

## FACING TRIALS WITH CHRIST-LIKE PRAYER

**14** <sup>32</sup>They came to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, Sit here, while I pray. <sup>33</sup>Then he took Peter and James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and very troubled. <sup>34</sup>He said to them, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, even to [the point of] death. Stay here and keep watch. <sup>35</sup>Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. <sup>36</sup>He said, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. However, not what I will, but what you will. <sup>37</sup>Then he returned and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not keep watch for one hour? <sup>38</sup>Keep watch and pray, so that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. <sup>39</sup>Again he went away and prayed, speaking the same words. <sup>40</sup>Then again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know how to answer him. <sup>41</sup>He came the third time and said to them, Continue sleeping and resting, the matter has been decided, the hour has come. Look, the Son of man is [about to be] betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>42</sup>Get up, let us go. Look, the one who will betray me is almost here.

<sup>43</sup>Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. He was accompanied by a large crowd from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders, [armed] with swords and clubs. <sup>44</sup>Now the one who betrayed him had given them a signal, saying, Whoever I greet with a kiss, that is the man; seize him, and lead him away securely. <sup>45</sup>When he arrived, he immediately came to [Jesus] and said, Rabbi; and kissed him. <sup>46</sup>Then they seized him and arrested him. <sup>47</sup>But one of those who was standing there drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. <sup>48</sup>Jesus responded by saying to them, Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me, as though I were the leader of a revolution? <sup>49</sup>Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple [courts], and you did not arrest me. But [this is being done] so that the scriptures might be fulfilled. <sup>50</sup>Then everyone deserted him and fled. <sup>51</sup>A certain young man, wearing nothing but a linen cloth, was following [Jesus]. When they seized him, <sup>52</sup>he left the linen cloth behind and fled away naked. (Mk. 14:32-52)

### **Introduction**

Don was a Christian man who worked for the railroad. He and the rest of his co-workers knew that trouble was brewing; a strike was inevitable. An undercurrent of bitterness about wage demands and working conditions had buzzed through the company for some time.

Then, while Don was on vacation, over the radio he heard the report that his co-workers had gone out on strike. Even though he was on vacation, Don immediately called one of the officers of his union. The official confirmed the report and informed Don of an up-coming union meeting.

As Don drove to that emergency meeting, he thought back over his fifteen years as a fireman on the railroad. Even though he was a Christian, he had always been very vulnerable to peer pressure, both in high school and at work. He had gone through a

period of being one person at church and at home, and a different person at work. Gradually, though, he had become stronger in his Christian life; his commitment to Christ had become firmer, and the men at work began to see the difference in him. More and more he was finding a mission field among his fellow workers whose marriages were in trouble. Some of the men would ridicule him in public, but privately they would unburden their hearts to him, asking questions, sharing hurts, opening up to discuss spiritual things.

The union meeting that night was bedlam. Some of the men were already drunk and in an ugly mood. The union's strategy was to get a federal judge to refuse to issue an injunction that would force the striking workers to return to their jobs. It was very evident that the company had done much to instigate the strike in the first place.

Throughout the remainder of his vacation, Don worked for the strike effort, and when he was due to report back to work, he joined his fellow workers on the picket line. About five weeks into the strike, Don was approached by a Christian lawyer at church. "Are you working?" asked the lawyer. "No," replied Don. "Don't you know that you are breaking the law? Your union has called a wildcat strike, which is illegal under the National Railway Labor Act."

Don protested, "As far as I know no one else is working either." Deep down Don felt uncomfortable about the wildcat strike, but he also knew that he was not strong enough to face the heckling and the threats that would come if he crossed the picket line and went back to work. Even as he protested, a fellow worker and fellow Christian standing nearby spoke up, "I'm still working."

Now Don had to face the issue: Was he staying out on strike because he believed the union was within their rights? Or was the real reason the peer pressure brought to bear upon him by his fellow workers?

Finally, Don resolved to go back to work. He consented to work the night shift, when there would be no picket lines to face. Although the night shift meant there were no picket lines to cross, Don knew that it was inevitable that the union would find out that he had broken ranks, and when the strike was over he would be identified with the "scabs." Don was aware of the hatred and rejection the "scabs" would certainly face when the strikers returned to work.

Several weeks later that day came. How would Don handle that hatred and rejection? How would he handle the trial he was about to face?

