



THE PRAYER CLOSET

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRAYER CLOSET MINISTRIES

JULY, 1998

PRAYING FOR YOUR PRODIGAL

Every person has at least one prodigal in their life. It could be a family member or a friend. By the term "prodigal," I mean a person who has turned away from the Lord Jesus Christ and His church. This person was raised in a Christian family. This person made a profession of faith and was faithful for a time. This probably happened when this person was a child or a young adult.

There are times when an older person professes faith in Christ. This person has lived a wicked life. There appears to be a change in this person's life. For a period of time, this person lives differently. This person seems committed and zealous in his or her devotion for Jesus Christ.

Yet, this person has now changed. He or she has turned away from the beliefs and practices of his or her Christian home and upbringing. This person is no longer faithful to church and is sporadic at best. The commitment that this person made seems forgotten or buried in worldliness and indifference. He or she is practicing things that should not be a part of a Christian's life. The joy and hope that you had for this person and his or her relationship to God has now faded into deep sorrow and great concern.

I am sure that you can think of at least one person that you know that is in this condition. You may be able to think of numerous. The person I am describing may be a family member or friend. Because this person is in this condition, you are grieved. Your heart is broken because he or she has turned away from Jesus Christ and His church. They appear to no longer have any interest in spiritual things. Because of this, you are concerned about their condition and their eternal destiny.

In this situation, what can a person do? You have talked to this person. You have loved this person. You have tried to live an example of Christian faith before this person. Yet, he or she does not respond. This person continues to follow his or her selfish, sinful path away from God, His Word, and His church. Nothing seems to work in turning this person back to God and His Word.

Is "hoping for the best" all that you have left to do? Is it possible that there is nothing left to do? Prayer is not one of the ways that you can see this person turned back to God. It is not the last chance effort to see this person delivered and restored. It is the essential key in seeing this person changed. **The crucial element in seeing this person changed and brought into a right relationship with God is prayer!** God will honor your prayers on behalf of a prodigal.

One of the most amazing truths in all of the Word of God is that God uses the prayers of His people to deliver and restore people. God uses prayer to deliver people from their self-destructive course and into a right relationship with Himself. When God's people pray, He does change lives. God does deliver and restore believers to Himself through the earnest and humble prayers of other believers. God does save sinners through the pleading and praying of broken, sincere believers. God is pleased to use your prayers in delivering and restoring people from the grip of sin and Satan.

This truth is illustrated in the life of Abraham. In **Genesis 18**, Abraham is told by the Lord that He is going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 18:20-21**). This burdens Abraham because he knows that Lot and his family are living in Sodom (**Genesis 14:12**).

Lot was a genuine believer (**2 Peter 2:7-8**). Yet, he allowed himself to be drawn into Sodom by his worldliness and lust. Sodom was an extremely wicked city (**Genesis 13:13**). Lot was grieved by the wickedness of the city. However, he had backslidden to the point that he tolerated this and turned away

from his relationship to God. Lot no longer went to the altar to pray, fellowship with God, and seek forgiveness (**Genesis 13:4**).

This is exactly what happens to the prodigal. This person is drawn away from God and His Word by worldliness and lust. This person wants to live life as he or she chooses. This person no longer seeks God as he or she once did. He or she is no longer diligent to serve or follow the Lord Jesus Christ. This person has separated himself or herself from godly influences and is now under the influence of wicked and godless people and practices. This person is preoccupied with the world and not with spiritual things.

Lot was in Sodom and was about to be swept away in the judgment of God. **The only thing that kept Lot from being swept away by the judgment of God is that he had an uncle on the hillside praying for him.** Abraham's praying in **Genesis 18:22-33** kept Lot from being destroyed in the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.

This should cause you to consider two sobering truths. First, you may be the only thing standing between the judgment of God and the prodigal. God may be pleased to withhold judgment because you are pleading for this person. You may be the only person standing in the gap for this prodigal. This should cause you to continue to be faithful and earnest in your praying. You may be the key to the withholding of God's judgment and the restoration of this person.

Second, you can see that God will deliver people through your prayers. **Your prayers in behalf of others are not in vain!** God is pleased to deliver and restore people through the humble and earnest praying of His people. This should cause you to be recommitted to praying for the prodigals. There is hope for a person as long as God's people are praying for that person.

