

## I. The Priority of Prayer

That's the man who knew how to pray. Prayer is a priority. Priorities are something that takes precedence over another thing or things. Your being here this morning is a priority over sleep, which none of us got much of last night. Priorities are the blueprint for what you're going to do in your own life.

Years ago, in the war between England and France in 1815, Napoleon was battling a fellow named Wellington, who was the British commander. The battlefield was out here, and yet over here was a barn or whatever, which was on a hill. Here's the battlefield, and Napoleon was sending massive numbers of troops over here to this building. Wellington did the same thing. Wellington won the battle. You see, that was the high ground. They knew whoever had the high ground would win the battle. The high ground for a Christian is prayer. It is so important and yet so little used.

## II. The Church as a House of Prayer

As a local church, this independent, Bible-preaching, old-time church, if you please, God has given a priority here.

*Isaiah 56:7*

*Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.*

He went on to say, "For mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all peoples." It didn't say a house of preaching. Isn't that amazing? A house of prayer. So, your individual home as well as your corporate home. Now, you will have great preaching and teaching, but God says, "Be careful." Be careful because if you depend upon the preaching for doing everything, you may lose a whole lot. Prayer says, "God, You're in charge." The pastor will be the first one to say, "God better be in charge in this place." Then he'll say, "God better be in charge." How do we know He's in charge? It's if we're talking to Him. How do I know if God's in charge of my home? Is it because I read my Bible every day? Well, I do that. I want to do that. But do I turn it all over to my Father who is in heaven?

You see, we come here, and if we're not careful, we get up and we throw up a prayer that may not go very far. Prayer is going to be in the millennial kingdom. It's interesting; Isaiah 56:7 deals with people going there in prayer. You read Revelation, prayer. Because prayer is recognition of who's in charge. It says, "You're in charge, Lord." My house is going to be talked about as a house of prayer. He calls us to that.

*Jeremiah 7:11*

*Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.*

You see, that which was the house of prayer, and as we know, when Jesus walked into that same house, He said, "My house shall be called a what? A house of prayer." You made it a den of things to those people who were buying and selling there.

*John 2:16*

*And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.*

It goes to the house of prayer. It's a place where we come corporately and say, "God, You're in charge."

### III. Prayer: First of All

Now, you have great teachers and an excellent preacher-teacher here, a prophetic kind of a guy who can share these things. He's sort of weird at times, but a good guy who knows his name. But we better make sure that we're not looking to Bob for answers. We're looking to the Boss for answers. I'm not being unkind with that, because the moment somebody takes the place of God, we're all in trouble. We had a great pastor in Canton, Ohio, Harold Henniger, the most gracious man who ever lived. My house should be called the house of prayer. God still has to be in charge, and He wants that particular place.

Paul, writing to Timothy, said, and he'll turn there to 1 Timothy chapter 2 for just a moment. He said, "Listen," and again, let me say this, "prayer is not easy." I remember, I don't know if you ever went through this, Jim, I'd gotten saved in Houston, Texas, and I remember the first, they called them watch night services. I remember going to that thing there, and these people were going to pray past midnight. After about three minutes, I was still praying, and it wasn't 11 o'clock yet. I was in trouble. I remember I'd be on my knees, and I'd look over there, some of these little preachers, they're praying, I guess they're praying. I didn't know if they were sleeping or praying. But I'd look over there, "Man, how does he do this stuff?" Prayer is not easy, because prayer is humbling yourself. You see, with prayer, you don't do anything much except talk to Him. But we want to do; we're doers instead of talking to Him first.

*1 Timothy 2:1-4*

*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;*

*For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;*

*Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

He's talking to Timothy, who's going to become a leader in the church. He could say, "Timothy, after you sing, after you preach, after you witness, pray." No, no, no, no, no, "first of all." And I'll be very honest, in multitudes of Christian lives, it's sort of last of all. Eighty, ninety percent of Christians, their prayers are "Hail Marys." "God, I'm in trouble, help!" Don't let "Hail Mary" pass up to heaven. Young people start praying when they see a girl that they'd like for her to like him, and they pray for God to touch her heart, instead of praying for God to make their heart what it ought to be, or vice versa.

Prayer. "First of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks to be made for all men, for kings, and all that are in authority." I appreciate that Jim, I think you said every Sunday, the church prays for the president, whether you like it or not, because he's the official God has put over us there. "Pray for them that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved." Hey, I pray first, and then God's going to get some people saved.

