

"POWER SOURCE"

A Sermon By

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INTRODUCTION

It's been reported that a man stopped by a computer store where he had recently purchased a personal computer. He said to the salesman who greeted him with great enthusiasm,

"I have a question about the computer I bought here the other day." "What kind did you buy?" asked the salesman. "It's called a Crimean Extravaganza, 1900" said the customer.

"Wow! That's a nice computer" replied the salesman. "It has a 100-megahertz pentium processor, 16 megabytes of ram, a 256 kilobyte pipeline burst cache. It has a PCI 64 bit video and a 1.2 gigabyte hard drive. What more could you possibly want in a computer? Do you need some add-ons? Or, more memory? An accelerator board, perhaps?"

"No" said the customer...."Actually, all I need to know is how to turn the thing on!"

Those of us who are not into computers can sympathize with that poor bewildered customer. But, on a different level, isn't that the critical question that so often confronts us as we struggle to make sense out of our lives? "How do we turn the power on and get things to go?" We have at our finger-tips more knowledge than our ancestors a hundred years ago could ever have imagined. We have gadgets to make our lives so much easier than the generation of our grandparents. Space age technology and transportation take us around the world in minutes and hours, depending on whether it is our mind or our body we want to send on the journey.

In so many ways, even Solomon in all of his glory did not live with as many advantages as you and I enjoy. Yes, the key question we have to ask about our lives is, "Where do you turn the thing on?" And where does the power come from to make our lives effective and fulfilling and worthwhile?

WISE PEOPLE DRAW THEIR POWER FROM PRAYER

We know where it came from for the early Church. The power came from prayer. It was after the Ascension of Christ that the disciples returned to Jerusalem and there they gathered in the upper room. A line there in the Book of Acts tells us that they engaged in one practice and one practice only.....they were "continually devoting themselves to prayer". And there it is - the secret of the early church's dynamism - PRAYER. They may not have known it at the time, but those early followers were preparing themselves for the great outpouring of God's Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. They were doing it with prayer and wise people still draw their power from prayer.

Eric Liddell was such a man. Remember him...Eric Liddell, the Olympic runner who was the hero of that movie, Chariots of Fire? He knew about the power of prayer. He was in prison in China during WW II. His biographer speaks of the high esteem with which Liddell was held in prison camp. A woman in that camp told of Liddell's extraordinary leadership power, his joy, his integrity in the

midst of severe and enormous hardship, but she also revealed the secret of Liddell's power.

Every morning around six o'clock, Liddell used to climb out of his bunk, quietly passing by the sleeping forms of his dormitory mates and then, at the small Chinese table, he and another prisoner would sit close together with just enough light to illuminate their Bibles and notebooks. Silently they read and prayed together and thought about what should be done. Eric was a man of deep prayer who talked to God all the time. His life was grounded in God, rooted in faith and in trust. And it was no wonder that he exhibited such strength and such confidence and power.

People who do great things for God invariably have their lives planted in the incredible power of God's love and God's mercy - through prayer. Don't overlook it. It's a secret many of us would do well to learn. We have power wardrobes and talk about power lunches and power walking, but what about power prayer?

WHAT PRAYER IS NOT

Now, before we go any farther in this, we would do well to see that there are some things that prayer is not. For one thing, prayer is not a meaningless ritual. There are many prayers that are more ceremonial than they are sincere out-pourings of the human heart.

Ron Davis, in one of his books, tells of a prank he played on a seminary friend by the name of Joe. Seems he and Joe were taking a dull and somewhat boring class on church polity and it was being taught by a professor who was overdue for retirement. And like all classes in that seminary, this one always opened with prayer by the professor and would close with prayer by a student. Ron Davis's friend, Joe, would often doze during the hour-long lecture. Davis had an idea. Right in the middle of the lecture, after Joe had been dozing for about five minutes, Davis leaned over and nudged him and whispered,

"Joe...class is over and the professor is calling on you to close the class with prayer." Joe jumped up and in that moment of silence startled not only the professor but the entire class of eighty students by announcing for all to hear, "Fellow class mates, let us bow our heads and be together in prayer....."

Joe knew the ritual so well, says Ron Davis, that he could go from a sound sleep to leading in prayer in the snap of a finger. I've often wondered if a lot of prayers aren't sometimes done off the top of the head, like Joe's. My suspicion is that a great many public prayers fall into this category.

Sometime back, The Joyful Noiseletter, carried a story about a group of students who developed a tactic for dealing with the Supreme Court ban on prayers at public school graduation exercises. After all the diplomas had been passed out at the May 28th Commencement Exercises at River Valley High School out in Three Oaks, Michigan, an unidentified graduate deliberately sneezed for all to hear. And, in unison, all 95 graduates exclaimed, "God Bless You!"

