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Teaching Notes

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# Power through Prayer

Opening thoughts: “Are my best days behind me?” Psalm 90

***Psalm 90:10 The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength***

Caleb: ***Joshua 14:10-11 So here I am today, eighty-five years old! <sup>11</sup> I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.***

What is this “strength”? Where does it come from?

Ascending Lion's Head Trail, Mt. Washington:

***Hebrews 11:34 whose weakness was turned to strength***

## I. We Are Weak, He Is Strong

### A. The Omnipotence of God

***Isaiah 40:26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.***

***Jeremiah 10:6 No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power.***

***Jeremiah 32:17 “Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.”***

### B. The Frailty of Man

***Psalm 144:3-4 O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? <sup>4</sup> Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow.***

***James 4:14 What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.***

### C. The Strength of Our Opposition

**2 Samuel 22:17-19** *"He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. <sup>18</sup> He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. <sup>19</sup> They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support.*

**Psalm 142:5-6** *I cry to you, O LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." <sup>6</sup> Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.*

**Ephesians 6:12** *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

### D. The Basic Prayer of Salvation: Weakness Crying for Power... to LIVE!

1. We are powerless to save ourselves

**Romans 5:6** *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

2. The Law of God is made powerless to save us by our flesh

**Romans 8:3** *For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.*

3. Only Christ can save us, as we call to Him for help

**Romans 10:13** *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

### E. God Strengthens His People

**Psalm 68:34-35** *Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies. <sup>35</sup> You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God!*

**Isaiah 40:27-31** *Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? <sup>28</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. <sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; <sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint*

### F. Paul's Thorn in the Flesh: The Lesson of Prayer

**2 Corinthians 12:7-9** *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

G. Prayer: Weakness Begging for Strength

**Psalm 22:19** *But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me.*

## II. Christ's Display of the Use of Power

A. Reliance on the Power of the Spirit

**Luke 4:14** *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.*

**Acts 10:37-38** *You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached-- <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

B. Power for Signs and Wonders

**Luke 5:17** *And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.*

**Luke 8:44-46** *She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. <sup>45</sup> "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." <sup>46</sup> But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."*

C. Power in Speech

**Mark 1:27** *The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching-- and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him."*

D. Power Given to Apostles

**Luke 9:1-2** *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, <sup>2</sup> and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.*

**Luke 10:17-19** *The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." <sup>18</sup> He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from*

*heaven. <sup>19</sup> I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.*

#### E. Power for the Spread of the Kingdom

*Luke 24:49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*

### III. Christ's Weakness Turned Into Strength: The Resurrection

#### A. Christ's First Prayer, Answered Differently

##### 1. What Christ requested

*Luke 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*

##### 2. Christ's weakness pictured

*Luke 22:44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

##### 3. How God answered

*Luke 22:43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.*

a. What did the angel do to Christ? What strength did he impart?

b. What was the result of this strengthening?

#### B. Christ's Second Prayer, Answered Powerfully

##### 1. The greatest display of Jesus' weakness ever: death

*2 Corinthians 13:4 For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power.*

##### 2. How Jesus prayed

*Luke 23:46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

##### 3. What God the Father did in answer

*Romans 1:4 who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## IV. Case Studies: Weakness Turned into Strength

### A. Physical Weakness Turned to Strength

#### 1. Samson

- a. After killing a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey, he became extremely thirsty

***Judges 15:18-19 Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the LORD, "You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" 19 Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, and it is still there in Lehi.***

- b. Strengthened in death

***Judges 16:28-30 Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." 29 Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, 30 Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.***

2. Daniel: Physical strength by the hand of an angel

***Daniel 10:4-19 On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, 5 I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. 6 His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. 7 I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. 8 So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. 9 Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.***

***10 A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. 11 He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. 12 Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-***

*one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. <sup>14</sup> Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."*

*<sup>15</sup>While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless. <sup>16</sup> Then one who looked like a man touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and began to speak. I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. <sup>17</sup> How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."*

*<sup>18</sup>Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. <sup>19</sup> "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."*

