

Spiritual Prayer 3: Our Need to Pray

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

There was a famous revival in the outer hebridian islands in Scotland in the 1950s. And things were cold, the churches were dead, people came to the services just because they had to and were used to coming but there was no sense of the warmth of Jesus' presence. And their lives were utterly unaffected by their worship. And four men, who had ordinary jobs -- some of them fished and some of them farmed -- began to pray all night for three nights each week. So they would do their ordinary jobs and then they would pray the whole night on three nights Monday, Wednesday, and Friday night.

And they prayed that God's Spirit would come down and would touch the people of the Hebrides and would awaken them to the reality of what God had done for them in Jesus and would begin to apply that to their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. And as they began to pray, God's Spirit began to touch their consciences and they themselves began to repent of coldness in their hearts towards God and of sins they had got used to in their own lives. And they went on praying like that for six months and then they sensed that they should invite a preacher called Duncan Campbell to begin evangelistic services in one of the local churches.

And so they prayed that God would bless and would enable Campbell to accept the invitation and they sent the letter to him. And he got it and prayed and after a long time he decided yes, God wanted him to come. And so he came and of course, they were full of enthusiasm and they had posters up all around the villages and they had a fair crowd in the church that evening. And Campbell preached and it was the deadest service he had ever been at in his life. And there was just coldness throughout the services and there was no response to what he was preaching at all, there was not even a sign of any understanding in their eyes or their hearts.

And after the service of course, these four men came up and thanked him and he said, "Do you not think you've made a mistake?" And they said, "No, we have sought God for six months and we know that we have his promise that he is going to warm the spirits of our neighbors, and our friends, and he is going to make it all live for him." And so Campbell preached the next few nights and came to the end of the week and there was no change. And he got together with them after the service and he said, "Listen, do you not think that I should go back home and you should continue to pray for this place? Perhaps we've missed God's timing and I'm willing to come back in six months or a year if you want, and then perhaps your prayers will have taken affect." And they said, "No, we are sure that God is going to move in these weeks."

And with that they all went home, him very unsettled and very uncertain about what was happening. And as he walked down the village street he saw lights in the windows of the houses and he looked in and there were people on their knees seeking God. And then he went further down the village street and there were people out in their gardens. Now, I know Scots people and we don't pray outside, we keep it quiet, but there were people out in their front gardens praying and seeking God. And that was the beginning of a mighty revival that set through those northern Hebrides of Scotland.

Now loved ones, that's what happens when people pray. That's been the same story all down through history. We in Ireland always look back to the 1859 revival which started exactly the same way. The churches were dead, the people were unexcited about Jesus, the lives were unChristlike and six

men began to pray in a little schoolhouse not 30 miles from where I was born. And they prayed for nine months and then they did the same thing. They invited a preacher to come. And of course it wouldn't have mattered which preacher had come because the Holy Spirit had already prepared the consciences and the hearts of the people and there came down a mighty conviction of sin upon them. And the 1859 revival in Ireland spread throughout the world. And there are churches in Australia and in Canada that are the result of that 1859 revival.

Now loved ones, that's the place of prayer. Prayer is the method our Father has ordained for actualizing what he has done to us all in Jesus. You see your friend who is sick has been placed by God in Jesus and the sickness was destroyed in Jesus. And with Jesus' stripes that sickness has been healed. But that can only be actualized in their physical body by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit acts in response to our prayers.

And it's the same with your relatives and mine, my brother in Ireland, the same with your brothers and sisters here, or your dad and your mum, or your children. God has placed them into Christ, he has already done everything to them that is needed but that will only be actualized in their lives by the Holy Spirit as their consciences are convicted by the Spirit of their sin and of their unbelief in what Jesus has done for them. And that will only come as the result of your prayers and mine. And that is the way the kingdom of God is brought down here to earth from that eternal position in Jesus where it has been wrought already.

