

GOD'S CALL

Major themes in the Scriptures

Quality of being (6)

Quality of being and prayer

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “Quality of being”, the sixth message, as we seek to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

Moral quality of being directly affects the quality of our prayers. Prayer is portrayed as the hand that moves the sword of the Spirit. It is also the means by which we take the whole armor of God. The armor portrays the quality of our moral and spiritual being and our relationship with God. How can we effectively develop such a quality by prayer if in the first place, our prayer is not of quality?

We will look to the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

In the last message, we sought to appreciate moral quality of being in relation to spiritual warfare and spiritual victory. And we looked at **Ephesians 6: 10-20** and we saw that the apostle Paul exhorts the Christians to take THE HELMET OF SALVATION and the sword of the Spirit, which is or who is, the Word of God by means of all prayer and petition.

We saw that if we are to move the sword of the Spirit, we need to exercise ourselves in prayer. By means of all prayer and petition, we are to take THE HELMET OF SALVATION and the sword of the Spirit. And we saw that the sword is the Spirit. It is so critically vital in spiritual warfare.

But how are we to exercise this by prayer? Is it so that whenever we pray, the sword will move; whenever we pray, the Holy Spirit will work?

The Scriptures make it very clear that unless our lives are righteous, God may not hear us and the Holy Spirit may not respond. If our lives are of quality, then our prayer will be effective, meaningful before God and He will respond to us.

For example, we see in **James 5: 16**, the apostle James tells us:

James 5: 16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Here, the apostle is not just saying when you pray, God will listen, He will respond and He will grant to you what is the most meaningful according to your request. He says, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." So prayer that moves the sword of the Spirit must be prayer of quality. The higher the quality, the more effective it will be. So if our lives are poor in quality, then we cannot expect much in terms of spiritual victory in our lives. The Holy Spirit may not respond when we pray.

Prayer from the righteous brings joy to God; it is a delight to Him. He hears our prayer when our hearts are righteous.

Solomon understood this in the wisdom that God gave to him, although he did not live by that wisdom. **Proverbs 15: 29** tells us:

Proverbs 15: 29

The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

The LORD is far from the wicked – He does not respond positively to their prayers. He does not regard their prayers with pleasure. But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

Proverbs 15: 8

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

So a person who is wicked, he may offer a sacrifice to God. It may seem to be good. He seems to be serving God, honouring Him outwardly. But when God looks at his heart and He sees that it is a wicked heart, then that sacrifice becomes an abomination to God. He despises it, He rejects it; He will not accept it. But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

So, quality of prayer is primary and quality of prayer is directly associated with quality of our moral and spiritual being.

But **Ephesians 6** also implies and brings across the picture that prayer is also the means by which we put on the whole armor of God.

We take THE HELMET OF SALVATION and the sword of the Spirit with our hand. And the hand portrays prayer: our submission to God, our calling upon God, our looking to Him. So when the apostle Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God, we put on the ... armor with our hands. We have to take the full armor of God.

So whether it be the belt of TRUTH, the BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, the shield of faith, THE HELMET OF SALVATION, we are to use our hands to put on the whole armor of God.

So in this portrayal then, we see that if we are to put on the whole armor of God, prayer is critical. We cannot put on this armor of God just by our mental knowledge, just by our physical abilities and powers, just by wanting to do the things that we think are good. Prayer is central and critical. It is only as we come to God and we pray to Him and we look to Him, then we can properly put on the whole armor of God.

I mentioned that the armor of God concentrates on, or portrays, or basically refers to our moral and spiritual being and our relationship with God. Here, when I refer to relationship with God, I am not just referring to the status of relationship – that God is our God, He is our Father. But I am referring to relationship in terms of a living and dynamic relationship.

It is a relationship of active participation, that is, it involves God and it involves us in a living and loving relationship that is active. So as we call upon God, He responds. As we submit to Him, He works. So as we pray, the Spirit of God moves. That is an aspect of our relationship with God.

But it also refers to our moral and spiritual quality of being. As the Holy Spirit moves, He also works in our heart. He teaches us the ways of God; He helps us to become what we ought to be; He enables us to do what the Lord wants us to do.

So it is a living, dynamic relationship: the quality of our being and our relationship with God.

So if we are to be effective in spiritual warfare, if we are to be victorious, we need to nurture and develop the quality of our being and our relationship with God to its highest level.

So how do we, for example, PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS?