In praying for your prodigal, there are some basic principles that you must remember and put into practice. **First, you must be committed to the task.** When Abraham began to pray about the situation in Sodom and Gomorrah, he stood still before the Lord (**Genesis 18:23**). Abraham had come to do serious business with the Lord God: he would be interceding for his loved one. Abraham was determined to seek the Lord for the deliverance of Lot and his family. He would not cease praying until he received the answer. You must do the same. You must be committed to the task. You must be determined to seek God with all your being for the deliverance and restoration of the prodigal. You will have to anchor yourself in the presence of God. You must get alone with God and be committed to praying for this person until you receive the answer. You cannot give up. You cannot quit. No matter what happens or how desperate the situation gets, do not stop praying until you receive the answer. William S. Plumer wrote, "**Real prayer seeks an audience and an answer.**" Go into the presence of God, committed to the task of praying for this person and not giving up until you receive an answer.

The next principle of praying for a prodigal is that you must be bold in your pleading with God. Abraham began his prayer by asking God to deliver the city if there were fifty righteous people. He continued to plead until God had assured him that he would deliver the city if there were ten righteous people.

It is interesting that Abraham plead with God until he was assured that God would not destroy the city if there were ten righteous people. The ten that Abraham was thinking about was Lot's family. Lot, his wife, and two unmarried daughters would add to four. Then, Lot had sons-in-law. The Hebrew form of the word in this text is plural and means more than two (**Genesis 19:4**). The number of the sons-in-law has to be more than two. This means that the sons-in-law and the daughters of Lot that they married would total at least ten or more.

It is important that you notice the boldness of Abraham. When he prayed to the Lord, he was bold in making his request. He did it with humility (**Genesis 18:27**). Yet, he boldly prayed to God about his heart's desire.

In praying for your prodigal, you must be bold in your praying. This person is in a desperate and

dangerous condition. God is the only One who can change this person. It is time to be bold. You must be humble before the Lord. Yet, you need to understand that being humble before the Lord does not lessen one's boldness. Sometimes people make it sound like humility before the Lord and boldness in praying are enemies. They are not! Actually, the more humble a person is before the Lord, the greater the boldness that person will have in prayer. **True humility fuels the fire of boldness!** Humility before God means that you are absolutely convinced that you cannot do anything in the situation you are praying about and God is the only one who can change the situation. If you know that you cannot change anything or anybody and only God can, it will make you bold to pray to God. You must plead for this person with all the intensity that you have, absolutely trusting and resting in God for the final outcome. **If God is allowing this person in rebellion to still live, there is hope.** Plead with God with a holy and humble boldness!

The final principle of praying for your prodigal is that you must focus on the character of God. In this prayer, Abraham focused on the righteousness of God. God always does right. He never does what is wrong. Abraham knew this and used this in his praying for Lot. Lot was a righteous man. Yes, he had allowed himself to be drawn into worldliness and compromise. Yet, he was a righteous man. Since God is righteous, He will not allow the righteous to be destroyed as the wicked are. Abraham used this by calling on God to be true to His character. He asks God not to destroy the righteous as the wicked are. In doing this, he is actually praying for Lot. Since Lot was a righteous man and God is righteous in His character and actions, He would deliver Lot from the destruction.

In praying for your prodigal, you need to focus on the character of God. You need to plead with God to be true to His character. God is merciful. You need to plead that God would reveal His mercy by withholding judgment on your prodigal. God is good. You need to plead that God would show His goodness by delivering this prodigal. God has all power. You need to call on God to show that power by restoring your prodigal. As you plead for the prodigal, call on God to be true to His character. Ask God to reveal how great and mighty He is by changing this person. Plead with God to reveal His glory by powerfully transforming the prodigal and bringing him or her into a right relationship with Him!