But we can mix that thing up, can't we? We can go up to Nebraska, or we can go in, and I used to work in child evangelism; they went all over the country. If we weren't careful, it was so easy to get, "You've got to do this, and you've got to do this, and you've got to do that." And God sort of stands back and says, "Well, let me know when you need My help." You go through and you get married, and your kids come, and you get involved in this, you get involved in that. We get over here at the church, "Got to do this, got to do that, got to go over here, got to do all these things here." And you get tired, and you wonder, "What's wrong?" Have you talked to the Father lately? You see, that's the communion that He wants more than anything in the world. The aroma of God's house ought to be the aroma of prayer.

The food last night was great, whoever made all those things. I was standing there talking to people, and I kept eating that barbecue. It kept talking to me at three o'clock this morning. No, but the aroma here needs to be the aroma that God's in charge. We're going to talk to Him. We're going to seek His face. It's a priority. People sometimes need weeks to fit the church into their life and their schedule, but if they've got something going on they want to go to, they can do that the next moment. It takes time to get prayer in their life, but if this is a fun thing, they'll get to doing it. Preaching is great, we need it. God says, "Who's in charge?" Because if you're not careful, you'll put such weight on the back of your pastor and the leadership in this church that they can't handle it. But if you're a people of prayer, they'll be able to handle everything. But if you're not a people of prayer, you'll be depending upon people instead of the God who enables those people. Same thing in your home. How's your prayer life? The music of heaven is prayer.

You think of what we call the Lord's Prayer. I know they do that before all the football games. I'm always wondering if God gets confused because a guy on this team scores and he points up to heaven. They go down and they score at the other place, they point up to heaven. Which side is God on? I don't know. I'm not going to comment, Jimmy, because I know. All right. I was saying, he said last night he'll preach all day. I thought, "Go ahead, I'm leaving at noon."

#### IV. Prayer: The Power Plant of the Church

It's amazing in Acts chapter 4, under the persecution. The local church was not born while preaching; it was born while praying. Isn't that amazing? The upper room, they're praying.

*Acts 1:14*

*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*

Then Acts chapter 4, verse 18, they went back to a prayer meeting. They'd been thrown in jail and everything else.

*Acts 4:23-26*

*And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.*

*And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and the sea, and all that in them is:*

*Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?*

*The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.*

They lifted up their voice to God with one accord and preached? No, they prayed. "God, You are God, which made heaven and earth." See, they're acknowledging what the chain of command was. You're first. You're first before my wife. You're first before my kids. You're first before the preacher. When God gets first place, we can put everything else in right order the right way. It doesn't mean you don't take care of these other things. What it means is the fact that I serve Him. If I'm going to serve Him right, I'll take care of her right. I'll take care of my kids right. And I'll do what I need to do right in church. But if I get mixed up and I forget to put Him first, it's amazing how it will, pardon the language, screw up everything else I'm trying to be used in. Lord, You have been good to us. When they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, they said, "You're God, You made heaven, You made earth." They see it all in the midst. "Who by the mouth of Thy servant David said, 'Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?'" It was amazing. They came out of being persecuted and started praising because they realized God's in charge. Do you? Do I? Their instinct was prayer. When persecuted, prayer. God's house is the house of prayer.

Some great effects when you do that.

*Acts 6:4*

*But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*

It's amazing what prayer results in. The effect of prayer is to be able to maybe witness in Nebraska. The effect of prayer is to witness in Kansas City. One of the results of prayer is to be able to minister in the schools that you go to. You young men and young ladies go into school,

high school, junior high, wherever you go, that's your mission field. You don't have to go to Africa. God's got it all around you. Now, you have to determine, "Do I want to be popular with God or with them?" If you want to be popular with God first, the neat thing is, you can still be popular with others in the right way. Now, you don't go throwing Bibles at them and things like that. But you get up in the morning, "God, use me some way to minister to someone in this school." And you get up instead of saying, "Good Lord morning," you say, "Good morning, Lord. How can I be used today?" You may be amazed what God will do.

We had a chance coming in. There's a young lady, a sharp-looking little girl in front of us, a college graduate. She had a cage with her, her pet rabbit. I've never seen anybody bring a rabbit on a trip. Sweet girl, wasn't she? Just a sweet, sweet, born-again believer though, invited her to church here also. Just a nice young man. But you never know who God will give you a chance to witness to. I had a chance to witness to Meadowlark Lemon, some of you who are old and know who he was. Man, the Globetrotter leader, that's amazing. God gives you lots of opportunities to witness to people. But you better do prayer first. Do prayer first.