If we are to use our hands to PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE, then in the spiritual realm, it means we come to God in prayer, we ask God so that He can help us, enable us to become righteous.

But before we became Christians, we were not righteous. How then did we become righteous?

The Scriptures tell us that we can become righteous when we come before God in the right way. When we pray to Him, we come to Him in the right way, we can become righteous.

There was once a man who thought that he was quite good, maybe very good. He thought that God would be quite pleased with him, and he came before God and he said, "I thank You for what I am today. I am a good man. I have done many good things. I do my duties religiously. I am not like other people: swindlers, corrupt, evil people."

Then there was another man. He was a person who had done many wrong things and he recognized it. And he felt very sorry; he wanted to change. He came to God. He knew that he was not worthy to come before God. He felt very ashamed of himself and he just asked God, "Please be merciful to me. I am a sinner."

Well, the first person, his prayer was rejected by God. The second person was received by the Lord and God forgave him.

The Lord Jesus told this story in **Luke 18: 9-14**.

Luke 18: 9-14

- 9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:
- 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
- 11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.
- 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'
- 13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'
- 14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Pharisee thought he was very good, that God would appreciate him. He had done many things that seemed to be so good. He fasted twice a week, he tithed of all that he had. He was not like other people, doing many things that were so obviously negative. But God rejected his prayer: he was self-righteous, he was not repentant; he was not contrite; he was arrogant – he was not acceptable to God.

On the other hand, the tax collector, he was unrighteous. He knew it; he knew he was a sinner, but he came before God in a humble and contrite spirit. He asked God for forgiveness. He acknowledged his sinfulness, he asked God to be merciful to him. And God forgave him. He became righteous: An unrighteous man became righteous as a result of his prayer.

God is a holy God. He dwells in a high and holy place, but he dwells with one who is humble and contrite in spirit.

So, we begin in a situation where we have sinned against God, we have turned and gone our own way. But God is willing to forgive us if we are prepared to humble ourselves, to come to Him, acknowledge our sins, to be prepared to repent, to choose the path of righteousness.

If we do that, then this prayer becomes acceptable to God and God can forgive us on the basis of the cross. On the basis of what the Lord Jesus has done for us, God can forgive us. We can become righteous. The Lord Jesus Christ is called The LORD our righteousness. So this is the path by which we can PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The path of developing righteousness continues throughout our lives and throughout eternity. Righteousness is a quality of being that can increase in its beauty, intensity and depth as we grow in the Lord. We begin by coming to the Lord for forgiveness. We begin by having our sins forgiven to become righteous before God. But we must not stop there: We must continue to pray, continue to seek God, continue to ask Him to help us to develop greater and greater quality of righteousness.

The Lord Jesus, when He spoke to the seven churches in Asia, again and again, He brought to their consciousness the importance of righteousness and the importance of repentance when we have sinned and when we have failed God.

So it is today for us. When we have failed God, when we have gone astray, when our lives are not what they ought to be, it is important for us to come to God to pray just like this man – “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” Although we are now Christians, we are children of God, we can still sin. And when we do, we must come to Him that He may forgive us.

So we PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS by means of prayer, but we must make sure that the prayer comes from the right spirit. If we come to God in an arrogant spirit, self-righteous in attitude, God will reject us. But if we come to Him humbly, with a desire to walk in His ways, then God will help us.

All prayers are not the same, even for the same person. There are different degrees of quality of prayer, different intensities and they come from a heart that is responding to God in a different way.

The Lord Jesus told another parable in **Luke 18: 1-8**:

Luke 18: 1-8

- 1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,
- 2 saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man.
- 3 "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.'
- 4 "For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,
- 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'"
- 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge *said;
- 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?
- 8 "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

The Lord Jesus told this parable to help us understand that at all times, we should pray and not to lose heart.

There are many situations of life that we go through that can be difficult and in the area of seeking to develop quality of our being, we can also lose heart. We can become discouraged. We have tried so hard, we have sought so hard to be good, to change, to become a better person, but we fail again and again. In the process of time, we may become discouraged; it seems not possible to develop that quality.

But the Lord says we should at all times ... pray and not to lose heart.

And so, He told this parable about the widow in the city who kept coming to this judge: A judge who said he did not fear and he did not respect man, and yet, because this woman kept coming to him, in the end, he did for her what she asked.

He said, "...because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out."