### 3. Nehemiah

*Nehemiah 4:10 Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."*

*Nehemiah 6:9 They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."*

#### B. Emotional Weakness Turned to Strength

*1 Samuel 30:6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.*

#### C. Spiritual Weakness Turned to Strength

##### 1. Weak faith made stronger

*Mark 9:23-24 And Jesus said to him, "'If you can'! All things are possible for one who believes." <sup>24</sup> Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"*

*Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."*

##### 2. Weak apprehension of Christ's love made stronger

*Ephesians 3:16-21 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in*

*your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> ¶ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

#### D. Power for Military Victory

*2 Chronicles 14:9-12 Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. <sup>10</sup> And Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. <sup>11</sup> And Asa cried to the LORD his God, "O LORD, there is none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak. Help us, O LORD our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. O LORD, you are our God; let not man prevail against you." <sup>12</sup> So the LORD defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled.*

*Psalm 18:6 In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. ...*

*Psalm 18:32-37 It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. <sup>33</sup> He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. <sup>34</sup> He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. <sup>35</sup> You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. <sup>36</sup> You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn. <sup>37</sup> I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed.*

#### E. Power for Perseverance in the Christian Life

*Colossians 1:11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy*

#### F. Power in Temptation

*Matthew 26:41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."*

*Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."*

*John 17:11-12 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-- the*

*name you gave me-- so that they may be one as we are one. <sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost...*

#### G. Power for Evangelism

*Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

*Acts 4:29-31 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. <sup>30</sup> Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." <sup>31</sup> After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*

#### H. Power for Lasting Good Works

*2 Thessalonians 1:11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.*

#### I. Power for Contentment

*Philippians 4:12-13 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

Note: it takes immense strength of character to be content "in any and every situation"... to stand firm in that resolve despite the onslaught of adverse circumstances can only be done through the ongoing, constant strength given by Christ.

#### J. Power for Hope

*Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

### V. The Power of God Needed... or All Is Worthless

A. A Work that Will Stand for Eternity? How Can It Be??

B. "Unless the Lord Builds the House..."

C. The Basic Issue of Ministry: Overcoming Forces Too Powerful for Us



1. Overcoming the Devil
2. Overcoming our Flesh
3. Overcoming the World
4. Overcoming Trials
5. Overcoming Successes

## VI. Unction in Preaching

### A. Defining “Uction”

1. KJV verse

*KJV 1 John 2:20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*

2. Concept of POWER through the presence of the Lord
3. To some degree undefinable

### B. Paul’s Display of the Power of God

1. Power of signs, wonders, and preaching

*Romans 15:18-19 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— <sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.*

2. Power in weakness: transforming lives for the glory of God

*2 Corinthians 4:7-12 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

*<sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. <sup>12</sup> So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

### C. Power in the Gospel: “That Your Faith May Rest on God...”

1. God zealous that only by His power will the church be built
2. Paul utterly rejects human power

*1 Corinthians 1:17-18 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its*

*power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

*1 Corinthians 1:23-25 we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*

3. Paul's display of the Spirit's power

*1 Corinthians 2:1-5 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.*

D. Apostolic Power Different Than Human Power

*1 Corinthians 4:19-20 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*

*2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. <sup>4</sup> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

E. Testimonies on "Unction" in Preaching

1. J.I. Packer and Don Carson on hearing Martyn Lloyd-Jones

a. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: served the Westminster Chapel in London, England, for thirty years

b. JI Packer's testimony

When J. I. Packer was a twenty-two-year-old student, he heard Lloyd-Jones preach every Sunday evening in London during the school year of 1948-1949. He said that he had "never heard such preaching." Packer said it came to him "with the force of electric shock, bringing . . . more of a sense of God than any other man" he had known

c. Don Carson's testimony

Three stages in hearing Lloyd-Jones preach

## 2. E.M. Bounds on “Unction Through Prayer”

a. Undefinable, indescribable, unmistakable

b. Old Scottish preacher

“There is sometimes something in preaching that cannot be ascribed either to matter or expression, and cannot be described what it is, or from whence it cometh, but with a sweet violence it pierceth into the heart and affections and comes immediately from the Lord; but if there be any way to obtain such a thing, it is by the heavenly disposition of the speaker.”

c. It makes the word of God “quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword...”

d. It creates massive upheaval in the hearers, converting some, transforming others, leaving still others enraged

“Unction backs and impregnates revealed truth with all the energy of God. Unction is simply putting God in his own word and on his own preacher.”