Now, that's the way it works, loved ones. And so all that we do outwardly is really only a tenth part of what the kingdom of God moving on earth is about. You see that? All this preaching is alright, it's good, and it's necessary but it's powerless. And all our witnessing is good and it's necessary but it is powerless. None of us with human words or human actions can create Jesus alive in another human being. Only the Holy Spirit can do that and he does it in response to the prayers of God's children. So loved ones God has ordained that his kingdom here on earth will be created by the Holy Spirit in response to our prayers. And in so far as we pray we will see deep results of God's work in our hearts.

Now, may I point out to you that we're in a dangerous position and I suggested it to you before. There is nothing so popular in America today as Christianity. Everybody is aware that there's a charismatic movement on, everybody is aware that evangelicalism is in the White House, everybody is aware that being a Christian is not a terribly unpopular thing to be. It's pervading all of the life in our nation. And the danger is that it will remain at the shallow level that much of it is at this present time. Why do I say it? Because at this time when Christ is so popular crime has never been so popular, sin has never been so popular, and so there is a presence of a great enthusiasm outwardly and a great deal of witnessing outwardly along with a spiritual sickness and a deep immorality that has gripped our nation.

Now, you see the danger? The danger is that many people will see this Christianity and will enter into this superficial shallow, mental, and emotional understanding of what God has done for us in Jesus but will not have any of it made real in their spirits. And that's what will happen unless some of us begin to learn to pray. And you remember, that's what Paul said. He said, "I'm again in travail for you until Christ be fully formed in you." And you remember, he said the same thing to the Ephesians, he said, "I bow my knee to the Father giving thanks for you in my prayers and asking God that he may give you a spirit of revelation that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you. That you may know what is your glorious inheritance in the saints."

And so Paul knew that unless he prayed and travailed in prayer the people to whom he had preached and spoken would enter into only a mental assent to the truths that he shared and into an emotional experience of the fellowship that he had with the Father unless he prayed for them. Now loved ones, that's what's needed, we need to pray. And it's not simply because Jesus told us we are to pray and we are to ask and it will be given to us, but you can see it's because that's the only way the miracle that has been wrought in Jesus for all of us can be actualized here in our own lives. It's actualized by prayer.

Now, do witness you know, and let's all preach, and let's write, and let's live, but at the end of all that we are unprofitable servants. The real work of the Lord is prayer. Bishop Ken wrote "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow". He was an Anglican bishop. He prayed for 12 hours each day. Luther prayed for three hours each day and said, "I am so busy that I cannot afford to spend less than three hours a day in prayer." Wesley got up at four o'clock and prayed until six every day. Now, these are the men that God uses. Brainerd prayed for 16 hours every day and then preached through a drunken interpreter to primitive Indians and those Indians came to some of the highest levels of sanctification that have ever been observed. And that was because of his prayer because they could hardly understand what came through the drunken interpreter.

Now loved ones, that's why prayer is important. It's by prayer that God works his miracles. And you know, if you have found your own relationship with Jesus getting dry it is because you are not spending time in prayer with him. And many of you belong to other churches; if there's a deadness in your church it is not better Bible reading courses that you need, it isn't even a better preacher or a better minister, it isn't better music in the choir, it isn't a new method of witnessing to the outsider, it isn't learning the techniques of Kennedy's "Evangelism Explosion", it isn't going to some other great speaker. It is prayer.

Prayer will break the cold hard grip that the snow and frost of Satan has on the hearts of your dear friends and the people in your churches. Prayer will do it. And prayer is for many of us the hardest thing because we are caught in carnality. Carnality is a gross independence of God, a selfish, sinful, self sufficiency. That's what we're caught in. We think we can do it ourselves and that's the heart of sin.

And so when men and women begin to bend their great wills towards God, and spend as much time praying as they do talking, and as much time praying as they do witnessing, then God begins to believe that they really depend upon him and trust him and that they really understand that he alone can do the work. And do you see that's the heart of it? See, we keep on thinking we can do the work. We keep on thinking, "If we can only talk to that person who is going for a divorce and if we can only get them to listen to the right tape, or if we can only explain it correctly to them their hearts will change." You cannot legalize hearts and you cannot change hearts. Only God can circumcise a person's heart by the power of his Holy Spirit. And so, what we need to do is to pray and to learn to pray.