And from there, the Lord Jesus says, "Hear what the unrighteous judge *said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?"

So we see the Lord Jesus compares God with this unrighteous judge. How do we understand this?

Obviously, we know that God is not like the unrighteous judge. God is perfectly holy. And God is not going to give in to us just because we keep coming to Him and bothering Him, we keep asking Him for something we like, that we want; and if we pray long enough, we keep on persisting, God will give to us. Obviously, that is not true.

The Lord is saying to us that in the world, persistence, perseverance can often bring about results. Even for this man who was not very willing to listen to what she had to say, but because of her persistence, he was prepared to do so. It produced results.

If that is so, how much more will God respond to us if we are persistent, but with the condition that it is for the right reasons. The unrighteous judge may respond even if the request is not very good, but he just wants to get rid of this person who bothers him. But God is not like that.

But there is an aspect where the issue of persistence comes in. The persistence is an expression of how important the issue is to the person. The widow kept on persisting because that was very important to her. So, because it was so important to her, she kept persisting and she obtained what she wanted.

In the spiritual realm, there is such a principle. God will respond to you in your prayers if you truly want it, if it is so very important to you and if it is good.

If you are asking for something unrighteous, do not keep on coming to God. The more you come to God, the more He will be angry with you.

But if you come to God for something that is really good, never give up. God may seem to be not answering your prayer. God may seem to not care, but He actually does. He is watching you; He is looking at your heart: How much do you want it? How far are you prepared to go? How long are you going to persevere? Will you keep coming, will you keep on seeking?

If you seek and you keep on seeking, you will find. If you knock and keep on knocking, it will be opened to you. If you ask and keep on asking, it will be given to you.

So this is an important aspect about prayer. Let us not come before God light-heartedly. Let us not come before God casually and think: "I uttered my prayer, I can expect God to answer."

God expects you to consider: What does it mean to you? When you ask God for something, do you really want it? Is it so precious to you? Do you value it? If you value it, you will not give up. You will persist, you will continue, you will press on. And when God sees that, He will be pleased to give to you according to His bountiful mercy, love and grace.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

Even earthly fathers who have various elements of self-life and selfishness, they still know how to give good things to their children. They care for their children, they love their children and they want to give them good things, even though they are not so pure and not so good. If that is the case, the Lord says, "How much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

God will give us good things and the very best that He can give to us is the Holy Spirit. When He gives us the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, the Holy Spirit will teach us God's ways, He will help us to understand the spiritual realm, He will help us to know who the Lord is, He will help us to develop the character of the Lord, that Christ may be formed in us.

It is by the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we can draw near to God, we can know Him and love Him, walk with Him. And as we walk by the Spirit, we will fulfil the requirements of the Law. As we learn to love Him and walk with Him and we do not grieve the Holy Spirit, then He will have the freedom to work in our lives and the quality of our prayer will increase.

And as the quality of our prayer increases, so the sword of the Spirit will move more rapidly and effectively because God will hear our prayers. And when we pray, it is important to Him and God delights in our prayer.

So we need to recognize that prayer is such a wonderful thing. It is an avenue that God has given to us. It is a lifeline that God has given us, where we can receive life from Him. God imparts spiritual life to us as a result of our prayers.

As we look to Him, we call upon Him, we trust Him, we submit to Him, God imparts the Holy Spirit to us. God gives His life to us. We become partakers of *the* divine nature; we become partakers of His holiness. God then develops that quality in our being.

But it is important for us to learn to pray, not just wanting what is good, not just persevering, but with a quality of heart that God delights in.

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

16 Rejoice always;

17 pray without ceasing;

18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

There are many people who rejoice and they are very happy, but for the wrong reasons. They rejoice over things that are not important, things that are not good. They rejoice because they get what they like, what they want in a selfish way. That kind of rejoicing leads us to destruction because we treasure the wrong things.

If we treasure the right things, we may then experience many a time, we do not rejoice, because when we treasure the right things, they are very difficult to come by; and there are many easy things and pleasant things, we have to pass them by. So, we may feel very sad: "There are many things I cannot have. I see other people enjoying all these, but I am deprived of these things." So they feel very sad, they do not rejoice. Likewise, we want to be good, we want to walk with God, we want to be close to Him, but then we find there are many wrong desires within us; we often go the wrong way and we feel very sad. So, we do not rejoice.

But the apostle Paul tells us, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks".

