

Spiritual Prayer with Questions

Matthew 6:5-8

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I'm sure you can feel it yourselves that God is beginning to make us surprisingly strong as a group. That's exciting in one way but in another way there's a threat to it. I think it's the old threat that is the strength of Mormonism and of other sects. Their strength is a kind of soulish herd instinct by which they draw the power from the group itself. And really they are utterly laid open to the skeptical psychologist who says, "All you're doing is reinforcing each other psychologically." Whether we like it or not, as soon as God begins to make a group of his people strong that becomes a very real temptation.

And it's for that reason that God cut down the numbers of Gideon's army so that there might be no question in their minds that the victory came by the power of his Spirit and not by their great numbers. I really do believe that's often why God has to cut a body down mercilessly at times. They get proud and complacent in themselves and begin subtly to depend on each other so much that the only way God can save them from hell is simply to cut the feet under them and bring them back down to small numbers.

So I know beyond all doubt that our only safe way here is to make absolutely sure that we are not feeding on each other. It really is such a subtle thing, because we can talk about the body of Jesus, and how great it is to be in the body, and it's really the members of the body that mean so much to us. Then we protest, "Well, we are justified in having each other's love aren't we?" Yes, we are but we're to love the Creator rather than the creature and our love for each other and our enjoyment even of each other's love is always to be something that we can do without. We are always to be in the position where Jesus is most precious to us.

It's interesting that a body where the members listen to the head has a beautiful harmony and cooperation that is spiritually vital. But a body that look at each other and try to work with each other, and try to cooperate with each other, and try to fit in to each other's personalities becomes a miserable, boring, stereotype group of conformists. So there is a vast difference between a body of Jesus where all the members draw individual strength and life from the head, and a body of Jesus that eats off itself. It eventually consumes itself.

Loved ones, that really is important. I didn't plan to say all that tonight so I would imagine that God does want us to listen to it and take it to our own hearts. And I would really encourage those that come into the body at this time to be really sure that you're dealing with Jesus. In a way we who were in the body at the beginning were safer. That's because there was nothing there but a few people meeting in an old dark theater. There wasn't too much in it to attract you. In fact, there was no beauty or comeliness that we should desire him. And so that was good because we came only because of Jesus and because of his Spirit. He was the only one that kept us.

Now, it becomes just a little trickier because there are a lot of exciting things, (I think you'll agree), happening among us. And you are beautiful people -- you are. I think you are a lot of rats who need to deal with God, but you are a beautiful people. You are just dear people. You're winsome and enjoyable to be with. If I had to choose who I would live in heaven with I would choose you. And I'd imagine you'd choose all the rest of us. But because of that loved ones, it is doubly important

to really be sure that it is Jesus that is the reason for our coming and for our remaining.

That's why I'd like to share very briefly these few evenings some subjects that we won't be able to deal with when we get into the normal pattern of Sunday evenings which will presumably begin in October. I'd like to share a little tonight on spiritual prayer. I'd point out to you first of all that if Jesus really is more precious to you than everybody else then you'll want to spend more time with him than everybody else. And you can only keep protesting so long, "I love you Lord, but I don't have much time to spend with you," before Jesus begins to say, "Ho hum, I hear you." So really a test, in a sense of Jesus' place in your life, is how much time you just spend with him in prayer, and how much time do you spend with the Father?

It's very difficult to have Jesus more precious to you than everybody else unless you spend considerable lengths of time with him. I'd just point out to you the sheer human difficulty in it. If we are with each other hour, upon hour, upon hour enjoying each other's company, and talking with each other, and preoccupied with each other's personalities I'd put it to you are we not bound to begin to regard each other as more real than Jesus or our Father? It's just a sheer human psychological practice you're up against in that situation.

And so I'd ask you to think first of all before you think of praying in the Spirit or praying in some other way, just think of praying. I put it to you again, how much time do you spend talking with the Father? This Tuesday, we're going to begin a new practice in Fish. We're going to stop all the work at two o'clock and we're going to pray from two until five, for three hours, every Tuesday afternoon. I know that some of us think, "Three hours? I've managed one hour once, but three hours?" And really isn't it true that many of us respond that way because we say, "Oh, that will be glory for me, glory for me, in the sweet by and by. We'll meet God and we'll spend eternity with him. But three hours?"