I enjoy golfing, but I always pray, "Lord, give me someone to talk to." I was one time golfing with a guy, and he rebuilt homes and so on. Cocky as could be. He said, "What do you do?" I said, "Well, I work for a Father-Son business." I got this from Chuck Swindoll years ago, and I've adopted it. He said, "Oh." I said, "Yeah, man, we've got a great spirit in this thing." "Oh, okay." I said, "And you asked what we do? I work with them. We supply retirement homes." I said, "It's amazing. The Benefactor has set aside such funds. These places are absolute mansions. And the retirement plan is out of this world." This guy's counting. I'm serious. I remember he was cocky, but he listened to us. I said, "And the amazing thing is, those who sign up for it, they don't pay a dime." I said, "It's unbelievable health benefits." I said, "Twenty-four-hour security." It's amazing what you can do, man. He didn't even want to talk about his business anymore. I'd blown by him so far. When we got through, I said, "Hey, I think I carried my contract with him. You will see it. Would you like to have a copy?" "Oh, man. Yeah." So I handed him a gospel tract.

I read about the little boy one time, I remember this quickly. This cocky guy, this kid was reading his Bible on the plane. Some wise cracker sat next to him and said, "Hey, son, I'll give you an apple if you can right now show me something God can do." The boy looked over at him and said, "I'll give you a crate of apples if you can show me something God can't do." Prayer, man. Seeking God for wisdom. It's basically the wisdom God will give you if you pray.

I only knew a couple of guys in high school who knew the Lord. After I got saved, I respected them, but they stood for truth. God wants us to do it. "We'll give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word." If you do the ministry of the word without prayer, it's amazing what will not take place.

*Philippians 1:19*

*For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,*

I want to read you an illustration. I think I brought it this morning. It's a true story. This isn't preaching; this is a true story.

This missionary was on furlough, and he told this while visiting his church home. He said, "I was serving in a small field hospital in Africa. Every two weeks I traveled by bicycle through the jungle to a nearby city for supplies. This was a journey of two days, required camping overnight at the halfway point. On one of these journeys, I arrived in the city where I planned to collect money from a bank, purchase medicine and supplies, and then begin my two-day journey back to the field hospital. Upon arriving, I observed two men fighting, one of whom had been seriously injured. I treated him for his injuries and at the same time witnessed to him about the Lord. I then traveled the two days, camping overnight, and arrived home without incident. Two weeks later, I repeated my journey, and upon arriving in the city, I was approached by the young man that I had previously treated. He looked at me and said, 'You know, I knew you were carrying money and medicines.' Then he said, 'Some friends and I followed you into the jungle, knowing you'd have to camp overnight. We planned to kill you, take your money and drugs, but just as we were about to move into your camp, we saw you were surrounded by about 26 armed guards.'"

The missionary said, "I laughed and said, 'Man, I was alone.'" The young man pressed the point. He said, "No, my friends and I also saw them, and we all counted them. Because of those guys, we left. We were afraid to leave you alone."

At this point, as this missionary is preaching, one of the men in the congregation of his home church in the United States, not Africa, stood up. He said, "Preacher, wait a minute. When was that that happened?" The missionary told him the date. The man said, "Wait a minute, sir. On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here. I was getting ready to play golf. I was literally about to putt when I felt the urge to pray for you." (He added, "I've had an urge to pray when I've putted lots of times.") Anyway, he said, "I was about to putt. In fact, the urging was so strong, I left the golf course, called some men in my church, and said, 'Meet me here. We need to pray.'" This member of the church looked around the congregation and said, "Will all of you men who met me to pray stand up?" They all stood up. The missionary began counting. He counted 26 men. That native said you had 26 soldiers standing around you. You don't think your prayers mean something? Twenty-six men protected him.

You see, when you pray here, you never know what God's going to do there. But if you don't pray here, you'll never know what God's going to do there. I think of that situation, and I think of when our son went through it. He went through it. Can you imagine somebody walks in, sticks a gun right there, and says, "Don't you move"? That's what they did to my son. My flesh wanted to go there and not be very Christian to people. I mean that. Because they could have just as easily killed him as left him. I believe that it was the prayers of people who were seeking the face of God.