It is interesting to notice that when the apostle Paul talks about pray without ceasing, this phrase “pray without ceasing” takes place in between two verses that talk about rejoicing, giving thanks – a very happy heart, a very thankful heart. It is in that context that we pray without ceasing. And that kind of prayer is a delight to God.

But how can we do that? How can we rejoice when there are so many problems in our lives? How can we rejoice when we fail so many a time? How can we rejoice when things are so difficult? How can we give thanks when we find the situation so very unpleasant?

The answer lies in where your focus is.

If your focus is on yourself and your failures and your difficulties, if your focus is on your environment, in the problems that you face, the unpleasantness, well, you will not rejoice because you want what is good and meaningful and you look around you, you look at yourself, it is not like that. So you cannot rejoice. And so, we see many serious Christians very sad, gloomy, miserable, not rejoicing because we tend to look at ourselves and our situation.

But if we learn to look at the Lord, we learn to behold Him, we learn to come to Him, appreciate who He is, what He has done, His calling, what does it mean, the value, the direction, the potential; if we concentrate on that and say, “This is what I want and I am going to work at it, I am going to strive for it, I am going to labour, I am going to proceed in this direction whatever it costs me, however difficult it is,” if we move like that, we will rejoice.

We rejoice because God is so good.

We rejoice because the Lord Jesus has overcome on the cross, we can overcome too.

We are thankful because in every situation, God cares for us; in every situation, God wants the best for us; in every situation, God is prepared to help us, if we really want to be like Him.

If we really want to follow Him, God will take care of us. Can we not be thankful?

Yes, we can rejoice always and in everything give thanks, no matter what the situation. Does God change because our situation changes? Is God's love different when we go through different situations? No. As long as we love Him and as long as we are prepared to walk in His ways, then God will always love us, care for us and help us.

The problem is we do not come to Him.

We face our problems with our own little strength. We face our problems with the might of the world's wisdom and abilities. And so we will fail. We come before our problems, we face them, striving according to our own power.

And so: The good that I would, I do not; the evil that I would not, that I do. Even though we want what is good, even though we strive for what is good, if we do not come to God, we will fail and we will surely fail. And so, we will experience what it means to be brought down by this body of death. We constantly fail. It leads to spiritual death, it leads to sin.

So, the Lord calls upon us: "Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy-laden." So all those who labour and are heavy-laden, the Lord calls us to come to Him, learn from Him. Take His yoke upon us, come to Him, appreciate who He is, understand His ways, walk together with Him, then YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. You will find that peace, the joy, the freedom of life that is meant for all children of God.

So, in the midst of rejoice always, in everything give thanks, we are to pray without ceasing. What does that mean? How do we pray without ceasing?

Some people will say, "That is not possible. I have so many things to do. I have many things to attend to. I cannot be praying the whole day."

But remember: prayer is from the heart, prayer is in the realm of the spirit. And in the realm of the spirit, your heart can be with God all the time.

If you love Him, if He is your treasure, if He means everything to you, your heart will constantly be absorbed in God; you will be sensitive to Him. Whatever He wants to say to you, He has the freedom to tell you. Even in the midst of a very busy life, even in the midst of many things you need to attend to, you can continue to have that fellowship with God.

Fellowship with God is not just during times that are specially set aside for us to pray. Such times are important, such times are very helpful, but prayer is meant to continue the whole day, wherever we are, whatever we are doing. It is a spirit of fellowship with God; it is a spirit of consciousness of God to look to Him, to trust Him, to seek His guidance, to depend on Him and to honour Him in the things that we do.

Whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, whatever we do, we are conscious we want to do it to the glory of God, we want to do it with a good purpose, we want to do it because it is a meaningful thing, it is a good thing. We are not just attending to things, just trying to accomplish things, perform certain acts, go through certain events. We want meaning and life in every situation that we go through.

So for that, we must pray without ceasing. It is a constant fellowship with God and as we keep on doing that, the quality of our being will develop.

Colossians 4: 2-4

- 2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving;
- 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;
- 4 that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

The apostle Paul is writing to the Colossian Christians and he says something very similar to what he wrote to the Thessalonians. He told the Thessalonians, “rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks”. Here he says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving”.

So he emphasizes thanksgiving. Whatever we go through, whatever situation that we go through, are we really thankful to God? That must be the attitude in us at all times, in all situations.