And really there is some kind of problem in many of our lives just around that issue of prayer. We talk about spending eternity with the Father but we really have problems lasting one hour with him in our present everyday life. And one of the reasons we're going to go into that in Fish is that one essential of praying spiritually or spiritual prayer is time.

Now I agree with you that time is not an absolute measure of the depth of the spirituality in the prayer. I agree with that. And I agree with you that there are dear saints who have spent hours, and hours with God in prayer and then because of that can send up an ejaculatory prayer to God in a second that he is able to answer. But loved ones, it's usually because of the long hours that they have at some time or other spent with the Father. It just is a fact that it is very difficult to pray spiritually unless you're prepared to give some time to the Father.

That's part of what it means to pray in the Spirit. And you remember the verse occurs in Ephesians, "Pray in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication." Praying in the Spirit does demand time. One of the reasons it demands time is this. You come in from driving the car home in the rush hour traffic and however controlled your mind is if you haven't really begun in deep long spiritual prayer to walk in the spirit then your mind is still whirling around with all that traffic. And it continues to be preoccupied with that four, five or 10 minutes. And then you either switch the TV on, or somebody else comes into the room and your mind begins to be preoccupied with them. And so your mind jumps from one thing and one person to another thing and another person and the mind is active whirling around all the time. And when the mind is active like that it's very difficult for the spirit to really dwell in the Holy Spirit at all.

In other words, when your mind is active and restless it's very difficult for you to live in your spirit at all. Now it is possible after your spirit begins to get control of your mind. But before you've come into that place where you're able to walk in the spirit like that it's very difficult for you to switch from an active, worrying, frenzied mind to a quiet spirit in God. And so it really takes some time for the mind to run down. And if it takes time for the mind to run down think of the emotions that are so taken up with how the body feels, that are so taken up with half a dozen years of relationships with people that govern your emotions so that your emotions are able to keep on bleeping away long after the mind has stopped. And so the emotions keep surging, and surging, and surging. And it takes a very long time for you to realize that the emotions are active at all.

Your mind and your emotions go on for a long, long time after your body stops. That's why somebody has said if you start an all night prayer meeting at nine PM in the evening, about Midnight people have at last run out of their own prayers and are beginning to listen to God. Then about two o'clock God's Spirit begins to be able to pray through their spirits. Really, it just does take time.

Now I'm with you, time is not an absolute measurement of a spiritual prayer but it has something to do with spiritual praying. There is some reason loved ones, why the revival came down upon Ireland in 1859 after six men had prayed all night Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for six months. There is some reason why every time of revival such as the one that came down in the Hebrides in the 40s and 50s of this century, came after a group of men and women had prayed for a year in a similar way. It has something to do with length of prayer. And I would suggest to you that it has something to do with the depth of your own spiritual life and with your independence of the other members of the body and your utter dependence on the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of God. And you'll find yourself getting very dry and very empty here in the body if you don't begin to engage in some kind of spiritual prayer. And that really means prayer that has some time given to God that can be called time.

Now loved ones, I would just push you again then to be absolutely down to earth and honest with yourself. I don't think I have any illusions about you no more than I had about myself before God impressed this upon me over years of just agony and hardship. I would imagine there are surprisingly few of us here who spend more than an hour a day in prayer and I would imagine most of us are talking in terms of 15 minutes.

Now could you take it from me who love you and whom you've trusted in the past, and whom you've been able to check up on in some other things, it isn't enough loved ones. 15 minutes gets over to God the things that you want to say to him and it begins to touch a little those unpleasant silence periods when you're having difficulty thinking of what to say to him next. You just begin to touch those periods at 15 minutes. But it really takes an hour before you're beginning to run out of your own ideas and then begin to wonder, "What am I doing sitting here? Is there a God? Well, I've been here an hour and a half now he must at least know that I'm serious about the thing." And then about two hours you begin to realize, "He knows I'm serious otherwise I wouldn't be sitting here wasting my time." Then after about two hours you begin to sense the activity of God the Father.

But loved ones, it's honestly like that. You really only begin to sense the activity of God the Father and his Spirit coming through to you whenever you have at last run down. And it takes the soulish mechanism, i.e. the mind, the emotions, and the will; it takes them a fair time to run down.

And then after that it takes your spirit just a while to begin to sense God coming through.

