

“More and More”  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
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 Texts: Psalm 71:9-18

One thing that the “Harp and Bowl” services used to elevate was the union between prayer, praise and worship. We gathered, sang, prayed and praised God together—we sang hymns, praise songs and choruses enthusiastically—we prayed fervently and different pastors hosted these worship events. How these differed from old—fashioned prayer meetings would be hard to put one’s finger on, except that preaching may have held a higher place, or standing at the latter. Set published prayers such as found in the Book of Common Prayer, the Protestant Missal, Collects<sup>1</sup>, or in the Book of Psalms (where we locate Psalm 71—as among the prayers of David) and the written prayers of various religious leaders such as Brother Lawrence, Luther, Calvin, the Wesley’s and Charles Spurgeon (See Book Five in “The Practice of Praise,” Prayer and Spiritual Warfare, 1998, Whitaker House anthology ). With the mention of one final, odd book, The Valley of Vision, 1975, edited by Arthur Bennett and published by The Banner of Truth Trust, I close these introductory remarks: Rev. Bennett wrote (in the introduction) “The soul learns to pray by praying; for prayer is communion with a transcendent and immanent God who on the ground of his nature and attributes calls forth all the powers of the redeemed soul in acts of total adoration and dedication.” The book was sent forth with a dedicatory prayer by Philip Doddridge: “However weak and contemptible this work may seem in the eyes of the children of this world, and however imperfect it really be, it may nevertheless live before thee, and through a divine power be mighty to produce the rise and progress of religion.” (Preface) This book uses phraseology “like the rise and progress of religion” that sounds quaintly “ecumenical,” church unity. I would prefer “the rise and increase of saving faith;” but that would hardly surprise anyone who knows my heart!

Prayer brings the rise and increase of saving faith and brings with it an increase of spiritual power—the **effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.** (James 5:16) Or, better, **the prayer<sup>2</sup> of a righteous man availeth much in its working.**

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<sup>1</sup> The Collect begins by addressing God (YOU). It continues by acknowledging something God has done or a characteristic of God (WHO). Then, there is a petition – we ask God to DO something. Finally, we recognize that our prayer is always through Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit (THROUGH). The point of entry often is adoration, praise, or celebration and the exit is one of thanksgiving, or gratitude for being heard.

<sup>2</sup> “ Regarding confession sacramentally, it might be said: “It was not then the faith and doctrine of God’s Church, as of the Papacy at this present—(1) that the only remedy for sin after baptism is sacramental penitency; (2) that confession in secret is an essential part thereof; (3) that God Himself cannot now forgive sins without the priest; (4) that because forgiveness at the hands of the priests must arise from confession in the offender, therefore to confess unto him is a matter of such necessity as, being not either in deed, or, at the least, in desire, performed, excludeth utterly from all pardon, and must consequently in Scripture be commanded wheresoever any promise of forgiveness is made. No, no; these opinions have youth in their countenance. Antiquity knew them not; it never thought nor dreamed of them” (*E. P.*, vi. iv. 14). Ellicott, citing Hooker on the sacrament of confession.

The prayer of the just, pleading, striving fervently, hath power with God, even like Israel of old, and shall prevail ([Genesis 32:28](#)). Some divines trace a literal force in the passage, finding in it an allusion to the Energumens of the first century (the “mediums” of that age), who were possessed by demons; we ought like Jacob, perhaps, to wrestle with the Lord persistently in prayer

“What are men better than sheep, or goats,  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer—  
Both for themselves, and those who call them friend?  
For so the whole round earth is, every way,  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

Alfred Lord Tennyson  
“Idylls of the King”

Does this communicate anything beyond “and effectual is effectual?” A truism. “The Greek word (**ἐνεργουμένη** *energoumenē*) would be better rendered by the word energetic, which indeed is derived from it. The word properly refers to that which has power; which in its own nature is fitted to produce an effect<sup>3</sup>.” (Barnes Notes) About the abuse of confession, Barnes adds:

Nothing gives so much power to a priesthood as the supposition that they have the power of absolution. ***Nothing serves so much to pollute the soul as to keep impure thoughts before the mind long enough to make the confession, and to state them in words.***[The power of suggestion was known long before the schools of psychology came into being!] Nothing gives a man so much power over a female as to have it supposed that it is required by religion, and appertains to the sacred office, that all that passes in the mind should be disclosed to him. The thought which but for the necessity of confession would have vanished at once; the image which would have departed as soon as it came before the mind, but for the necessity of retaining it to make confession - these are the things over which a man would seek to have control, and to which he would desire to have access, if he wished to accomplish purposes of villainy. The very thing which a seducer would desire would be the power of knowing all the thoughts of his intended victim; and if the thoughts which pass through the soul could be known, virtue would be safe nowhere. Nothing probably under the name of religion has ever done more to corrupt the morals of a community than the practice of auricular, “heard” confession. [The practice in AA of “admitting that one is powerless over alcohol” and self-identification, “I am an alcoholic” share a critical point of vulnerability here.”]

Some, following John Gill, have rendered fervent/effectual prayer as “inspired,” or as “inwrought” by “the spiritual breath of God which yields spiritual life—a reverberation of the Spirit of God in a person. “Such prayer cannot fail but to succeed . . . true prayer is not what is written in a book, but what is wrought in the heart by the spirit of God who is the editor of prayer(!) Who impresses the minds of his people with a sense of their wants and fills their mouths with arguments and puts strength into them to plead with God.” This enormous sentence, in Gill’s commentary on James 5:16 contains a complete doctrine of prayer, yet not exhaustive. The Spirit of God “makes intercession for them

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The *Energumeni* were those who were acted, or worked, on by an evil spirit, and the word became a synonym for the “demoniacs” of the New Testament. It is possible that a like passive meaning may be intended here, and that the participle describes the character of a prayer which is more than the utterance of mere human feeling, in which the Spirit itself is making intercession with us ([Romans 8:26](#)). —Cambridge Bible Commentary

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Poole adds: **The effectual fervent prayer:** our translators use two words (and little enough) to express the significancy of the Greek word in this place: some translate it *inwrought*; it seems to be a prayer wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, and so may imply both the efficiency of God’s Spirit, (the Spirit of supplications, [Zechariah 12:10](#)), and the vehemency of holy affections caused by him in prayer, [Romans 8:26](#).

according to the will of God **and such prayer is always heard. . . this has great power with God . . . is received.** To wit: Jacob's success in wrestling the angel, the Canaanite woman for her possessed daughter, other prayers dispossessing Satan (dislodging even the most stubborn of devils!), the preservation of kingdoms (Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah), the removal of judgments (Moses and Jonah), bringing down blessings from heaven (Elijah. Both fire and rain and manna), and delivering Peter from prison . . . all through the grace of the Spirit and/or the mediation of Jesus so that ***the will of God is that which is performed!*** Prayer is like a shovel which turns the grain on the floor from one place to another—from the wrath of God to His rescuing mercy. Wrath to mercy.

What shall we conclude from all this? Truly if we hope to make a difference, we should pray. If we hope to effect some good in this world, we should enlist prayer.

Pray the promises of God, pray the will of God—express yourself for everything that gets to the divine desk is edited first by the Spirit of God. *We cannot err.* *Our inadequacy is transformed and in that form is compelling, forceful and true.* Pray for what you think is right, true and loving and rest assured only what is right, true and loving will get through.

Consider this: if God is concerned first and foremost for His glory and if we were called to the praise of His glory—nothing can better fulfill us than prayer. Prayer is praise, fellowship and communion with God. We do not enter the presence of the Most High God and come away empty-handed, or diminished. . . when we magnify Him we are exalted. I invite you to find your fulfillment in a prayerful life.

**Amen.**