

Travailing in Prayer

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

As a believer with an earnest desire to please God, you may have observed people whom you consider to be “dynamic” Christians. You note their vibrancy, adventures of faith, and continual fruit bearing. Instead of striving and tension, which marks the “movers and shakers” in the world scene, these Christians exhibit amazing peace, joy, and meekness in every circumstance—and you want that kind of life.

Like many godly, well-intentioned Christians, you may have come to a place where you feel as though something is missing in your walk with God. Besides being faithful in church attendance and daily devotions, you give your tithe and your time. When it comes to prayer, you give thanks before every meal. Each morning and evening, you pray for guidance and protection. Your prayers are sincere, and you believe that God hears them—and He does. So, why the discomfort?

God never intended for our lives to become static. From the start of His public ministry in a face-off with Satan himself, until He breathed His last breath on the Cross, Jesus Christ's life never became easier. Every moment of His life was dynamic. Beginning with those forty days of fasting in the wilderness to the last hours of his life on earth, God the Son showed us what it means to travail in prayer.

This booklet confirms the fact that once you are born again, the whole reason for your existence is to bring glory to God. As you grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, your prayer life will also grow in intensity. You are being transformed into the image of the Son of God, who created you, redeemed you, sustains you, and lives through you.

Chapter One

ALONE WITH GOD: HAVING CHRIST FORMED IN YOU

“We have heard the fame thereof: our hands wax feeble: anguish hath taken hold of us, and pain, as of a woman in travail” (Jeremiah 6:24).

“As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children” (Isaiah 66:8b).

To travail means to be in a process of bringing forth, to deliver a new life, through anguish and sometimes through agony.

The apostle Paul said in Galatians 4:19, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” Here, “travail” means, “I feel the pains of childbirth. I feel the pain of having Christ formed in you.” It speaks of identification, development through discipleship, and the application of Bible doctrine in real life situations. Paul continued to pour out love and to invest Christ’s life in others, and that became a very heavy responsibility.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:8-9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8, Paul encouraged the Thessalonian Christians to continue in the same pure Gospel they had received from him: "Remember our labor and travail as we preached unto you the Gospel of God."

Guard Your Time with God

Do not let anything keep you from having your time alone with God. God is very concerned about our intentions (see Proverbs 4:23); however, He is even more concerned about our actions (Philippians 4:9). The seeds we plant today and this week we will harvest in the future. We can be alone and be quiet without really taking advantage of that time to be alone with God. Therefore, we must do everything in our power to protect our private times with God.

We should desire to treat others as though they are more valuable than we are, (Philippians 2:3). But how do we reach that place, practically speaking? The only way a believer can honestly change from a self-serving existence to a laid-down life is through travailing. Travailing is a process whereby God promises miraculous results to the person who travails. Unless the Holy Spirit leads, it is very difficult to travail.

The flesh finds it very hard.

“As soon as they travailed, they brought forth children.” There is such satisfaction when a child is born into the Kingdom of God. And once a person is saved, we need to guide them and pray as the apostle Paul did, that Christ would be formed in his converts.

A lady was having a terrible time with her children. She met with her pastor and said, “I have a girl six, a boy twelve, and another boy fifteen. My husband and I go to church. He is a deacon. We don’t live in secret sins, we have worship in our home, and we cannot figure out why our children are so rebellious.

“Pastor, say anything you can to me. I don’t care! If there is anything you can say, please say it. It will not trouble me. I want help.”

The pastor said, “I would ask you a question only because you’ve given me the liberty to ask this question. How many nights has your pillow been wet with tears?”

She looked the pastor in the eye, and she said, “I have to tell you, never.”

Now, this is a very good Christian lady, to be complimented. But she said, “Never.” She had never travailed.

That night, with her husband, she began on

her own to understand what it means to travail in prayer. Without telling anyone, praying all night long in a private place in her home, she asked the Lord to teach her. She wept and wept, and she begged God. She said, "I'm going to fight for my children."