Leave it to young people to work out a novel solution to a complex problem. But I don't believe I would count that as a prayer. Prayer is not some sort of meaningless ritual...not real prayer. And we need to see that and then work hard to prevent it from becoming that and nothing more.

NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR HARD WORK, EITHER

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And neither is prayer a substitute for hard work. As someone once pu

"There will always be prayer in schools as long as there are exams to be taken".

How many of us try to use prayer as something of a "bail-out" device? Or, how many of us use prayer to avoid responsibility?

I heard about some volunteers for an evangelism team in a local church who were being briefed on techniques for making calls. One newly elected member of this evangelistic outreach team was obviously quite timid about her responsibilities....going out and talking to others about faith in Christ. Her pastor was hoping to encourage her by stressing the power of prayer. He said,

"I think you'll find it helpful...before you make the call, just to spend a few moments talking to God about it...that will help you to 'focus' and quiet you and set you at peace."

When the volunteers met later to report this rather timid soul was just bubbling with enthusiasm and ready to share,

"Oh, thank you, pastor....for what you said about prayer. I tried it and it works!" Beaming, her pastor replied, "I felt it would help and I'm so glad to hear that. Tell us what happened". "How did it go....?" "Well, I prayed that the people wouldn't be home" she said, "And they weren't....."

Let's face it. Some of us have prayed prayers like that at one time or another in our lives. I doubt if God takes such prayers very seriously. Prayer was never intended to be a substitute for fulfilling our responsibilities. Indeed, the opposite is true. Prayer accompanies steadfast devotion.

Chales Sinclair, a lawyer down in Coral Gables, Florida, was locked inside the trunk of a car by kidnapers. He eventually escaped after his captors drove the car into a hospital complex and slowed down for a speed bump, allowing him to dive out of the trunk and alert the guards. He managed to make his escape with a tire iron with which he broker open the trunk latch. Said he,

"I knew my only chance was to get the trunk open. As I wasspraying, I was prying like mad!" One commentator later noted, "Praying and prying....what a beautiful expression of the proper approach to trouble. Our approach is usually complaining and crying. How much better to pray and pry, praying as if everything depended on God and then prying as if everything depended on us!"

So, put this down then: prayer is neither a meaningless ritual nor should it everbecome a substitute for some tough, hard work.

PRAYER IS PLACING OUR NEEDS IN GOD'S CARE

with our lives....trusting that God will supply our needs. Prayer is a daily

Prayer is placing our needs in God's care and then going on

offering of our deepest concerns to God, and THEN....giving our very best to God AND trusting that God will handle the rest. Such prayer is powerful, for one thing, because it allows us to relax and to focus on the things we need to do.

It's comparable to an experience that Richard Speight had. Speight is a golfer though not always a good one. Speight tells us he would hit a golf ball with all his might and it would never seem to go where he wanted it to go. One day, a stranger was playing ahead of him who had no trouble hitting the ball straight and far. Speight, on the other hand, lumbered along the fairway in a rather grumpy mood slapping at the ball, moving it a few yards at a time. The gentleman ahead of him noticing his game offered him some advice. He said,

"You're trying too hard, young fellow....just relax and take it easy. Let the club do the work. That's what golf's all about...let the club do the work....."

Now this wasn't the first time Speight had heard that bit of advice, but it was the first time he had really been willing to listen. The club was designed to hit the ball, the other man told him. Richard Speight was trying to move the ball with brute force. Later he was to admit,

"I had been feeling totally responsible and also totally inadequate at the same time....."

And so he took the man's advice and let the club do the work and what a difference it made. The ball rose and sailed smoothly down the fairway and fell in the middle of the green.

Richard Speight reflects that unfortunately his prayer-life and his golf game had similarities. In both ways, he always felt the need to always be in total control. He prayed for results, but always told God what those results should be. Likewise, he prayed for action and almost always told God what action to take. He learned a valuable lesson that day out there on the golf course and instead of always relying on his own abilities, he began trusting in God.

So many of us fill our lives with unnecessary stress and worry and aggravation because we will not trust our lives completely to God. Do the best you can. Open your heart up to God in prayer. Yes - let go and let God. And go on from here remembering that prayer is not a substitute for hard work, nor is it some kind of meaningless ritual. Power prayer is offering up our needs and concerns to God and trusting that God will respond to our needs. I believe He will meet our needs if only we ask.

Tennyson put it so well for us all in those lines from The Passing of Arthur:

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

PRAYER

Make us sensitive, dear God, to Your presence...to Your nearness in these quiet moments.

Help each of us to grow in our understanding of how You come to us in prayer.

Help us to see it as that which turns on our lives for more effective, creative and useful living. This we ask in the spirit of Christ, our Lord. Amen.