Our Lord Jesus also faced trial, one of far greater intensity, as He departed from Gethsemane with the knowledge that His betrayal and arrest were at hand. How did our Lord face His trial? He faced it by resorting to prayer. Since Jesus found it necessary to resort to prayer as He anticipated His hour of trial; surely we, too, must do the same.

## I. Resort to Christ-like Prayer, When Your Heart is Overburdened (Mk. 14:32-34)

Knowing that He was about to face the trial of His betrayal and arrest, which would ultimately lead to the cross of Calvary, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray (Mk. 14:32.) Here is the Son of God preparing Himself for a successful, God-honoring response to trial by resorting to prayer. If our Lord Himself found it necessary to resort to prayer in anticipation of the trial before Him, how much more should we do the same. Indeed, we are invited and exhorted to resort to prayer: *"call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me"* (Psl. 50:15.) Consider, too, the exhortation and invitation given in Hebrews 4:16, *"Let us ... approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."* Why is it necessary for the Lord to exhort us to resort to prayer? It is necessary for Him to do so because we are prone to resort to everything except prayer: worry, self-confidence, retreat, compromise, even surrender to the temptation of yielding our Christian commitment in the face of trial.

Upon entering the Garden of Gethsemane and removing Himself from the main body of His disciples, our Lord took with Him Peter, James and John. He confided in them and shared His burdened heart with them (Mk. 14:33-34.) If the Son of God confided in a few close friends when He faced His hour of trial, could we not do the same? The Son of God unburdened His heart to His friends. He *"began to be deeply distressed, and very troubled"* (vs. 33.) He confided in them, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, even to [the point of] death"* (vs. 34;) literally, *"My soul is encompassed (περίλυπος) with sorrow."* Our Lord was overwhelmed with sorrow and agony, almost to the point of expiring. He exhorted them, *"Stay here and keep watch."* Jesus requests that His friends and disciples stand by Him and support Him as He goes to pray. The Apostle Paul was never too proud or self-reliant to solicit prayer support on his behalf, and neither must we:

*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. <sup>9</sup>Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup>He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, <sup>11</sup>as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many. (2 Cor. 1:8-11)*

Sometimes, as the Lord Jesus found with Peter, James, and John, we may find that our confidants prove unable to watch with us (vs. 37,40.) If a fellow Christian confides in us, let us be very sensitive to his need and by God's grace fulfill our Christian duty: *"Bear each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ"* (Gal. 6:2.) At times, a sympathetic, listening silence and prayer support is all that we can do and need to do; note what is said of Job's friends in Job 2:13,

*“Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was”* (Job 2:13.) If we try to gain the support of a fellow Christian but fail, we may be confident that the Lord Jesus Himself will never fail us; as the Apostle Peter assures us, *“Cast all your care upon him because he cares for you”* (1 Pet. 5:7.)

Our Lord Jesus resorted to prayer as He faced His hour of trial, not only for Himself, but to encourage His disciples to do the same (Mk. 14:37-38.) Earlier, Simon Peter was warned of his impending trial, Jesus had warned him, *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat”* (Lk. 22:31.) Now he is being instructed by Jesus’ own example to prepare for his trial by resorting to prayer.

Let us resort to Christ-like prayer, when our hearts are overburdened—prayer for ourselves and for fellow Christians who confide in us.

## **II. Resort to Christ-like Prayer, Prayer that Wrestles with God (Mk. 14:35-36)**

Jesus began His prayer with the request that He might be spared from His impending trial (vs. 35.) Jesus, by His example, teaches us that it is legitimate to pray that God would provide us with an “alternative route” and would allow us to avoid the encounter with trial, if it is possible. Note the Apostle Paul’s prayer in 2 Corinthians 12:7-8,

*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a stake in my flesh, a messenger from Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. (2 Cor. 12:7-8)*

Jesus qualifies His request by submitting Himself to His Father’s will (vs. 36.) Jesus, recognizing that His Father could not remove this trial from Him and thus spare Him from it—not if He were to accomplish the mission for which the Father sent Him—submits Himself to His Father and accepts His Father’s will. We must recognize that our heavenly Father does not subject us to unnecessary trials: *“he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men”* (Lam. 3:33.) As the Apostle Peter informs those Christians who were undergoing severe trial: *“now for a little while, since it is necessary, you have been brought to grief by all kinds of trials”* (1 Pet. 1:6.) We must be willing to submit ourselves to the LORD’s will if He ordains that we endure the trial rather than be spared from it.