Now, even more so when you look at the world. You see, we're a privileged group here, really. I mean, probably most of us here are live Christians and yet do you see that you have nine hundred million people in China, probably almost all of whom know nothing about Jesus. And you have about six hundred and fifty million in India, many of whom are under the darkness of deception and of evil spirits and very few of whom really understand Jesus.

Now, we here have to get out to all those people. Now you examine your life and examine how you're

getting tied down with mortgages, and how you're getting tied down in jobs. And really you know, it's strange, those aren't the real ties at all because the mortgages can be shrugged off and the jobs can be changed, it's the hearts that get tied down. And examine your heart and see are you ready to go to China if it opened up? Are you ready to go to India if it were possible and live there as a child of God? You can't imagine the language so are you ready to go to Australia and live there as a child of God? Or New Zealand? Or, are you ready to go to South America and live as a child of God -- not next door to all kinds of other Christians but probably the only Christian in the street.

Now, as you answer that question I would point out in you the vast change that has to come about in people like ourselves if we're going to have any chance of touching any of that fifteen million people that are in those countries. What a vast change has to come among us if we're going to touch them. That is, if we're not going to end up having a little Christian jamboree here in the USA for the rest of our lives. Now, the only way we're ever going to get out to those millions of people is by miracles, isn't that right? I mean, even if all of us went out today, we would be a small scattering among the nine hundred million in China, among the six hundred and fifty million in India. We would be only a very small scattering. And if we're going to touch them at all it has to be by mighty miracles.

Now that's the situation that the early church was in. So I'd like you just to look at some of the incidents with me. Acts 4:13, and let's just settle down to real study loved ones as maturing children of God so I'll just assume that you can read with me for some time without going to sleep. So this was, you remember, the time when Peter and John had preached and of course had aroused hostility in the rulers. Acts 4:13, "Now when they," the rulers, "saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred with one another, saying, 'What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name.'

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.' And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old." So obviously they were a small minority facing a mighty power that was ruling the country. And the only reason in fact that they caused any ripple in the surface of the quiet of the country, was that this miracle was performed.

Now, many of us will go to China and we won't even cause a hesitation in anybody's mind unless we too are able to do something that causes them to stop and notice. Now then, do you see what happens? "When they were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them." And you can imagine being in that situation in China where the government would then forbid you to speak. "And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God," they prayed, "And said, 'Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the

earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed” – for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus.’

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” Now, that came in response to prayer and God acted in response to their prayers.

Now loved ones, that’s what you and I will be faced with. Now, do you see you won’t be faced with it if you carry on with the shallow superficial Christianity that we’re facing so much in the States today. You won’t be faced with that kind of stuff. Nobody is going to object to that because there’s nothing terribly harmful or convicting about that. But if you once begin to live like Jesus and you once begin to share in a way that cuts into people’s hearts and consciences, then you’ll find not only them opposing you but you’ll find in this country and in others that the governments will oppose you. And then the only answer is if you are mighty prayers.

In other words, if you go out on a limb for God you will find yourself out of your depth and you will find yourself facing problems that you cannot handle yourself. And actually, probably you’re already facing that but it’s just that at the moment you’re able to evade it. And probably you have fathers and mothers that are not responding to Jesus. Probably you have colleagues at work that you’ve been praying for in a kind of dilettante, periodic, desultory kind of fashion and you haven’t seen any change in them but somehow you’re able to come together like this and forget it. Forget that there is a part of your ministry that is failing.

And loved ones, what I would urge you to do is to look at those places and to see that it is God’s will that a person either receive his Son or deliberately reject his Son. But it is never God’s will that your mum, or dad, or my brother, or your sister, or your husband, or wife should fail to see the choice that is before them. And that choice is going to be brought before them by the Holy Spirit in response to your prayers. So it is interesting that it’s simply that we can avoid some of our apparent failures today by being preoccupied by the good things that are happening. But when we get into situations such as these men, we’ll find that prayer is the only thing that will turn overwhelming odds around.