## 3. How is unction attained?

“By mighty and great prayerfulness and by continual prayerfulness, it is all powerful and personal to the preacher; it inspires and clarifies his intellect, gives insight and grasp and projecting power; it gives to the preacher heart power, which is greater than head power; and tenderness, purity, force flow from the heart by it. Enlargement, freedom, fullness of thought, directness and simplicity of utterance are the fruits of this unction.” [EM Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*, p. 90]

“This unction comes to the preacher not in the study but in the closet. It is heaven’s distillation in answer to prayer. It is the sweetest exhalation of the Holy Spirit. It impregnates, suffuses, softens, percolates, cuts, and soothes. It carries the word like dynamite, like salt, like sugar; makes the Word a soother, an arraigner, a revealer, a searcher; makes the hearer a culprit or a saint, makes him weep like a child and live like a giant; opens his heart and purse as gently, yet as strongly as the spring opens the leaves. This unction is not the gift of genius. It is not found in the halls of learning. No eloquence can woo it, no industry can win it. It is the gift of God—the signet set to his own messengers. It is heaven’s knighthood given to the chosen, true and brave ones who have sought this anointed honor through many an hour of tearful, wrestling prayer.” [p. 93]

“Prayer, much prayer, is the price of preaching unction; prayer, much prayer, is the one, sole condition of keeping this unction. Without unceasing prayer the unction never comes to the preacher.” [p. 100]

## 4. Richard Cecil: Without unction, preaching is worthless

“All the minister’s efforts will be vanity or worse than vanity if he have not unction. Unction must come down from heaven and spread a savor and feeling and relish over his

ministry; and among the other means of qualifying himself for his office, the Bible must hold the first place, and the last must also be given to the Word of God and prayer.” [p. 95]

### 5. Charles Spurgeon

“One bright benison which private prayer brings down upon the ministry is an indescribable and inimitable something—an unction from the Holy One....If the anointing which we bear comes not from the Lord of hosts, we are deceivers, since only in prayer can we obtain it. Let us continue instant, constant, fervent in supplication. Let your fleece lie on the threshing floor of supplication till it is wet with the dew of heaven.” [p. 83]

## Prayer Warriors in Action

### VII. Biblical Examples

#### A. Abraham: Perseverance

##### 1. Abraham intercedes for the righteous of Sodom

***Genesis 18:16-33*** *When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. <sup>17</sup> Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? <sup>18</sup> Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." <sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know." <sup>22</sup> ¶ The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing-- to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" <sup>26</sup> The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." <sup>27</sup> Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, <sup>28</sup> what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?" "If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it." <sup>29</sup> Once again he spoke to him, "What if*

*only forty are found there?" He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it." <sup>30</sup> Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?" He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." <sup>31</sup> Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?" He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it." <sup>32</sup> Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it." <sup>33</sup> When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.*

2. The prayer does not seem to have been answered

*Genesis 19:27-28 Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. <sup>28</sup> He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.*

3. But it was!!

*Genesis 19:29 So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.*

4. E.M. Bounds' comment refuted

"Perhaps the failure to ultimately rescue Sodom from her doom of destruction was due to Abraham's optimistic view of the spiritual condition of things in that city. It might have been possible—who knows?—that if Abraham had entreated God once more and asked Him to spare the city if even one righteous man had been found there, for Lot's sake, He might have heeded Abraham's request." [E.M. Bounds, *Prayer and Praying Men*, p. 31]

BUT remember who BEGAN the time of intercession and who ENDED it:

*Genesis 18:17 Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?..."*

*Genesis 18:33 When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.*

B. Jacob: Urgency

C. Moses: Pleading God's Name

D. Daniel: Humility and Redemptive History

## VIII. Examples from Church History

A. Augustine: Intimacy

1. Augustine's *Confessions*, all written as a direct address to God
2. As though we are listening to his personal prayer life
3. Remarkable how raw with emotion and passionate toward God it is

How shall I call upon my God, my God and my Lord, when by the very act of calling upon him I would be calling him into myself? Is there any place within me into which my God might come? How should the God who made heaven and earth come into me? Is there any room in me for you, Lord, my God? Even heaven and earth, which you have made and in which you have made me – can even they contain you? Since nothing that exists would exist without you, does it follow that whatever exists does in some way contain you? ...

