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to his knees . . . and into the adventure of prayer!

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# VERITAS

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Howard G. Hendricks (Th.M., Dallas Theological Seminary; D.D., Wheaton College) is Chairman of the Center for Christian Leadership and Distinguished

Professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. For 53 years he has touched the lives of thousands of students and countless other Christians around the globe. He finished his 53rd year of teaching at Dallas in the fall of 2003, teaching four classes during that semester.

A Christian visionary, he provides leadership as a board member for several large Christian corporations, including Search Ministries, Walk Thru the Bible, and Ronald Blue & Co., and was a past board member and keynote speaker for Promise Keepers. He handles a rigorous speaking schedule, having ministered in over 80 countries personally, and his impact is furthered through books, radio, tapes, and films.

Dr. Hendricks—known as "Prof" to his students—has written or co-written numerous books, including *As Iron Sharpens Iron*, *Living by the Book*, *Color Outside the Lines*, and his newest release *Heaven Help the Home Today*.

Married to Jeanne Hendricks for 56 years, he and his wife have raised four children and are the proud grandparents of six granddaughters.

Dr. Hendricks gave the address from which this article was taken at T Bar M Ranch, a Christian retreat center in New Braunfels, Texas, on October 3, 2003. (To order a cassette of the full address, just send back the enclosed reply slip.)

## Prayer—the Christian's Secret Weapon

Howard Hendricks

**J**esus says that we ought always to pray and never throw in the towel. The apostle Paul says to pray without interruption and to make prayer our spiritual breathing apparatus. And James says that we have not because we ask not.

Yet if your experience matches mine, the one area in your Christian life in which you are constantly shot down in flames is your prayer life.

How do you explain that?

I suggest that it is not the product of an accident; it is the product of satanic cultivation.

Satan does not mind if you read the Bible, *just so you don't pray*, because then reading it will never transform your life. It may even give you a severe case of spiritual pride because you know it so well. Satan does not mind if you share your faith, *just so you don't pray*, because he knows if you don't that it is far more important to talk

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to God about men than it is to talk to men about God. Satan does not mind if you become neurotically involved in the ministry of a local church, *just so you don't pray*, because then you will be active but you really won't be accomplishing that much.

You see, Satan has methods. And one of his greatest methods is to keep you and me off our knees.

To help discover why prayer—the Christian's secret weapon—is so important, I would like to ask three questions.

## What Did Christ Do in His Life on Earth?

The first question is *What did Christ do in His life on earth?* I believe that the life of Christ on earth was a life of prayer.

In fact, I would like to recommend a study that could revolutionize your prayer life.

Study the Gospels, particularly the Gospel of Luke, to examine Christ's prayer life. There are only 15 occasions in which Jesus Christ prayed that are recorded in the Gospels, and 11 of those occasions occur in the Gospel of Luke. Luke shows us that Jesus Christ lived His

life on earth dependently through prayer.

I don't know of anything that has changed my life more dramatically than this study,

which begins with Luke 3:21–22 at Jesus' baptism. This is when Jesus

began His messianic work. Verse 22 says, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Three times in the Gospels, we hear the remarkable statement, "This is my beloved Son in whom I find all of my pleasure." Why is that true? God found all of His pleasure in the Son because the Son found all of His pleasure in doing the Father's will.

Luke 5:16 says, "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." This is the secret of His ministry. Show me a man or a woman who is effective in public, and I will show you a person who is more effective in private.

There are two aspects of ministry. One is involvement with people, and the other is isolation from people. If you spend all of your time around people, you no longer impact them because you have lost the source of your power. That is why 12 times in the Gospels, Jesus takes the disciples away to a solitary place and teaches them the strategic importance of prayer.

In Luke 6:12–13, Jesus is praying about the choice of His disciples. Two of the most crucial phases of His life were the choice of His disciples and the time when He prayed to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Lord, if possible, let this cup pass from me, *nevertheless* [the key to all prayer], not my will but yours be done" (emphasis added).

Have you ever prayed for healing? I prayed for the healing of my older daughter, who just a few

years ago was taken home to heaven. But I have learned by hard experience in ministry not to ever pray for healing without the biblical caveat, "nevertheless." Do I want my daughter? You'd better believe it. But under every circumstance I'm willing to bow before the sovereignty of God to say, "It's Your will that I want done, not mine."

## They Kept Finding Him on His Knees

Continuing on in this amazing catalog of Christ's prayer life, Luke 9:34 depicts the Transfiguration. "While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud." And that is where a voice said, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; *listen to him.*"

I once read a fascinating study by *Harvard Business Review*. It said the average executive spends 70 percent of his time listening—the one skill for which he receives no training. It's easy to teach people how to speak. It's very difficult to teach them how to listen. And by the way, have you looked in the mirror lately? Did you notice you have two ears but only one mouth? Imagine if God had reversed that.

