**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 04 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**PRAYER OR FAINTING by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*They ought always to pray, and not to faint.*

*Luke 18:1*

SUCH IS LUKE'S INTERPRETATION OF THE MEANING OF THE parable which Jesus uttered to His disciples concerning the unrighteous judge "which feared not God, and regarded not but man" but who granted the request of the importunate widow from the purely selfish motive which he expressed graphically and accurately in the words, "lest she wear me out by her continual coming." This is one of the most remarkable things in some senses that the Bible says anywhere about the prayer life. "They ought always to pray, and not to faint." It is one of those statements that stagger, and in the presence of which Christian men and women are always in danger of indulging in some measure of that criticism which is the outcome of unbelief. The first objection raised is to the word "always." It is suggested that this does not quite mean what it says, that the evident intention is that we should be men and women of prayer, having our appointed times, and seasons, and habits of prayer; that believing in the power of prayer, we ought to take advantage of the great possibility whenever we are able so to do, whenever we are in need. That is not what the text says. That is not the interpretation placed upon the parable of Jesus by Luke. The text says, "always to pray." If this is one of the most remarkable things said concerning prayer, and one which does undoubtedly challenge the criticism of our unbelief, it does not stand alone in Scripture. There are other passages that indicate the same necessity. When he is closing his letter to the Thessalonians Paul utters in epigrammatic form great injunctions concerning the Christian life, One of them is, "Pray without ceasing," Of this it is also affirmed that he did not literally mean that we are to pray without ceasing. We are to pray every day, two or three times a day, as regularly as possible. We are to be men and women of prayer. But that is not what the apostle wrote, He wrote, "Pray without ceasing." You will not at all misunderstand these introductory words. I recognize the difficulty. You say, I have been too busy today with work for God to take time in prayer. I was so pressed with the business cares of last week that I had very little time for prayer. I prayed at morning, noon and night, and often in the midst of the city's rush and din, when some great need crowded on my heart I lifted that heart to God. I prayed often, but I did not pray always, I did not pray without ceasing. I quite recognize the difficulty; but I am so perfect a believer in the inspired infallibility of Scripture that I abide by the words of it, "always," "Without ceasing." It behoves us, therefore, to ask very carefully what this really means. I submit to you immediately that this particular text of mine in which Luke gives the inspired interpretation of the meaning of the Master's parable lifts the whole subject of prayer on to a very high level, and reveals to us the fact that there is infinitely more in prayer than the offering of petitions, than the uttering of words, than the taking of time, than the attitude of the body or of the mind; that there are deeper depths and higher heights; and that if we would enter into the prayer life with all its fullness of virtue and of victory we must discover what this really means, "They ought always to pray," "Pray without ceasing."

