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The particular value of private prayer consists in being able to approach God with more freedom, and unbosom ourselves more fully than in any other way. Between us and God there are private and personal interests, sins to confess and wants to be supplied, which it would be improper to disclose to the world. This duty is enforced by the example of good men in all ages.-Amos Binney

THE possibilities of prayer are established by the facts and the history of prayer. Facts are stubborn things. Facts are the true things. Theories may be but speculations. Opinions may be wholly at fault. But facts must be deferred to. They cannot be ignored. What are the possibilities of prayer judged by the facts? What is the history of prayer? What does it reveal to us? Prayer has a history, written in God's Word and recorded in the experiences and lives of God's saints. History is truth teaching by example. We may miss the truth by perverting the history, but the truth is in the facts of history.

“He spake with Abraham at the oak,
He called Elisha from the plough;
David he from the sheepfolds took,
Thy day, thine hour of grace, is now.”

God reveals the truth by the facts. God reveals Himself by the facts of religious history. God teaches us His will by the facts and examples of Bible history. God's facts, God's Word and God's history are all in perfect harmony, and have much of God in them all. God has ruled the world by prayer; and God still rules the world by the same divinely ordained means.

The possibilities of prayer cover not only individuals but reach to cities and nations. They take in classes and peoples. The praying of Moses was the one thing which stood between the wrath of God against the Israelites and His declared purpose to destroy them and the execution of that Divine purpose, and the Hebrew nation still survived. Notwithstanding Sodom was not spared, because ten righteous men could not be found inside its limits, yet the little city of Zoar was spared because Lot prayed for it as he fled from the storm of fire and brimstone which burned up Sodom. Nineveh was saved because the king and its people repented of their evil ways and gave themselves to prayer and fasting.

Paul in his remarkable prayer in Ephesians, chapter three, honours the illimitable possibilities of prayer and glorifies the ability of God to answer prayer. Closing that memorable prayer, so far-reaching in its petitions, and setting forth the very deepest religious experience, he declares that “God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.” He makes prayer all-inclusive, comprehending all things, great and small. Where is no time nor place which prayer does not cover and sanctify. All things in earth and in heaven, everything for time and for eternity, all are embraced in prayer. Nothing is too great and nothing is too small to be subject of prayer. Prayer reaches down to the least things of life and includes the greatest things which concern us.

“If pain afflict or wrongs oppress,
If cares distract, or fears dismay;
If guilt deject, or sin distress,
In every case still watch and pray.”

One of the most important, far-reaching, peace-giving, necessary and practical prayer possibilities we have in Paul's words in Philippians, chapter four, dealing with prayer as a cure for undue care:

“Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”
“And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

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“Cares” are the epidemic evil of mankind. They are universal in their reach. They belong to man in his fallen condition. The predisposition to undue anxiety is the natural result of sin. Care comes in all shapes, at all times, and from all sources. It comes to all of every age and station. There are the cares of the home circle, from which there is no escape save in prayer. There are the cares of business, the cares of poverty, and the cares of riches. Ours is an anxious world, and ours is an anxious race. The caution of Paul is well addressed, “In nothing be anxious.” This is the Divine injunction, and that we might be able to live above anxiety and freed from undue care, “In everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God.” This is the divinely prescribed remedy for all anxious cares, for all worry, for all inward fretting.

The word, “careful,” means to be drawn in different directions, distraction, anxious, disturbed, annoyed in spirit. Jesus had warned against this very thing in the Sermon on the Mount, where He had earnestly urged His disciples, “Take no thought for the morrow,” in things concerning the needs of the body. He was endeavouring to show them the true secret of a quiet mind, freed from anxiety and unnecessary care about food and raiment. To-morrow’s evils were not to be considered. He was simply teaching the same lesson found in Psalm 37:3, “Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” In cautioning against the fears of to-morrow’s prospective evils, and the material wants of the body, our Lord was teaching the great lesson of an implicit and childlike confidence in God. “Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.”

*“‘Day by day,’ the promise reads,
Daily strength for daily needs
Cast foreboding fears away;
Take the manna of to-day.”*

Paul’s direction is very specific, “Be careful for nothing.” Be careful for not one thing. Be careful for not anything, for any condition, chance or happening. Be troubled about not anything which creates one disturbing anxiety. Have a mind freed from all anxieties, all cares, all fretting, and all worries. Cares divide, distract, bewilder, and destroy unity, forces and quietness of mind. Cares are fatal to weak piety and are enfeebling to strong piety. What great need to guard against them and learn the one secret of their cure, even prayer!