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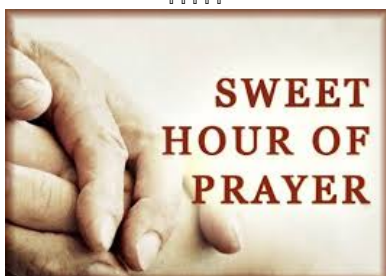
Sweet Hour of Prayer

*Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer,
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known;
In seasons of distress and grief
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare,
By Thy return, sweet hour of prayer.*

*Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer,
The joy I feel, the bliss I share
Of those whose anxious spirits burn
With strong desires for Thy return!
With such I hasten to the place
Where God, my Savior, shows His face,
And gladly take my station there,
And wait for Thee, sweet hour of prayer.*

*Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer,
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless;
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His word, and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my ev'ry care,
And wait for Thee, sweet hour of prayer.*

WORDS: W. W. Walford (w 1845)
MUSIC: William B. Bradbury (w. 1861)



Finding Your Purpose in Prayer

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

A few years ago I was in a study on developing holy habits. The study leader emphasized the habit of expressing thankfulness, even when we aren't feeling very thankful. I couldn't really appreciate what I was learning at the time, but it came back to me a short time later.

Life was moving along quite nicely until I woke up unable to hear one morning. I felt absolute terror. I felt like screaming, and I prayed over and over to regain my hearing. This went on for months. I was desperate, but no one seemed to know what to do. Medications and various procedures failed. My prayers for healing seemed to go unanswered, and it was difficult to continue them. I wondered, how anyone could possibly rejoice about something like this. Accepting this as the new normal for me was nearly impossible, and I found myself following up on everything anyone suggested. However, none of it made a difference.

Despite my disappointment, with time I began praying thankfully for all the previous years when I had heard. I even became grateful that I had lost my hearing in one ear 43 years earlier. It was because of that earlier loss I had learned to read lips long before losing my hearing in both ears.

Soon my prayers were filled with less requests and more gratitude. I was thankful as I remembered hearing my husband's first words of love, my child's cries when God spared his life as an infant, and so many other wonderful sounds I had heard in the past. Daily, my list of thankfulness grew. I also became more aware of my own unworthiness, and more grateful for the grace that saved me. It wasn't a short-lived thankfulness either. It

became a way of life; a holy habit. Only through my tears of discouragement did I learn to see how heartbreak, suffering, and setbacks are opportunities to grow in grace, just as the apostles and our Lord's brother James promised the first century Christians.

About a year later during some other testing my problem was accidentally properly diagnosed. Six weeks later, surgery and titanium inner ear bones were used to restore my hearing. After 43 years of dealing with various stages of deafness, there are no words to describe my joy when the packing was removed (nine weeks after surgery) and I could hear clearly again.

God's timing had seemed terribly slow, but He knew what I needed to learn spiritually. It was what the apostle Paul encouraged the church in Thessalonica to do: be grateful in every circumstance (I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Dealing with my hearing loss and learning to count the blessings in life's trials brought back a special memory. In her mid-nineties, my grandmother was unable to attend church services or get out to see her friends any longer. Satan saw his opportunity. For the first time in my life, I saw the one person I thought of as the queen of making lemonade from life's lemons question despondently why God wouldn't just take her on home. She felt useless and depressed. Even though we all tried to cheer her, we failed.

Then one day she seemed to be her old self again, and when I asked her about it, she explained. The day before when the preacher came by to visit, she lamented to him about her uselessness and her desire to just go ahead and die. She told him there wasn't anything she could do anymore. He took her hand in his and very wisely said, "Why, Lizzie, you might just be the most important person in the whole congregation because you don't have to cook and clean and do all that work you used to do. That means you are blessed with a lot of time to pray for others. And we have a lot of people in desperate need of those prayers." Before he left, he made her a list of those who needed her prayers, and she began to lift their needs before the Father.