Alas for me! Through your own merciful dealings with me, O Lord my God, tell me what you are to me. Say to my soul, *I am your salvation*. Say it so that I can hear it. My heart is listening, Lord; open the ears of my heart and say to my soul, *I am your salvation*. Let me run towards this voice and seize hold of you. Do not hide your face from me: let me die so that I may see it, for not to see it would be death to me indeed. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I, Chapter I.

Let me know thee, O my Knower; let me know thee even as I am known, O Strength of my soul, enter it and prepare it for thyself that thou mayest have and hold it, without "spot or blemish." This is my hope, therefore have I spoken; and in this hope I rejoice whenever I rejoice aright. But as for the other things of this life, they deserve our lamentations less, the more we lament them; and some should be lamented all the more, the less men care for them. For see, "Thou desirest truth" and "he who does the truth comes to the light." This is what I wish to do through confession in my heart before thee, and in my writings before many witnesses. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, Chapter I.

## B. Martin Luther: Praying for the Word's Power

1. Before conversion, lived in Augustinian monastery and followed prescribed times of fasting and prayer
2. After coming to understand justification by faith, Luther's reliance on God in prayer increased; he realized that his ministry in the word would amount to nothing if God didn't bless it

*"Dear Lord God, I want to preach so that you are glorified. I want to speak of you, praise you, praise your name. Although I probably cannot make it turn out well, won't you make it turn out well?"*

*That the Holy Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent is most certain. Therefore your first duty is to begin to pray, and to pray to this effect that if it please God*

*to accomplish something for His glory – not for yours or any other person's – He very graciously grant you a true understanding of His words. For no master of the divine words exists except the Author of these words, as He says: 'They shall be all taught of God' (John 6:45). You must, therefore, completely despair of your own industry and ability and rely solely on the inspiration of the Spirit.*

*You should completely despair of your own sense and reason, for by these you will not attain the goal ... Rather kneel down in your private little room and with sincere humility and earnestness pray God through His dear Son, graciously to grant you His Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide you and give you understanding*

### 3. A life saturated with prayer

*"If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the Devil gets the victory through the day...I have so much business, I can not get on without spending three hours daily in prayer."*

*"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness."*

*"As it is the business of tailors to make clothes, and the business of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray!"*

*"None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience. It is a great matter when in extreme need to take hold on prayer. I know, whenever I have prayed earnestly, that I have been amply heard, and have obtained more than I prayed for. God indeed sometimes delayed, but at last He came."*

### 4. Luther's final words... on his deathbed:

“Wir sind alle Bettler. Hoc est verum.” [German: “We are all beggars.” Latin: “This is true!”]

## C. John Calvin: Systematic Instructor on Prayer

### 1. Thorough instruction on prayer in the *Institutes*

But after we have learned by faith to know that whatever is necessary for us or defective in us is supplied in God and in our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell, that we may thence draw as from an inexhaustible fountain, it remains for us to seek and in prayer implore of him what we have learned to be in him. To know God as the sovereign disposer of all good, inviting us to present our requests, and yet not to approach or ask of him, were so far from availing us, that it were just as if one told of a treasure were to allow it to remain buried in the ground. Hence the Apostle, to show that a faith unaccompanied with prayer to God cannot be genuine, states this to be the order: As faith springs from the Gospel, so by faith our hearts are framed to call upon the name of God (Rom. 10:14). And this is the very thing which he had expressed some time before--viz. that the *Spirit of adoption*, which seals the testimony of the Gospel on our hearts, gives us

courage to make our requests known unto God, calls forth groanings which cannot be uttered, and enables us to cry, Abba, Father (Rom. 8:26). This last point, as we have hitherto only touched upon it slightly in passing, must now be treated more fully. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.16.

