

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
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The Sermon: PRAY ALWAYS

Scripture: Book of Mormon, Alma 16:218-222.

Cry unto him for mercy, for he is mighty to save. Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him; cry unto him when ye are in your fields; yea, over all your flocks; Cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening; yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies; yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness. Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them; cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase. But this is not all: ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness; Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.

Ye must pray always, and not faint.

Few of us know how to pray. Ofttimes those who are most punctilious about maintaining regular habits of prayer know least about it, simply because their prayers have become habitual, mechanical, meaningless, and therefore ineffectual. Prayer can become simply a matter of form and ceremony, and lose its spontaneity and its honesty. Prayer can become very lengthy, and never come to the point. Prayer can be couched in the most eloquently pious phraseology, and yet be irreverent and hypocritical. Many of us, I fear, pray without faith, without expectation, without much honesty, and without much to show in the way of results. All of us need to pray frequently the prayer of Jesus' disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray."

Why should we pray? Because sincere, heartfelt, intelligent, dedicated, directed prayer is the most effective tool we can use to achieve happiness, health, and success for ourselves and all those about us, and to build for ourselves a character that is worthy to enjoy God's presence through eternity. It is our best tool in helping to establish God's reign and God's kingdom among the children of men -- beginning with ourselves. Because prayer at its best could furnish the answer to so many of our needs in an age when we demand that everything be practical, more people should have more successful daily experience with prayer.

Where does prayer begin? It should begin with an utter and absolute honesty

which is willing to confess that we are not as good as we ought to be, and to see objectively and specifically why and in what way. It begins with an honest admission that we are not self-sufficient, that we need God. It begins with faith in God, the Creator, the Father of all, the inexhaustible source of all good, the author and arbiter of every law in the universe. Only by facing ourselves and our need honestly, and by working in harmony with God and his laws, can we hope to be successful in prayer.

The Book of Mormon tells us that there is a good Spirit, the Spirit of God, which teaches us to pray, and that we should hearken to it. There is an opposing spirit which teaches men that they do not need to pray, that prayer is useless and foolish. The good Spirit will not only teach us to pray, but will teach us how and for what to pray, so that we shall ask in the mind and spirit and will of God, and asking aright, may have our prayers answered. We cannot expect God to bless us by harming or depriving someone else. We cannot ask him to suspend or cancel all the laws of the universe in order to give us what we want. But by prayer we can be made aware of and taught how to use the laws and forces and inexhaustible powers which are eternally available, but which in the very nature of things cannot be made available to the irreverent, the proud, the arrogant, the self-sufficient, or the sinful who would misuse them only to create greater suffering and need. We need to cultivate the Spirit that teaches prayer.

When Christ visited the people of ancient America, the Book of Mormon records that he taught his disciples how to pray, and that "they did not multiply many words, for it was given unto them what they should pray, and they were filled with desire." If we can have this Spirit to direct our prayers, and if we can pray in the name and in the Spirit of Jesus, we can pray with expectation and with results, claiming God's promise that we may ask what we will and receive it.

Those who have learned the secret and the power of prayer, and who heed the promptings of the good Spirit, will pray always, and not faint. This does not mean that one must spend all his waking time on his knees to the neglect of his daily work. Rather it means that even when there is no expression or phrasing of prayer, the mind and heart will still be in an attitude of praise, humble thanksgiving, and joyful communion with God. The Book of Mormon says, "Yea, let all the doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest, let it be in the Lord; yea, let thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever; counsel the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good." "Praying always" means that we do nothing without consulting God and asking that he consecrate our performance to his purposes and our good. It means that we will always feel our dependence on him, and that in our hearts we will carry an attitude of worship, thanksgiving, and praise, into whatever place we go, or whatever task we do.

What shall we pray for? One important thing is deliverance from evil and temptation. The very practice of prayer guards against temptation, for one who is in constant communion with God, and striving to become like him, will not be susceptible to the enchantments of evil. Prayer is practical. The Book of Mormon counsels us to pray over our fields and crops, over our flocks, over our households, over business affairs. It teaches us to pray for the health and spiritual welfare of ourselves, our families, our enemies, and all about us. It admonishes us to intercessory prayer, and gives several notable examples. In one instance, the prayers of a humble father and his brethren of the church changed his sons from reckless, godless, atheistic ne'er-do-wells to dedicated, eloquent missionaries of spiritual perception and power,

who went boldly into the territory of their hereditary and national enemies, preached repentance to them, and destroyed their enemies by converting them to peace and righteousness.

The Book of Mormon makes it quite clear that prayer is not a substitute for work, but that it gives direction and strength for work. Specifically, by way of example, you must make yourself an instrument for answering your own prayers by caring for the needy, visiting the sick, and imparting of your substance to the poor -- praying as you minister to them. If you do not supplement prayer with work, your prayer is vain.

The Book of Mormon teaches that the place and time of prayer are not so important as the act of prayer itself. It suggests evening, morning, and mid-day as good times, but sets no limit on those times. As to place, Alma bears witness that God was merciful to him and heard him when he cried from the wilderness, when he prayed for his enemies, when he prayed in the field, when he prayed in his house, in his secret closet, and in the congregation of God's people; and in concluding his testimony says: "I will cry unto thee in all mine afflictions; for in thee is my joy." If it is right to pray always, it is right and obligatory to pray in all places. We should pray in public, in the congregation, in our families. We should pray at work, at play; at home and abroad. But perhaps most important, we should pray alone, in secret, as we present to God the intensely personal needs, thoughts, and desires which we do not wish to share with anyone else.

The promises to those who pray are simple, but wonderful. There are some few conditions to be met, if prayer is to be effective. Many who will not pay the price give up prayer, thinking that it will not work, but many have claimed the promises and proved them true. Prayer must be honest; as we pray we must face honestly the hardest, the most shameful facts about ourselves. We must pray in faith, nothing doubting, believing that we shall receive. We must pray in the name and in the Spirit of Christ, in order that we may not pray amiss, or ask for that which is not right. We must pray in humility, in repentance, in obedience. If we can learn to pray thus, we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us.