The change in her was remarkable. She now knew what God wanted her to do with her empty hours. The preacher updated her list as he visited her each week. It wasn't long before the members began stopping by to thank her for her prayers and to share how they had been answered. Before she died she was almost grateful to be homebound because it allowed her plenty of time

to pray for others. She developed the Christian habit of being thankful, even while enduring difficult circumstances. After my own experience many years later, I could more fully admire her faith and appreciate her example.

Linda Settle, Rolla, MO

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Two Words

Two-word phrases are interesting. Some evolve and have a different meaning today than the original meaning. Let me share a few that have lasted and are popular today.

1. Hands down – In horse racing a jockey who is way out front doesn't even have to lift his hand to guide his horse. It has come to mean to score a victory without much effort.
2. Double take – This came from movie makers in which the director wants to take another look at the scene in order to make sure it's like he wrote it. Today it is anything that deserves to be looked at a second time.
3. Chicken feed – To the farmer, chicken feed is the poor quality of wheat or corn that is given to chickens. The phrase soon became popular meaning a small amount of money
4. Senior moment – This phrase first appeared around 1997 to mean a lapse of memory in elderly people. Today it is applied to anyone who temporarily forgets a name, or where she laid her car keys.
5. Let's Roll – Todd Beamer, a passenger on hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 on 9/11/2001, spoke his last audible words as the plane turned in a southeast direction: "Are you ready? Let's roll." It became a catch phrase of national sentiment after 9/11. It means to get going, get busy, move along, and a time of action.

These phrases have stuck with us over the years. We continue to use them. The apostle Paul puts two words together in his final instructions in I Thessalonians 5 that are powerful for our lives. He says, "Pray continually."

Susan and I are in the same Bible class. She taught me a great lesson on "praying continually," and she has allowed me to share her story.

"My son, Kevin, was born in 1978 and was an easy and kind child. Kevin loved God, family and church. During his junior year in high school he rebelled and drew away.

He quit going to church altogether by his senior year. Satan was pursuing him. I began meeting with five Christian sisters, and we prayed for our children specifically. We did this for three years, then I continued in prayer asking for my son to return to Christ. The years passed; Kevin was now 36 years old, and honestly, I was tired of praying. I was on an airplane flying home and pulled out a writing pad. During the flight, I wrote the most heartfelt personal letter to God I had ever prayed concerning Kevin. My words were detailed and truthful. When I returned home, my son called his sister and they went to church. That day he walked to the front of the auditorium, repented, and rededicated his life to Jesus. I was overwhelmed with joy! It had been nearly 20 years! My prodigal son had come home! Praise God! From this I have learned to pray unceasingly and never give up!"

These two words can change lives – “pray continually!”

Sally Shank, Oklahoma City



Hope, not Despair

Life has certainly changed in this past month. Before, families hurried here and there getting children to their sports practices and games, and having get-togethers on the weekends watching movies or sports on the television. Life was all about go, go, go!

Now it's about sheltering in place and keeping to ourselves to keep our families safe. There are no sports events for the kids nor even to watch on the television. We have been forced to take a step back from the hustle of life, and it has given us time to stop and reflect. What is really important in our lives?

We see the count of positive COVID-19 patients going up and up; sadly, the number of deaths have increased as well. We could despair, wring our hands, and cry, “Where are you, God?” But we know where God is, and as Christians we have hope and not despair.

Satan has been given a great deal of control over the present world, building up to the time when Jesus comes back and sentences him and all his demons to the uttermost regions of hell. Satan will use each and every opportunity to make us doubt our faith and the blessed promises we have in Christ.

But if you look around you, look deeply, you'll see that Satan is failing in his attempts. We have nurses and doctors working the front lines to treat patients who have contracted the virus. As New York City is overwhelmed by the numbers of ill people, nurses and

doctors are flying in from other places to lend a hand. As truck drivers fill the highways to bring supplies to the stores, we see people holding up signs to say “thank you” and giving them meals and snacks. Women are falling back on their sewing skills to make masks to protect people from the airborne virus.