## 2. Deep and personal requests in pastoral prayers

Grant, Almighty God, that as we set up against thee so many obstacles through the depravity of our flesh and natural disposition, that we seem as it were to be designedly striving to close up the door against thy goodness and paternal favor, O grant, that our hearts may be so softened by thy Spirit, and the hardness which has hitherto prevailed may be so corrected, that we may submit ourselves to thee with genuine docility, especially as thou dost so kindly and tenderly invite us to thyself, that being allured by thy sweet invitation, we may run, and so run as not to be weary in our course, until Christ shall at length bring us together to thee, and, at the same time, lead us to thee for that eternal life, which he has obtained for us by his own blood. Amen. [John Calvin, Pastoral Prayers from the Book of Hosea]

## 3. Calvin modeled his personal prayer life after the Psalms, which he called “an anatomy of all parts of the soul.”

Genuine and earnest prayer proceeds first from a sense of our need, and next, from faith in the promises of God. It is by perusing these inspired compositions (i.e. the Psalms), that men will be most effectually awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure. In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book. And not only are the promises of God presented to us in it, but oftentimes there is exhibited to us one standing, as it were, amidst the invitations of God on the one hand, and the impediments of the flesh on the other, girding and preparing himself for prayer: thus teaching us, if at any time we are agitated with a variety of doubts, to resist and fight against them, until the soul, freed and disentangled from all these impediments, rise up to God; and not only so, but even when in the midst of doubts, fears, and apprehensions, let us put forth our efforts in prayer, until we experience some consolation which may calm and bring contentment to our minds. ...

Although distrust may shut the gate against our prayers, yet we must not allow ourselves to give way, whenever our hearts waver or are agitated with inquietude, but must persevere until faith finally come forth victorious from these conflicts. In many places we may perceive the exercise of the servants of God in prayer so fluctuating, that they are almost overwhelmed by the alternate hope of success and apprehension of failure, and gain the prize only by strenuous exertions. We see on the one hand, the flesh manifesting its infirmity; and on the other, faith putting forth its power; and if it is not so valiant and courageous as might be desired, it is at least prepared to fight until by degrees it acquire perfect strength. John Calvin, Introduction to *Commentary on Psalms*, 1557.

### D. David Brainerd: Intensity, Sacrifice, and Zeal

#### 1. Missionary to Indians, 1740s

#### 2. Astonishing passion and commitment to prayer



*“Thursday, June 28.* Spent the morning in reading several parts of the Holy Scripture, and in fervent prayer for my Indians, that God would set up his kingdom among them, and bring them into his church.--About nine I withdrew to my usual place of retirement in the woods; and there again enjoyed some assistance in prayer. My great concern was for the conversion of the heathen to God; and the Lord helped me to plead with him for it. Towards noon rode up to the Indians, in order to preach to them; and while going, my heart went up to God in prayer for them; could freely tell God, he knew that the cause was not mine, which I was engaged in; but it was his own cause, and it would be for his own glory to convert the poor Indians: and blessed be God, I felt no desire of their conversion, that I might receive honour from the world, as being the instrument of it. Had some freedom in speaking to the Indians.”

*“Saturday, June 30.* My soul was very solemn in reading God's word; especially the ninth chapter of Daniel. I saw how God had called out his servants to prayer, and made them wrestle with him, when he designed to bestow any great mercy on his church. And, alas! I was ashamed of myself, to think of my dulness and inactivity, when there seemed to be so much to do for the upbuilding of Zion. Oh, how does Zion lie waste! I longed that the church of God might be enlarged: was enabled to pray, I think, in faith; my soul seemed sensibly to confide in God, and was enabled to wrestle with him. Afterwards walked abroad to a place of sweet retirement, and enjoyed some assistance in prayer again; had a sense of my great need of divine help, and felt my soul sensibly depend on God. Blessed be God, this has been a comfortable week to me.