First of all, I would ask you to notice very carefully the slight change in the Revision which is an interesting and important one. The Authorized Version reads, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." The Revised Version reads, "They ought always to pray, and not to faint." To whom was He speaking? If you go back to the previous chapter you will see how wonderful a chapter it is, full of solemn warnings and prophetic utterances, strange and mysterious many of them. At its twenty-second verse I find these words, "And He said unto the disciples, The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it." Then He continues His teaching of the disciples right on to the end of that chapter, and immediately and in that connection, whether uttered at that point or not is of no consequence, in that relationship, according to the placing of the story by Luke, He spoke the parable "unto them," that is to His own disciples, "that they ought always to pray, and not to faint." The distinction is an important one, and it is fundamental to our meditation. I am not for a moment suggesting that Jesus Christ had one philosophy of life for His disciples and another for men of the world. On the other hand, I affirm that He had one philosophy of life, and He called all men to accept it. Here, however, He is laying His instructions upon such as have heard His call, and having obeyed it, have become His disciples. They are such as are described in the letter to the Hebrews - which I believe Luke wrote, although the thinking is the thinking of Paul - "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him." If a man do not believe these things He will never pray. If these things are indeed believed, if this is indeed the truth concerning God accepted by the heart and mind, then of such as believe, the Lord by His parable affirms that "They ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Having drawn attention to the fact that these words were spoken to disciples, to those who believe that God is and that He is a Rewarder, let us notice the circumstances of this discourse. He is talking to His disciples in view of the fact that the life of faith is a strenuous life, characterized by stress and strain and conflict and difficulty. Mark how He ends His exposition of His parable, "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" In the previous chapter I find Him telling these men that to gain their life they must lose it, and to find the real value of eternal things they must turn themselves away from all the allurements of the material and the sensual. He is putting into contrast the life of faith with the life that is lived on the material level. I turn over the pages of the Gospel of Luke a little farther on and I find Him saying almost exactly the same thing, Speaking of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and of the fact that in those days men would faint for fear, He charged His own to watch and make supplication. So that the message of this parable and the declaration of this text have application to such as are His disciples, and declare to them the supreme truth concerning the secret of prevailing life in the midst of the stress and strain of discipleship. I need hardly stay to argue the fact that the Christian life is one of stress and strain. I am perfectly well aware that there are senses in which it is a life of peace, and ease, and quietness. I remember the great promises of Scripture concerning peace for the children of God. There is granted to the child of God the peace from God our Father. There is granted to the child of God the peace of God in the heart, and, moreover, the presence and comradeship of the God of peace. Yet these very facts create the strain and stress and difficulty. There is no man in this house who is attempting to live a godly life who does not know the absolute truth of this. Surrounded every day by things material, in the midst of an age which in its outlook is as absolutely godless as any age which has preceded it, it is not easy to live the life of godliness. It is not easy to bear perpetual and prevailing testimony to the unseen things to the ordinary crowd of men and women with whom the man of faith comes into contact, living, as they do, as though there were no God, no hereafter, no spiritual verities. To live the life of godliness in the midst of this age is still to live the life of conflict. Because of the allied forces of godlessness, the Christian life is the strenuous life, and there are scores of men and women in this house tonight - perhaps the affirmation is a strong one, but I believe it to be true - who are weary in the midst of the Christian life, who are tired because of the pressure of the forces of the world upon them - fainting, filled with weariness. To these people Christ says, "They ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Before laying further emphasis upon the "always" let me take the terms of my text in order to understand Christ's philosophy of life for His own disciples. What is the real suggestiveness of this word "pray"? If you take it as to its first simplicity and intention, it means - and this is not complete but it will help us to reach the complete thought - to wish forward, to desire toward the ultimate; or if you will have that interpreted by the language of the apostle in one of his greatest epistles, that to the Colossians, it means the seeking of things which are above. That does not at all suggest that the Christian is forevermore to be sighing after heaven, and expressing his discontent with the present world, and longing to escape from it; but rather that the Christian is to seek the upper things, setting his mind upon them, and everywhere and everywhen he is to be hoping for, and endeavouring after, the ultimate. That is the simple meaning of prayer. Reaching forward, wishing forward, desiring forward, seeking the upper, the higher, the nobler. So that in prayer there is included, first, always first, the thought of worship and adoration, that content of the heart with the perfection and acceptability and goodness of the will of God which bows the soul in worship. That is the first attitude of prayer. To pray is forevermore to set the life in its inspiration and in all its endeavour toward that ultimate goal of the glory of God, "Being justified by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through Whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and let us rejoice in hope of the glory of God." That is the first quantity of quality of prayer. The vision of the ultimate with a corresponding attitude of life toward it, which is that of perpetual endeavour after it. This means not merely that in the midst of battle and strife and din and smoke, and wounding and blood and tears, that we see a better day, a golden age, but that the soul, seeing that golden age as in the will of God, and realizing that the supreme fact of the vision is that of God Himself, the supreme attitude of the life becomes that of submission, and the supreme effort of the life is that of co-operation with God toward the ultimate upon which His heart is set. That is prayer. Prayer is not merely position of body, or of mind. Prayer is not merely asking for something in order that I may obtain it for myself. Prayer forevermore says when it asks for anything, "Not my will, but Thine be done," which means, if the thing I ask for, however much I desire it, however good it seems to me to be, will hinder or postpone, by a hair's breadth or a moment, the ultimate victory, will be denied to me. Those who know the real secret of the prayer life have discovered the fact that denial is over and over again the graciousness of overwhelming answer. To pray is to desire forward, to seek forward, to endeavour after. It is to have a new vision of God, and of the ways of God, to be overwhelmingly convinced of the perfection of God, of the perfection of all He does, of the certainty of His ultimate victory, and then to respond to the profound and tremendous conviction by petition, by praise, and by endeavour; and so men "ought always to pray" and to "pray without ceasing."

Now notice another term of our text, "to faint." This is our Lord's recognition of the strenuous nature of the life of the believing soul. What is this word, "to faint"? Quite simply, to be paralyzed, to be weak, to be worthless, to feel the force dying and the vigour passing, to be beaten, to be broken down and helpless. I need stay no longer with definition that point.