Now loved ones, there are other examples in Acts about it. If you’d like to look at Acts 8:14-17, many of us know ourselves that we need the Holy Spirit, to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Many of us know friends who need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The tragedy is that we will not hold on in prayer for that to happen. We give them an Andrew Murray book, or we’ll get them to listen to a cassette, or we’ll witness to them but we will not drive through in prayer, which is the only way to bring about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

It’s Acts 8:14, “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy

Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.” And unfortunately, we are great at laying our hands on people, and we’re great at quick little instant answers, but we’re not great at what these men did before they ever laid their hands on them and that’s the praying.

Now loved ones, is it God’s will that your mum and dad, and our brothers and sisters, and our friends and colleagues should be baptized with the Holy Spirit? Well, you know it is. It’s obviously God’s will and it’s therefore his will that they should either move into that baptism with the Holy Spirit or should reject it completely. At least then you know where people are and where the Holy Spirit moves. Black is black and white is white. And loved ones, we by our prayerlessness are making black and white gray -- so that we’re all wandering together and drifting like happy old jellyfish in a mediocre kind of attitude which is more or less Christian. But only prayer will bring about decisiveness.

I would put it to you, do you not yourself get a little frustrated with the half moves that your colleagues and friends make towards God and the half moves back that they make? Are you not yourself frustrated that you’ve been witnessing to some people for so many years and there has been little or no change? Do you not get frustrated with yourself when you keep on saying, “Well, they’re a little better than they were. Well, they’re a little more interested than they were.” Do you not get tired of yourself? And of course, that kind of a response comes when there are not prayers around who will pray the Holy Spirit down upon people in such a way that clear conviction takes place.

And so you see loved ones, that God’s word always moves forward when people either accept it or reject it? It does, really. Even when God’s word is rejected, his word moves forward and prospers.

But when people hem and haw, and ho hum, and debate, and discuss, and like a little of it but don’t like the other, and make little moves and try to bluff each other that they’re all moving vaguely towards God, God’s word begins to weaken in its power and its strengthen. And that always happens where people don’t pray.

Where people don’t pray the Christian gospel is diluted and becomes a poor shadow of the power that God describes it. God says, “The gospel is the power of God.” Now, where there is no prayer the gospel is not a power it is just a debate, or a dialog, or a set of truths. But, where people pray the gospel is a power of God that changes peoples’ lives.

Now, it’s the same right through this dear book, loved ones. If you’d look at Acts 9:36, “Now there was at Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which means Dorcas or Gazelle. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him entreating him, ‘Please come to us without delay.’ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he had come, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing tunics and other garments.”

Isn’t that terrible? That’s what we do, you know. “Showing tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed; then turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, rise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa and many believed in the Lord.” You

see, where there is real prayer miracles are performed and people react definitely one way or the other.

Now, it's the same with all of us loved ones, even more with those of us who live with loved ones because all of us here live with dear ones that need to be further on in Jesus and they are living with us and we need to be further on in Jesus. And it's even more essential that we go to God in prayer for those loved ones. Otherwise, you get used to each other and you get used to accepting each other's nominal commitment to Jesus. And prayer alone will change that.

Now loved ones, just very briefly, how do you pray? Set aside a time for prayer. Do that. That's the biggest battle, having a set time. You will have every excuse under heaven and above heaven to change that time. Could I explain to you that Jesus' strength is made perfect in your weakness and it doesn't matter if you are up completely one night with no sleep at all, God will make his strength perfect in your weakness the next morning if you'll hold to the time that you've set.

Satan will use every trick to get you to postpone that prayer time for one day. All you have to do is give in on one day and the slide begins and three weeks later you find that you have no quiet time at all. Set a time when you'll pray. There is no easy time. There is no convenient time to pray, there isn't. There is no convenient time to pray. You'll find that. It doesn't matter what way you play the game, God will not let you avoid the beauty and the deliverance of his cross and he will demand that you face the cross in regard to this prayer time.