Even though schools cannot meet at their buildings, classes are being taught online and meals are still being distributed to the children. Teachers drive through the streets in a parade to see their students standing outside and waving to them.

The hands of Jesus are busy everywhere, looking out for others and taking care of the needs of their neighbors and friends. The light is shining in the darkness!

Although it's not getting as much publicity, Christians everywhere are spending more time in prayer. They are praying for the health and safety of not only their families, but for people around the globe. This is not just an American crisis. Many fervent prayers are ascending to the throne.

This is not a time for fear and despair – it is a time for hope. Hope is not a wishful thinking, but being able to visualize what has already been promised. God has promised us victory in Jesus! The battle has already been won! If we have obeyed by faith and have been baptized into Christ, we already know an eternal home in heaven is waiting for us. Let us show that hope to the world, and maybe this world “can be turned upside down” like what happened in the days of the apostles.

Lorna Smith, Lubbock, TX



The Prayer of Importunity

She was getting weary. So weary. Would the day ever come when she would get justice? She trudged up the hill to the place where the judge presided daily. No one, absolutely no one, liked him. He was arrogant and contemptuous, keenly aware of his authority. No one received respect or even the slightest common courtesy from him. And yet here she was once more to present her case to him because he was the only one with the power to rectify her situation.

Alone, a widow, there was no man to confront her neighbor who had defrauded her. There was no one to represent her before the judge. She had only herself to plead her case. Yes, the judge had power and arrogance and a hard heart, but she told herself she had something he did not. She had relentless determination. *If I must*

come knocking every day at his door for the rest of my life, I will.

This is the picture Jesus paints for His followers in Luke 18 as He teaches them “always to pray and not lose heart.” It’s a somewhat tragic picture – a grim-faced woman with nowhere else to turn imploring a godless, disrespectful man to help her. It all seems so futile.

Jesus then reveals, though, that the woman’s relentless determination ultimately wins out. This judge who doesn’t care about anyone else, not even about God, at least cares about his own convenience. He finally grants her a judgment in court just so he won’t ever have to see her face or hear her voice again.

Much like Jesus’ lesson in Luke 11 about God giving good gifts to His children, the parable in Luke 18 is a lesson in comparison and contrast, not a parallel. If a father will give his child good, wholesome food and not something toxic, how much more will God the Father, the epitome of love, give good gifts? And if a sorry, no-good judge – who ought to be disbarred – will grant justice just to get rid of the petitioner, how much more will a perfect, holy God hear and answer the prayers of His children whom He loves?

The parable of the persistent widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18 calls us to persist, to engage in the prayer of importunity. Importunity is one of those words we may not use in everyday conversation, but it simply means persistence—even to the point of annoyance. Jesus taught a very similar parable in Luke 11:5-8 where a persistent neighbor knocks at the door late at night asking for bread. Many translations say that because of his “importunity,” the other neighbor finally gives in.

So do these parables teach us that God must be annoyed to distraction before He will act? And when He does act on our behalf, is it only to stop the sound of our voices? No. We might also think of a prayer of importunity as a prayer of perseverance. It is not a test of God. It is a test of us. It is a test of our trust in God, and our belief in Jesus’ statement that we “ought always to pray and not lose heart.”

Jesus always led by example, and perhaps the most famous example of a prayer of importunity was His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me’... And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” Luke 22:42, 44. He prayed it repeatedly; He importuned God the Father with His whole being.

And the answer, as it sometimes may be for us, was No. God always answers, but knowing what is best and what we cannot always understand, He sometimes answers No. When that happens, we must follow the example of Jesus. “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” Having prayed and not having lost heart, but at last perceiving the answer, we must say Yes to God.