The unity in the church in Jerusalem was born in a prayer meeting. They all continued with prayer and supplication. It's amazing, isn't it? Their instinct was prayer. "My house will be called a house of prayer." This church here, it's great what you have. But I don't think you even know the beginning of what God may want to do through what you all have here. But I believe this

group and you are the prayer. Unbelievable with prayer, people. Young people, what God will do in and through your life. Sometimes we don't see it now; we will see it later. But it comes through prayer. It's leadership enabling when you pray. They said, "We'll give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word." All Sunday school teachers, you need to be praying for them. The hand of God will be all over.

Prayer is not easy because it's one of those things that we don't necessarily see the results right now. But God said to do it, and Lord, I believe You for it. Critical needs. Prayer answers that.

*Philippians 1:19*

*For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,*

He was in jail, but he said, "You pray."

*2 Corinthians 1:11*

*Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.*

Your prayer can encourage somebody else somewhere else. It doesn't matter if others aren't praying. You be that prayer warrior. Learn to develop that. Witnessing power.

*Ephesians 6:18-19*

*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*

*And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,*

Paul said, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance for all saints, and for me, that utterance may be given me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel." You need to pray for Danny when he speaks or sings, and anybody else, and pray for Pastor Bob when he preaches. Don't come to us to be fascinated by what we're doing. "Oh God, this can, if I'm not careful, this can fly way over my head. God, give my preacher power that what he says can penetrate my heart, and penetrate the heart of those around us, that we not look at him, but we look at Him because He's the source. And these men are just the mouthpieces for God. Use them as tools that You get glorified, Lord Jesus."

I remember someone who had heard one of the great preachers of England. They had great men there when Spurgeon was in the area. In the 1800s, they had thousands in these churches. Some men were heard to have come out of one of the great preachers that was in England. "Man, wow, what a message!" Then they went to Spurgeon's church. Spurgeon said, "I want to show you a power plant." These guys, "Okay." They were looking for a boiler room. He took them downstairs to where several hundred men were praying. "Here's our power plant." People who had walked out of the one church and said, "Wow, what a message!" They walked out of

Spurgeon's church after the service and said, "Oh, what a Savior!" You see, there's a difference. You ought to leave here every Sunday, "Hey, great message!" But, "What a Savior!" Because you want to point people to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. You want the defining thing of this church to be, "We serve a risen, awesome Savior, and we want people to know about Him." Because Bob will make mistakes. Danny will make mistakes. Their wives don't, but they do. We all make those mistakes. But Jesus never made a mistake. If we fall in love with Him and help people to see Him, we can look beyond the mistakes that preachers and teachers and everybody else makes. But what a Savior who can take a poor lost sinner, lift him up. I won't sing. Jim will tell you why, probably.

## V. The Privilege and Secret of Prayer

"When thou prayest," it's a privilege. Not "if you pray," but "when." They say Wesley's mother, she had a parcel of kids. When she would take her apron and put it over her head, that was her prayer closet. Her kids knew, "Shut up and don't bother me."

*Matthew 6:6*

*But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

Sometimes your prayer closet may just be sitting at a piano stool over here. And great piano, pray for them, man. I can't even play chopsticks. I love it. She gets them and does all of them. The music is great. Pray for them. But pray to your Father in secret. Jim and I know in New England, we see these, sometimes these fat, pompous individuals walking around with the collars and all that stuff. They get their glory. Our glory is not who we are. Our glory is in talking to Him. Young people, I want to challenge you, listen. Take time to talk to your Father. Your Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly.

*Revelation 5:8*

*And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.*

God takes and knows your prayers. I read this some years ago, and I've saved it for a long time. By the Great Commission Prayer League, it says, "No Christian is greater than his prayer life. The church may have many organizers, but few agonizers. Many who pay, but few who pray. Many wrestlers, but few wrestlers. Many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding. People who are not praying are playing."

I won't mention his name. Many of you may know him; I know Jim would. A man who was a great preacher in the Baptist Bible Fellowship, a great leader. I remember one time years ago when I was in New England, he was preaching at a fellowship meeting. He said, "You know, I don't have time to pray. My men pray for me." That's exactly the thought I had, Jim. And you know what? His messages at that time were sort of sterile and cold. God took him through a valley, and then I heard him again later on. He was a praying preacher who had time to talk to

God, and the power of God was on him. You see, the ministry of preaching is open to a few, but the ministry of praying is open to every child of God. Don't mistake action for unction, commotion for creation, and rattles for revival. The secret of praying is praying in secret. A worldly Christian will stop praying, and a praying Christian will stop worldliness. Pretty true.