Luke 11:1 says, "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'" That is the *only* thing the disciples ever asked Jesus to teach them.

Why?

I'll tell you why. Every single

time they found Him, where did they find Him? *On His knees!*

Would anybody ever ask *you* to teach *them* to pray because they discovered you spent so much of your time on your knees and that was the secret of your life?

In Luke 22:31, Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail."

And Jesus goes on to tell Simon Peter that when he has turned back, when he has done a 180-degree turn, then teach it to the brethren. Did Peter do that? Yes, and we see that in 1 and 2 Peter. It was a result of Jesus' prayer for him that Peter made that complete transformation.

In Luke 22:39–46, Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed to the Father, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But He added that tremendous caveat, "[Nevertheless] not my will, but yours be done."

In Luke 23:34, 46, Christ is now on the cross. It is impressive that His first words, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," and His last words, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," on the cross were prayers.

Luke 24:30 is post-Resurrection. Jesus is talking to two men on the way to Emmaus, and the men do not recognize Him.

Later, when Jesus took the bread and broke it and prayed at the meal, they understood because they saw the nail prints in His hands. The moment they saw Him

break the bread, they recognized that He was the resurrected Savior.

In Luke 24:50–51, the eleventh and last passage in our study, Jesus blesses them. This is the last impression that He left with His disciples.

Now we can see, after going through this study, that Jesus Christ prayed about everything. Prayer pervaded His life from beginning to end. He prayed about ordinary occasions, He prayed about extraordinary occasions. He prayed in public, He prayed in private. He prayed about common activities like eating bread and beginning a meal, and He prayed about crises such as the choice of His disciples.

Prayer was not peripheral; it was absolutely paramount to

Jesus' life. It was not a *part* of His life; it was His life. The Scriptures teach that even Jesus, the Son of God, found it necessary to pray and to make prayer an

**Even Jesus, the Son of God, found it necessary to pray and to make prayer an integral part of His life. Prayer was His life.**

### What Is Christ Doing Now in Heaven?

The second question is *What is Christ doing now in heaven?* I can't tell you how many times I have been asked, "What is Jesus doing now?"

The answer can be found in two passages of Scripture.

The first is Hebrews 7. The theme of Hebrews is the superiority of Jesus Christ. He is superior to the prophets, He is superior to the angels, He is superior to Moses, and in Hebrews 7:22, He is superior in His covenant.

What's the matter with the Old Testament covenants? Their priesthood has ended; Jesus' priesthood is a permanent one.

"Therefore he is able to save completely [to the uttermost] those who come to God through him." Why? "Because he always lives to intercede for them."

Every time you pray, you need to remember you are entering a prayer meeting that is going on 24 hours a day. And what is Jesus praying for? *He is praying for you!* I'm not talking about generally; I'm talking about specifically. If you have no one else to pray for you, Christ is. You can count on it.

Do people ever ask you, "Would you pray for me?"

What is your response?

"Yes, sure. I'll pray." But later, are you honest enough to say, "I forgot"?

That is why I have come to the place where I will say to a student who asks, "Will you pray for me, Prof?" "Yes, right now." If I pray now, I have a better chance of remembering it later.

Do you ever have a "senior moment"? When I told my secretary the other day that I had had a "senior moment," she replied, "I have 'senior moments' all the time, and I'm half your age!" We all

have a built-in ability to forget.

*Jesus never forgets.*

The second passage is Romans 8:26–28. In light of this passage, I have seen God do the most incredible things when I was not equipped to pull them off.

You would not believe some of the decisions I have to make, particularly in counseling students, graduates, and people I love deeply. They call me up in desperate situations, and they ask for my counsel. They need it *right now*. And I have to send up a sky telegram and say, "Lord, help me to help my brother, my sister in Christ. I don't *know* what to tell them."

Have you come to the place in your prayer life where you don't even know how to say the words

**Have you come to the place in your prayer life where you don't even know how to say the words because you're so weak?**

because you're so weak? You don't even know how to express your thoughts because of your lack of understanding of the Scriptures at that particular time? And so

you say, "Lord, You're going to have to work in me and through me."

But here's the exciting thing: The Holy Spirit is a specialist on the will of God. And He is perfectly capable of revealing it to you.

So what is the bottom line?

Our representative in heaven is Christ. His representative in *us* is the Holy Spirit—the one who is the specialist on the will of God—and

He is able to take the feebleness of our understanding and of our willingness to believe and turn it into overwhelming strength.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit is what transformed my life when I first came to Dallas Seminary.