Ina McKune, Rolla, Missouri

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PRAYER

Think of the Lord Speaking to you and saying...

You do not have to be clever to please me. All you have to do is want to love me. Just speak to me as you would to anyone of whom you are very fond.

Are there any people you want to pray for? Say their names to me and ask me as much as you like. I am generous and know all their needs, but I want you to show your love for them and for me by trusting me to do what I know is best.

Tell me about the poor, the sick, the sinners. If you have lost the friendship or affection of anyone, tell me about that, too.

Is there anything you want for your soul? If you like, you can write out a long list of all your needs and come and read it to me. Just tell me about your pride, your touchiness, self-centeredness, meanness, and laziness. Do not be ashamed. There are many saints in heaven who had the same faults as you. They prayed to me. Little by little, their faults were corrected, too.

Do not hesitate to ask me for blessings for the body, mind, health, memory, success. I can give everything needed to make souls holier.

What is it that you want today? Trust me, for I long to do you good. What are your plans? Tell me about them. Is there anyone you want to please? What do you want to do for them?

And don’t you want to do anything for me? Don’t you want to do a little good to the souls of your friends who perhaps have forgotten me? Tell me about your failures, and I will show you the cause of them. What are your worries? Who has caused you pain? Tell me about it, and ADD that you will forgive. I will bless you.

Are you afraid of anything? Have you any tormenting, unreasonable fears? Trust yourself to me. I am here. I see everything. I will not leave you.

Have you no joys to tell me about? Why not share your happiness with me? Tell me what has happened since yesterday to cheer and comfort you. Whatever it was, however big or small, I prepared it. Show me your gratitude and thank me.

Are you determined to run into no temptations? Have you made up your mind about bad friendships and bad books that disturb the peace of your soul? Are you going to be kind to that one who has hurt you?

Well, go along now. Try to be quieter, humbler, more submissive, and kinder. Come back soon and bring a more devoted heart. Tomorrow I shall have more blessings for you.

Author Unknown

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Prayer

Prayer has always been a favorite biblical subject for me. I believe prayer is one of the greatest, most important privileges (duties) in the lives of Christians. It is also one of our most neglected privileges.

God speaks to us through His word, and we talk to Him through prayer. Relationship with Him must be a two-way street. Without close daily relationship with Him, our lives may be filled with anxiety, stress, anger, faithlessness, materialism, fear, or unbearable grief. Do we live as though this is the only life we have? Paul told the Ephesians they needed to mature (grow up) in Christ (Ephesians 4:13-14).

Several years ago, I attended two 3-day prayer retreats and did a study on prayer. The retreats and the study of prayer were great blessings. One of the studies was, "Prayerlessness and the Disaster it can Bring." In the physical realm, if an infant does not grow, it will die. The same is true in the spiritual realm.

Joshua 9:3-27 tells of the Gibeonite deception. Moses was dead, and leadership of the Israelites had been passed to Joshua. Led by God, Joshua conquered and destroyed Jericho and Ai. God said **all** the cities of Canaan and their inhabitants were to be destroyed. No peace treaties were to be made because God wanted no contamination in the land He was giving to His people. Through the Israelites, He was bringing judgment upon this land of wickedness.

When the Gibeonites heard of this conquest, they were very afraid. They decided to trick Joshua into making a treaty of peace with them. Pretending to be from a far

country, they went to Joshua. They loaded donkeys with worn out sacks and cracked, mended wineskins. They put on worn-out, patched sandals and wore old clothes. The bread in their food supply was dry and moldy. When Joshua asked who they were and where they were from, they replied, "*Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God.*"

Joshua and the Israelites believed them and made a treaty with the Gibeonites. They forgot one important thing—to inquire of God. God would have told them who these men were and would have reminded them of His commands concerning the land. Three days later, the Israelites discovered who these men really were. It was too late to do anything but honor the treaty they had made. Breaking the treaty would compound the problem. This "mistake" changed everything. Now, the Gibeonites were a great burden to Israel to feed, clothe, and house them as slaves and were a constant reminder of the great mistake Joshua and the Israelites had made. It would haunt them for all time (Numbers 33:55-56).