And after several nights, she came downstairs, and her oldest boy said, "Mom, how does anyone really get saved?"

She didn't bring it up. On his own he said, "How does a person really get saved?"

While this was going on, the twelve-year-old boy took off and ran upstairs. It seemed as though he didn't want to hear it.

The older boy said, "Mom, would you kneel with me so I can have the real thing?" and she did.

Then next day, her second son said to her, "I took off, but not because I didn't want you to talk about God. I ran because I have such a need for Him." He accepted Christ, and her little six-year-old girl prayed as well. It happened because of a mother's travail—travailing in prayer.

I would say with you, with all of my heart, "God, please teach me how to travail."

As soon as they travailed, they brought forth children. We are called to trust God and to travail

in prayer, separated from the world and all of its clutches and the diverse powers that wish to attack us, hurt us, and destroy us. While we acknowledge God's sovereign will, let's learn to travail in our intercession—separated from the world, the flesh, and the devil—not letting go of God until He does something.

God loves to build and to bring new life to the desolate places and the waste places when people travail (Job 38:27, Psalm 34:22, and Isaiah 54:3). In Ezekiel 38:12 we read, "The desolate places are now inhabited"—and all because someone stood in the gap and travailed.

Surrender Comes before Power

With God, surrender comes before power. And when people in a church begin to travail in prayer, God promises a tremendous victory. It is so easy to be touched by a message but not changed by it. Yes, there are people who faithfully get together to have prayer, and that's good. But beyond including prayer in our schedules, we need to be taught how to travail through the Spirit of God, in prayer.

I don't know how many Christians have experienced the faintest resemblance to what God sees as seriously travailing in prayer. In some

cases, as with Jesus in the garden, it means “anguish of the soul.” It means emotional pain. It means the intensity of exercising your desire.

With all the gambling, drugs, homosexuality, adultery, with all the murders and oceans of iniquity, I have often thought about the many professing Christians in our country. How many, in God’s eyes and His omniscience, will be travailing in prayer tonight? Maybe one elderly lady will respond, or a man, or perhaps a young pastor, on fire for God, who believes what I am saying. But whether they are few or many, God has always used the remnant—whosoever will yield himself to His purpose, for His glory.

No one will ever know what travail will bring forth until they experience it. The experience is not automatic. It is not a system of works, but it is a lifestyle. Therefore, travailing in prayer has to be developed, because it means to be separated from the world and the flesh—separated to intercede for others.

Chapter Two

LABOR AND DELIVERY: BRINGING FORTH NEW LIFE

“A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world” (John 16:21).

“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).

To travail does not mean just to get together for prayer. Travail implies intensity, labor, and anguish.

If we could picture Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, we would begin to understand what it means to travail in prayer. In Matthew 26:38-44, He asked three of the disciples to come with Him as He prayed, but He found them sleeping. He prayed again, and again they fell asleep. Then He prayed again,

falling on His face as blood came through His pores. He travailed in prayer as He said to the Father, “Thy will be done.” “Remove this cup; nevertheless, thy will be done.”

It is questionable that many people are going to understand what it means to travail with God in prayer. You will want to do it, but it requires first being taught and then withstanding the enemy—and that is why we need to pray for one another.

A woman has sorrow, in terms of physical suffering, when she is giving birth to a child. But, when the child is delivered, her anguish goes away because a new life is born into this world (John 16:21). As soon as she travails, a child is brought forth.

Worry, fear, insecurity, subjectivity, passivity, and carnality, questions and more questions: everything comes against those who desire to bring forth life. But God says, “Watch with me. Enter into travail, and don’t give up.” No wonder He said, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).

In Acts 1:14, the believers continued in prayer. In Acts 12:12, many gathered to pray. But in Acts 21:5, many gathered to pray because they had been taught how to travail.

