use a microphone, his speaking would be purely words without the passing through of the electricity. In a sense, it is the same with our prayers. Sometimes it seems that we go before God to pray, but actually it is just we ourselves who are praying—without God passing through. But there are also times when we deeply feel that every sentence in our prayer has God in it—God has actually passed through our being. Ordinarily when this condition exists, we say that our prayer has touched God or that it has touched the presence of God. But this does not precisely describe such an experience. It would be more accurate to say that God has passed through our prayer as well as through our being. Brothers and sisters, please review your past experiences. You will see that every prayer of real value that you prayed before God was one in which God passed through you—God's essence, even God Himself, was in your prayer, flowing through your prayer and also through your being.

PRAYER BEING MAN AS WELL AS HIS PRAYER PASSING THROUGH GOD

Prayer is not only God passing through us, but every time we prayed an effective prayer that touched God as well as His throne, we also felt that in such prayer we were walking in God, and even the words of our prayer were spoken in God. Both we, the praying ones, and the words of our prayer passed through God. Because of these two aspects of passing through, when we pray, we often sense God's presence more strongly than at any other time. In our daily living, God's presence is with us in the closest, deepest, strongest, and sweetest way when we have had really good prayer. While we pray, on the one hand, it is God passing through our being, and on the other hand, it is also we, our being, passing through God. On the one hand, it is God passing through the words of our prayer, and on the other hand, it is the words of our prayer passing through God. Hence, at such a time of prayer we can sense a very strong flavor of God's presence. Let me say this simple word again; prayer is God walking in us as well as we having our activities in Him. Once we lose such a sense in our prayers, we must immediately adjust ourselves, for we have departed from this particular principle of prayer and have a problem before God.

PRAYER NEEDING TO BE GOD AND MAN, MAN AND GOD, PRAYING TOGETHER

Prayer is not only a matter of God and man's mutual passing through but also a matter that God and man do together. I admit that such a saying is seldom heard among Christians. Very few people would tell you that when you pray, you must pray together with God. But in reality, many who pray well have this experience. As we have mentioned in chapter 1, a good prayer is Christ in you praying to the Christ on the throne.

I would like to point out one thing. Take the example of one who ministers the Word properly. The words that he speaks are not only his speaking but also the utterance of the Spirit. When such a condition exists, while you are listening, you really feel that you are touching God. It not only causes you to be stirred, but it also causes you to touch God. This not only applies to ministering the Word but also to the matter of prayer. When you pray with the brothers and sisters, such a condition may exist. While someone is praying very properly, you may sense that you have touched God in the words of his prayer and that his utterances are God's coming forth. When we meet this kind of situation, we say that his spirit has come forth. Actually, it is God coming forth from him, for it is not only he praying there but God and he praying together. God is praying in him, and he is praying in God. He really can say, "My prayer is God and I, I and God, praying together." We have had this kind of experience in the past; however, since it had not been pointed out adequately, there was not the thorough knowledge concerning this matter. Now we can point out from our experience that a prayer that is up to the standard is not only God passing through man and man passing through God but also man and God, God and man, praying together.

PRAYER BEING NOT FOR MAN HIMSELF BUT FOR GOD

A prayer that is up to the standard must be one in which man is not praying for himself or for others but for God. Even when we pray for sinners to be saved or for the brothers and sisters to be revived, we ought to be praying for God. In the Bible there are many examples of such prayer. For example, in Daniel 9, Daniel prayed that God would hear and be gracious to Daniel and the people not for their sake but for "Your own sake" (v. 19).

Brothers and sisters, what then is prayer? The highest meaning of prayer is that it is a means by which God may gain His authority and benefit. Apparently, you may be praying for many people, for many things, or for yourself, but you must be able to go to the root of the matter and say, "O God, all these prayers are for Your sake. Whether or not my prayers are answered is of very little significance, but Your authority and benefit in these matters are of immense importance. Therefore, although I am praying for these people, events, and matters, actually my prayer is for Your sake. The same is true when I pray for the church. Whether the church is cold or hot, good or bad, dead or living—these are of small concern compared to whether or not Your plan, Your testimony, and Your authority can benefit and gain their rightful places. Therefore, I am not praying for the revival of the church but

for Your authority and benefit." Brothers and sisters, I know for a fact that if we pray in accordance with these first four principles, our prayer will surely be one through which God may gain His authority and benefit. Obviously, if this transpires, the church will be revived.

May the Lord cover me with His blood and allow me to share something from my own experience. There were quite a few times when I suffered want in material things and necessities. The moment I went to pray concerning these things, I was immediately put to the test. As I knelt down before God, there was an asking within: "Are you praying for yourself, or are you praying for God's sake?" Whenever there was such an asking within, I prostrated myself before God and said to Him, "O God, if it were for myself, it would not matter if I suffered poverty and starvation even unto death, but Your authority and benefit are involved. Although I am asking for some material things from You, it is still not for my own sake but for Your sake. If You would rather let Your authority and benefit suffer loss, my poverty and hunger are insignificant matters." You see, this is a proper prayer.