*“Lord's day, July 1.* In the morning was perplexed with wandering, vain thoughts; was much grieved, judged and condemned myself before God. And oh, how miserable did I feel, because I could not live to God! At ten, rode away with a heavy heart, to preach to my Indians. Upon the road I attempted to lift up my heart to God; but was infested with an unsettled, wandering frame of mind; and was exceeding restless and perplexed, and filled with shame and confusion before God. I seemed to myself to be ‘more brutish than any man;’ and thought none deserved to be ‘cast out of God's presence’ so much as I. If I attempted to lift up my heart to God, as I frequently did by the way, on a sudden, before I was aware, my thoughts were wandering ‘to the ends of the earth;’ and my soul was filled with surprise and anxiety, to find it thus. Thus also after I came to the Indians my mind was confused; and I felt nothing sensibly of that sweet reliance on God, that my soul has been comforted with in days past. Spent the forenoon in this posture of mind, and preached to the Indians without any heart. In the afternoon I felt still barren, when I began to preach; and for about half an hour, I seemed to myself to know nothing, and to have nothing to say to the Indians; but soon after I found in myself a spirit of love, and warmth, and power, to address the poor Indians; and God helped me to plead with them, to ‘turn from all the vanities of the heathen, to the living God:’ and I am persuaded the Lord touched their consciences; for I never saw such attention raised in them before. And when I came away from them, I spent the whole time while I was riding to my lodgings, three miles distant, in prayer and praise to God. And after I had rode more than two miles, it came into my mind to dedicate myself to God again; which I did with great solemnity, and unspeakable satisfaction; especially gave up myself to him renewed in the work of the ministry. And this I did by divine grace, I hope, without any exception or reserve: not in the least shrinking back from any difficulties that might attend this great and blessed work. I seemed to be most free, cheerful, and full in this dedication of myself. My whole soul cried, ‘Lord, to thee I dedicate

myself! O accept of me, and let me be thine for ever. Lord, I desire nothing else, I desire nothing more. O come, come, Lord, accept a poor worm. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.* After this, was enabled to praise God with my whole soul, that he had enabled me to devote and consecrate all my powers to him in this solemn manner. My heart rejoiced in my particular work as a *missionary*; rejoiced in my necessity of self-denial in many respects; and still continued to give up myself to God, and implore mercy of him; praying incessantly, every moment, with sweet fervency. My nature being very weak of late, and much spent, was now considerably overcome: my fingers grew very feeble, and somewhat numb, so that I could scarcely stretch them out straight; and when I lighted from my horse, could hardly walk, my joints seemed all to be loosed. But I felt abundant *strength in the inner man*. Preached to the white people: God helped me much, especially in prayer. Sundry of my poor Indians were so moved as to come to meeting also; and one appeared much concerned.

#### E. Adoniram Judson: Winning a Kingdom for Christ on His Knees

1. Had a life of great suffering in the Kingdom of Burma
2. Relied tremendously on prayer to get him through
3. His recommended pattern of prayer:

"Arrange thy affairs, if possible, so that thou canst leisurely devote two or three hours every day not merely to devotional exercises but to the very act of secret prayer and communion with God. Endeavor seven times a day to withdraw from business and company and lift up thy soul to God in private retirement. Begin the day by rising after midnight and devoting some time amid the silence and darkness of the night to this sacred work. Let the hour of opening dawn find thee at the same work. Let the hours of nine, twelve, three, six, and nine at night witness the same. Be resolute in his cause. Make all practicable sacrifices to maintain it. Consider that thy time is short, and that business and company must not be allowed to rob thee of thy God."

#### F. Charles Simeon: Deep Humiliation, Glorious Exaltation

1. Struggling with the discipline of early rising

Early rising did not appeal to [Simeon's] natural tendency to self-indulgence, however, especially on dark winter mornings. . . . On several occasions he overslept, to his considerable chagrin. So he determined that if ever he did it again, he would pay a fine of half a crown to his "bedmaker" (college servant). A few days later, as he lay comfortably in his warm bed, he found himself reflecting that the good woman was poor and could probably do with half a crown. So, to overcome such rationalizations, he vowed that next time he would throw a guinea into the river. This (the story goes) he duly did, but only once, for guineas were scarce; he could not afford to use them to pave the river bed with gold. [from John Piper's "Brothers, We Must Not Mind a Little Suffering"]