Jesus truly wrestled with God in prayer over this matter. He repeated the same prayer three times: *“he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing”* (Matt. 26:44.) What was true of Jesus is also true of us: accepting the will of God means denying ourselves, putting our own will to death. Submitting to God’s will may mean rejecting our own immediate desire. Submitting to God’s will may mean being rejected by others for the sake of

Christ. But as Christians we are enabled to make that self-denying sacrifice because, when we gave our heart to Christ we died together with Him, and we have the Holy Spirit's presence to apply the victory of Christ to our lives.

When we face a trial we may wrestle with God in Christ-like prayer, but in the end we must submit to our heavenly Father's will. Jesus wrestled with God in prayer, but He gave up His own will when it became apparent that it was imperative that the trial had to be endured for the Father's will to be accomplished.

In contrast to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Old Testament king, Hezekiah, wrestled with God in prayer and insisted that his own will be done:

*In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him and said, This is what Jehovah says, Put your affairs in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover. <sup>2</sup>Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Jehovah, <sup>3</sup>saying, O Jehovah, I beg you, remember how I have sincerely walked before you and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your sight. And Hezekiah wept bitterly. <sup>4</sup>Then the word of Jehovah came to Isaiah, saying, <sup>5</sup>Go back and tell Hezekiah, This is what Jehovah, the God of your father David, says, I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Listen; I will add fifteen years to your life. (Isa. 38:1-5)*

But far from leading to fulfillment, Hezekiah's insistence on his own will being done led to disaster. In his pride at having received a miraculous answer to prayer that resulted in his healing—as well as receiving a divine sign in the heavens—Hezekiah showed off all the wealth of Israel to the Babylonian ambassadors. In judgment for this display of pride, the LORD would eventually allow the Babylonians to come and plunder all the land of Israel, as He foretells through the prophet Isaiah: *"Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the LORD. <sup>17</sup>The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD'"* (2 Kgs. 20:16-17.) Furthermore, during the fifteen years of his extended life Hezekiah gave birth to a son, Manasseh. This son would prove to spend much of his life as a prodigal living in rebellion against the LORD and would consequently bring much sorrow and judgment upon both himself and the people of Israel:

*"Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years ... <sup>2</sup>He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. <sup>3</sup>He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed ... (2 Kgs. 21:1-3)*

When we wrestle with God in prayer, let us be sure to imitate our Lord Jesus in surrendering to our heavenly Father's will—if it becomes clear that our will is

set in opposition to His will and that it is imperative that His will be done without deviation.

### **III. Resort to Christ-like Prayer, and Receive Strength from God (Mk. 14:42)**

When He entered the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was so overwhelmed with the weight of His trial that He was about to expire (Mk. 14:34.) But having resorted to prayer, and having exchanged His will for His Father's will when it became clear that there was no alternative, our Lord emerged from prayer with the strength to successfully face His appointed trial (Mk. 14:42.)

Having resorted to prayer our Lord was now enabled to unflinchingly face a hostile armed mob; endure betrayal at the hands of one of His own disciples; accept the desertion of His beloved friends; resist the temptation of defending Himself by force of arms; accept the suffering and the shame of the cross. In a word, He was enabled to do all that His Father required of Him.

Having resorted to prayer, Don, the railroad employee mentioned in the Introduction, was likewise enabled to successfully face his appointed trial: The day came when the railroad strike ended and Don had to face the returning workers who had held out to the bitter end. One day he was assigned to the blast furnace department where he would encounter the men most bitter towards "scabs." When he walked into the locker room all conversation stopped, all eyes were riveted on him with cold hatred. On his locker someone had written, "Don is a \_\_\_ Christian scab."

Don could feel the icy hate-filled stares on his back as he opened his locker. Everyday Don had sat in his car before work, pleading with the Lord, not for deliverance from this trial, but for the strength and grace to undergo this appointed trial, the strength and grace to face his fellow workers. Now, as he stood before that locker and as he turned to face these hard and bitter men, Don could not explain the peace and strength that flowed through him. Now he knew he could face any challenge, he knew that Christ stood beside him (*POWER*, 5/4/86.)

When we face a God-appointed trial, let us be sure to resort to Christ-like prayer, and receive strength from God to successfully undergo our appointed trial unto the glory of God.