There is no situation where we cannot be thankful to God. Even in times of pain and suffering, even in times of failure, we can still be thankful to God. Even when we have failed, we can be thankful to Him that He is a gracious God who is prepared to forgive us when we repent, when we come to Him. We can always be thankful to Him, as long as we are prepared to humble ourselves, to be contrite, to repent and walk in His ways.

And he says, “Devote yourselves to prayer”. Devote tells us that it is not just once in a while, here and there. It is something that we are occupied with constantly. We are constantly conscious to look to God. We devote ourselves to prayer.

So, some may think: “If you devote yourself to prayer, does it mean you do not do anything else?”

Again, it does not mean that. You devote yourself to prayer in the sense that your heart is occupied with God, you are constantly looking to Him and it is in that state that you do the things that you need to do. The things that you ought to do, everything that you do, ought to be done in the context of prayer and thanksgiving.

It is also in this state of prayerfulness, looking to God, that we can be alert. Keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving – alertness is so very important in our time on earth.

If we are not alert, the evil one can deceive us very easily. If we are not alert, we can be drawn away from the Lord very easily. If we are not alert, the world’s power can influence us very readily. There are many things that can draw us away from God.

So if we want to be alert, we need to be devoted to prayer. We need to develop a heart of thanksgiving, rejoicing in the Lord, constantly grateful to Him, constantly learning to live for Him, to walk with Him.

And then in that context, he says, “praying at the same time for us as well”.

If you really want to contribute to the lives of other people, then this aspect is primary. You must first learn to pray for yourself so that you develop righteousness, so that there will be quality in your being and as you develop quality in your being, you will learn to pray for others in the right way, you will know what is important for them, how to pray for them in a way that will be most meaningful and helpful for their lives.

And here, the apostle Paul is asking the Colossian Christians to pray for him and others who are working, who are serving God.

As you develop in your life of prayer and you learn to pray for others, you will be contributing significantly to what God is seeking to do.

So much takes place in the realm of prayer in service that many people are not aware of.

And so, because it is something that people may not see the result so obviously, others may not attribute to your prayers, many people may not be so eager to spend time to pray, whereas if you go ahead and do something that others can see, can recognize, it is more satisfying in many situations.

So, when you do something others can see and they thank you, they say you have done this and that for them, they are grateful. So you are happy because you have done something.

Of course, there is a place for us to do those things, things that can be seen. Our light must shine in the world. We must be involved in good works to help those who are in need.

But that can be effective and meaningful only when we learn to pray, only when there is a right spirit within us, only when our concern for others is deep and it comes from our recognition of the true value of life.

So we see the apostle Paul calling upon the Christians to pray for him and his ministry.

But we read **Colossians 1: 9-14** and we see the other way round.

Colossians 1: 9-14

- 9 For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
- 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;
- 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously
- 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.
- 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,
- 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

So while the apostle Paul called upon the Christians to pray for him, he also tells them, "I pray for you". And he prays for them earnestly with deep concern for their well-being.

And the apostle Paul tells us what he concentrates on in his prayer for them. He says, "...we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord..."

So his primary concern is that we will walk worthy of the Lord.

Whatever that God may give to us is meant to help us to walk worthy of the Lord, to live our lives where there is quality, there is meaning, where we can please God in what we do.

Bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience... - the apostle Paul is praying for them, that they will be involved in a very positive direction. And this will lead to a quality in steadfastness and patience, endurance in the quality of our being, reliable, trustworthy.

And he says, "joyously giving thanks to the Father" – a spirit of thankfulness, of rejoicing is what God wants us to have.

So the apostle Paul prayed for them in this direction.

But this joyous spirit and a spirit of thanksgiving can come about only when we do not focus on ourselves but focus on the Lord. We appreciate Him, we are grateful to Him, we want to live for Him; we give our lives to Him. It is in that state that our hearts will be really joyful, thankful.

If we concentrate on ourselves – what we want, what we want to get, what we cannot have – we will be miserable because it is a self-seeking attitude.

The only reason why we should ever focus on ourselves is to concentrate on dealing with ourselves so that we can be good: dealing with whatever is negative so that we can be good, developing whatever is positive so that we can grow in the Lord. But it is not a focus on ourselves in order to get what we like, what we want. We concentrate on ourselves only in the context of submission to God, in the context of seeking to be like Him, in the context of looking to Him, trusting Him, depending on Him.