When we pray, God listens to our heartbeat. Hannah's lips moved, but her voice was not heard. When we pray in the Spirit, there are groanings which can't be uttered. Tithes may build a church, but tears will give it life. There's a difference between the modern church and the early church. Our emphasis today in this world we live in today is paying; theirs was praying. When we've paid, the place is taken. When they prayed, the place was shaken. There's a world of difference in that. This is an unusual church. You hear people say it all the time, but don't take it for granted. God can take His hand off this church just in a moment's time. What will keep His hand on this work? Men and women and young people who believe that we need to pray, that God will keep our hearts clean and close to Him. In the matter of effective praying, never have so many left so much to so few. Brethren, let us pray. One man said, "Seven days without prayer make one week. W-E-A-K." And we don't prevail because we don't travail.

## VI. A Dying Church and the Five-Finger Prayer

I think of this reality, and I'm going to close with the illustration out of the book of Acts chapter 10. They say that only two of the seven churches of Revelation, Pergamum and Thyatira, were scolded for false doctrine. Most of them had lost their spiritual vitality. Isn't that amazing? Ephesus, wow, I read the book of Ephesus, and my head busts. The heavenlies. Wow. But they lost their spiritual vitality.

What's a picture of a dying church? I've heard lots of illustrations, but if I had one, it would be of a church that you see a picture of it: a huge congregation. Places are full. Money coming in all over the place. So that's a picture of a dying church? Keep looking. You look around, and wow, they've got all these teenagers, all these people here, all these people here. But then over here, there's a door. It's this prayer room. And you look close, you know what? Of course, there's a spider web over the door, covering the door. Because that thing, that thing that makes it something special, is the prayer of God's people. That can happen here. I've watched it happen in lots of churches. They had all the tools, and they were doing it. God, sort of, I think, was sitting back, "Let me know when you're tired." We need to study. We need to preach. We need to sing praises. But I tell you, that will not suffice for a biblical church. "My house should be called the house of..."

It says we do that. Everybody hold your hand up like this. I always try to teach people, teaching their daughters a long time ago, when you pray, pray for those closest to you.

- 1.) The thumb: Those closest to you (family, friends).
- 2.) The index finger: Those who point the way (teachers, preachers, those giving out the Word of God).
- 3.) The middle finger: Those in authority (leaders, government).
- 4.) The ring finger: The weak (sick, struggling, those who need help).

- 5.) The pinky finger: Yourself (your own needs).

So when you do that, it's a good way to think about prayer.

## VII. The Power of One Man's Prayer: Cornelius

In Acts chapter 10, there's a man who would not be called a believer in our time. He was one who sought after God. He was an Old Testament believer, if you please. An interesting thing took place in his life. He sought God. His name was Cornelius. He was a soldier. He was a special forces guy, Brother Bob, of the Italian band. That meant he was the Italian soldier there, and he'd be in charge of at least 100 individuals.

*Acts 10:2*

*A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.*

He was like an Old Testament believer. Now, Acts is that transitional place, and he needed something more though.

*Acts 10:3-4*

*He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.*

*And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

"Wow."

*Acts 10:5-6*

*And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:*

*He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.*

"Wow."

*Acts 10:7*

*And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;*

Cornelius calls his house servants and the loyal guards, sends them out.

*Acts 10:9-16*

*On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:*

*And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance;*

*And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:*

*Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.*

*And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.*

*But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*

*And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

*This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.*

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, getting near to the city, Peter goes up on top of the housetop to pray about the sixth hour, about noontime. Amazing what happens when you pray. So he's praying, and he's hungry. He's a Baptist, probably. He fell into a trance and saw heaven opened, and a vessel descending to him, a great sheet knit at the four corners. All manner of four-footed beasts, wild ones, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. A voice said, "Peter, kill and eat." And Peter made this contradictory statement, "Not so, Lord." He called Him Lord and said no. See Leviticus 11, there are things you don't eat. "You're a card-carrying Jew. I can't eat that stuff, God." He said, "Listen, I've never eaten anything unclean." Now, he said a lot of unclean things. "I've never eaten anything unclean or uncommon." The voice said again, "Eat it. What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." Three times! Aren't you glad you listened to God the first time? Peter, down it came again. "No!" Down it came again. Peter's wondering what in the world. He doubted what's going on.

