



REFLECTIONS

Grace OPC

Complete in Christ

By Pastor Brian De Jong

Colossians 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

A church like ours is somewhat unusual in this day and age of entertainment-based religion. We are admittedly not music-driven or music-centered, though music certainly has its place in our worship services.

The preaching of our pulpit is also somewhat distinctive. You won't find a string of jokes, funny stories or touching poems flowing from our pulpit. Neither will you hear self-help sermons on how to be more effective and productive in your vocation. The pulpit of Grace Church has never been known for shallow moralistic messages based vaguely on Bible stories. Instead, you will hear sober, serious, probing expositions of the Word of God. You'll learn doctrine (what we are to believe concerning God) and Christian practice (what duties God requires of men). The sermons of our church are more likely to step on your toes than to tickle your ears.

A legitimate question may be asked of us: Why? Why do we do what we're doing? What is the end in view? What goal are we striving for by carrying out such a ministry?

The answer to this valid query must begin with the "chief end of man." We do this in an effort to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The greater glory of God motivates all that we do. If any of our conduct detracts from God's glory, then

we must cut that out.

But the answer goes on to add another important component – we do this in order that we may present every one of you complete in Christ. We are aiming for perfection – your perfection. As Paul puts it in Ephesians 4:13, "to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

How can this happen? How can you be made complete in Christ? How can you mature to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ? By the ministry of the Word of God. As we proclaim "Him" – Christ Jesus – and as we admonish every man, and teach every man with all wisdom, God uses this ordinary means of grace to grow you to maturity and completion.



This is why it is so very vital that you're "all in"

with the ministry of our church – especially with the preaching that goes on in public worship. If you joyfully engage with it, you will grow toward fullness. If you neglect the means of grace, especially in our corporate worship service, you will shrink back and wither, spiritually speaking.

This is my prayer as your pastor – Lord, use my ministry to grow the believers at Grace OPC to full maturity in Christ. Enable me to present them complete in Christ on that final day!

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Mnemonics...

- *August 13th Church Picnic*
- *August 30th Lord's Supper*

“When he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.”— Acts xii.

IT was a great wonder that the infant church of Christ was not destroyed. Truly, she was like a lone lamb in the midst of furious wolves, without either earthly power, or prestige, or patronage to protect her, yet, as though she wore a charmed life, she escaped from the hosts of her cruel foes. Had not this child been something more than others it had been slain like the innocents at Bethlehem: but being heaven-born it escaped the fury of the destroyer. It is worth while asking, however, — with what weapons did this church protect herself? for we may very wisely use the same. She was preserved in her utmost danger from overwhelming destruction; what was her defence? Where found she shield and buckler? The answer is, — in prayer: “many were gathered together praying.” Whatever may be the danger of the times, and each age has its own peculiar hazard, we may rest in calm assurance that our defence is of God, and we may avail ourselves of that defence in the same manner as the early church did, namely, by abounding in prayer. However poisonous the viper, prayer can extract its sting; however fierce the lion, prayer can break its teeth; however terrible the fire, prayer can quench the violence of the flame. But this is not all: the new-born church not only escaped, but it multiplied: from being as a grain of mustard seed, when it could all assemble in the upper room, it has now become a great tree; lo, it covers the nations, and the birds of the air in flocks find shelter in its branches. Whence this wondrous increase? What made it grow? Outward circumstances were unfavourable to its progress; upon what nourishment has it been fed? What means were taken with this tender shoot, that has been so speedily developed? for, whatever means were used of old, we may wisely use them to-day also to strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die, and to develop that which is hopeful in our midst. The answer is— the fact that on all occasions “many were gathered together praying.” While praying the Spirit of God came down upon them; while praying the Spirit often separated this man and that for special work; while praying their hearts grew warm with inward fire; while praying their tongues were unloosed, and they went forth to speak to the people; and while praying the Lord opened to them the treasures of his grace. By prayer they were protected, and by prayer they grew; and if our churches are to live and grow they must be watered from the self-same source. “Let us pray,” is one of the most needful watchwords which I can suggest to Christian men and women, for if we will but pray, prayer will fill up the pools in the valley of Baca, yea, and open to us all the channels of that river of God which is full of water, the streams whereof make glad the city of our God.