Praying is asking—asking in faith. There are many opportunities to travail as you are doing what you have to do. Maybe it is during your bus ride on the way to work, or in your office during your lunch hour—but you will sense that it is a time set apart by God, when your heart can go back to travail over a subject that God has placed there.

Believe and Receive

A group of Christians prayed, and their prayer was very simple—that the local tavern would close. Two weeks later, on a Sunday morning at eleven o'clock, lightning struck the building and it burned down. The owner knew they had prayed, and he sued them. They hired an attorney and said they were not guilty. Now, that is interesting. The tavern owner believed in prayer, and they didn't!

John Knox was a fervent preacher and Bible teacher during the time of the Reformation. Arrested and tortured for treason, he was delivered from being burned at the stake, though many at that time were martyred for their faith. He continued to serve God and to pray with fervency until he died, and many souls were brought into the Kingdom of God through the power of his

prayer. Mary, Queen of Scots said of him, "I'd rather face all my enemies than have John Knox pray." She, by the way, lost her head when England took a stand for God.

Travailing As We Go

Recently, during Saturday morning outreach, on the last visit that we made, blood was on the sidewalk where the night before a forty-eight-year-old man had been kicked, knifed, and killed. Many people were involved in the slaying, which turned out to be a case of mistaken identity. Imagine it. Blood all over the sidewalk. It happened Friday night, and we were there on Saturday. We had gone just as we always have. But this time we went with a new sense of the presence of God, because we were responding to His call to travail in prayer for our city.

Oh, how God honors outreach, and how He honors and delights in the prayers of His children. As soon as we travailed, souls were saved. As soon as we interceded, God delivered and answered prayer with healing, and we were separated from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

For Our Example

One of the great preachers of all times was

Dwight L. Moody. In his early ministry, he was not fluent in his speech. Yet, he was rich in his understanding of the Gospel and his knowledge of the Word of God. So when two ladies heard him speak in England, they began to pray for him. They prayed day and night when they could. Then, during an evangelical crusade in New York, the power of God came upon him, and Dwight L. Moody became the great preacher that he was. As soon as they travailed, they brought forth children.

“But we’re too busy to *travail*. It’s hard enough just to get to a prayer meeting once a week.” Many good Christians, who are sincere, have no idea what it means to travail in prayer.

In Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron interfered with Moses’ marriage and accused him. Their judgment kindled God’s wrath, and Miriam became leprous. But Moses travailed for his sister (verse 13), praying that God would release her of leprosy and let her go free. He travailed and God answered his prayer.

God was angry with Aaron for not rebuking Israel when they rebelled in the wilderness—angry enough to have destroyed him. But in Deuteronomy 9:20, Moses travailed in prayer for Aaron, and he was spared. In Deuteronomy

9:24-26, Moses said that the Lord was ready to destroy the nation of Israel too, and Moses prayed for forty days and forty nights that the nation would be spared. He travailed in prayer, and God heard him.

During Israel's captivity in Babylon, a law was signed, declaring that anyone who prayed to God would be cast to the lions. The plan was to destroy the Israelites who refused to worship the idols of Babylon. Still, in Daniel 6:10, after hearing of the decree, Daniel prayed faithfully, morning, noon, and night, "and gave thanks before his God, *as he did aforetime.*" Daniel was already a faithful man of prayer, and the God of Israel proved faithful to Him once again, saving him out of the mouths of hungry lions (Daniel 6:22). In Daniel 9, he prayed for the children of Israel to be delivered from captivity.

In the fullness of time, God answers the prayers of men and women who pray and believe consistently. Don't believe a lie. Believe God, trust Him to provide you with a plan and a purpose, and receive the fruit of travailing with Him in prayer.

Chapter Three

MIRACLES HAPPEN WHEN WE PUT GOD'S PURPOSE FIRST

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16b).

Unless we band together and purpose to give ourselves to God's heartbeat for the lost, we will not affect places of sin. Without fervent prayer, I have no great faith that we are going to see people come under conviction as they walk down the street. A person has to be taught how to travail in prayer. It achieves unbelievable miracles, indescribable things that you cannot comprehend. That is the fruit of travailing.

