

Challenging Christians to Pray



Prayergram[®]

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The Agony of Prayer

“And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44).

In Gethsemane, Jesus fervently prayed as He sought God’s will—an intense spiritual ordeal that left a lasting mark on his ministry. History was in the making; Son of God was in agony, and in that dark hour He sought the fellowship of His disciples, but they all fell asleep. They were too tired to pray; too weak to participate in that memorable hour.

Agonize. What an extra-ordinary and profound word to choose in reference to prayer! It is a costly term; therefore, its usage is limited and selective. It depicts a time of deep sorrow, sadness, anguish and true brokenness. It is a time of seeking nothing but the perfect will of the Father. It refers to a comprehensive and dedicated effort directed toward a particular activity. It indicates nothing is held back. It means that there is a price to be paid in whatever the activity is referred to. In this case, of course, the activity is prayer. This spiritual activity transcends all other activities.

Now, let’s look at the word revival. What an enthusiastic word! It is an exciting word among Christians. It brings out an air of excitement among God’s people at least once or twice a year. Whenever we mention revival, agony must also be included. These two words are tightly connected and cannot be separated. Revival service brings out the crowd, but agonizing service disperses the crowd. Remember, it is the agony that gives birth to revival! We have had many revival services but isn’t it time that we start having agonizing services! Do we agonize with our suffering Lord? Our intercession must touch the point of agony. Agony is no spiritual picnic; it is taxing; and enduring as we plead with God for the salvation of the lost. Agony is an experience we frequently overlook or avoid.

Abraham was an agonizer who interceded for Sodom. You might recall when the judgment upon the cities of the plain was impending, there were two believers who stood largely in the story. One was inside the city of Sodom, namely Lot, and the other was outside the city, namely Abraham. Although Lot was vexed every day by the sin which surrounded him (2 Peter 2:7), there is no record of any prayer on his part on behalf of Sodom. Finally, we know that God had to drag Lot out of the city that he might not be involved in its doom. Abraham didn’t condemn Sodom but pleaded with God for its restoration. It was left to faithful Abraham, the devoted one, to agonize over Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18: 16-33). Beloved, we must in practice and in principle, willing to help and pray for those who are in distress. We often point out society’s flaws but seldom pray for its renewal.

The prophet Joel tells us, “Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch

and the altar, and let them say, spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, where is their God?" (Joel 2:17). Arise, servants of God, arise! Will you agonize for your church, nation and the world! Will we act in time! God forbid that we should fail in this critical hour! The destiny of our nation and the world depends upon the prayers of God's praying minority. Agony is the prelude to ecstasy, and pain is the gateway to praise. Our delightful participation in His agony makes us beneficiaries of His strength and power. Remember, without agony, there is not going to be any revival regardless of how much enthusiasm we show. Can a woman bring forth a child without having birth pain? Can we obtain grape juice without crushing the grapes? Can we receive elevation without humiliation? Can we experience real revival without the agony of prevailing prayer and soul travail? Let's answer these questions with a sincere heart!

Praying with sincerity requires faith in God's triumph over sin and death. Experiencing God's sovereign power can be both humbling and transformative. Prayer is addictive. Regularly seeking God with humility brings remarkable blessings. Christians need to experience the real effectiveness of prayer that goes far beyond 'asking and receiving;' they need to get into the heart of God with a childlike simplicity and confidence. Prayer is about spiritual hunger and passion for God. As praying people, we don't just create a spiritually conducive environment, we are given the opportunity to make history. I must submit to you, if your family members are unsaved or backslidden, you must not condemn them. Simply pray for them and stand with them in Christian love. We cannot nag anyone into the kingdom of God. Never underestimate the power of prayer. Plead with God for the salvation of your loved ones. Share the joy of being forgiven by God without the process of aggravation. Then, bathe your family in prayer and watch the enemy flee!

One gratifying thing about prayer is that it has no need of human enhancements— it holds its power and greatness within itself. When I speak about prayer, I speak one language, one purpose, transcending race and denomination. As Christians, we have an opportunity to make a profound difference in the lives of many through prayer. If we care about the world, then we must pray. Does not the sin of our nation and the world, ever 'slouching toward destruction,' propel us to plead with God for renewal and spiritual restoration? Does not the present-day carelessness of God's people cause us to bury our face in true humility and pray to the God of heaven who alone has the power to awaken us from our deep slumber! Let us cry mightily unto the Lord of heaven, "Oh, Lord, my life is in turmoil, please help me!"

Without a deeper prayer life in the leadership, the so-called growth of the modern churches will be short-lived. If our churches are frozen and unresponsive, it is because we are indifferent. Anyone who desires true revival should earnestly seek the face of God in true anguish and brokenness. Agony is the order of the day, the need of the hour. May God give every one of us a compelling burden to seek His face daily, is my prayer!

The revivals of tomorrow are deposited in the tears of today.

---Matthew Skariah

GOD'S DELIGHTFUL JEWELS

"Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (Isaiah 62:3).

A limited approach to Christian commitment can restrict one's devotion to Jesus; however, by fully surrendering to God—beyond religious formalities—individuals become more receptive to the guidance of the Lord through the influence of the Holy Spirit. God loves us so much that He wants to make us into a bright star that will light up a dark and confused world. We are made in God's image to love Him and receive His love; otherwise, creation lacks purpose. There is a feeling of universal kinship among God's people, and the security of being bonded, redeemed

and ransomed by the precious blood of the Lamb that makes the Christian life transcendent and majestic. By nature, we are crude, rough and unshaped, but if we place ourselves in His hands, He will refine us for His purpose. It is all up to us what we choose! To have a special place in the Lord's vineyard, we must submit ourselves humbly to the master with complete trust and confidence in His ability to mold us.