So you get up at 6:00 a.m. normally, then start getting up at 5:30 a.m. -- at least hold half an hour for prayer. Not for Bible study, half an hour for prayer. Let me start there. Then, move it to 5:00 a.m. but as you do that decide how many hours of sleep you need and go to bed early and see that if you don't go to bed early it's like saying to the Lord, "I will not pray at 5:00 in the morning." See that. Don't be silly, don't think that you can go to bed late and be faithful in the morning. You won't be. It's at night when you're going to watch the television for another ten minutes that you're saying to God, "I will not see you in the morning." Or, "Well, if I do see you I won't be able to see you very clearly because I'll be half asleep."

So decide when you're going to get up for prayer and then do it and fight it. It doesn't matter if you set three alarms, it doesn't matter if you rig the alarm up to the bed clothes so they all fly off. It doesn't matter what you do, win at that point. Win with a fixed time. Keep a fixed time. There are lots of reasons for keeping the fixed time but one obvious reason is that your physical being and your psychological being gets used to it and it just becomes easier and easier the more often you do it at the same time because the body and the personality works better in set fixed cycles. So set a time and get up for prayer, get up.

No, maybe later on when you become a very holy saint you will be able to prostrate yourself on your bed and pray but don't do it now. Get up and get down on your knees. Why? Because it's signifying to the Father, "I bow my life before you Lord and I bow my mighty will before you, and I treat you as my God." And get down on your knees and then -- adoration first. And there's no mystery about it, you just look at the One you're going to pray to and so adoration is preoccupation with God. So think of where he is, think of what he's doing. The Father will respect you if you make whatever childish attempt to set your mind on him you can. Think of him, think of what he's doing. Is he with Jesus? Is he with the angels? Can he see Hawaii? Can he see you? Can he see everything in the world?

Think of what God is doing, put your mind into his mind. Adore him, that's what adoration is. It's putting your thoughts out upon God, not that stuff, "Are you running with me Jesus?" Not that. Not preoccupation, "Well Lord, my mouth is very dry this morning. I'm not feeling very fragrant but I'd like to try and pray to you." Not that stuff. Forget yourself, we are miserable poor little worms, we're of no importance. But, the dear God will lighten us with his brightness if we put our minds upon him.

So take your mind off yourself, take your mind off of how you're feeling, of how your body is and put your mind on God. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." You can stay your mind on God. You can stay your mind on him if you want to. Use the Psalms. If you look at the last Psalms in the book you'll see that all of them are Psalms of praise and you see Psalm 150, "Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!" Psalm 149, "Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song."

Even though you're not going to do your Bible study in that half hour, use one of those Psalms of praise and speak it and then memorize one of the verses. Don't make a big deal of it so that you become preoccupied with meditation instead of prayer but get at least one of the phrases, even if it's just "praise the Lord". And then, pray that up to God, "Lord, I do praise you. I praise you for who you are. I praise you for your mightiness, and your greatness, and your kindness, and your love to me."

And at times you'll find it useful to verbalize. And even if you can't verbalize because someone else sleeps in the same room as you, you can move your lips. And sometimes it helps with those of us who are still having trouble with mental prayer, or spiritual prayer, it helps to mouth the words. And so mouth the words and praise God. And then, thank him. Thanksgiving, it's so easy because we have so much to thank him for. But, do you see the beauty of it? It's casting your mind away from yourself and it's having actual thoughts.

Now loved ones, I agree with anybody here who says, "Aren't we supposed to pray with the spirit?" Yes, but Paul says, "Pray with the spirit and pray with the mind also." And most of us are at such an adolescent stage in our spiritual lives that God needs to encourage us to use thought forms until we eventually lift into the levels of prayer that Saint Theresa and Saint Thomas Aquinas were in. But start with thoughts. So encapsulate things in thoughts, you know. Don't waft off into Transcendental Meditation, don't. Don't waft off into that vagueness, into those shades of blue and azure, and all that kind of thing. Don't.