*Acts 10:17*

*Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,*

Then he hears them rumbling downstairs.

*Acts 10:19-20*

*While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.*

*Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.*

They said, "These guys were there. There's someone, a guy named Simon Peter." So the Spirit of God said to Peter, "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, get thee down, and go with them. Doubt nothing, for I have sent them." Now remember, Peter's a Jew. Jews, they meant there are three things they didn't want to be near in this sense, the old Pharisee: women, a dog, and a Gentile. Now, "Peter, I want you to go to these Gentiles." "Good night! What are my

friends going to think? What do my relatives think if I go to that Bible-preaching church over there?"

And so he does, and if you know the story, he gets there and he comes into the house.

*Acts 10:24-26*

*And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.*

*And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.*

*But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.*

Cornelius, that's after a couple of days, he's there, calls his kinsmen and his near friends. He brought all his relatives. I love this. Cornelius believed more in the things of God at that moment than Simon Peter did. He got all his relatives together because he believed God was going to speak to his heart through this man because he prayed and asked God to do something. God was answering the prayer. He got them together there. When he came in, Cornelius bowed down to Peter, wanted to worship him. Peter was right. He said, "Listen, I'm a man, and you stand up. You only bow before Jesus."

So he talked to him, and as you know, Peter said,

*Acts 10:28*

*And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*

You read the rest of the story, Cornelius comes to faith. Peter goes his way, but he knows in the back of his mind there's going to be a problem in Jerusalem. They learned about it, and the Bible says when he got to Jerusalem,

*Acts 11:2*

*And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,*

The believing Jews who were of the circumcision, they contended with him, "What do you think you're doing going there?" And he shared how that God had opened the door of the Gentiles to him. Because of prayer, Peter risked his whole future. Some of you, because you have sought the face of God in prayer, you are risking a lot of things in the future to do what you believe God wants you to do. But prayer causes that. Prayer changes your destination. Prayer changes your priorities. Prayer changes what happens in other people's lives because you listen to Him. Peter was praying. Cornelius was praying. God did a work.

*Ephesians 6:18-19*

*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*

*And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,*

Paul said, "Pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth as I ought to." Your prayer groups, as you pray for the health of this person, that person, all these things, God's going to do something.

The interesting thing to me is to keep in mind the power of one prayer. What do you mean? Cornelius, he wasn't a Jew. How many of you here are Jews? No Jews? You see, every one of you are a result of Cornelius's prayer. That's the power of one prayer. One man from Italy prayed and sought the face of God, and God opened up so you could get saved, and you could get saved, and you could get saved, and everybody in here gets saved because of Cornelius. Isn't that amazing, the power of one man's prayer? Because he prayed, God opened that door to the Gentiles, and we get in. What a God we serve. What a God we serve.

I want to encourage you, listen. He's listening. The prayer of the upright is His delight. There are a lot of things I enjoy, but I've learned, I'm trying to learn all the time. I'm 73 now. And I realize there are only some things that are going to really count in heaven. Only what's done for Christ will last. It really does start with prayer, and then being in the Word. Not worshipping the Word, worshipping the God of the Word. Not worshipping the book, worshipping the God of the Book. There's a difference. This is my tool, but He's my trust. When I do that, you'll be amazed. God will use you to reach someone's life that perhaps you could never imagine. In heaven, can you imagine what's going to happen when you meet Cornelius and you say, "Cornelius, man, thanks for praying that prayer. I got in. I got in because..." Now, Jesus wanted it to happen. I always win all that. But the power of one man's prayer, 2000 years ago, you're saved. You're saved. You're saved. I'm saved. And God worked through that man's prayer.

Father, we come to You. I pray these prayer groups, whether they see the results now or not, they shall one day. Cornelius never saw all the results. Wow. What's going into his bank in the account of heaven because he prayed and he was faithful to God. Lord, You honored that prayer, and every Gentile is saved because the door was open to Gentiles through that man's prayer. Thank You, Lord. Thank You for men and women in this church and young people who I've heard pray before, who challenged my heart. Thank You for what You're doing here. But may we ever remember, Lord, You're the Lord of this church. May we ever come to You in prayer. May we ever praise You to the ultimate. We can appreciate what everyone else is doing, but You're God. You're the Savior. Lord Jesus, till You come, may we lift up Your name above every other name. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.