Above all, a Christian should desire to see God's will fulfilled. Every believer ought to develop his or her own personal walk with the Lord regardless of the Church affiliation. 'Agape' love is truly wonderful and special, giving us the ability to love each other. It is possible for one to serve God out of duty, obligation, religious status, or for other reasons, not realizing that Jesus came to take away the drudgery and monotony out of Christian living. Why do we have to bribe people to do something for Jesus, the One who gave Himself for us voluntarily! Walking with Jesus should be a delight, not a chore!

Sadhu Sundar Sing was an Indian mystic who lived in the Himalayan region many years ago and he knew Jesus better than any of his earthly friends. He wrote, **"His presence gives me a peace which passes all understanding, no matter in what circumstances I am placed. Amid persecution I have found peace, joy and happiness. Nothing can take away the joy I have found in my Savior. In home He was there. In prison He was there. In Him the prison was transformed into Heaven, and the cross into a source of blessing. Now, I have no desire for wealth, position and honor...His infinite love has expelled the love of all other things. The heart is the throne of the King of Kings. The capital of heaven is the heart where that King reigns."**

Yes, indeed, he was a 'royal diadem' in the hands of the master craftsman, and was called, **"The Apostle with bleeding feet."**

Jim Elliot was another faithful servant of the Lord. After graduating from Wheaton College, he joined **Nate Saint, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, and Roger Youderian** to serve as missionaries to the Ecuadorian indigenous people, who were considered violent and dangerous by outsiders. On January 8, 1956 the five missionaries were attacked and killed with spears. The bodies were thrown in the river. Let us hear Elliot's riveting words: **"God, I pray Thee, lift these idle sticks of my life and may I burn up for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you Lord Jesus. Father, take my life, yea, my blood if Thou wilt, and consume it with Thine enveloping fire. I would not save it, for it is not mine to save. Have it, Lord, have it all. Pour out my life as an oblation for the world. Blood is only of value as it flows before Thine altar."**

It is truly reflective of what Christ can do through a life whose heart is set on God. Elliot also wrote, **"God gives his best to those who leave the choice with Him."**

David Brainerd was one of early America's greatest intercessors. He was only 29 when he died...his gravestone simply read, "A faithful and laborious missionary to the Stockbridge, Delaware and Susquehanna tribes of Indians." Though he died at an early age, yet he inspired and challenged a generation of modern-day intercessors around the world. His name is synonymous with intercession and intercessors.

On April 20th 1742 (his 24th Birthday) Brainerd wrote, "I hardly ever so longed to live to God and to be altogether devoted to Him; I wanted to wear out my life in his service and for his glory..." Whenever one hears the name of Brainerd, automatically inspires the mind to think of surrender, sacrifice, and above all intercessory prayer and fasting in a manner that perhaps has never been surpassed. He travelled 15,000 miles on horseback, sharing the love of Jesus mainly among Native American Indians. He lived alone in poor conditions, became ill with tuberculous, and had no one to care for. So, Jonathan Edwards, that Puritan saint who brought David Brainerd to his home to be cared for in his last days. This is what Jonathan Edwards wrote about Brainerd, **"I want to thank God for allowing me to bring Brainerd to my home, so I**

could hear his prayers.” What an epitaph! Though his life was brief, this young man left an enduring legacy and ranks among the most influential Christian figures throughout history. The devoted Intercessory prayer life of David Brainerd influenced the lives of many godly men of the past such as, **John Wesley, F.W. Robertson, Robert Murray McChesney, A.J. Gordon, Frances Asbury, William Carey, Jim Elliot and Henry Martin,** to name just a few.

Every soul is precious to God. He loves us all in a manner that He works carefully and lovingly, chiseling away all the rough edges and corners till it achieves its divine purpose. This process is extremely challenging, so it's unsurprising that few pursue the path of 'dying to self,' as it undermines pride and self-reliance. Christ always cuts the hard crust of religious hypocrisy and empty formalism. He unravels the puzzled web of worldly practices, and thus, making us purer than gold as He promised in His Word.

Beloved, heaven is filled with such jewels!

---Matthew Skariah

CROSS: STATUE OF OUR LIBERTY

According to God's Word, "The message of the cross may seem foolish to those who are lost, but for those who are saved, it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Some people hesitate to preach about the cross thinking that it is negative, and it should not be mentioned. Consequently, many are eager to crossover without the Cross, sort of sliding into eternity with no real affinity to the Lordship of Christ. The Bible does not teach about 'sliding salvation'. Salvation is free but the cost of discipleship is very high. The Cross spells death to the man of 'self' and it is unavoidable to the believer. The Cross represents poverty, self-denial, and death—not earthly indulgence or self-sufficiency. It is the symbol of those who cast their lot with Him who said, "Take up my Cross and follow me." We never know the magnitude of the Cross fully until we realize that it was our sin which sent Him there. The cross was a blood-stained wooden beam, bearing a wounded body. Jesus faced not only condemnation, but the burden of all world's sins. The message of the Cross stings before it heals. The way of the Cross is not for those seeking comfort; its message is essential and non-negotiable. Let us thank God for the Cross, the statue of our liberty and the citadel of our freedom in Christ!

Mr. Alton Lang, who played the part of Christ in a crucifixion scene, drew himself up to his full height and with compelling dignity and conviction came to the producer of the play and said: "Sir, if I did not feel the weight of His Cross, I could not play the part!"

Can I? Can you? Can anyone? Let us remember, it took a negative cross to give birth to a positive life!

---Matthew Skariah



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