We may now consider our Lord's philosophy of life. He puts these two things into opposition. He declares in effect that this is the alternative before every one of us, to pray or to faint. There is no suggestion of a middle course. To pray or to faint. According to this word, this inspired interpretation of the meaning of our Lord's parable and teaching, if men pray they do not faint. If men faint it is because they have ceased to pray. If men do not pray they faint. Men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." Interpret your prayer by the negation. Prayer is the opposite of fainting. Fainting is a sudden sense of inability and helplessness, the cessation of activity, weariness which is almost, and ultimately is, death, Pray, and do not faint. To pray is to have the vision clear, the virtue mighty, the victory assured. To pray is to "mount up with wings as eagles," to "run and not be weary," to "walk, and not faint." Suffer me one moment with that. Have you imagined that the great Isaiah at that point failed in his rhetorical method, and that having said the great thing, there was nothing greater to say, and therefore he climbed down, and there was an anti-climax, and perhaps something of bathos? It is not so. As a matter of fact, he began with the easiest thing of all to "mount up with wings as eagles." Then he took the next thing in the order of difficulty, to run, and the hardest thing last, to walk. In the day when you first caught your vision of God you mounted up with wings like eagles. I am not undervaluing that day. Thank God for the experience. We thank God for it whenever it returns. He gives us the vision ever and anon, and we "mount up with wings as eagles." A defeated and disappointed man once said, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! then would I fly away and be at rest." What a mistake. A man with the wings of a dove could not fly away and be at rest. When the inspired seer speaks of a man flying, he says "wings as eagles." Mark the significance of it. The eagle is forevermore the symbol of Deity. To wait upon God is to use the pinions of Deity, and mount and soar away. Every young believer has those pinions and that great beginning, and God gives them to us ever and anon all the pilgrimage through. Presently, however, there comes a day when there are no wings and no mounting above; we must run through. Yet "they shall run, and not be weary." And yet there comes another day, some of you are in it now, it is almost night, so dark has it all become. You cannot run, the way is not clear enough, the enemies are too many, there are difficulties all about you - you must walk, "They shall walk, and not faint," Mark Isaiah's word and Christ's, "They shall walk, and not faint," "They ought always to pray, and not to faint." Prayer is the opposite of fainting. It is mounting with wings. It is running without weariness. It is walking the uphill, rough and rugged road, and never fainting. That is Christ's great philosophy of life. If men pray they do not faint. If men faint it is because they have forgotten to pray. "They ought always to pray, and not to faint."

How are we to do it? Take the parable and notice carefully one fact about it. It is an exposition of the philosophy of the prayer life by contrast, by contrast all the way through it. The moment you forget that, you miss the beauty and the glory of it. First, all that the judge was, God is not. The judge did not fear God, that is to say, he was not submitted to the highest authority. He did not regard men. He was absolutely careless, and you may sum up the whole thing in Christ's illuminative word, he was unrighteous. All that the judge was, God is not. God regards man. Mark the word of Jesus, "longsuffering over them." God is righteous. "He will avenge," and the word "avenge" there is not the word revenge." It means to do justice to. The widow came to the unrighteous judge and said to him, "Avenge me of mine adversary," Do me justice in connection with my adversary. He was an unjust judge, an unrighteous man. God is righteous and just and will do justice by all who come to Him. That is the first contrast. There is another contrast, and it is the second contrast that we often miss. In order to persuade the unjust judge importunity was necessary. Importunity is never necessary to persuade God. That is the point where we generally break down in this parable. We make the contrast between the unjust judge and God, but not between the consequent action of the widow and that of the Christian. This parable is constantly taken as teaching that we are to be importunate toward God. It teaches us rather that if we are always praying, importunity in the sense of begging is not necessary. The prayer life does not consist of perpetual repetition of petitions. The prayer life consists of life that is always upward, and onward, and Godward. The passion of the heart is for the Kingdom of God; the devotion of the mind is to His will; the attitude of the spirit is conformity thereto; and the higher we climb in the realm of prayer, the more unceasing will prayer be, and the fewer will be the petitions. It is the opposite of importunity that is taught here. The thought that Jesus gave of God is that of One compassionate, just, mighty, quick to respond to the forward wish of the weakest soul, so that in the midst of the stress and strain and struggle there need be no fainting. The life uplifted in prayer, the whole desire Godward, brings an answer, and there is no comparison equal to showing the celerity of that answer. Quicker than thought or the lightning flash. There is in one of the old prophets an illustration of this in one realm of prayer, where he speaks of God as "a God ready to pardon." This is only an illustration, but notice it. There is a man here tonight while I preach, God grant there may be, who is tired of his sin, broken-hearted on account of it, who determines that without any after-meeting he will seek the pardon of his God. Will he have to be importunate and wait and beg and beseech? No, "ready to pardon." Yonder is a great battleship, the decks are cleared for action, every man is at his post. At last, as the awful moment arrives, the commanding officer says, "Ready?" "Ready, aye ready! " comes back the answer, and he gives the order, "Fire!" You know what happens. That is slow work compared to God's answer. He is ready to pardon, ready to answer your prayer. The unjust judge did not regard God or man. He was selfish and self-centred. Because the widow went and went and went to him, to get rid of her, to save her bruising him, he gave her what she wanted. That is the picture by contrast. God is the opposite of that. Your method in prayer is the opposite of that. Therefore men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." Because of such a God, so full of compassion, so full of might, so full of infinite and strict integrity and the forward wish of the weakest, feeblest, frailest soul brings an answer. He is a God ready to hear and to answer.