Now, don't make the other mistake that you now go home tonight and you say, "Well, I can expect nothing for the first hour." No, the only way to pray in the Spirit is to go forward in full faith believing that the Father is listening to you and that he can obviously come through to you at any moment and you can come through to him in a moment. And that's his will after you've begun to engage in some kind of deep prayer life.

I'm just saying that many of you are having difficulty with your prayer lives because you've kept trying to go on the 15 minute thing and you're wondering now why it's not as good as it was in the beginning and the reason is that the Father was kind and gracious to you as a little baby at the beginning. And so he blessed you with some intuition as to what he was thinking of you. He blessed you with some sense of his presence at the beginning.

But he wanted to draw you on and so like a dad does he walked away a wee bit so that you would walk after him and begin to be interested in knowing him and knowing where he was going. But you have sat back there saying, "15 minutes and if you don't produce then that's it." And so the Father has no chance of coming through to you deeply and will have no chance loved ones, until you really begin to say to yourselves, "Lord, I know you're there as you were in the beginning when I first started these prayer times. Father, I know you want to come through to me and so Lord I'm anxious. I want you to know that you're the only one I'm interested in contacting and I'm prepared to stay here as long as is needed."

Loved ones, there's something that happens to you when you get down content to stay there for two or three hours. I don't know what it is but there's something that happens in that person's spirit when you get down there and say, "No, it's not an hour Lord and then I have to rush out to work. It's not an hour and then so and so is calling for me whether you're coming through to me or not." There's something that happens when you get down and say, "Father this is your time. This afternoon is given to you and I give it to you Lord. I give this day to you Father." There's a quietness that comes into your spirit.

I've often thought of it as the experience I had when I first tried snorkeling. It was incredible the way the sea was so windy, and so upset, and so rough on the surface. And then you go down underneath and it's like a different world. The plants just go like that; it's just peaceful and quiet. Everything is so soft, and easy, and flowing. You can't imagine what it's like above it all.

Now loved ones, that's what you get down to when you begin to pray in the Spirit. There's a place where you begin to leave the rough and tumultuous nature of your mind, emotions, will, and your body all striving and crying -- and the earthquake, the fire, the thunder, and the lightening -- and you get down to a quiet place in your spirit. And it's there that you begin to find a face begins to reveal itself to you through that water and through those waves and you begin to see a face that you've never seen before. You begin to sense the very appearance and the very character of your Father. You begin to sense a closeness and an immediacy to him that you've never had in all the attempts that you've made at memorizing scripture to get your mind off the job, and all your attempts you've made at singing a chorus softly to try to begin to sense God's presence. There's something more real and deep that comes into your spirit when you begin to give yourself to the Father.

Loved ones, I really believe it's vital to do that if you're not to become a casualty of a strong body. That's because there are many casualties in strong bodies. There are many dear ones that are really casualties simply because of the sheer strength of the body of Christ in which they live and in which they minister. They begin subtly to dwell on the other members instead of in Jesus. And that is what makes a body dead and what lays us open to every cynical, skeptical psychologist that wants to accuse us of spiritual or moral reinforcement.

Now there are some basic things that I should share about praying in the Spirit besides those. First of all praying in the Spirit is not necessarily praying in tongues. Perhaps you'd look at 1 Corinthians 14:15 and maybe you'd look at Verse 14 just before that. 1 Corinthians 14:14, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful." Now keep your finger in that place and look at Ephesians 6:18, which is the command in scripture to pray in the Spirit. Do you see the difference in those two verses? Ephesians 6:18 reads, "Pray at all times in the Spirit." In Greek it is "the Spirit" meaning the Holy Spirit and that's why they have a capital S for Spirit in Ephesians 6:18.

So God says through Paul, "Pray at all times in the Spirit," that is the Holy Spirit. That is God's Spirit. Now back in 1 Corinthians 14:14 Paul is saying, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful." And it's a small s. Now the spirit that Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians is our own spirit. He's saying, "If you pray in a tongue, your own spirit is praying." But that doesn't mean that you have to pray in a tongue to pray in the Holy Spirit. You can pray in the Holy Spirit and by the guidance and by the power of the Holy Spirit in a tongue, or you can pray in the Holy Spirit in your own language. But when your own spirit itself prays and only your own spirit without the use of your mind or emotions, then you will be praying in a tongue.