We have heard a great deal of talk in certain sections of the church about going back to primitive times, and they are introducing to us all sorts of superstitious inventions, under cover of the customs of the early church. The plea is cunningly chosen, for primitive practices have great weight with true Christians; but the weak point of the argument is that unfortunately what they call the early church is not early enough. If we must have the early church held up as a model, let us have the earliest church of all; if we are to have Fathers, let us go back to Apostolic Fathers; and if we are to have ritual, and rule, and ceremonial, modelled on strict precedent, let us go back to the original precedent recorded in the Holy Scriptures. We, who are called Baptists, have not the slightest objection to go back in everything to the apostolic habit and practice; we reverence the real primitive method, and desire to follow the customs of the true early church; and if we could see every ordinance restored to the exact mode in which it was practised by the saints immediately after the ascension of our Lord, and during apostolic times, we would clap our hands with delight. 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. To see the early church alive again would cause us unfeigned satisfaction. Especially upon this point would we imitate the early church, we would have it said of us— “Many were gathered together praying.” May we have much prayer, much household prayer, much believing prayer, much prevalent prayer, and then we shall obtain great blessings from the Lord.

I. This morning my earnest desire is to stir up the church of Jesus Christ to increased prayerfulness, and I have taken this text as it furnishes me with one or two points of great interest and full of practical suggestion. The first is this, LET US NOTICE THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE EARLY CHURCH ATTRIBUTED TO PRAYER, and to prayer meetings. Let this be a lesson to us. As soon as we begin to read in the Acts, and continually as we read on in that record, we note that meetings for prayer had become a standing institution in the church. We read nothing of masses, but we read much of prayer-meetings. We hear nothing of church festivals, but we read often of meeting together for prayer. It is said that Peter considered the thing: I fancy that he considered it all round, and thought "Where shall I go?" and he recollected that it was prayer-meeting night down at John Mark's mother's house, and there would he go, because he felt that there he should meet with true brethren. In those days they did things by plan and order, according to that text, "Let all things be done decently and in order," and I have no doubt that it had been duly arranged that the meeting should be held that evening at the house of John Mark's mother, and therefore Peter went there, and found, as he probably expected, that there was a prayer meeting going on. They were not met to hear a sermon. It is most proper that we should very frequently assemble for that purpose, but this was distinctly a meeting where "many were gathered together praying." Praying was the business on hand. I do not know that they even had an address, though some will come to the prayer meeting if the pastor is present to speak; but you see James, who is generally thought to have been pastor of the church at Jerusalem, was not there, for Peter said, "Go show these things to James," and most probably none of the apostles were there, because Peter added, "and to the brethren," and I suppose by that he meant the brethren of the apostolic college. The eminent speaking brethren seem to have been all away, and perhaps no one expounded or exhorted that night, nor was there any need, for they were all too much engrossed in the common intercession. The meeting was convened for praying, and this, I say, was a regular institution of the Christian church, and ought always to be kept up. There should be meetings wholly devoted to prayer, and there is a serious flaw in the arrangements of a church when such gatherings are omitted or placed in a secondary position. These prayer-meetings should be kept to their object, and their great attraction should be prayer itself. An address if you like, a few burning words to stir up prayer if you like, but if you cannot have them, do not look upon speech-making as at all necessary. Let it be a standing ordinance in the church that at certain times and occasions many shall meet together to pray, and supplication shall be their sole object. The private Christian will read, and hear, and meditate, but none of these can be a substitute for prayer: the same truth holds good upon the larger scale, the church should listen to her teachers, and receive edification from gospel ordinances, but she must also pray; nothing can compensate for the neglect of devotion.