A friend of Simeon's named Housman lived with him for a few months and tells us about this discipline. "Simeon invariably arose every morning, though it was the winter season, at

four o'clock; and, after lighting his fire, he devoted the first four hours of the day to private prayer and the devotional study of the Scriptures . . . Here was the secret of his great grace and spiritual strength. Deriving instruction from such a source, and seeking it with such diligence, he was comforted in all his trials and prepared for every duty"

## 2. Deep humiliation

Handley Moule captures the essence of Simeon's secret of longevity in this sentence: "'Before honor is humility,' and he had been '*growing downwards*' year by year under the stern discipline of difficulty met in the right way, the way of *close and adoring communion with God*". Those two things were the heartbeat of Simeon's inner life: growing downward in humility and growing upward in adoring communion with God.

But the remarkable thing about humiliation and adoration in the heart of Charles Simeon is that they were inseparable. Simeon was utterly unlike most of us today who think that we should get rid once and for all of feelings of vileness and unworthiness as soon as we can. For him, adoration only grew in the freshly plowed soil of humiliation for sin. So he actually labored to know his true sinfulness and his remaining corruption as a Christian.

*I have continually had such a sense of my sinfulness as would sink me into utter despair, if I had not an assured view of the sufficiency and willingness of Christ to save me to the uttermost. And at the same time I had such a sense of my acceptance through Christ as would upset my little bark, if I had not ballast at the bottom sufficient to sink a vessel of no ordinary size.*

He never lost sight of the need for the heavy ballast of his own humiliation. After he had been a Christian forty years he wrote,

*With this sweet hope of ultimate acceptance with God, I have always enjoyed much cheerfulness before men; but I have at the same time laboured incessantly to cultivate the deepest humiliation before God. I have never thought that the circumstance of God's having forgiven me was any reason why I should forgive myself; on the contrary, I have always judged it better to loathe myself the more, in proportion as I was assured that God was pacified towards me ([Ezekiel 16:63](#)). . . . There are but two objects that I have ever desired for these forty years to behold; the one is my own vileness; and the other is, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: and I have always thought that they should be viewed together; just as Aaron confessed all the sins of all Israel whilst he put them on the head of the scapegoat. The disease did not keep him from applying to the remedy, nor did the remedy keep him from feeling the disease. By this I seek to be, not only humbled and thankful, but humbled in thankfulness, before my God and Saviour continually*

## 3. Glorious exaltation

Simeon's missionary friend Thomason writes about a time in 1794 when a friend of Simeon's named Marsden entered his room and found Simeon "so absorbed in the contemplation of the Son of God, and so overpowered with a display of His mercy to his soul, that he was incapable of pronouncing a single word," till at length, he exclaimed, "Glory, glory."

## G. Hudson Taylor: Learning to Move Men by Prayer Alone

### 1. Key lesson: taught before he left for China

“To me it was a very grave matter to contemplate going out to China, far from all human aid, there to depend upon the living God alone for protection, supplies, and help of every kind. I felt that one’s spiritual muscles required strengthening for such an undertaking. There was no doubt that if faith did not fail, God would not fail. But what if one’s faith should prove insufficient? I had not at that time learned that even ‘if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself.’ It was consequently a very serious question to my mind, not whether He was faithful, but whether I had strong enough faith to warrant my embarking in the enterprise set before me.

‘When I get out to China,’ I thought to myself, ‘I shall have no claim on anyone for anything. My only claim will be on God. How important to learn, before leaving England, **to move man though God by prayer alone.**’” Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor*, vol. 1, p. 131

H. Taylor soon put this into practice with his employer, who, while a kindly man, frequently forgot to pay his salary!! Taylor resolved not to mention it to the man, even if it meant going to bed hungry. He relates a marvelous experience in which he had a half-crown coin, and a needy person came to his door. He went with the man and, seeing his sick family, inwardly lamented that all he had was this sizeable coin... if he had several smaller coins, he could give it, and still have some to live on himself. But God led him to give that coin to save the man’s wife... he then was surprised the next morning when a letter arrived with four times the amount he had given to the man and his sick wife the night before!!