There will be anguish and labor and sorrow of heart in the one who is patient, waiting upon God. But when the answer comes, the anguish is gone. Travailing.

Travailing Brings Life out of Death

In our little town of West Sumner, Maine, there hadn't been a fundamentalist church for fifty consecutive years. The Baptist church had been closed, and no gospel was preached in that little town where I was reared up. No gospel—for *fifty* years. But finally, the doors opened. And as the doors opened, everyone in that little town, with their disbelieving attitudes, mocked.

A man from Bob Jones University came to preach for two weeks. Back then, we called it a revival. But after ten days, very few had responded, and he said, "We're absolutely getting nowhere." Then he said, "If you feel led, meet me. I'm going to stay here all night and pray." And so we did, on a Tuesday night.

That pastor said, "Let us pray." He said, "There are many walls in this little town that have to be broken. The church hasn't been open for fifty years. The Gospel hasn't been proclaimed, and it seems as though people just don't need Christ—or so they think."

This was new to me but I joined in, and we prayed all night. The most shocking thing happened in that town. Twenty-eight people came to the next service and were born again—people

who had never stepped foot in a church as far as I know.

On a Wednesday night, after fifty years of no results, no Gospel message, no church doors opening, twenty-eight people came forward. Among them was my precious mother. She was such a great woman. The only thing I had said to her before was, "If you want to go to these crusades, even for just one night, I'd be proud to take you." She didn't answer me. But she came in and stood way up back (that was just like her), and I didn't even know she was there.

Tuesday night, we travailed. Wednesday night, for the first time in fifty years, twenty-eight people were saved.

The Fruit of Abiding

Throughout the years, people in our ministry have grown through the trials of their faith, both personally and as a body, by learning to go before the throne of grace and seek God's help for one another.

One person had a very serious heart condition, and another person had a tumor on the brain. One hundred people got together and agreed to pray three times a day for those two specific requests for healing. Within forty days,

both people were totally healed. Travail brought forth life for the person with the tumor, and travail moved heaven to bring healing to the person with the serious heart condition. As soon as they travailed, they were healed.

A wife left her husband, a faithful Christian, for another man. Though he was understandably distraught, instead of reacting in his emotions he contacted a pastor in his church to travail in prayer with him. They met together morning and night, and they prayed on the phone at noon. They wept as they prayed, and they believed God's promise to be faithful. Several weeks later, he received a call from her from a Billy Graham Crusade in Tampa Bay, Florida. She had accepted Christ and said, "Is it possible that you would accept me back?"

He didn't plead with her, he didn't argue, and when she came back, he didn't judge her. He travailed in prayer, believing God, and received her completely because of unconditional love.

Travailing in prayer. In the natural, I don't think you or I would do it. But I have a hunch that you will follow through. Pray for each other, that we will all learn to pray with travailing. It does not come naturally. We need to learn

how, and God is more than willing to teach us. We don't have to look far for situations to pray about.

Often, people will take time to relax, to just get away from it all, but they forget the rest that comes with *travailing* (Hebrews 4:9-11). It doesn't make sense, yet God has said that *travailing* in prayer is the one thing that brings forth *life*—and the life of Christ always brings rest (Matthew 11:28-29).

CONCLUSION

Messages, people may not come to hear. Arguments, they may oppose and win. But prayers, they cannot resist, because God answers our prayers.

The disciples in the upper room were revived and in one accord, having one heart and one soul. When their enemies came against them (Acts 4:31-33), they went back and prayed more and with reverence. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and their faith, though on trial, was red hot.

Heavenly Father, bless these words in the depth of truth. The seed has been planted. Teach us how to travail in prayer. Examine our hearts and purify our motives so we can develop those godly habits because of our relationship with You, as our fellowship grows. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.