I know that when some brothers and sisters pray for their necessities, they are usually not so brave and strong. Instead, the moment they kneel down, they would shed tears and pray, "O God, have pity on me. I have nothing to eat, I have nothing to wear, I have no place to live; I beg You, have pity on me." This kind of prayer is pitiful because it is altogether for yourself. Therefore, in asking God for material things, we may have two vastly different motives—for God's sake or for ourselves.

Let me ask you, brothers and sisters, what if your child should get sick today and you go to pray for him. In your prayer could you say to God, "O God, my child is sick, please heal him; yet my prayer is not for my own sake but for Your sake"? Could you pray such a prayer? Or would you pray feeling that your child is so lovely that you wonder what you would do if he were to die and, therefore, shed tears, earnestly and mournfully begging God to heal him. If so, I can boldly say that although your prayer is fervent; it is not in God but altogether in yourself. Your earnest imploring does not pass through God, nor does it allow God to pass through you; moreover, it is not God and you, you and God, praying together. Instead, it is purely you yourself praying before God. But there are some who have learned the lesson and have received guidance so that when they pray for the healing of their child, they can also say before God, "O God, this is not for my sake but for Your sake; this is not my business but Your business. Not only when this one child is ill, but even if all my children were sick and all would die, it is Your business, not mine."

Brothers and sisters, you must touch this deep and tremendous principle and measure your prayers by it. Then you will discover, even in such a divine matter as prayer, how much you are still filled with yourself and how little you have passed through God's purification. Whether it is in the intention, the motive, or the expectation of your prayer, there is mixture within you. Yes, you are praying to God, but in your heart you are praying wholly on your own and for your own sake. Therefore, you must be dealt with by God until one day you become able to say, "O God, I am praying not for myself but for Your sake. In my motive, intention, and expectation there is no place for me; rather, everything is for Your sake."

If we would learn such a lesson, we would no longer need to implore God or beg for His pity; instead, we would be able to pray bravely and strongly, for we would be praying not for ourselves but for God's sake. I very much like this word that Daniel uttered: "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! Do not delay, for Your own sake" (Dan. 9:19). Without a doubt, Daniel was one who passed through God and allowed God to pass through him. He was also one who prayed with God and allowed God to pray with him. Hence, he could pray, "O Lord, hear...for Your own sake." This is a very basic principle.

PRAYER BEING THE EXPRESSION OF GOD'S INTENTION

Every proper prayer is also man speaking forth the intention of God. Yes, it is you who are speaking, but it is God who is expressing His heart's intent. Your words are the expression of God's intention. For example, you may pray, "O God, forgive me of my sins." This word expresses God's desire to forgive you of your sins. Therefore, true prayers do not express our ideas; rather, they express God's intention through our utterance.

We have said earlier that every prayer which is up to the standard is not initiated by man but by God. This initiation means that God anoints His intention into man. After man receives this intention, he converts it into

words and utters them to God. This is prayer. Therefore, when you pray for the salvation of your relatives and friends, if your prayer is proper, you ought to believe that in the universe God has the intention to save that particular relative or friend of yours. This intention of God could never be expressed or completed by God Himself. This is a law. God desires that all men be saved; this is His intention. But if no one prays for all men, then they cannot be saved. Therefore, unless you pray for your relative or friend and thus express God's desire, His intention cannot be done, and your relative or friend cannot be saved. Hence, when we go before God to pray, we should not immediately pray according to our own ideas, for this kind of prayer is usually initiated by ourselves and not by God. When we pray, we must first be quiet before God, fellowship with Him, and allow Him to anoint His intention into us; thus our prayer can express God's intention.

PRAYER BEING GOD'S INTENTION
ENTERING INTO MAN'S INTENTION

Every proper prayer is also the entering of God's intention into man's intention. A person who prays this way must be one who regularly draws near to God, allows God to gain him, and lives in God, thus affording God the opportunity to put His desire into him. Originally, it was God's intention, but now it enters into man and becomes man's inner intent. For example, as mentioned earlier, you may be praying for a certain relative or friend to be saved. While praying, you eventually begin to express God's desire to save that particular person. This could only have occurred because you were one who drew near to God. At a certain point, while you were drawing near to God, God put His intention to save that particular relative or friend into you; thus, His desire became your desire. Therefore, when you prayed for this matter, it was as if you were expressing your desire, but actually, it was His very desire being expressed.

For this reason many times when people requested us to pray for them, we could not accept their request, because we know that proper prayers before God must not be according to our own decision but according to the burden that we receive from God when we contact Him and touch Him. Hence, at the outset of our praying, we cannot bring others' affairs with us and pray for them.

Because of this, before we open our mouth to pray for some matters, we need to have a considerable length of time to open our being before God. No one who knows how to pray can go before God and immediately open his mouth to pray. Rather, he is one who daily carries with him a spirit of prayer, is silent before God, does not say much, and does not have many suggestions. He prays as God's intentions are anointed into him one by one. Therefore, prayer is also God's intention entering into man's intention.

