

- Lesson One -

“To Agonize In Prayer!”

Introduction:

The mightiest prayer warriors down through the ages were those who exercised something of the agony of Christ's experience.

* John Fletcher stained the walls of rooms by the breath of his frequent, earnest praying.

* John Welch often laying prostrate in prayer had a wife who complained about his praying in such a fashion. To whom he stated: *“O, woman, I have the souls of 3,000 to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them.”*

* It is said of Payson, a mighty prayer warrior that he wore the hardwood boards into groves where his knees pressed so often and so long in persevering prayer.

* Maybe our problem today is the lack of such praying? We don't know much about warring against Satan, defeating his work, and mobilizing the saints for God. Very few Christians really know much about wrestling in prayer.

* * We might say we want prayer to be profitable, please -- but an easy exercise, nothing exhausting, nothing difficult. We know little about the agony of prayer, it's striving, persistence or burden. Seldom do American Christians loss any blood, sweat, or tears over prayer. (Consider Heb. 12:2-4)

I. WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN:

A. It does not mean we are to beg for what God has already promised.

He has given us many precious promises. -- II Cor. 1;20; Rom. 8;32

He has promised to meet all our needs and urges us to trust Him.

Matt. 6: 24-34; Phil. 4:19 -- But consider what these words actually teach us.

B. It does not mean that God is reluctant and has to be begged.

He knows all about our needs and is more concerned to meet them than we are concerned about praying in the first place. God does not have to be coerced, plead with, urged upon to answer prayer. He has promised to meet needs (not wants) and He desires we would trust Him ahead of time for those material things we need.

II. WHAT IT DOES MEAN:

A. There are times when we need to agonize in prayer:

There are conditions, needs that demand not just trusting-- but giving ourselves to agonizing in prayer. Mark 13:38 Scripture clearly teaches us that some things are not just claimed, but must be wrestled for. Eph. 6:10-12

B. There are good reasons why we must agonize in prayer:

1. Such as the times we are facing the powers of darkness.
2. As Christ did when He encountered the hardness of men's hearts.
3. When we are facing the problem of our own weakness of the flesh, we need to *“watch and pray,”* for prayer is often a grim conflict with sin and Satan. Christ wept and prayed over Jerusalem.
4. When we are faced with the power of the world's enticements, and when we sense the encroachment of the world into lives of those we ove or into our own homes and hearts.

C. It means to enter into conflict as Christ did:

1. There were times in His life He stated the Father heard him. These were times of special need and sometimes of great conflict.
2. There were also times in His life that He was in anguish, with tears, and He groaned in the spirit. (**Heb. 5:7-10**) Consider the Garden of Gethsemane experience when He sweat as it were drops of blood.

III. SO, WHEN SHOULD WE BE EXERCISED IN SUCH PRAYERS?

A. As Paul requested -- Rom. 15:30

Paul desired there would be those who would strive in prayer for him, wrestle as it were in prayer. Paul wanted to be delivered from Satanic oppression. As a servant for the Lord, against the powers of darkness, he sought the prayers of others. Paul faced all kinds of pressures, afflictions, persecution, etc. Often at the hands of men, but especially because of Satan's work in other's lives.

B. As Paul experienced -- Gal. 4:19 *"for whom I travailed in prayer..."*

He travailed first for the salvation of those at Galatia. Then he travailed for Christ to be formed in them, or for their Christlikeness. To travail is the agonize in prayer. These people faced the Satanic work of the Judaizers, those who sought to lead the newly saved astray.

C. As Epaphras had prayed -- Col. 4:12

He had prayed for their *"standing fast"* in the will of God, that the saints would stand complete, in maturity in the will and plan of God. What a blessing it is when God's people determine to know and stand in the perfect will of God. We will serve successfully only when we know His will, and then pray in His will.

God desires that we would *stand, and having done all to stand, to stand therefore* as we are aught in Ephesians 6:10-18. We must learn to stand against the wiles and darts of Satan. One of the weapons in this need is the *"all prayer"* of Ephesians 6:18. We can't truly put on the armor without also praying as God's Word teaches us.

Note: We don't struggle with God to get answers, but our battle is with Satan, the world, and the flesh. Often the problem is our own selfishness, slothfulness, lethargy, and worldliness. What about YOU?