It's important to see the distinction. Some people say, "To pray in the Spirit is the command of God and he says back here that if I pray in the tongue I'm praying in the spirit." No, you're just praying in your own spirit. When you pray in a tongue just your own spirit is praying and your mind isn't being used. That is your mind isn't being used to form words like, "Oh lord, I praise you," or, "Oh Lord, I thank you." Your mind is not being used it's just your spirit.

You can pray in the Holy Spirit either by praying in a tongue or by praying with your mind. And of course that's what Paul recommends there in 1 Corinthians 14:15, "What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit," (that is without using the mind), "How can any one in the position of an outsider say the "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?" That's just a very practical reason why in a fellowship like this it's important to trust the Holy Spirit to really get such control of your mind that you can express yourself to God using your mind so that others can take part and can share.

So praying in the Spirit is not necessarily praying in a tongue. Now I think many of us would testify to a real freedom that has come into our own prayer lives because of tongues. And so I think, all of us would agree that this is a gift from God and that it is really a blessing in our own prayer lives. All I'm saying is to pray in the Spirit you don't need to pray in tongues. Let's get rid of that thought so that Satan doesn't use it to make the thing difficult for you.

Praying in the Spirit is not a self conscious determination to pray spiritually. That gets pretty wild in a prayer meeting, "I want to pray spiritually Lord. I want to pray spiritually. They say he (Pastor) prays spiritually so I'm going to try to pray the way he prays. Now which word did he

use? Okay, I'll use that." Or, "So and so prays with a quiet voice and they're spiritual so I better pray with a quiet voice."

That is madness, and a falling back into the whole thing that Jesus was pointing out with the Pharisees in Matthew 6. Maybe you should look at it just to shock you out of it thoroughly. Matthew 6:5-8, "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words."

I'd just notice that a number of us are so anxious to really please the Father and to really grow spiritually that at times we take teachings on spiritual prayer and we make them legalistic regulations for ourselves. So that's why I'm saying to you that praying spiritually is not a self-conscious determination to pray spiritual prayers. It is not a matter of observing how other people pray and copying them. Nor is it at the other extreme a shutting up so that nobody will see how unspiritual you are. That's just fear and love casts out all fear. If you love the Father you don't care how unspiritual the rest think you are.

So praying spiritually is not arrived at by a self-conscious determination to pray spiritual prayers. Nor, is it on content. I think a number of us have a feeling, "Oh well, you said once that praying spiritually is praising God. That the closer you get to him, the more occupied you get with praising him. So I better praise God and if it ever crosses my mind to pray for my mom I better not do it because that's not a spiritual thing to pray for." Well do you see that that gets you into bondage, impossible bondage? Then we come into prayer times and we all sit around dumb and God just looks at us with tears in his eyes because all of us are bound up and won't pray because we're all anxious to pray spiritually.

Loved ones, you pray at the state you're in. That's what Luther meant when he said, "If you sin, sin boldly." Be what you are. Be what you are and pray out loud, and pray as you are and at least be yourself and be honest and then God will be able to lift you to the next stage. But if you're never going to be honest with him, and if you're never going to be yourself in front of your brothers and sisters then you're just going to get more and more twisted up and entangled. So it's really important to see that to pray spiritually you have to pray. You can't sit around there working out, "How am I going to pray a spiritual prayer?" You'd better get in there and throw yourself into it. Plunge in up to your neck and just pray and let God take it from there.

Now there are some clear marks of what spiritual prayers is. You could find one of them if you look at what the Holy Spirit will do when he comes among us. It's in John 16:14 where Jesus says, "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." "He will glorify me." And in John 15:26, "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me."

So one thing that praying in the Spirit will be clear of is a preoccupation with whether you're getting through to God or not. It'll be free from looking into yourself and deciding, "Am I really praying spiritually? Am I really in touch with God's Spirit?" It will be free from all seeking after visions, all searching after warm glows, all seeking after exhilarations and revelations. It'll be what the Holy Spirit is, preoccupied with the Father.

Now loved ones, if you're praying in the Spirit it will be like Thomas, "My Lord and my God." It will be free from this whole temptation that we face to look in and see, "Are we really spiritual? Am I getting revelations? Am I getting tongues? Am I getting interpretations of tongues? Have I laid my hands on anybody in this prayer meeting? Have I seen Jesus? Is he speaking to me? I can't hear you Lord, are you speaking?" It will be free from that whole preoccupation with ourselves and what's coming through to us.

