

Salt & Light

Spring 2007

The Newsletter of the Social Concerns Ministry Team

Educating and informing the church body in light of biblical principles

You are the salt of the earth...
You are the light of the world...

Mt. 5:13-14

Editorial Note:

When we think about what strategies will be most effective in tackling the perplexing social challenges of our day, what do we think of: fundraising? Political engagement? Community organizing? Prayer may not appear on that list, because prayer has to do with our relationship with God and our inner being, not changing the world, right?

Not so, according to this issue of *Salt & Light*. C.S. Lewis speaks first here, insisting that the Bible teaches prayer does change the world, and explaining why that makes sense even though God knows our concerns before we pray them. Andrew Murray is right behind Lewis, explaining why Christians who would pray must work and those who work must pray: Prayer is not an alternative to work it is its essential companion.

Prayer is powerful, but not because it allows us to control God. God's wisdom directs when prayer will change the world. It is folly, as the final article here explains, to think that we can prove that prayer will always change what we want changed in a predictable way.

Does Prayer Matter?

From: C.S. Lewis, *Work and Prayer*

The case against prayer is this. The thing you ask for is either good—for you and for the world in general—or else it is not. If it is, then a good and wise God will do it anyway. If it is not, then He won't. In neither case can your prayer make any difference. But if this argument is sound, surely it is an argument not only against prayer, but against doing anything whatever?

In every action, just as in every prayer, you are trying to bring about a certain result; and this result must be good or bad. Why, then, do we not argue as the opponents of prayer argue, and say that if the intended result is good God will bring it to pass without your interference, and what if it is bad He will prevent it happening whatever you do? Why wash your hands? If God intends them to be clean, they'll come clean without your washing them. If He doesn't, they'll remain dirty however much soap you use. Why ask for the salt? Why put on your boots? Why do anything?

We know that we can act and that our actions produce results. Everyone who believes in God must therefore admit (quite apart from the question of prayer) that God has not chosen to write the whole of history with His own hand. Most of the events that go on in the universe are indeed out of our control, but not all. It is

like a play in which the scene and the general outline of the story is fixed by the author, but certain minor details are left for the actors to improvise.

It may be a mystery why He should have allowed us to cause real events at all; but it is no

"You do not have, because you do not ask God...Pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."

- James 4:2b, 5:16b-18

odder that He should allow us to cause them by praying than by any other method.

"Pascal says that God 'instituted prayer in order to allow His creatures the dignity of causality.' It would perhaps be truer to say that He invented both prayer and physical action for that purpose. He gave us small creatures the dignity of being able to contribute to the course of events in two different ways. He made the matter of the universe such that we can (in those limits) do things to it; that is why we can wash our own

(Continued on page 2)

National Day of Prayer May 3, 2007, 7:00 pm Service

Winnetka Bible Church 555 Birch Street Winnetka, IL 60093

Prior issues of *Salt & Light* available at www.wbc.org

Power for Prayer and Working

From: Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*

He that believeth on me, he shall do greater works, because I go to the Father, *and whatsoever ye shall ask in my Name, that will I do.* His going to the Father would give Him a new power to hear prayer. For the doing of the greater works, two things were needed: His going to the Father to receive

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my Name, that will I do.

—John 14:12-13

all power, our prayer in His Name to receive all power from Him again. As He asks the Father, He receives and bestows on us the power of the new dispensation for the greater works; as we believe, and ask in His Name, the power comes and takes possession of us to do the greater works.

Alas! How much working there is in the work of God, in which there is little or nothing to be seen of the power to do anything like Christ's works, not to speak of greater works. There can be but one reason: the believing on Him, the believing prayer in His Name, this is so much wanting. O that every labourer and leader in church, or school, in the work of home philanthropy or foreign missions might learn the lesson:

Prayer in the Name of Jesus is the way to share in the mighty power which Jesus has received of the Father for His people, and it is in this power alone that he believeth can do the greater works.

The Lord gave the wonderful promise of the free use of His Name with the Father in connection with the *doing of His works*. It is the disciple who gives himself wholly to live for Jesus' work and kingdom, for His will and honour, to whom the power will come to appropriate the promise. He that would fain grasp the promise when he wants something very special for himself, will be disappointed, because he would make Jesus the servant of his own comfort. But to him who seeks to pray the effectual prayer of faith, because he needs it for the work of the Master, to him it will be given to learn it; because he has made himself the servant of his Lord's interests. Prayer not only teaches and strengthens to work; work teaches and strengthens to pray.

This is in perfect harmony with what holds good both in the natural and the spiritual world. Whosoever hath to him shall be given; or, He that is faithful in a little, is faithful also in much. Let us with the small measure of grace already received, give ourselves to the Master for His work: work will be to us a real school of prayer. It was when Moses had to take full charge of a rebellious people that he felt the need, but also the courage to speak boldly to God and to ask great things of Him (Exodus 33:12, 15,18). As you give yourself entirely to God for His work, you will feel that nothing less than these great promises are what you need, that nothing less is what you may most confidently expect.