In that state, yes, we look at our own lives: Where have I gone astray? Where have I gone wrong? What are the areas I need to correct? We must deal with these things. Because the self-life has very deep roots, so we need to deal with all these very deeply in our lives. But to deal with that is not just to concentrate on ourselves all the time.

We are to look to the Lord, concentrate on Him and in that Light deal with our lives.

So prayer enables us to deeply identify with what is in the heart of God and to become like Him in our being.

If we really want to know what is in the heart of God, if we really want to do the will of God as Christians generally say they want to, do we really know what is in His heart? Or are we in fact doing many things according to our own thinking? We think it is a good idea, we do it. Or, we do it because other people think it is a good idea, many people think it is a good idea. So we do it because it is something that many people think is good.

But do we know what God thinks? Are we aware what is in His heart, what is He concerned about, what does He want?

So if we really want to know what is in God's heart, then we need to learn to pray. We need to learn to come to God, ask Him, talk to Him; ask Him to teach us what is in His heart, what does He want of us personally, and of the church and of the people in the world, what is God seeking to do.

The Lord Jesus, the perfect Man, He chose twelve disciples in order that they might be with Him, that He might teach them and that He might send them out.

Before He selected the twelve, we are told He spent the whole night in prayer to God. He spent the whole night in prayer to God and then when the morning came, He selected His twelve apostles. You can read that in **Luke 6**.

Why did He spend the whole night in prayer? It is because He wanted to draw near to God to listen to Him, to discuss with Him, to consider with Him, to hear what He has to say, that in the context of that fellowship with God, knowing that this is what God wants to bring about, He then would move together with God as the Perfect Man walking with God.

He said, "I do nothing on My own initiative..." He would not do things just based on His own thinking as a man. He would submit to God, He would seek God, He would seek to understand what is in the heart of God. It is in that context that He would do the will of God.

Then we look at the apostle Paul. We know that he was Saul, the persecutor of the church. The Lord Jesus met him on the road to Damascus, having risen from the dead. And the Lord Jesus spoke to him. And we know that he was then blinded for three days.

What did he do during those three days? **Acts 9: 11** tells us what the Lord said to Ananias, who was a disciple of the Lord, who was reliable, trustworthy.

Acts 9: 11

And the Lord *said* to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying..."

This tells us that the likelihood is that during those three days, when the apostle Paul was blinded, he spent time praying.

Why was he praying? What was he praying about? We are not told, but the likelihood is he spent time praying to understand the will of God. He spent time praying to appreciate God's calling. The Lord had appeared to him and the Lord called him with a mission to accomplish. He wanted to understand: What is this? How do I accomplish it? What do I do?

So it is very likely that in this time, he spent time to pray, to seek the Lord, to understand so that he could be identified with the Lord in the mission that God had given to him. And that is why later he could testify to king Agrippa: "I was not ... disobedient to the heavenly vision".

Why is it that he could be not ... disobedient? It is because he had spent time to pray, to ponder and to put into practice what he had come to understand.

For many people, when the Lord speaks to you, you may say, "Thank You, Lord. It is very good; it is very interesting, very meaningful." How long does it last? An hour or two? A day? A week? A month? A year? Or, will it last a lifetime?

When the Lord tells you something important, will you ponder over it? Will you keep praying over it? Will you put into practice and deepen and develop it?

If you do not, the vision will dim. The life will go out. The fellowship with God will become more distant. If God gives you something important, if you do not treasure it, it may be taken away. So, let us be careful: Take heed, learn to pray, come to the Lord, listen to Him; understand what is in His heart, work with Him, respond to Him, live according to His instructions, not according to what the world says, not according to your own ideas, not according to your feelings and preferences, but according to His revelation, His teaching, His guidance.

2 Corinthians 3: 18

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

The apostle Paul wants us to know that we can be transformed, we ought to be transformed. And not just transformed to a certain degree of quality, but to the highest degree of quality possible in us. We are to be transformed into the same image. What is the same image? It is the image of the glory of the Lord. We are beholding ... the glory of the Lord. We are to be transformed into the same image, that is, we are to become like Him. Christ is meant to be formed in us – Christ in you, the hope of glory.

That is what the apostle Paul was labouring for: that we will all learn and respond well, to be transformed into the same image from glory to glory. The glory that can be developed in us is unlimited because God is infinite. He will keep on giving His life to us when we respond to Him and the glory will increase in quality as we keep on responding, from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. The Spirit of God will so work in us, the fruit of the Spirit will develop in us; He will teach us and enable us to become like our Master.