That's a subtle thing because many of us have said, "We know that prayer is not feeling. It doesn't mean that you have to have feelings. We get over the idea, "Do I feel joyful? Do I feel happy? Do I feel peaceful?" But then we take another step and we say, "Yes, but your spirit should be experiencing some things." And we begin to try the impossible task of looking into our spirits which we can't do because we're looking in with our mind and our mind can't see our spirits. But we begin the impossible task of looking into our spirits and trying to see, "Am I getting something from God?"

Loved ones, how often are we just miserable, selfish, parasitic little beggars who are asking God to give us more feelings? Have you ever thought how often in our prayer times after we've said, "Father we want nothing, we want nothing. You have given us everything that we need." How often in our prayer times do we end up wanting crumbs from the table, "Well, I want the feeling Father. Well, I want to know that you love me." I mean, he's given his dear son to die in blood and sweat on the cross there should be no doubt in our minds. But we say, "No, give me an assurance Father. Give me an assurance."

Loved ones, how often are we like the little children pulling on their dad's coattails, "Give me, give me, give me. You've given me everything that I have but give me more, give me something today. Give me a sense of your presence Lord. Give me a vision, give me a tongue today. Give me a revelation." Loved ones, I think the Father comes hoping that we will love him and that we'll fill our minds with him, and that we'll be preoccupied with expressing our love to him and our praise to him. But so often he finds us trying to drain him again of something for ourselves.

Loved ones, praying in the Spirit is Thomas, "My lord and my God." It's a preoccupation with the Father. It's a being taken up with him. It's a freedom from that miserable, --- there's something so degrading, and so undignified about princes and princesses of the Father going to him wanting more and more feelings. "Not feelings Lord, but spiritual assurances. I just want spiritual assurances." Loved ones, would you be prepared to go before God and stay with him for three hours whether you feel anything in your feelings or sense anything in your spirits or not? God wants such to worship him.

Those who worship him in spirit and truth, who don't worship him in the midst of their feelings and in the midst of the little things that they want from him but just worship him – who go before him in faith and obedience. That's what praying in the Spirit is, going before God in faith and obedience, "Father I believe you're there. I believe you love me with all your heart. I believe your word. Father, here's my response to you." And that's really praying in the Spirit, with an obedient life behind your words, with a life that is consistent with your own conscience.

Praying in the spirit is beginning to get to know the Father himself. Maybe a good verse to look at is in 1 John. I think I can find it. I think it's 1 John 2:12. 1 John 2:12, "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his sake." That's the first step; the little

children in God know their sins are forgiven. That's the basic step. They know that God has forgiven them and they know they're going to go to heaven.

And you know how much of Christendom is preoccupied with just that fact. This is part of the reason why God isn't able to move in his world as he wants to because so much of Christendom are just at the stage of little children. That's all they know. Then verse 13, "I am writing to you, fathers," why? "Because you know him who is from the beginning." And really that's what praying in the Spirit is about, knowing the Father, and knowing his mind.

You remember, the whole promise of answered prayer is based on this. "This is the confidence that we have, that if we ask anything according to his will we know that he hears us and if he hears us we know that he'll answer us." So the whole confidence that we have that God will answer prayer is based on the fact that we know God's will. And how can you know a person's will unless you know him himself? And the only way to know a person is to look into his face and to see what he's thinking and what he's feeling. And you remember God says, "I will guide you with my eye."

Unless you look into his face and seek his face you'll never see where his eye is pointing and you'll never know what his will is. And if you don't know what his will is how can you pray according to his will? You're back into the old fleshly and soulish prayer, "I ask this Lord if it is your will," which is no prayer at all. It's no prayer, "If it is your will." How can you pray that way when God tells you to pray with absolute firmness because anybody who wavers will receive nothing from the Lord. And so most of Christendom knows their sins are forgiven and wavers praying, "If it is your will."

What God desires is men and women who are so interested in finding out his will that they'll spend time before him getting to know him himself so that they'll begin to sense what he wants them to pray. And I think we've often touched upon that. God knows what all of us need. He knows what needs to be done in Moscow at this moment. But God cannot do it until one of us realizes exactly what he wants to do and asks him to do it. That's the basic key to prayer.

God knows all that is needed. God knows everything that's to be done with your mom and dad and with all our relatives. But God refuses to ignore our free wills and come down and do what he wants to do. He requires somebody here on earth to sense what he wants to do and ask him to do it.