During my first year, I was single and lived in the dormitory. I would sit in Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer's class, and he would teach on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As he spoke, tears would be rolling down my face. I'd start writing notes, and the tears would fall down on my notes. I still have the notes with the tearstains.

Dr. Chafer's classes were so dramatic that, after he had finished speaking, nobody moved. And he would turn out the lights and leave the room while we sat transfixed by the truth.

Later, I would walk up to my room, 301 in Stearns Hall, throw myself across the bed, and say, "Lord, I can't take it anymore. This is like getting saved all over again." Because I had come out of such a legalistic background, I spent all of my time trying to put together whether you do this, that, or the other thing, all the time missing out on the grace of God.

So if you don't have anyone to pray for you, never forget Christ is, every hour of the day. And if you're too weak, too ill, too limited, too frustrated, or too confused, then the Holy Spirit will bring order out of the chaos in your heart and express the depths of your heart to God.

## What Does Christ Desire to Do in You?

The third question is *What does Christ desire to do in you?*

Ephesians 3:17 says, "That Christ may dwell [be completely at home] in your hearts through faith."

For years I used to ponder over that verse. What is the apostle Paul talking about?

He's talking about a group of Christians; Christ already lives in their hearts. And he uses a very unique word for "home." It's not the ordinary word. It means to make yourself at home.

When I was a student at Wheaton College, I lived in the home of a lovely Swedish lady and her husband. They were one of the most Christlike couples I had ever encountered.

I remember coming home one day, and she said to me, "Howie, I know you live upstairs in the room that you've chosen, but you need to know that I bake twice a week. I bake on Tuesday and on Saturday, and I want you to feel free to come on down and help yourself. Anything that's in there is yours."

Well, I took her at her word. In fact, I gained 42 pounds from that experience!

They were going to Florida for a vacation and said, "Howie, we have a bed that's much more comfortable than yours. Come on down and stay in our bed while we're gone. Make yourself at home!"

That lovely couple made me feel at home.

Is Christ at home in your heart? That's what He wants. He's not going to intrude; He's not going to take advantage. He just wants you to make yourself at home and relax.

I think that many of us are going to get home to heaven, and God is going to say, "I'm really sorry you didn't enjoy it more. I never intended it to be that grim."

Philippians 1:21 says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." If the purpose of your life is Jesus Christ, imagine what's going to happen less than a minute after you die, when you end up in His presence, when you realize it's for eternity that you're going to be with Him.

In Colossians 1:27, Jesus explains the mystery of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Christ, in you, with all of your limitations, with all of your problems, with all of your giftedness.

The more Christ makes His home in your heart, the more of the characteristics of Christ will be produced in your life. And perhaps the most significant one will be your prayer life.

So I'm asking you the same question I'm asking myself.

If you can do anything without prayer, is it really worth doing?

## Yes, you.

**W**ow. What a great challenge "Prof" Hendricks gave us not long ago, and I'm so glad to pass his words on to you. Indeed, I urge you to order the full audiocassette.

But let me add two responses.

**First**, Prof asks himself, "If you can do anything, Hendricks, without prayer, is it really worth doing?" It's a question he recommends to us all, and I can tell you that in the past three years I have personally experienced that truth like never before.

Things are good at the Seminary. Enrollment is up. I believe the spiritual impact of our graduates is growing. Why? It's not me. It's not even our worthy faculty and staff. *It's God.* Out of His grace, He is blessing us.

That's humbling, and it has driven me to my knees like nothing ever has. I want to be in His will because I want His blessing on this ministry to continue and increase.

**Second**, you are no different. Your life and ministry (and no matter what you are doing, it's a ministry) are no less in need of daily prayer.

The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer said that with God, there are "no little people." That's because every individual is made in God's image, and every calling in life is a sacred calling.

So God wants me, you, and all Christians to pray.

You're not a "little person." Your life is not "peripheral." Christ died for you, brought you into His family, and wants to use you wherever you are. So it's important to God that He hear from you. As Prof pointed out from the Book of Hebrews, Jesus Christ "ever lives" to make intercession—for you! He waits to take *your* prayers to the Father. Yes, you.

Believe me, you're also important to the Seminary.

We exist to provide ministers and ministry to you and others. And we also are extremely grateful for your prayers for us—and your financial support, which is such a crucial tool in God's hands as we move into 2004.

We thank God for you in prayer, and pray that we are a blessing to you as well.



**DR. MARK L. BAILEY**  
President  
Dallas Theological  
Seminary

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark Bailey".