It appears, however, that while prayer-meetings were a regular institution, the prayer was sometimes made special, for we read that prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God "for him," that is, for Peter. It adds greatly to the interest, and not a little to the fervency of prayer when there is some great object to pray for. The brethren would have prayed if Peter had been out of prison, but seeing that he was in prison, and likely to be put to death, it was announced that the prayer-meeting would be specially to pray for Peter, that the Lord would deliver his servant, or give him grace to die triumphantly; and this special subject gave enthusiasm to the assembly. Yes, they prayed fervently, for I find the margin of the fifth verse runs thus, "Instant and earnest prayer was made of the church for him." They prized the man, for they saw what wonders God had wrought by his ministry, and they could not let him die if prayer would save him. When they thought of Peter, and how his bleeding head might be exhibited to the populace on the morrow, they prayed with heart and soul, and each succeeding speaker threw more and more fervency into his pleading. The united cry went up to heaven, "Lord, spare Peter I think I can hear their sobs and cries even now. God grant that our churches may often turn their regular prayer-meetings into gatherings with a special object, for then they will become more real. Why not pray for a certain missionary, or some chosen district, or class of persons, or order of agencies? We should do well to turn the grand artillery of supplication against some special point of the enemy's walls.

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It is clear that these friends fully believed that there was power in prayer; for, Peter being in prison, they did not meet together to arrange a plan for getting him out. Some wise brother might have suggested the bribing of the guards, and another might have suggested something else; but they had done with planning, and betook themselves to praying. I do not find that they met to petition Herod. It would have been of no avail to ask that monster to relent: they might as well request a wolf to release a lamb which he has seized. No, the petitions were to Herod's Lord and Master, to the great invisible God. It looked as if they could do nothing, but they felt they could do everything by prayer. They thought little of the fact that sixteen soldiers had him in charge. What are sixteen guards? If there had been sixteen thousand soldiers these believing men and women would still have prayed Peter out. They believed in God, that he would do wonders; they believed in prayer, that it had an influence with God, and that the Lord did listen to the believing petitions of his servants. They met together for prayer in no dubious mood. They knew what they were at, and had no question as to the power which lay in supplication. Oh, let it never be insinuated in the Christian church that prayer is a good thing and a useful exercise to ourselves, but that it would be superstition to suppose that it affects the mind of God. Those who say this have foolishly thought to please us by allowing us their scientific toleration to go on with our devotions, but do they think we are idiots, that we would continue asking for what we knew we should not receive; that we would keep on praying if it would be of no more use than whistling to the winds? They must think us devoid of reason if they imagine that we shall be able to keep up prayer as a pious exercise if we once concede that it can have no result with God. As surely as any law of nature can be ascertained and proven, we know both by observation and experiment that God assuredly hears prayer; and, instead of its being a doubtful agency, we maintain prayer to be the most potent and unfailing force beneath the skies. We say in the proverb, "man proposes but God disposes," and here is the power of prayer, that it does not dally with the proposer but goes at once to the Disposer, and deals with the First Cause. Prayer moves that arm which moves all things else. O brethren, may we gather power is prayer by having faith in it. Let us not say, "What can prayer do?" but "What cannot it do?" for all things are possible to him that believeth. No wonder prayer-meetings flag, if faith in prayer be weak; and no wonder if conversions and revivals are scarce where intercession is neglected.

This prayer in the early church we remark, in the next place, was industriously continued. As soon as Herod had put Peter into prison the church began to pray. Herod took care that the guards should be sufficient in number to keep good watch over his victim, but the saints of God set their watches too. As in times of war, when two armies lie near each other they both set their sentries, so in this case Herod had his sentries of the night to keep the watch, and the church had its pickets too. Prayer was made of the church without ceasing: as soon as one little company were compelled to separate to go to their daily labour, they were relieved by another company, and when some were forced to take rest in sleep, others were ready to take up the blessed work of supplication. Thus both sides were on the alert, and the guards were changed both by day and by night. It was not hard to foresee which side would win the victory, for truly except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain; and when, instead of helping to keep the castle, God sends angels to open doors and gates, then we may be sure that the watchmen will wake in vain, or fall into a dead slumber. Continually, therefore, the people of God pleaded at his mercy-seat; relays of petitioners appeared before the throne. Some mercies are not given to us except in answer to importunate prayer. There are blessings which, like ripe fruit, drop into your hand the moment you touch the bough; but there are others which require you to shake the tree again and again, until you make it rock with the vehemence of your exercise, for then only will the fruit fall down. My brethren, we must cultivate importunity in prayer. While the sun is shining and when the sun has gone down, still should prayer be kept up and fed with fresh fuel, so that it burns fiercely, and flames on high like a beacon fire blazing towards heaven.