This is new to some of you so maybe you should look up Ezekiel 36:37. Many of you know the verse by heart because it is the key to answered prayer. I think many of us don't realize that. Ezekiel 36:37, "Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their men like a flock."

Now God knew they had been diminished in their numbers by the exile. He knew he had to increase their number if they were to survive. But he says deliberately, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them and until they ask me to do it I cannot do it." That's why it's so vital for us to be prepared to pray in the Spirit, to spend time before God getting to know his mind so that we will then be able to pray according to his will.

Loved ones, it's really impossible to do it unless you begin to engage in spiritual prayer and that really does take time. There's just no other way. It takes time and a determination to get to know your God personally and a readiness to stay with him. When I went to London I knew Jesus didn't want me to give all kinds of talks or presentations. And so I explained the first day what God wants us

to do is to settle down to prayer at two o'clock every afternoon and pray until five. The first day was hard for some of us. The second day was good. The third day we wanted to do twice as long in prayer. And by the fourth day the Holy Spirit had sorted out all the relationships.

Loved ones, there's something that God is able to do in spiritual prayer that he cannot do any other way. And he'll do it for you, because none of us are experts at this kind of prayer. But this is the kind of prayer that God yields to. This is the kind of prayer that moves the mountains that will need to be moved in the era in which we live. And it really is a deep, spiritual prayer that is not filled with all kinds of antics. It's prayer that is seeking God and then if a tongue comes forth it's from the Father. It's not a tongue to prove that we're praying spiritually. It's a tongue that comes from the Holy Spirit. If a revelation comes it comes from God.

I think a lot of the circuses that we go through in what we call charismatic and spirit filled prayer meetings are just circuses because we're not long enough on our knees before God to ever stop our own activity in time for him to come through to us. And a lot of what we're producing is just imitation of his gifts.

And really loved ones, there's no way to get through to God but to be prepared to give him some time. So I'd really encourage you to at least make a start. If you're on 15 minutes then you don't go for a three hour stretch on your own, okay? No, because you'll sleep half of the time and the rest of the time you'll think of the last TV program you saw. So you don't do that. You go 15 minutes and then you go half an hour, and then you go 40 minutes, and then you go 50 minutes. And you do it sensibly as you would do anything that you do in athletics or anything in any other type of activity. You increase it gradually. But you do set your face steadfastly towards Jerusalem and say, "Father, I'm staying with you. I'm staying with you. All I have time to do in these 15 minute bouts is give you all my troubles. All I have time to do is preoccupy myself with all my troubles by repeating them all. All I have time to do is get further bogged down in the circumstances that surround and drive my life. So Lord, I'm going to stop this kind of playing with you and I'm going to set my face steadfastly towards some kind of prayer in the Spirit and I'm going to move in that direction."

And loved ones, if you have difficulty on your own then come and join us in Fish Enterprises on Tuesday afternoons in the prayer room. Also, nine o'clock to Midnight on Friday is open to everyone. And even if you don't spend the whole time spend part of the time.

Now part of my concern of course is if you don't begin to get down to spiritual prayer. Forget the time of it, I'm not saying a three hour prayer, but if you don't get down to a spiritual prayer of some length then we will become just a psychological reinforcement group. We'll just become a kind of soulish mob that enthuse each other and whomp each other up with songs and little talks on Sundays. The only way that we'll continue to be the body of Jesus is if you individually link up to the head.

I think I've talked rather long but maybe if there is anyone that is very anxious to ask anything then I give you 30 seconds.

Q: What do you experience with concentration as you pray for three hours?

A: You either concentrate or you go to sleep. Undoubtedly God comes down and fills your whole mind with himself but I think brother at the beginning you have to be prepared to set your mind on God.

And undoubtedly I would agree that as you do it, certainly as we did it, at least after the first two days, then it became just a very natural thing and a thing we looked forward to so much. But I don't think you could underrate the concentration that is needed. That's part of the battle I think.

You must admit loved ones, that it's a battle of the mind. Even our educational system is planned so that we can get something on the way past as we go to something else. And so few of us have ever really bent our minds into discipline. Therefore, for many of us it is a real exercise.

Q: Which is better morning or evening?

