

Living Prayer

By Glenn Clark

The first function of a living prayer is to make all life alive by filling it with the wonder of the presence of God. This prayer that brings one into the presence may vary from the most abstract of meditations, as in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, to the most intimate of conversations with God over the most trivial of subjects, as in *The Game With Minutes*. It matters little what the subject of these prayers may be, or the form of meditation, just so it brings one into the presence.

A man like Edison might say, "As oil comes through the highest hills, so are the unseen forces of the universe sending these fifteen-hundred inventions through me." A man like Frank Laubach might say, "Take my hand, Father, and don't let it go as I start these undertakings." Jesus himself gave us many methods and the only test he required was, "By their fruits ye shall know them." He was not so much interested in the method as in the humility, sincerity, and love with which the method was applied. When he saw a publican beating his breast and saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he put his seal of approval on it rather than on the egotistical prayer of the Pharisee. When Jesus heard a man say "I won't" and then saw him go and *do* the request of the Father, he approved that, rather than the insincere prayer of the man who promised and did not keep his word.

A living prayer is, in short, "the soul's sincere desire, unuttered or expressed." In direct contrast to this is the ego's insincere desire. The soul and the ego within each one of us are constantly struggling for supremacy. In the Pharisee the ego was in control; in the publican the soul was supreme. There is no doubt that the cry "God be merciful to me a sinner" was a soul's sincere desire, and there is no doubt that it was answered.

A prayer that springs from the sincere wish of one who is taking into consideration the welfare of others as well as of himself, and the answering of which will resound to the glory of God and the spreading of the Kingdom is truly a soul's sincere desire.

But the final test of whether a prayer is a soul's sincere desire is whether it is accompanied by a soul's sincere *trust* in the Father to whom it is addressed. The word *desire* points in the direction of the thing prayed *for*; the word *trust* points toward the One prayed *to*. When the trust balances the desire there is power in the prayer; it then possesses a celestial dynamic symmetry that is irresistible. But how do we know for sure that we really trust? The real test of trust is the capacity to *let go*. When one can put his desire utterly in the hands of God and go off and leave it with Him, that prayer has become – as far as our human capacity permits – a perfect prayer.

But powerful as an individual prayer may be, still more powerful is a group prayer. Here the essential requirement is that there shall be no resentments, irritations, doubts, or conflicts of any kind among the group. Knowing the frailty of human nature, Jesus did not say, "The larger the number of folks that come together the more powerful the prayer will be." He said, rather, "Wherever two or three *agree* together asking in my name it shall be done." He himself found that only three of his entire twelve disciples could meet that test of "agreement" in a completely satisfactory way. But when those three did come together with him, great mountaintop experiences were theirs!

The average spiritual leader has erased his own personal ego from the picture sufficiently to let God take control of his life, or he would not be a spiritual leader. But one subtle temptation still remains – he sometimes as a sort of mistaken loyalty to the cause or group that he represents that tempts him to insist that his particular brand of religious expression be given precedence over all others. We sometimes forge that Jesus' parable about taking back seats in the synagogue applies to our little band of fellow worshippers, as well as to ourselves.

We must decrease that he may increase. That is the key to the secret of power in corporate prayer. When a group of men, known as authorities on the subject of prayer and the deepening of the spiritual life, come together and lose themselves in one another, and immerse themselves in corporate prayer until they become virtually invisible even to each other – that is an experience of heaven itself. That is Pentecost, as everyone who has experienced it can testify.

Those who read these lines may find themselves thinking, “I can understand all this about ‘agree together’ but what did Jesus mean by ‘ask in my name’? Just as “where two or three agree together” means praying in mystic partnership with our brothers, so “ask in my name” means praying in similar mystic partnership with our Christ. We experience oneness with our brothers on earth through the spirit of love, humility, and trust. We may experience the same sense of oneness with Christ in heaven through the expression of the same virtues. Humility, love, and trust are the essential ingredients for all-powerful group prayer.

When a group prays in this spirit no one thinks that he alone does all the praying. He knows that true corporate prayer is like the Brooklyn Bridge, so constructed that the weight of a man on one trestle is equally distributed to all the rest. And as those walking on a bridge are not responsible to hold up the bridge – it is the function of the bridge rather to hold *them* up – so those who pray do not have to hold up the prayer. The very act of agreeing together creates the power by which the prayer holds them up.