I would fain pause here a minute, and urge my dear brethren to attach as much importance to prayer as the early church did. You cannot think too much of it. Believing prayer, dictated of the Spirit, and presented through Jesus Christ, is to-day the power of the church, and we cannot do without it.

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Some look at her active agencies, and prize them, but they suppose that prayer might be dispensed with. You have seen the threshing machine going along the country road from farm to farm: in front there is a huge, black engine which toils along the road, and then behind you see the machine which actually does the threshing. A novice might say, "I will hire the threshing machine, but I do not want your engine; that is an expensive affair, which consumes coal, and makes smoke; I do not require it. I will have the machine which actually does the work, but I do not want the engine." Such a remark would be absurd, for of what use would the machine be to you if the motive power were gone? Prayer in the church is the steam engine which makes the wheels revolve, and really does the work, and therefore we cannot do without it. Suppose a foreman were employed by some great builder, and sent out to manage works at a distance. He has to pay the men their wages weekly, and he is very diligent in doing so; he neglects none of his duty towards the men, but he forgets to communicate with head-quarters, he neither writes to his employer, nor goes to the bank for cash to go on with. Is this wise? When the next pay-night comes round, I am afraid he will find that, however diligent he may have been towards the men, he will be in a queer position, for he will have no silver or gold to hand out, because he has forgotten to apply to head-quarters. Now, brethren, the minister does, as it were, distribute the portions to the people, but if he does not apply to his Master to get them he will have nothing to distribute. Never sunder the connection between your soul and God. Keep up a constant communication with heaven, or your communications with earth will be of little worth. To cease from prayer is to stop the vital stream upon which all your energy is dependent; you may go on preaching and teaching, and giving away tracts, and what you like, but nothing can possibly come of it when the power of Almighty God has ceased to be with you.

Thus much on our first point. May the Holy Spirit use it and arouse the churches to unanimous, intense, importunate intercession.

II. Next we notice THE NUMBER ASSEMBLED, which is a rebuke to some here present. The text says, "Many were gathered together praying." Somebody said the other day of prayer-meetings, that two or three thousand people had no more power in prayer than two or three. I think that is a grave mistake in many ways; but clearly so in reference to each other; for have you never noticed that when many meet together praying, warmth of desire and glow of earnestness are greatly increased. Perhaps two or three might have been all dull, but out of a larger number some one at least is a warm-hearted brother, and sets all the rest on a flame. Have you not observed how the requests of one will lead another on to ask for yet greater things? how one Christian brother suggests to another to increase his petition, and so the petitions grow by the mingling of heart with heart, and the communion of spirit with spirit? Besides, faith is a cumulative force. "According to thy faith so be it done unto thee" is true to one, to two, to twenty, to twenty thousand; and twenty thousand times the force will be the result of twenty thousand times the faith. Best assured that while two or three have power with God in their measure, two or three hundred have still more. If great results are to come they will be accompanied by the prayers of many; nay, the brightest days of all will never come except by the unanimous prayer of the entire church, for as soon as Zion travails— not one or two in her midst, but the whole church travails— then shall she bring forth her children. Therefore I do earnestly pray brethren to make the numbers gathered in prayer as great as they can be. Of course, if we come together listlessly, if each heart be cold and dead, there is only so much more coldness and deadness; but taking for granted that each one comes in the spirit of prayer, the gathering of numbers is like adding firebrand to firebrand, and piling on the burning coals, and we are likely to have a heat like that of coals of juniper, which have a most vehement flame. Now this is not a very common occurrence, and why is it that so many prayer meetings are so very thin? I know some places in London where they talk about giving up the prayer-meeting, where instead of two services during the week they have compassion on their poor overworked minister, and only wish him to hold forth for a few minutes at a sort of mongrel service, half prayer-meeting and half lecture. Poor dear things, they cannot manage to get out to worship more than once in the week, they are so much occupied. This is not in poor churches, but in respectable churches. Gentlemen who do not get home from the City and have their dinner till seven o'clock, cannot be expected to go out to a prayer meeting, who would have the barbarity to suggest such a thing! .