Believer in Jesus! You are called, you are appointed to do the works of Jesus, and even greater works, because He has gone to the Father to receive the power to do them in and through you. *'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my Name, that will I do.'* Give yourself, and live, to do the works of Christ and you will learn to pray so as to obtain wonderful answers to prayer. Give yourself, and live, to pray, and you will learn to do the works He did, and greater works. With disciples full of faith in Himself, and bold in prayers to ask great things, Christ can conquer the world. †

Does Prayer Matter?

(Continued from page 1)

hands and feed or murder our fellow creatures.

Similarly, He made His own plan or plot of history such that it admits a certain amount of free play and can be modified in response to our prayers. If it is foolish and impudent to ask for victory in a way (on the ground

that God might be expected to know best), it would be equally foolish and impudent to put on a [raincoat]--does not God know best whether you ought to be wet or dry?...

It is not unreasonable for a headmaster to say, "Such and such things you may do

according to the fixed rules of this school. But such and such other things are too dangerous to be left to general rules. If you want to do them you must come and make a request and talk over the whole matter with me in my study. And then--we'll see." †

Prayer and Healing

From: Donal O'Mathuna and Walt Larrimore, *Alternative Medicine*

The fundamental theological flaw with all prayer research is the assumption that only humans impact the results. In this view, if prayer works, what people pray for will come about.

Dossey and others believe prayer follows some natural law, and science will help us understand that law, just like it did the law of gravity. Under this view, negative results or inconclusive results count as evidence against prayer being effective.

Such an assumption holds true only if prayer is *impersonal*, based on some energy or thought-power or unknown force. But that's not biblical prayer. Prayer, according to the Bible, is not an energy that, once emitted, takes on a life of its own with predictable outcomes. Scientific research could easily measure whether such an energy "works," but this is not what Christianity means by prayer, given the biblical teaching on prayer for healing.

After James instructs Christians to pray for healing, he presents Elijah as an example of a righteous man whose prayer was "powerful and effective" (James 5:16-18).

Elijah didn't relate to God through impersonal rituals, or rote prayers. He prayed to God directly and personally. God is not interested in meaningless repetition. The Bible affirms persistence in prayer (Luke 18:1-5), but Jesus gave us the Lord's prayer while rejecting rote prayer. "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words" (Matthew 6:7; see also Isaiah 29:13). Sadly, even the beautiful Lord's Prayer can be recited in meaningless ways.

We should humbly make our requests to our Father in heaven, and lay the burdens of our hearts at his feet.

For Christians, the inconclusive results of prayer research can be discouraging. Does this mean that God doesn't answer prayer? Or worse still, does he just arbitrarily pick and choose whose prayer to answer? Why would God not heal us physically in answer to our prayers for healing?

Prayer research will never answer these questions. Clinical research on the effectiveness of prayer is designed to control the impact of human factors on the results. It cannot take into account God's decision—whether or not to answer a particular prayer—or even to delay an answer.

God may choose not to heal people of great faith despite their prayers for healing. God may use an illness to assist us in our spiritual growth and to remind us of our need to depend on him. Paul's prayer to remove his "thorn in the flesh" was not answered the way he first wanted. This "thorn" is widely believed to have been a physical ailment.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it [the thorn] away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The inconclusive results from

prayer research may also be due to another factor: researchers cannot ensure that those in a control group receive no prayer. We would have ethical problems with any such attempt to block prayer. A whole host of other people could be praying for the research subjects in both groups. Because of such lack of controls, some scientists think this type of research will never reveal clear-cut answers.

The inconclusive results of these experiments should not be viewed as evidence against the power of prayer. God never promised to answer every prayer immediately or in the affirmative. Like any loving parent, God can answer "No!" and still be just, loving, and righteous. God can answer "Just wait. Be patient." "Wait" and "No" are both answers to prayer that cannot be measured by the scientific method.

The inconclusive results of prayer research are consistent with the fact that God's will differs from one person to another. He may have a reason to heal someone in one situation, but not heal someone else. As more studies are published, the results will continue to vary because God cannot be forced to act within the controls of scientific research.

We believe in the power of prayer because Scripture teaches us to pray. We recommend prayer for healing on the basis of our theological beliefs, not scientific research. This research makes it clear that Christians must be discerning about what is meant by "prayer" before welcoming it into modern health care or participating in its practice.

(Continued on page 4)

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Inside this issue:

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Does Prayer Matter? | Pg. 1 |
| Power for Prayer and Working | Pg. 2 |
| Prayer and Healing | Pg. 3 |

Page 4

Prayer and Healing

(Continued from page 3)

As we learn to cope with our illnesses, disabilities, and the knowledge of our eventual death, prayer to God can make a huge difference in our lives. But as we pray for healing, we must remember that God does not promise to heal us of every disease, though he does make a number of remarkable promises:

- ◆ Salvation to anyone who is willing to turn to him for forgiveness.
- ◆ A personal relationship with those who initiate one with him.
- ◆ His unceasing presence in this life to comfort his people in their trials.
- ◆ Eternal life in his presence for those who put their faith in him.

We can, and should, pray for

all of these promises when we are sick and suffering. We can know that he will answer these prayers. He will give us the strength to endure what we must bear. We also can, and should, pray for healing. In spite of not having a guarantee of physical healing, we have something even greater: the knowledge that the Lord of the universe will be with us in our suffering. Knowing these promises, and trusting in God, we will be able to say along with Paul:

For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

—Philippians 4:11-13 †

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