Keep the mind, the mind is God's gift to you, encapsulate your thoughts and words and express them from God. And apart from anything else it keeps you awake, but what it does for the Father is it enables him to use your mind to prime your spirit. And as you're leading out with your mind like this your spirit is beginning to rise too and beginning to touch God's Spirit and so thank God for all that he's given you and give him thanks for the things that he's done for you. Don't forget to do that.

A lot of us ask God to answer prayers and then we never thank him for answering those prayers and so we never keep a running record with God and God knows that we don't. And he knows therefore, that we're not running a consciously developing relationship with him. He knows we wouldn't treat ordinary friends like that -- so thank God. So adore him and then thank him. And as you look upon him of course, the Holy Spirit of God begins to remind you of things that you yourself should be doing in your life. And so it's very natural to confess to him things that you see that are not

like Jesus. And be honest about it, you see.

And the importance of confession is not the verbal confession but the meaning of the word you remember, is to agree with God. It means putting up your hands saying, "Lord, I agree with you. I did speak harshly to my mother yesterday. I did speak critically to that friend at work. Lord, I agree with you. I name that as sin. Lord, I know it was wrong and Lord I repent of it now and I trust you by your Holy Spirit to lead me to the inner depths within me that caused that to come out from my mouth." But confess just plainly to God.

And then, begin your petition and always ask God for something. Ask him for something. That's what Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you." And always ask God for something definite either for your own life, maybe a spiritual gift or a physical gift, but ask him for something that you need. So if you need more of a heart for the Bible reading then, "Lord, will you give me more of a heart? Lord, will you work in my heart and cause it to be more hungry for your word?" But ask God for something definite. And, keep track of whether God answers you or not.

That's right. God wants you to hold him to his promises. God is not glorified at all by this scattershot kind of prayer where you throw up 25 prayers to him so that if three are answered you can testify to everybody, "Oh, God answers prayer." God is not glorified with that at all. The whole purpose of prayer in God's eyes is to glorify his own faithfulness to us by the answers. So ask God for definite things and always have petitions somewhere in your prayer. And, keep praying until God either answers the prayer or explains how you should change it.

And you remember that we've shared for some time that the basis for petitioning God or interceding for others is knowing God's will. So that's what you will find in your adoration of him. As you spend time with him his will will begin to reveal itself to you for different things and different people and then you can ask him for those. And then lastly, intercession – always be praying for some others.

Now, if you say to me, "Oh well brother how do you know which person you've got a burden for?" Well, normally as you go through the day you know of people who need different things. So intercede for those people, those people that you think of. Don't sit around and wait for a great burden to thump upon you. Use your mind and pray for the things that you see your friends, and your colleagues, and others need. And as you go through the list of intercessions, the Holy Spirit will lay certain ones upon you in a burdensome way and you'll know that you have a burden in your heart for those people.

And then pray until that burden is realized and never pray beyond the weight of the burden and I'll try to share a little next day about prayer and spiritual warfare in that sense. I'll keep quiet. Are there any questions? So loved ones, it's a very down to earth thing. Do you see that?

If I could put it to you, I won't ask you because I love you, but if I were to ask you to be honest and to put your hand up if you had a daily quiet time, how would you answer? Now, I won't ask you because I don't want to embarrass you, but where would your hand be? Now, that gives you a measure of how little of God's power we're experiencing. See, we're not involved in real Christianity at all, we're playing with it. And really, what I would say to you is you're getting the worst of it, you really are. You're getting all the agony without the joy.

And you're far better to begin to pray and begin to experience the power of God in your life instead

of all this ideology stuff that you're preoccupied with. And you know how many of us are arguing, "Well, that's a good way to pray." Or, "This is a good way to think of communism." Or, "This is a good way to think of that verse in the scripture about tribulation." That isn't what Christianity is about. The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

And so when you begin to pray and have a daily quiet time you begin to experience the power of God in your life and then you begin to find your life growing and progressing instead of what so many of us are experiencing up and down, up and down, round and about and a little way forward but mostly round and about, back and forward. Mostly, one step forward, two steps back and then one and a half steps forward and a half step back. And then we switch it round the next week. But that's not God's plan for us. God's plan for us is that we move forward towards the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus. And the simple way is prayer.