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They work so extremely hard all the day, so much harder than any of the working men, that they say, "I pray thee have me excused." Churches in the suburbs, as a general rule, have miserable prayer-meetings, because of the unfortunate circumstances of the members who happen to be burdened with so much riches that they cannot meet for prayer as poor people do. Some of you who have your delightful villas are very careful of your health, and never venture out into the evening air at prayer-meetings, though I rather suspect that your parties and soirées are still kept up. I say not this with particular reference to anybody, except it happens to refer to him, and if it does refer to him the reference is very special. After all, dear friends, this is a personal matter. It is of no use my standing here or you sitting there and complaining that so few come to the prayer-meeting: how are we to increase the number? I would suggest to you a way of increasing it, namely, by coming yourself. You may be aware, perhaps, that one and one make two, and that another one will make three, so that by accretions of ones we shall gradually get up to thousands. The largest numbers are made up of units; so that the practical point of all is, if choice blessings are to be gained by numbers coming together for prayer, the way for me to increase the number is to go there myself, and if I can induce a friend to go also, so much the better.

I have a very high opinion of the early church, but I am not sure that quite so many would have been gathered together that night if it had not been that Peter was in prison. They said to one another, "Peter is in prison, and in danger of his life, let us go to the prayer-meeting and plead for him." Did you ever know a minister who was often laid aside by illness and always found his people pray better when he was ill? Did it never strike you that one reason for his being afflicted was God's desire to stir the hearts of his people to intercede for him? Their prayers are better than his preaching; and so his Lord says to him, "I can do without you; I will put you on the bed of pain and make the people pray." Now, I have an opinion that the best way for these people really to do good to their pastor is to pray that they may be kept in a right condition, and may not need his sickness as a stimulus to prayer. If churches become slack in prayer, those whom they most value may be laid aside, or even taken away by death, and then they will cry to God in the bitterness of their souls. Could not we do without such flogging? Some horses want to be reminded now and then with a little touch of the whip; if they did not need the lash they would not get it; and so it may be with us, that we need church trials to keep us up to the mark in prayer, and if we need them we shall have them; but if we are alive and earnest in prayer, it may be that Peter will not get into prison, and some other trying things will not happen besides.

III. The third thing in my text is THE PLACE OF ASSEMBLY. That we will dwell upon this morning as a suggestion. "The house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark." This was a prayer-meeting held in a private house, and I want to urge upon my brethren here to consecrate their houses by frequently using them for prayer-meetings. This would have an advantage about it: it would avoid all savour of superstition. There still lingers among people the notion that buildings may be consecrated and rendered holy. Well, it is so babyish an idea, that I should have hoped the manliness of this generation, let alone anything else, would have given up the notion. How can it be that inside four brick walls there should be more holiness than outside, or that prayer offered in some particular seat should be more acceptable than prayer offered anywhere else. Behold, this day, God heareth prayer wherever there is a true heart.

"Where'er we seek him, he is found,
And every place is hallow'd ground."

Meetings for prayer, held at the house of the mother of Mark, at your mother's house, at your brother's house, at your own house, will do much to be a plain protest against the superstition which reverences holy places. There was a meetness in their meeting in this particular house, the house of Mark's mother, for that family stood in a very dear relationship to Peter. Do you know who Mark was, in reference to Peter? If you turn to Peter's First Epistle, in the fifth chapter, you will read, "Marcus, my son." Ah, I am sure Mark would pray for Peter, because Peter was his spiritual father.

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I should not wonder but what Mark and his mother were both converted on the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached that famous sermon. Anyhow, Mark was converted under Peter, and so both he and his mother often invited Peter to their house, and when he was imprisoned they had the special prayer-meetings at their house, because they loved him greatly. There is sure to be prayer for the pastor in the house where the pastor has been blessed to the family. He need not be afraid but what his own sons and daughters in the faith will be sure to pray for him.