A: There's a grave danger of getting into purely physical circumstances that could vary with the person. It seems to me that if a person is on an ordinary job situation where they're working during the day time that it's very difficult to get away from the example of Jesus. Again, and again you read that he rose a great while before day and went into the mountain to pray. Or before dawn broke he went into the wilderness to pray. I tried to get around that for years and convinced myself that I prayed better at night. But sooner or later you have to deal with a thing called an alarm clock. You have to set that alarm and get yourself out of bed. There's just no other way.

Sooner or later you have to say, "Father if I have to leave this house at seven AM then if I'm going to have an hour with you and have half an hour to at least gather myself together then I need to get up at 5:30 AM. So I have to set the alarm for 5:30." And that means going to bed. If you need seven hours of sleep, then seven hours before 5:30 AM you go to bed. The Father isn't bluffed by you saying, "Oh well, I was so sleepy." He knows fine well that you could go to bed earlier the night before and that that is part of your commitment to him. It's no use saying, "Well I love him so much in the morning that I want to get up early but I don't love him enough at night to go to bed earlier so I can get up in the morning."

So it seems to me just a matter of logistics that one ought to settle calmly and quietly and then commit yourself to it. It seems to me Jill you're talking about morning. I'm sure it varies from person-to-person as you get into night work and that kind of thing.

Q: If you've a prayer burden what's the importance of persistence in prayer?

A: It seems to me it's that whole parable that Jesus told of the neighbor who came looking for bread and kept on knocking and knocking until his neighbor came down and gave him something for his guest. Or, the same parable with the woman who kept on asking and even the unjust judge got fed up with her asking and God says, "So how much more will I give you...." It seems to me the Father is often looking upon us to see, "Are you really serious?" And if we give up after the first two years, three years, then okay he knows.

George Mueller in a particular instance always struck me. He'd been praying for a man for 40 years and the man was converted a week after Mueller died.

Q: I'm a mom and have a lot of trouble rationalizing that I can pray all through the day as I do things.

A: I think a lot of us say, "Well, we have the house to ourselves, we have the apartment to ourselves and we can run our time as we want." But it's amazing how the baby keeps occupying us even though we say we can run it according to our own plan. It seems to me that those who pray

ejaculatory prayers, (just prayers that you cast up to God as you're doing things) are possible only if you have set time apart for God himself.

It seems to me that God will listen to all our high and holy intentions and all our very dignified and elevated statements of our love for him but at the end of the day he knows that when you love a person you spend time with them and you set time aside for them.

Now it seems to me that somehow the Father is able to come through to a person that will set time apart for God alone. Well you know it yourself. As Scott said, "Will you marry me?" You say, "Well, I don't know. What did you say? Well, yes, I'll marry you. Okay." The Father knows the way we think of ordinary relationships and he knows fine well that our relationship with him is on something of the same basis as far as the value we attach to it is concerned.

We have enough exciting things going on here that we could just blast away at them. We could almost run without the Holy Spirit now and that's the danger. Those who are in business know that with the business you get to a point where it takes you to be pretty silly to make a mess of it because it just keeps going. And it's the same whether we like it or not with a body (church fellowship) like our own. There comes a time when success breeds success. That's why it's vital loved ones for us to get down to giving God his place. As soon as we stop giving God that high and holy place and giving him the time that he requires then he stops pouring his life into us and it becomes just a soulish operation.

Q: Can the Bible be used to get through to God in prayer?

A: It seems to me brother that reading the Bible is in a sense communion with God because it's communing with the words that his Holy Spirit has written. I think where we get into real difficulties is when we set aside an hour for Bible study and prayer and we end up with 15 minutes of prayer and three quarters of an hour of Bible study. That's I think the problem. It's different when we use the Bible study to create in us a preoccupation with God in our own minds and our spirits. That's good, and then we give ourselves to prayer. But when you occupy the greater part of the time with Bible study, then no you're not getting through.

And maybe I could go further because I sense you're asking more. If some of us are thinking, "Can you not commune with God through Bible study?" Not in the same way as you can commune with him in prayer. No, prayer is a deeper communion with God. It's more direct -- face-to-face. It's a freer relationship than the Bible study is. But the Bible study is a real help to prayer. And I think most of us have found that using the Bible sometime during a long prayer time is good, especially using the Psalms, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me." Psalms of praise are good.