Our lives can be disastrous without prayer. Prayer brings wisdom; wisdom brings discernment. We can only gain wisdom by asking God for it (James 1:5). In 1 Kings 3:9, Solomon prayed for wisdom, "*So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?*" God's answer is in verse 12. "*I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.*"

If God is not our leader and guide in **every** decision we make, we are prone to making wrong decisions. Discernment is being able to wisely decide what is good and what is evil, what answers are coming from God, and what may be coming from some other source.

The Bible speaks a lot about discernment. "*The discerning heart seeks knowledge,*" Proverbs 15:14. "*The wise in heart are called discerning,*" Proverbs 16:21. "*The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge,*" Proverbs 18:15. "*Rejoice always, pray continually,*" 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17. "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,*" Philippians 4:6.

Every aspect of our lives—choice of marriage partner, vocation, school, etc.—can be disastrous if we fail to inquire of God and wait on Him to lead us. When God is

left out, homes are broken, lives are shattered, children suffer, and preventable illnesses are endured—all because we did not “inquire of God.”

At times, we are guilty of being undiscerning; the result can be failure and unhappiness. God always knows what is best for us. His timetable is not always the same as ours. We are impatient people, not wanting to wait on anything. Every generation can fall into the same trap. Abram and Sarai tried to speed up God’s timetable (Genesis 16). Trouble came to them because they had tried to “help God out.” Sometimes we think we know more than God and that we can hurry things along. What unhappiness and heartbreak we could avoid if we were just willing to wait for Him.

Prayer is an awesome privilege. May we all grow in this great privilege! *“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord”* (Psalm 27:14); *“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him”* (Psalm 37:7).

Mary Anna Melton, Rolla, Missouri

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Prayer... It’s Special

I’ve been praying ever since I was little
And I never thought much about it
I just spouted my words right out there
And I figured I’d done what I needed to do
And everything would be okay
Well, I must have prayed for the wrong things
Or maybe in the wrong way
Because some things just ...didn’t turn out right
And then I grew up a little more
And listened to more Bible school lessons
And one day...
The words from one of those lessons
Finally made it to my brain cells
And prayer has never been the same since
Let me tell you in my little kid way
The way I see prayer now
It’s like “Wow!”
Do you know who you are talking to
When you bow your head
Close your eyes and say, “Dear Father in Heaven”
Well, let me tell you
You just opened the communication line
You’re talking to God!
The one and only Lord God Almighty
The one and only God

The God who made the earth
And everything in it and on it, the creator who made you
And everyone else there ever was, is or will be
And He really is now listening to little ol’ you
What are you going to say
To this one and only powerful Being?
I look up at night and see the stars
The One you’re getting ready to talk to...
He made all those stars and our moon too
Talk about power! Wow! He’s got it!
And a new baby
Wow! He made that baby inside its momma
You hold a baby and you are holding
Something God just made!
Seems like there ought to be
A better word than just “Wow!”
Maybe our knees ought to hit the deck
Every time we say “Our Father in Heaven”
Cause you’re talking to God, the one and only God
The one we all will meet some day

Have you told Him today that you love Him?

By Jackie Dean, Springfield, MO

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MY PRAYER

Please, this is my prayer, Psalm 118. Heavenly Father, deal with me kindly. Because your lovingkindness is good, deliver me from people that may not like me. This is what I want. Let me be proud of myself, and not put myself down anymore. Thank you for loving me and other people. Please help me when I walk and stand. I need you very much. I also give thanks to you with all of my heart. And you know I am sincere all the time, you have helped me very much. I love you very much for helping me. This is all for now, in Jesus’ name.

In Christian love,
Shirley Isbell, Rolla, MO

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