These meetings had a good effect upon Mrs. Mark's house. She, herself, no doubt, had a blessing, but her son Mark obtained peculiar favour of the Lord. Naturally he was not all we should like him to have been, for though his uncle Barnabas was very fond of him, Paul, who was a very good judge, could not put up with his instability, but he obtained so great a blessing from the Lord that he became, according to the unanimous tradition of the church, the writer of the Gospel of Mark. He might have been a very weak and useless Christian if it had not been that the prayer-meetings at his mother's house warmed his heart, and he might never have used his graphic pen for the Lord had not the conversation of the good people who came to his house instructed him as to the facts, which he afterwards recorded in the precious gospel which bears his name. The house received a blessing, and so will you, too, if your house shall be every now and then opened for special prayer. I urge upon the followers of Jesus Christ to use their own houses more frequently than they now do for holy purposes. How largely might the Sunday schools in London be extended if all the better instructed gathered together Bible classes in their own houses, and taught them during the Sabbath day; and what a multitude of prayers would go up to heaven if Christians who have suitable rooms would frequently call together their brethren and neighbours to offer prayer. Many an hour is wasted in idle talk, many an evening frittered away in foolish amusements, degrading to Christians, when the time might be occupied in exercises calculated to bring down untold blessings upon the family and upon the church.

Prayer-meetings at private houses are very useful, because friends who would be afraid to pray before a large assembly, and others who if they did so would be very much restricted in language, are able to feel free and easy in a smaller company in a private house. Sometimes, too, the social element is consecrated by God to promote a greater warmth and fervour, so that prayer will often burn in the family when perhaps it might have declined in the public assembly. I never knew the little church of which I was pastor before I came here to be in such a happy condition as when the members took it into their heads to hold prayer-meetings in their own houses. I have sometimes myself attended six or seven in an evening, running from one to another just to look in upon them, finding twelve in a kitchen, ten or a dozen in a parlour, two or three met together in a little chamber. We saw a great work of grace then; the biggest sinners in the parish felt the power of the gospel, the old saints warmed up and began to believe in young people being converted, and we were all alive by reason of the abundance of prayer. Brethren, we must have the like abundance of prayer; do pray that we may have it. We have been distinguished as a church for prayerfulness, and I am jealous with a godly jealousy lest we should go back in any degree, and I do affectionately suggest to you with much earnestness of heart that we should try to increase the number of the places where many shall be met together praying. I do not know where the mother of John Mark is this morning, but I hope she will start a prayer-meeting in her large room. She is well to do, I believe, because her brother Barnabas had land, and sold it, and I suppose she had property also; we will use her drawing-room. If a poorer friend has a smaller and poorer room, we shall be glad of the loan of it, for it will be more suitable for persons of another class to go to. Perhaps they would not like to go to Mrs. Mark's drawing-room, but they will come to your kitchen. All sorts will have an opportunity of praying when all sorts of chambers are dedicated to prayer.

IV. I have a little to say about THE TIME OF THIS PRAYER-MEETING. It was held at dead of night. I suppose they prayed all through the night. They could say, "We have been waiting, we have been waiting, all the night long." After midnight the angel set Peter free. Peter went to the house, and they were not gone to bed, but many were met together praying. Now, as to the time for prayer-meetings, let me say this. If it happens to be an inconvenient hour, and I should think the dead of night was rather inconvenient, nevertheless go. Better hold prayer-meetings at twelve o'clock at night than not at all; better that we should be accused, as the Christians were of old, of holding secret conventicles under the shadow of night, than not meet together for prayer.

But there is another lesson. The dead of the night was chosen because it was the most suitable hour, since they could not safely meet in the day because of the Jews. It becomes those who appoint the times for prayer-meetings to select as good an hour as they can, a quiet hour, a leisure hour, an hour suited to the habits of the people. Still let us remember that whatever hour is appointed, if we come together with true hearts, it will be an acceptable hour. Better still, it would be well if there could be meetings for prayer at all hours. Then every hour would be an acceptable hour, and if one happened to be unseasonable, another would be convenient, and all classes of believers could thus meet together at some time or other to pour out their hearts in prayer to God. Oh, brethren, if your business will not let you meet in the middle of the day, meet in the middle of the night; if you cannot come together for prayer at the times that are generally appointed, then have prayer-meetings at such times as will suit yourselves; but de let there be a unanimous resolve throughout the whole church of Christ, that much prayer shall be presented to the Most High.