- Lesson Two -

"The Necessity of Travail"

Isa. 66:7,8; 53:10,11; Gal. 4:19; I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:8

Introduction:

In these five texts we have one similarity, each Scripture portion speaks of travail. *"When Zion travails, then children will be born unto her..."* Often when we read about prayer or speak about prayer we hear such words as asking, seeking, knocking, but not often do we talk about wrestling, strong crying, importunate praying, or traving in prayer.

I. THE BURDEN OF TRAVAIL:

A. There must be the burden of travail -- Consider Neh. 1:4 *"I sat down and mourned, wept, certain days."*

The reason we lack the breath of heaven upon our lives, upon our ministries is we lack the burden of travail. The reason we don't see souls saved, youth going on for God, or the growth of new converts is the lack of traving for them. Paul knew what it meant to have such a burden. Paul spoke of such in Romans 9:1,2; 10:1. He had great heaviness of heart for the lost. His prayer to God was for their salvation. Consider his words. We are so used to things being instant, easy, with no effort or time spent. Are we willing to give ourselves in biblical praying such seen in Nehemiah's life?

B. There must be travail before birth -- Consider Isa. 66:7,8

There must be travail prior to the birth of a child. The mother will be consumed in the task at hand, the birth of the child. That mother won't go on a trip to town, or take a vacation, or go shopping, or visiting with a friend. When it is time for the birth she will be totally consumed in the demand of the hours. She is consumed totally -- physically, mentally and emotionally she will be spent for the birth of the child. Dare we think that spiritual birth can come any other way? The order will be: travail -- then birth -- then joy. There will never be any other order.

C. There must be travail for souls -- Gal. 4:19

Paul had travailed for their salvation, and then for their godly life. He was deeply burdened for their maturity and growth into Christlikeness and he knew what it meant to travail night and day.

II. THE BLESSING OF TRAVAIL:

A. The blessing of seeing people saved: Gal. 4:19; Acts 4:23-33

B. The blessing of seeing children, converts going on for God.

C. The blessing of seeing God at work.

Consider the book of Nehemiah. The whole book is the unfolding of events that came out of Nehemiah's burden -- his willingness to be spent in travailing prayer. He mourned, wept, fasted and prayed for certain days, probably for 40 days he was totally exercised in this kind of prayer life. No wonder the events of God's power upon him took place. He gave himself in the kind of prayer life that magnifies God.

There was a man called "*weeping Joe*." As a member of a church he travailed for souls, spent time during services in the basement of his church as he poured out his heart to God. He never did anything publicly, but God used him in a singular way. The pastor often felt the blessings of the Lord were largely due to the prayer life of this dear man who was an introvert, and usually was so burdened for souls he could not contain himself, but was weeping in the church service. So he would retire to the coal bin to travail for souls. Oh, if only we had weeping Joe's. **Psa. 126:5,6**

III. BEHOLD CHRIST'S TRAVAIL: Isa. 53:10, 11; Heb. 5:5-10; Luke 23:34

"He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied." The Lord Jesus knew what travail of soul meant. He gave himself to prayer in a way that none other has ever done. It is obvious the Lord spent time... crying, with tears, supplication, and the Word says He learned obedience by the things he suffered. (Heb. 5:5-10) I don't understand these things fully -- but they are true.

A. Consider His tears, cries to the Father: Matt. 26:36-46; Lk 22:39-46

Christ prayed with strong crying, tears, supplication. He wrestled in prayer in the truest sense. We could say that He practiced and lived out fervent, importunate praying. Consider what Gethsemane must have been like, sweating as it were great drops of blood. Think what His agony, travailing prayer truly mean.

B. Consider the Cross: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Luke 23:34

The original Greek means praying continually, over and over again. Maybe this was the cry of His heart as He was flogged with the cat of nine tails, when they beat him in the face, etc. Yes, Christ exercised importunate, travailing prayer. He shall see the travail of His soul and be satisfied. At Pentecost when 3,000 were saved, later another 4,000 and then the Word says souls were multiplied... great numbers were coming to Christ -- He indeed saw the results of the travail of His soul. In Hebrews 12: 2 (consider 12:2-4) we read: *"for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross..."* What joy? Ah, the joy of seeing many come to Himself. (John 12:32,33)