So how do we do that? We behold the glory of the Lord. How do we behold the glory of the Lord?

The apostle Paul was writing to the Corinthians and at this point of time, the Lord Jesus was not on earth as a Man in the physical form for them to behold. So the apostle Paul must be talking about the spiritual.

We behold the Lord in our spirit. We come before Him in our spirit and that primarily takes place in a spirit of prayer, in a spirit of communion with the Lord, in a spirit of listening to Him, in a spirit of appreciation of Him. We behold the Lord: We consider who He is, we listen to what He has to say; we ponder over His words; we appreciate Him.

And as we pray, we ask Him to teach us, we ask Him to enable us to live as we ought to live, to be what we ought to be, and to do what we ought to do – that He will enable us to live our lives as we should.

So it is in a context of praying without ceasing, it is in a context of rejoicing always, in everything giving thanks, it is in such a context that we can constantly behold the glory of the Lord and we can be transformed into the same image from glory to glory as the Holy Spirit works in us.

So let us recognize that prayer is very, very central in terms of the way in which God makes available to us all that can be helpful to us. If we do not learn to pray and to pray correctly, then we will not be able to receive God's grace and mercy and His goodness and His provisions as He intends for us.

If we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must learn to pray in oneness of heart with God. We must learn to listen to Him, behold His glory, depend on Him and receive life from Him, and so do His will.

So we see then, that meaningful prayer leads to quality of being, which will then lead to meaningful prayer with greater depth and effectiveness.

So if we want to pray meaningfully, we must develop quality of being. If we want to develop quality of being, we must pray meaningfully.

So, we see that we can begin to pray meaningfully even when we were unrighteous. When we are not a Christian, we can still pray meaningfully. How? By a humble and contrite spirit, by coming to God for forgiveness, by coming to God for His mercy, by coming to God to thank Him for His grace and all that He has done for us. So even when we are unrighteous, we can pray meaningfully by coming to God for help, for forgiveness, for life. So that is how we begin to really develop quality in our being.

So we cannot say - no one can say - "I cannot pray." All of us can pray - even the person who is unrighteous, the tax-collector, the sinner - everyone can pray.

Prayer by itself has no power. Prayer is effective only because there is a gracious God who will answer prayer.

Likewise, faith by itself cannot be a shield. Faith is a shield only because God exists and He is there to respond to your faith. So when you trust Him, when you give your life to Him, God is there to work in the situation as a shield, to protect you from the flaming missiles of the evil one.

So, whatever it is that we can really put on as the armor of God to enable us to live a life of victory, of peace and meaning, it is because of what God has done, of who He is, and what we can receive from Him and what we can become as a result of abiding in Him and He abiding in us: It is as a result of the development of the quality of our being and our relationship with Him.

And prayer is very central in this. We want to develop quality in our being, we want to develop quality in our relationship with God: We must learn to pray. And so as we pray, we can put on the whole armor of God. And the more we learn to pray, the more we develop quality of our being. And the more we develop quality of being, the more powerful our prayers become, the more meaningful our prayers will be, the more God will listen to us. And God will work in the situation in response to our prayers.

If we neglect this, then we can be doing many things, but they are of not much value to God. Many Christians pray here and there, but not sufficiently in fellowship with God, in the consciousness of what is meaningful to Him.

So this is something that we need to spend time to ponder over, to consider, to pray constantly, to ask God to help us understand and to live by it.

Then we can develop quality in our being and then our prayers will be meaningful to God and God will work.

But it does not mean that all men will be able to see all that you have done. We should not be preoccupied with that. We concentrate on what is right and what is good, and the meaningfulness will take place. God will be there; He will work, and our lives will be a positive influence on other people, just by being what we ought to be – walking with God, doing what He wants of us.

So then, let us come before the Lord, let us ask Him to help us understand why prayer is so important in our lives and how we ought to do something about it, and where we have neglected it, to take steps to correct that, where we have been working at it, to deepen in it.

And let us remember that we must do it with the right motive, with the right attitude. We must value the right things and we learn to trust God and walk with Him, absorbed in Him, submitted to Him and obedient to Him.

Let us thank the Lord for all that He has done for us and let us respond to Him in love and with gratitude in our hearts, that we may properly give our lives to Him, to live for Him as He desires of us.