The following prayer list is offered as a guide to help you in praying for your prodigal. These prayer requests are based on God's Word. You need to read the verses and then plead these to God. **Powerful praying is praying that is based on God's Word!** These prayer requests will help you get started. You need to plead these before God along with other requests concerning this person and his or her situation. Ask God to give you insight in how to pray for this person. Plead with the Holy Spirit to guide you and empower you as you pray for this person. When you pray for a prodigal, you need to pray for the following:

(1) That God would give this person a new heart and make him or her into a new creature (Ezekiel 36:26-27; 2 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:1-16). When you are praying for someone in this position, you have to consider the possibility that he or she has never experienced a life-transforming encounter with Jesus Christ through faith and repentance. It is very possible for a Christian to have periods in their relationship with God where they backslide and are not as diligent to serve and follow Jesus Christ. Yet, these are only for a season. The overwhelming testimony of the Bible is that a true Christian is not going to live in a habitual state of disobedience and sin (**Romans 6:1-2, 17-18; Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 1:6, 2:3-4; 3:6-9**). Lot does provide the example of a righteous believer who gets entangled in worldliness and lust. However, it must be remembered that there is only one Lot in the Bible. There is one Lot in order to show that righteous believers can get entangled in sin and still be saved. Yet, there is *only one* Lot to show people that they cannot presume on God in this matter. You need to hear and take to heart the words of A.W. Tozer. Tozer wrote, **"If I find anyone who is settled down too snugly into this world, I am made to doubt whether he's ever truly been born again."** R.G. Lee has stated, **"The faith that fizzles before the finish had a flaw from the first."** A person can make a profession of faith and appear

to be changed. Yet, this is no guarantee that one has been born again. When a person gets into this condition, you have to consider the possibility that he or she has not truly been saved. As C.H. Spurgeon wrote, "**A worldly Christian is spiritually diseased.**" This person is spiritually diseased. **This person has a serious problem.** His or her problem may be greater and more dangerous than that of being a backslidden Christian. You have to consider the possibility that he or she has been deceived and is not a genuine Christian. You need to plead that God would work a miracle of grace and save this person if he or she is not a Christian;

(2) That God would be true to His Word if this person is a Christian (John 6:39-40, 10:27-30; Romans 8:29; Philippians 1:5; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24-25). It is possible that this person is a Christian. Christians can allow themselves to be trapped into worldliness, lust, and compromise. They can turn for a season from God and His Word due to yielding to temptation and failing to be diligent in pursuing God in a daily relationship. Yet, God has promised to keep His people. He has promised to graciously preserve His people. He will not allow His people to fall away from Him or to abandon Him. A genuine Christian will not totally turn his or her back on Christ and fall away. There may be a period when that believer turns from the Lord through sin and compromise. Yet, God's gracious promise will stand true. He will preserve His people. The life of Peter illustrates this fact (**Study the following passages-John 6:66-71; 18:25-27; Acts 2:14ff**). Not only will God preserve His people, He will also cause His people to persevere in the faith. Despite sinning and failing God, the true Christian is going to keep pursuing holiness. The Christian will continue to pray, confess sin, repent, and follow Christ. This is due to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. God will continue the work that He began in a believer through the Lord Jesus Christ. When praying for a prodigal, ask God to be true to His promises. Plead with God to preserve this person if he or she is a believer. When praying for a prodigal, plead with God to cause this person to persevere in the faith. Call on God to work in this person by His Holy Spirit, creating holy desires and a sincere interest in and desire for the things of God;

(3) That God would cause the consequences of sin to become bitter (Jeremiah 2:19). This person has turned away from the Lord Jesus Christ for some reason—a person, a possession, a position, a pleasure. There is something that has become an obstacle between God and His Word and this person. When praying for this person, ask God to take all the enjoyment out of this obstacle. Plead with God to take away all pleasure that the prodigal has from this. Call on God to make this obstacle a "bitter pill to swallow" for this person. You need to plead with God that He will cause this person to see that the obstacle is just that—a hindrance to a right relationship with God;

(5) That God would remove any evil influences from this person's life (1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 1:10-19; Psalm 1:1). When a person gets into this condition, he or she becomes friends with and is influenced by wicked people. These people are influencing the prodigal away from God and His Word in order to do wicked things. These people are going to be a hindrance to this person turning back to God and entering into a right relationship with Him. You need to plead with God that He would remove these evil influences from this person's life. Pray that God will cause the prodigal's relationship to these people to sour. Ask God to remove any comfort, pleasure, or joy from these relationships. Call on God to remove these people out of the prodigal's life either by causing the relationship to fail or through circumstances in which the prodigal and these people no longer have contact.

(6) That God would send believers into this person's life who can minister to and reach this person (John 4:37-38; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9). As stated above, you need to pray for the removal of evil influences from this person's life. You need to plead with God that He will remove those people who would be a hindrance or an obstacle to your prodigal returning to God and His Word. Following this, you