

14, Praying Through the Promises of God

Contributed by LG Parkhurst Jr
Thursday, 24 January 2008

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem -- Isaiah 2:2,3.

As 1954 drew to a close, the Schaeffers celebrated the founding of their International Church; however, after their furlough, they had few reasons to rejoice. Right after learning Franky had polio, they discovered Susan had rheumatic fever. As they coped with these attacks on their health, Fran received some complaint letters from his mission board and the notice that their salary was being reduced by \$100.00 per month. When we remember that in 1954 a nice, spacious chalet could be bought for less than \$20,000, the cut was devastating.

As they prayed for the Lord's leading about whether they should begin L'Abri as a work of faith and about what to do next (since they believed the Lord returned them to Switzerland for a purpose), they learned that opposition to their remaining in Champéry was being raised by some villagers because of Mr. Exhenry's new found faith. Then they learned their permit to stay in Switzerland might be revoked, because of their religious influence in the village. They wondered if they would have to leave their chalet and work. And then as they prayed in the light of these new uncertainties, they were almost killed when their chalet nearly washed away from avalanches.

As Satan attacked them from without, literally using misguided believers, nonbelievers, their neighbors, nature, their health, the government, and everything that he could throw against them, he also began to attack them spiritually by tempting them to distrust God and disbelieve in His providential care for them. We can imagine Satan taunting them: "Did God really lead you back here? Does God really want you to stay. Shouldn't you pack up and go home? God is not faithful is He?" But as the devil attacked them fiercely, tempting them to deny God's faithfulness, God expressed His love for them more vividly. The Holy Spirit drew them closer to God, and they leaned more upon Jesus Christ and read their Bible more. They bowed before Jesus in submission and rededication once again, and vowed they would follow His leading no matter what the cost. The Holy Spirit used the Word of God and their prayers to teach them new lessons, and as they learned these lessons things began to change. Many and newer afflictions continued, but God also answered their prayers in the midst of all of these and strengthened their faith and witness. Those who had become Christians through their testimony saw them demonstrate their faith in God and love for others in the good times as well as the bad, and the devil lost his battle to lead others astray.

And then, in January of 1955, the Holy Spirit gave Edith a wonderful new promise from the Bible. As her reading progressed through the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit wrote the words of Isaiah, chapter 2:2,3, on her heart and mind as a personal promise to her. Yes, Isaiah had specifically foretold events to take place in Judea, but the Holy Spirit told Edith that God was going to do something very similar in the Swiss Alps through them. Edith shared this promise with the family, and as they prayed they claimed this specific promise as a reality for the new work that God would begin as He continued what He had begun in their lives. They prayed, and almost forty years later we know with certainty that God kept His promise and answered the prayers He inspired them to make according to His Word.

When a situation changes and we are kept from doing what we intended or what we thought God had wanted us to do, we need to pray for God to show us something else we can do in the new situation. Satan will be defeated over and over again, even as situations change, when we are faithful to seek only God's will, pray for the strength to do it, and then follow God no matter what the personal cost or sacrifice. For example, when the Romans chained Paul and cast him into prison, so he could not preach any longer in the market place, he praised God, sang hymns, preached to the guards and other prisoners, and wrote letters that changed lives. Through prayer, total dedication to Jesus Christ, and a willingness to die if need be, God will show us how to serve Him in every situation. If a guard hired to defend the queen has committed himself to the possibility of casting himself before her to stop the assassin's bullet, should we refuse to do any less for the Sovereign King of the universe? Our total commitment to God will be tested in a variety of ways, but each way gives us the opportunity to reexamine our lives, recommit ourselves, and learn new lessons in the school of obedient prayer.

Because the Schaeffers spent much time in prayer and regular reading of the Bible, they opened their minds to being taught directly by the Holy Spirit as they studied God's Word. God gave them scripture verses from time to time that spoke directly to their prayer concerns. And then the Holy Spirit motivated them to ask God to fulfill the promises in His Word. Many times the Holy Spirit would use this method to demonstrate God's power and loving faithfulness. They

prayed fervently and worked hard to build just what the Lord foretold He would do through them. They did not sit back and wait and watch, without praying for God to show them what they could do that day toward the accomplishment of His will in the strength He would give for that day alone.

God gives general and specific promises in the Bible to build our faith in Him as we pray. These promises become the evidence for a reasonable faith that God will do what He has promised. For example, Jesus promised believers, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" and "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 6:14; 7:7,8). When we pray, we can trust God to fulfill these promises. All we need to do is fulfill the conditions that He has set forth as we pray. As He said, when we forgive we have the assurance of God's forgiveness according to His promise (see also 1 John 1:9). As the Bible teaches, we need to comply with God's commands and ask in order to receive according to His promises. If we are asking and not receiving, then we may be violating some other principle. For example, we may be asking with selfish motives (James 4:3). Or, God may be answering the spirit of our prayer.

As we live and pray on the basis of the Bible's general promises, God will sometimes give us a specific promise and confirm it by the Holy Spirit or providence. This was the case with the Isaiah passage for the Schaeffers and L'Abri. They prayed and worked to fulfill every condition God revealed in His Word, so His work would be established in the mountains, and eventually their work became a worldwide ministry. Prayer

Dear Father, show me the promises that I should learn from the Bible. Enlighten my mind and apply them by your Spirit. Keep me from vain delusions. Keep me from following impulses and feelings. Lead me by your revealed Word and works. Amen.

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