V. Notice, in the last place, the SUCCESS OF THE PRAYER MEETINGS AS AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO US. They prayed, and they were heard at once. The answer came so speedily that they were themselves surprised. It has sometimes been said that they did not expect Peter to be set free, and that their astonishment was the result of unbelief; perhaps so; but I doubt it, for you must remember that their prayer did set Peter free, and therefore it does not look as if it could have been unbelieving prayer. I trace their surprise to another cause. I think they expected that God would somehow or other deliver Peter, but they did not think he would deliver him in the dead of the night. They very likely had appointed in their own minds that something would happen next day, and so their surprise arose, not from the fact that Peter was free so much as from his being out of the dungeon at that particular time, and in that particular manner, for I cannot judge that to have been an unbelieving prayer which really did win the day with the God of heaven. Dear friends, the Lord Jesus waits to give us great boons in answer to prayer. He can send us surprises quite as great as those which astonished the assembly at midnight. We may pray for some sinner, and while we are yet praying we may hear him cry, "What must I do to be saved?" We may offer our prayers for the sleeping church, and while we pray it may be answered. True, the church sleeps still; she has had a smiting on the side of late, but has not yet girded herself and come out of the prison-house of her coldness and conventionality; but if we continue in prayer we may see with astonishment the church rouse herself from sleep and come forth to liberty. We cannot tell what will happen, prayer operates in so many ways, but operate it will, and we shall assuredly have our reward.

I selected this topic just now for this reason. The American evangelists who have been so useful in this great city have gone from us, and the great assemblies which they gathered are no more. There must have been many converted: I cannot but believe that many thousands have found the Lord Jesus Christ, and I have no sympathy whatever with the remarks of those who affirm that our friends have not touched the lowest class of society. I believe they have touched every class of society. At any rate their business was to preach the gospel to every creature, and they have done so with great impartiality and earnestness. If the poorest did not go it was not because they were not welcome. But they did go; I am an eye-witness to it. I know that many who went nowhere before did attend the Bow and Camberwell Halls, and the fact that the congregation looked respectable by no means proves that they were not of the working classes; for what working man is there among us but tries to dress as neatly as he can when he goes to a place of worship?

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There are plenty of friends here who work hard for their daily bread, but looking around they all seem by their dress to be well to do. No one has a right to judge that because a man does not come to worship in rags he cannot therefore belong to the lower portion of the working class, for it is not the habit of the working men of London to go to places of worship in their every-day clothes or in rags. I saw with my own eyes that multitudes assembled there were of that class which did not habitually hear the gospel. I am sure that good was done, and I do not care who cavils. The practical point is— What is to be done now? We must keep up this work. And how? Not by those large assemblies, but by all the churches being revived all round, and the numbers in all the places of worship becoming more numerous, and at the same time becoming more prayerful. Let us pray now. We want prayer to train the converts, to keep God's people warm now they are warm, and to make them yet more so. What wonders we have obtained in the Tabernacle in answer to prayer. We began this work with a little handful of Christian men. I remember the first Monday night after I came to London; there was a slender audience on the Sabbath, but thank God there was almost as many at the prayer-meeting as on the Sunday; and I thought, "This is all right; these people can pray." They did pray, and as we increased in prayer we increased in numbers. Sometimes, at prayer-meetings, my heart was almost ready to break for joy because of the mighty supplication that was offered. We wanted to build this great house: we were poor enough, but we prayed for it, and prayer built it. Praying gave us everything we have. Praying brings us all manner of supplies, spiritual and temporal. Whatever I am in the church of God this day I owe, under God's blessing, to your prayers. As long as your prayers sustain me, I shall not flag nor fail, but if your prayers be gone then my power is gone, for the Spirit of God is gone, and what can I do? All through the church of God the true progress is in proportion to the prayer. I do not care about the talent of the speaker; I am glad if he has talent; I do not care about the wealth of the congregation, though I am glad if they have wealth; but I do care beyond everything for the deep, real, earnest prayer, the darting up of the souls of Christians to God, and the bringing down of the blessing upon men from God; and if this were the last word I had to address to this congregation, I would say to you, dear brethren, abound in prayer, multiply the petitions that you put up, and increase the fervour with which you present them to God. When my venerable predecessor, Dr. Rippon, was growing old, this was one of the things everybody noticed about him, that he always prayed earnestly for his successors. He did not know who they might be, but his prayer was, that God would bless the church and his successors in years to come, and I have heard old Christians say that our present prosperity might be traced to Dr. Rippon's prayers. Oh, let us pray. I believe we have had a revival very much in answer to the multitudinous fervent prayers that were put up here and elsewhere; and now that God is beginning to bless the church in answer to prayer, if she stays her hand she will be like that king of old, who had the arrows and the bow put into his hands, and shot once or twice, whereas, if he had shot many times, God would have destroyed Syria before him, and established his people. Take down your quivers full of desires, and grasp the mighty bow of faith. Now shoot again and again the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and God will give us multitudes of converts all over London, and throughout the world. "Prove me now herewith," saith the Lord of Hosts, "and see if I do not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that ye shall not have room enough to receive it." God bless you, for Christ's sake.