If all this be true, if this be what our Lord said to men, and if Luke's inspired interpretation of the meaning be correct, allow me for a moment to lay emphasis upon another word in the text, "They ought always to pray." It is a duty, not a privilege. Men ought. All omnipotence is at the disposal of the saint who prays. God is willing, then men ought to which means, men ought not to faint. There ought to be no fainting. You will understand me, I am not preaching to you. I am talking in the presence of Christ's words with you. I have fainted and still do faint: I ought not. Men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." I have no right to faint. Oh, but how strenuous is the life! I know a little of it. Men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." How fierce the battle! I know something of the conflict, but I ought not to faint, because I can pray. All which means that in God there is resource equal to every demand that can be made upon the trusting soul. There is no hour so dark but that if I will stay upon Him - once again to use Isaiah's fine language - I shall discover His readiness to support me as I stay. There is no battle so fierce but that if I pray I may not stand, "withstand, ... , and, having done all, to stand." No temptation so swift, so sudden or subtle, but that if I am always praying I may not find at once the wisdom and the might that enable me to overcome. Men ought not to faint, because men ought to pray.

The whole life of the believer should be prayer - and this is the summary and conclusion - every act, every word, every wish. The act that is not prayer in the ultimate, and the word which is not prayer in the last analysis, and the wish that is not prayer in the profoundest depth, are to be put away, they do not become the life of faith. They are things that produce fainting. How can every act be prayer? Ask yourself about your next act, why you are doing it. The Sabbath will soon be over, and we shall leave it behind, for it is the day of prayer. Tomorrow morning you will face the calling of the day, in the shop, the office, the school; in professional life, in the Houses of Parliament, in whatever is your calling. What are you rising early and toiling all the day for? The answer of the average man will suit me for the moment. That answer will be, I am working for my living. Perfectly right, but what do you want to live for? Why should you endeavour to support your life and keep it? You have been overwhelmed with the stress and strain of actual physical and mental toil, and you are away to the mountains, to the sea for rest. Why are you going for rest? Why do you want rest? I ask. That I may regain my strength. For what? Cross-examine yourself and see the meaning of your activity. Analyse your own wishing and desire, and see what inspiration lies at the back of it. If by His infinite grace and by the indwelling of the Holy Christ Himself, at the back of all the activity and of all desire and all speech there is the perpetual aspiration, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," then every act, every thought, is prayer. "To labour is too pray" they say. That depends. If your labour is merely for the making of your own name and fortune, if your labour is to build up your own reputation and to gratify your own sensual desires, then to labour is not to pray. If the reason of this day's toil is the maintenance of a life that is God's, all the forces of which are at His disposal to work His will according to His own appointment, then that life is prayer, and the mountain climb, the rest day by the sea, the toil in the shop and office, the drudgery of professional routine, and agony of life, all are prayer.

"They ought always to pray, and not to faint." If we do not pray always, we never pray. The man who makes prayer a scheme by which occasionally he tries to get something for himself has not learned the deep, profound secret of prayer. Prayer is life passionately wanting, wishing, desiring God's triumph. Prayer is life striving, toiling everywhere and everywhen for that ultimate victory. When men so pray they do not faint. They mount up with wings as eagles, they run without weariness, they tramp the hardest, roughest road, and do not faint.

My desire tonight has been to arrest irreverent and unintelligent prayer, to indicate a line of contrast which will reveal to men the fact that prayer is infinitely larger than we have often thought it to be. I charge upon you my comrades this life of faith, do not degrade prayer to a low standard of experience, or make it that by which you attempt to gain things - and mark the startling language of Scripture - that you may spend them on your own lusts, "Ye have not because ye ask not," or "ye have not because ye ask amiss." What is it to ask amiss? To ask for things that I may spend them on my own desires. That is praying that is not answered. Men "ought always to pray, and not to faint," I have come near fainting often. I have fainted mentally, spiritually. The fault is mine. I pray that I may learn the infinite lesson of Jesus that God is other than the unjust judge, and that my method with Him may be other than that of the importunate widow, and that if I do but know what prayer really is, I live homed in omnipotence, and I need never faint by the way. May this strength be ours.