It is no more a substitute for prayer than "talking with another Christian is prayer", (a quote by Bishop Robertson). It seems to me it's a rationalization. Prayer is talking face-to-face with God, your spirit with his.

Q: What about reading the Psalms in prayer?

A: It seems to me they're just a blessing. But again, they are an aid to prayer rather than a substitute for prayer. I think every morning at eight AM here on Sunday mornings one of us reads a Psalms of praise of some kind so that we set our minds away from the kind morning it is and whether we're tired or not. It helps us to set our mind on God.

Q: What is the difference between meditation and prayer?

Well I'm sure only the Holy Spirit can really tell each of us the difference. You could make a definition that meditation is thinking of truths about God whereas prayer is talking to God directly. The distinction is clear intellectually but it seems Jim that only the Holy Spirit can show each of us when we are meditating and when we are really dwelling upon God himself. But the intellectual definition would be meditation is meditation on truths, or things, or facts whereas prayer is speaking directly to the person. We have to be very careful that we do not find ourselves utterly taken up with meditation and not praying at all. But that would come out in your prayers. It would be obvious by the way you express yourself.

Q: Is there a definition of prayer?

I wouldn't have any trouble with that. Prayer is talking to God.

Q: Can meditation be prayer?

No, I think prayer is talking to God directly. I think meditation is just an aid to prayer in the same way Bible study is. I'm sorry. No, I don't think meditation is prayer if that's what you want. I think it's an aid to prayer.

Q: How then can meditating on scripture be used in prayer?

A: That's probably what I would mean by using the words of scripture, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me. Bless his holy name." You'd be meditating on a piece of scripture and it would be drawing your mind up to God.

Q: Won't meditating on scripture keep us from transcendental meditation?

A: I'm with you in that I think the Bible is the only safe guard against being led away by evil spirits and spirits of error in prayer. It's the Bible that will keep us from transcendental meditation and from wrong ideas of what God is like. I agree but I also think it's important for us not to rationalize ourselves into substituting bible study for prayer.

Q: How do we exercise our spirit in prayer?

A: It does seem that it involves certainly the distinction between praying in the soul, praying with our minds, praying with our bodies, and praying with the Spirit. And the Holy Spirit does need to make that distinction for us. But I really think that exercising our spirit could be put very succinctly by saying it's praising God. It's praising God and being preoccupied with the Father.

And it seems to me probably we're exercising our spirit most strongly when our body is worn out because we really have to exercise the spirit to hold on to God. And it seems to me we're exercising our spirit most strongly when the wandering thoughts are most difficult. So often God allows some of those things to come into our body and our soul so that we will exercise our spirits strongly. But on the whole it seems that exercising our spirit is praising God.

That's the danger about meditation. It tends to be an exercise of the mind on certain facts and

thoughts. Now the Bible should be more than that but often we read the Bible primarily with an intellectual content and it takes a little while for us to learn how to eat God's word, how to feed on it in our spirits.

You need to start praying because at the end of the day that's the way you learn. And if you regard yourself as a child of God, ask yourself, "How long can I take fellowship with God at this present time? And I wonder how I'll get on in heaven?" I think you should ask that question honestly.

If you're a child of God do you enjoy being with the Father? And are you able to be with him for a period of time? And I think if you answer, "Well no, pastor I'm not." Well probably it's partly because of lack of usage and lack of custom and you should just start it. But it could be also because there's something deep down independent inside you that you need to deal with.

So I'd just remind you loved ones, of the prayer time on Tuesday afternoons from two until five here in the prayer room and then on Friday night nine until Midnight. And then eight o'clock each Sunday morning we pray for an hour from eight until nine. You don't need to stay the whole time. You can come and go. It's not something that you commit yourself to for the whole time. You can come in at anytime. Really the important thing is that you need to start praying.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for the joy of looking to you. For the joy of being able to look into darkness and know that you're there whether we feel you or not just because you've said you're there. Father, we thank you for that. We thank you for being alive.

We thank you Lord that we can really talk to you and treat you as for real. And Father, we thank you that it does please you when we set time aside for you. And Father, we thank you for Luther's words, "I'm so busy that I cannot afford to spend less than three hours a day in prayer." Lord, we know that the busier we get the more time we have to spend with you to keep balanced and sane. And so Father, we would commit ourselves to setting time aside for you. You are the Creator of the whole universe and we want to spend time with you. May God give us the grace to do that starting tomorrow morning.