PRAYER BEING GOD'S HEART'S DESIRE
PASSING THROUGH MAN AND RETURNING TO GOD

Every proper prayer is uttered not with words conceived in man's mind but with words issuing from the particular burden within. Where does that burden come from? It comes from the fact that God's intention is being anointed into us through the Spirit and thus becomes our intention. Based upon this intention and burden that we sense within us, we go before God to pray. Therefore, we can say that our prayer is God's intention coming out of God, passing through us, and going back again to Him.

PRAYER BEING THE DISCHARGING
OF OUR BURDEN BEFORE GOD

In a proper prayer you should always feel very much burdened at the beginning but very light at the end. If at the beginning of your prayer you are indifferent and at the end you are still indifferent, if you are neither burdened nor light, if it seems to make no difference whether you pray or not, you know that your prayer is not up to the standard. A prayer that matches the standard must be one in which you first draw near to God. While you draw near, an intention enters into you that becomes your burden, making you feel the need to go before God to pour

out your heart and discharge your burden. Then, after you have prayed adequately, you immediately feel light within; the burden having been discharged. If this condition does not exist, your prayer is not quite proper.

For an illustration, let us use the story of the salvation of Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission. His biography tells us that when he was around fifteen or sixteen years old, on the day of his salvation his mother was visiting a relative seventy to eighty miles away. In the afternoon she felt a desperate burden concerning her son's salvation. Hence, she locked herself in a room and prayed before God, pouring out her heart's desire. She prayed until the burden within her was gone, and she felt rather light and free. Then, knowing that God had answered her prayer, she thanked and praised God. While his mother was praying, Hudson Taylor noticed in his father's reading room a gospel tract that contained this phrase: the accomplished work of Christ. This simple word touched him and compelled him to receive the Lord as his Savior with his whole heart. After a short while, when his mother came home, Hudson Taylor went to the door to meet her, telling her that he had good news for her. But his mother embraced him with a smile, saying, "My son, I already knew some time ago and have been rejoicing over your good news for two weeks."

In this story we can see that, first, God's intention was to save Hudson Taylor. At that moment his mother was looking to the Lord and was quiet before God. Thus, God gained the opportunity to put His intention into the mother, making it her inner burden, which she poured out before Him. Ultimately, this burden was completely discharged before the throne of God, and God then came in to bring this prayer to pass.

This illustration should convince us that this prayer not only caused Hudson Taylor to be saved; it also caused the praying mother to enter more deeply into God and to be gained by God in a deeper way. We cannot tell exactly how much the mingling between man and God in her deepened after that prayer. Moreover, this was not just a matter of a soul being saved. It involved the immeasurably great matters of the authority and benefit that God gained through Hudson Taylor. This should be the result of a proper prayer.

THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER BEING TO GLORIFY GOD

A proper prayer is not to cause man to have the enjoyment in his accomplishment or in the result but to cause God to gain one hundred percent of the glory. Yes, it is you who prayed, and it is God who answered your prayer and brought it to pass, but you should not have any place in this. If after a prayer has been fulfilled, you have any place in it, then you ought to know that there is something wrong with your prayer—you have not as yet thoroughly learned the lessons of prayer. Therefore, this principle is very important.

In Jeremiah 29 God said, "When seventy years are fulfilled for Babylon, I will visit you and establish My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think about you, declares Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not for evil, to give you a latter end and a hope" (vv. 10-11). These words proclaimed God's intention toward the Israelites; these were things that He intended to do. But let me ask you, brothers and sisters, how could God carry out His intention? According to God's principle, His intention must be carried out through man's prayer on earth. Without man's prayer, God's desire cannot be fulfilled. What kind of person can be used by God to pray for His intention? There is only one kind—a person who lives before God, waits before Him, and allows God to do the initiating. When you read the book of Daniel, you see that Daniel was one who really did not initiate anything before God. He waited before God, caring only for God, not for himself. Thus, he touched and understood this particular intention of God and learned that God would turn again the captivity of the children of Israel after seventy years were fulfilled. Since Daniel's desire matched God's intention, he fasted and poured out this desire before God in prayer. Thus, God's heart's desire and intention came out from God, went into Daniel, passed through him, and eventually returned to the throne of God. Then the throne of God took immediate action concerning the situation. This action was not at all for Daniel's enjoyment or glory but for God to gain the glory. This is a very meaningful matter. Although Daniel prayed for others that God would cause them to return, Daniel himself did not go back. He may have returned eventually, but there is no clear record of that in the Bible. It seems that he had asked for one thing and God brought it to pass, yet he himself did not participate in the result.

Therefore, concerning the principles of prayer, your whole being from head to toe must be put aside. Your being does not have much place in prayer. In the beginning it is God who initiates, in the process you are but one who cooperates with God, and ultimately it is for the glory of God. This is real prayer—man being united with God

and cooperating with Him on earth, allowing Him to express Himself and accomplish His purpose through man. It is based upon this that we have these ten principles. By the test of these ten principles, you can tell what kind of prayer you are praying. If all these ten principles apply to your prayers, your prayers before God are pure with not much mixture of self in them. But today how few people on earth can pass the test of these ten principles? This requires a very strict learning of the lessons. May God be merciful to us that we may strongly pursue this matter.

(Lessons on Prayer, Chapter 2)