The test of trust in an individual prayer is one’s capacity to “let go and let God.” The test of trust in a group prayer – “where two or three agree” – is one’s capacity to let go and let one’s friends let God. The test of trust in a prayer offered “in Jesus’ name” is one’s capacity to let go and let God himself do the “letting.” Think of what that implies: When *we* let the power of God into a situation the power is great. But when

God lets himself into a situation the power is greater still. It is wonderful beyond the power of words to express.

As a lad, I spent one summer on a Wyoming ranch. The owner of the ranch allowed me to open the sluice gates one morning and let the water from the hills flow in and irrigate the gardens. It was a new task to me and the arrangement of sluice gates proved as puzzling as the Cretan labyrinth. In spite of all my efforts and maneuverings, I could manage to get water only into the lower levels of the garden. Finally the owner came, and with a benignant smile opened the sluice gates higher up than those I had found, and let the water cover *all* the areas of the garden. That taught me that my “letting” is very feeble indeed, and the “letting” of my friends is only a limited affair also, compared to the “letting power” of the Owner of the garden himself. God alone knows all the gates, all the avenues, all the hidden channels by which the power from the high reservoirs may enter our lives and bless us. Tremendous power for meeting all the real needs of mankind can be released when we let go and let God let!

To “agree together,” then, means to have perfect trust in our friends. To “ask in my name” means to have perfect trust in Christ. To “be still and know that I am God” means to have perfect trust in God. And the way to express that triple trust is in the following sequence, which may sound as simple as a Mother Goose rhyme about the house that Jack built, but it is a sequence that illustrates the power in the prayer that Christ built:

1. When praying alone, let go and let God.
2. When praying with a group, agree together in letting go and letting each other let God.
3. When praying in Christ’s name, whether alone or in a group, let go and let Christ let God.
4. Finally, as you pray in the name of Christ, whether alone or in a group, be still and know that God to whom you are praying is a God of love, the giver of every

good and perfect gift. The moment you completely let go and let God do the letting, he will open the sluice gates and let all the power of heaven itself come into you life.

Your place in a prayer of this kind is similar to the position of the first domino in a row of dominoes set upright a fraction of an inch apart. When the first domino topples, it brings down the next, and so on clear to the end of the line. Unless you start a sequence of letting go at your end with perfect trust, the perfect performance will not follow through.

How much more powerful this group prayer can become by increasing the number of people who participate is an open question. The more links in a pipe, the more danger of leakage there will be. But I believe that if a sufficient number of people would draw apart awhile in retreats or camps and study and practice the art of prayer for an adequate period of time in this letting-go fashion, the problems of the world would be solved better and quicker than by any other known method. If corporate prayer continued long enough, wars and the causes of wars would soon cease.

I once witnessed an interesting example of this. Four spiritual camps offered themselves as laboratories of prayer for world needs. Following the example of Christ, who gave all his teachings in parable form, the camps relied upon the "Parable of the Pontoon" to furnish the leverage by which their faith could be lifted to its greatest power.

If it had not been for pontoons the submarine "Squalus" that went down just off Star Island could never have been raised. There were no ships, engines, or chains strong enough to lift it to the surface. When all the energies of men were found useless, the engineers in charge adopted the energies of nature. Then easily, without strain or effort of any kind, the "Squalus" rose to the surface and was towed into port.

How was it done? Four pontoons loaded with sand or other heavy ballast were sunk beside the submerged ship. Chains connecting these pontoons were passed beneath the "Squalus." Then the ballast was released from the pontoons and air pumped into them from a battleship riding on the waves above. The air pressure raised the sunken vessel.

What a perfect parable that is, especially for us in this hour of world need! What a perfect illustration of how living prayer becomes lifting prayer! The way to raise a defeated personality, or a sunken world, is for praying men to combine their efforts as these pontoons combined theirs.

The first essential step is for those who pray to become so weighted down with compassion and concern for those in need that they descend to the plane of suffering with them. Then extending their sympathy (chains) and "agreeing" together in their soul's sincere desire to lift them from this place of suffering, they "let go" their ballast, dropping all their concern, their fear, their doubt, and thus, lightened of self, they "let God" let in himself. As the air is pumped into the pontoons "from above," so the surrendered soul, when it lets go of self, *lets God send in the Holy Spirit from above.*

And as a sunken ship is raised effortlessly by the surrendered pontoons filled with air, so the sunken world may be lifted if enough persons can let go and let the Holy Spirit take complete control of the affairs of men.

Frank Laubach's dream furnishes the sinews of action and charts the steps Christians can take to help prevent World Wars. My dream is that three hundred thousand pray-ers may unite to forge chains of love that the living Christ may lift these missionaries of love, as they in turn lift [people all over the world] to freedom, understanding, and brotherhood.