

# *The Safety Net*

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***“Prayer Plan”***

Dear ones,

People come to Higher Ground for various reasons. Therefore I do various things with them, designed to target the need they brought here. But there are a couple of things that I do with EVERYONE. I ALWAYS put an emphasis on prayer, and share a one-hour prayer plan with my guests. Many of them already have rich prayer lives, but some don't. I ask people who come to Higher Ground to pray at least one hour daily while they're here. and I give them a plan to follow. It's called, "An Hour that Changes the World." I've been using it almost thirty years.

I grew up in a dedicated Christian home, but prayer was not what it should have been. We prayed at meals, we prayed when there was someone in special need, and I grew up with the childhood prayer: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."

People with my background in Churches of Christ/Christian Churches, have never been noted for their prayers. We've emphasized TRUTH and OBEDIENCE more. I asked some 80 year olds recently why we pray and they said, "Because we're commanded to." I felt sorry for them.

If you study the writings and sermons of our spiritual ancestors, people like Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone and John Mulkey you don't see prayer emphasized much. When they talked about it in the late 1800's they seemed to be more concerned about the proper posture of prayer than anything. "Are we commanded to kneel, or is standing O.K.?"

That's the way I grew up. I remember those dreaded words from my Grandfather's doctor: "All we can do is pray." That usually meant the situation was hopeless.

When I started preaching as a youth, I did far more studying than praying. I had no idea of the many facets of prayer. About the only ones I knew were "asking" and "thanking." I could do both of those. I even knew that "asking" was formally known as "petition." So most of my prayers were made up solely of "petitions" and "thanksgivings." Since another part of our theology was "The days of miracles has ceased," it really seemed hardly worthwhile to pray for "petitions."

In the late 1950's, when I was in my late teens, I spent part of the summer in Montana. There I met two wonderful men: Clinton Brazle and Clint Goben. Both had left Oklahoma to go to the mission fields of Montana. They were working with the church in Bozeman and trying to start a new one in Belgrade. I was doing some preaching at night and Clinton and Clint were visiting people that might be interested in attending. Some had already attended. I was amazed at the boldness and loving-kindness of these two brothers, and also amazed at their confidence in the Lord hearing their prayers. They introduced me to a new aspect of prayer: "intercession." I had interceded for people who were in the hospital, or getting on an airplane. But Clinton and

Clint “interceded” for EVERYONE. They never went up a door without “interceding” for the people inside, and for US. It was not just that they did so much praying, it was that they believed so strongly that God heard them! My prayer life would never be the same again.

After graduating from high school, I intended several Christian colleges and earned five degrees over the next several years. Even though my major was usually “ministry,” I never had any college class instruction on prayer. Many colleges offer courses on “spiritual formation” now, but they didn’t when I was in school. I’m frankly not certain that many of my professors even prayed much. I hope I’m wrong, but academics seemed to be more important than relationship with God.

I felt short-changed in my understanding and training. I felt like the disciples who asked the Lord to teach them to pray. That’s the only request I see them making in the Gospels. There was obviously something in His prayer life that left them feeling inadequate in their own prayer lives. And faithful Jewish men prayed a lot!

So in the late 70’s, while living in Sacramento, I heard about a seminar that was going to be held at a local church called “Change the World School of Prayer.” The teacher was unknown to me, a man named Dick Eastman. I went to the seminar with caution and was committed to leave quickly if it was not Biblical or practical.

Wow!

Talk about life changing!

I learned about “praise,” and “supplication,” and “listening” and “confession,” and even new things about “intercession.” I had always “interceded” for people I knew, and now I learned the value of “interceding” for people I didn’t know. Presidents, and Senators, and Dictators, and Movie Stars. There was no limit to the people I could pray for. And God was hearing and answering my prayers!

So I made a commitment to pray daily. I made the commitment and signed it: September 28, 1978. What a blessing it has been. I knew that I needed to commit a certain amount of time, but I didn’t want to make a brash vow. I even prayed for wisdom from God, and admitted to Him that when I prayed for an extended time I usually went to sleep. I opened my Bible and started looking for insights and one of the first things I read was: “*Could you not stay awake for one hour?*” I dropped my Bible and felt absolutely spooked!

But, after all, an hour wasn’t that much. So I committed an hour daily. Afterward I had second thoughts and asked myself, “What in the world will I pray for for an hour?”

That seems so funny now. I often spend an hour+ in praise alone, or intercession alone, or meditation alone.

So I now share this prayer plan with everyone who comes here. I ask them to pray for at least an hour daily while they’re here, but they have to make their own commitment long-term. It’s between them and God.

I’ve seen lives changed by people simply learning to pray more at Higher Ground.

And, even after all these years, I must quickly say that I am anything but an expert in prayer. I’m a novice. Sure, I have a prayer closet now, and pray for extended periods that I once thought impossible. But I’m a novice. And you can’t get me to say, “I believe in prayer.”

The correct statement is: “I believe in God!”

In the next few newsletters I’m going to talk about some of the specific kinds of prayer. I’ll share some thoughts with you from great prayer warriors like E. M. Bounds, and David Brainerd, and even Jesus and David.

We’ll start with some thoughts on “praise.” It’s the aspect that I knew the least about, and has come to be the most precious. My friend Stanley Shipp started first to teach me about praise. I’ll share some good thoughts with you. But good thoughts are not the goal: good prayers are the goal!

God bless you! Believe fully in Him.

Yours in Christ,  
Silas