So will you at this very moment settle in your own heart to begin to pray? Because you're missing the best of what God has for us. In fact, I think you're just pretending, you're playing with an ideology instead of experiencing God.

Question from Audience:

To what extent in prayer is it good to be concerned with personal issues? Might it be far better just to try and get out of things that are touching you personally at the moment and trust that God will somehow work them out? Or say, "Okay I have something for you in this situation. I want you to ask me for it." But to almost kind of try and shove self interests back on the back burner?

Response from Rev. O'Neill:

Bill is saying perhaps what attitude should you take to perhaps tremendous personal problems either in career, or in relationships, or in your own inner experience that you're having? Should you dwell on it and pray about it a lot or should you concentrate on God? And I would say as a general rule Bill, you should concentrate on God because that is certainly what they did in the Acts of the Apostles while they were worshipping and praising God the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart from me Paul and Barnabas for the work which I've called them."

So obviously while people were praising God, and were worshipping, and were preoccupied with him, the Holy Spirit brought to them the answers to their problems and the guidance. And many people have said that it's in praise that the answer to prayer comes. So undoubtedly that is the way to go rather than in subjective preoccupation with introspection. I think at the same time you ought to be very real about conviction that God is bringing into your conscience about things and you ought to definitely deal with things.

And could I just point out to you loved ones, that since you were all crucified with Jesus, you can stop anything that God tells you to stop. You can. And you can do anything that God tells you to do. And so I can see Bill, that if we're playing this whole game that we all love to play, "Oh, I want to do it, but I can't. And I really want to but I somehow can't do it." That's just bluff. Ever since Jesus died we have been able to do exactly what we want and we can obey God if we really want to and chose to. And honestly loved ones, Christian life begins when your will is bent and submitted to God. And it seems to me Bill, that's the basis. We have to start at that level. Otherwise you're just playing with God if you're playing along the fringes of obedience and disobedience.

Question from Audience:

How do you intercede for people if you're not really aware of where they are right now and praying vaguely that the Holy Spirit will convict them of sin can get rather dry too.

Reply from Rev. O'Neill:

I do think you have to be absolutely honest and it seems to me that most of us, when we think of the people we live with, we have no problem; we have a thousand things we could pray for them about. And it seems to me the same with intercession. We have to come to know them and we have to go out of our way to be interested in them and in that way the Holy Spirit can lay a burden upon us for them.

I think of my brother at this moment, and even though I don't know exactly what he's doing, I know what he needs and so I have no difficulty praying. So I don't think geographical distance or even a distance in time from our last meeting means that you don't know them. I think not knowing them usually involves maybe a somewhat shallow or superficial knowledge of them which could be partly our own fault. So I think it's basic to know as much about the person, even if you have to write to them, or go out of your way to meet them.

I didn't have time to talk about intercessory prayer but you should really read "The Intercessor" by Rees Howells. He emphasizes so much the importance of real identification with a person. Really feeling what they feel and sympathizing and empathizing with what they're experiencing. Be real loved ones, be real. Prayer is not a performance, be real. It's important to be real with God and to be honest.

Let us pray. Father, we come before you because we truly believe in you and we thank you for what Jesus has done for us and Lord we want to be the kind of people that you planned us to be. So Lord will you work in all our hearts and guide us to the right books in the bookshop, or guide us to the right kind of prayer ourselves so that we become men and women of God. Lord, we see that that's what you need; you don't need children but you need young men and women who have overcome the evil one. And you need old men and women who know the Father.

And Lord, we want to be godly men and women who can be used powerfully in your world. And so Lord, we would give ourselves to you at this beginning of the new year. And Lord we intend to finish with our dilettante desultory approach to discipleship. Lord, we intend to walk on that Calvary Road straight and to bend this mighty will to your will and to allow you to begin to have your way in our own personal lives and then to use us to make a way for your will in the places we work and study. We commit ourselves to you for this purpose for your glory, Lord Jesus. And now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and ever more. Amen.