Church Picnic

Our annual Church Picnic will be held here at church on August 13th at 6pm. This is a wonderful time to invite friends and family to join us for an evening of fellowship and fun!



“God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.”

C.H. Spurgeon

August Birthdays

Jonathan Arndt	3rd
Wendy Froh	15th
Ellen McNeese	20th
Sandy Baatz	29th



August Anniversaries

Brian and De Lou De Jong
August 9th, 34 years





Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ

August 2020

Grace OPC



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Book Review

From Carla DeMaster

When God Weeps by Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes
A Lifetime of Wisdom by Joni Eareckson Tada

It's easy to trust God when things are going well, but when suffering comes, especially senseless suffering, we have many questions and are filled with doubts and fears. Since our trust and obedience rest on God's character, we ask, Who is God and what is His purpose in suffering?

In *When God Weeps*, the authors make clear who God is, why he permits so much heartache and pain and how it is we can trust Him. There is a practical edge and heartfelt warmth in the book.

In *A Lifetime of Wisdom*, Joni compares her immediate angry reactions to her tragic diving accident 40 years ago to what God has provided throughout the years, when she had to live in a wheelchair for all those years. As she sought the Lord, Joni went from tolerating, to enduring, to persevering, to saying "Thank you, God, for this wheelchair. Thank you for the life You have given me."

These books have been a blessing to Ivan and myself as our lives get more challenging. Those who are experiencing some form of suffering or care for people who are going through it will get a blessing from these books. Appendices at the back of the books help in seeing God's purposes in suffering from verses in the Bible. Almost 40 purposes are listed.

Carla



Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6



Showing forth the
excellencies of Jesus
Christ

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Spurgeon Corner

“I know their sorrows.”

Exodus 3:7

The child is cheered as he sings, “This my father knows;” and shall not we be comforted as we discern that our dear Friend and tender soul-husband knows all about us?

1. *He is the Physician*, and if he knows all, there is no need that the patient should know. Hush, thou silly,

fluttering heart, prying, peeping, and suspecting! What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter, and meanwhile Jesus, the beloved Physician, knows thy soul in adversities. Why need the patient analyze all the medicine, or estimate all the symptoms? This is the Physician’s work, not mine; it is my business to trust, and his to prescribe. If he shall write his prescription in uncouth characters which I cannot read, I will not be uneasy on that account, but rely upon his unfailing skill to make all plain in the result, however mysterious in the working.

2. *He is the Master*, and his knowledge is to serve us instead of our own; we are to obey, not to judge: “The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth.” Shall the architect explain his plans to every hodman on the works? If he knows his own intent, is it not enough? The vessel on the wheel cannot guess to what pattern it shall be conformed, but if the potter understands his art, what matters the ignorance of the clay? My Lord must not be cross-questioned any more by one so ignorant as I am.

3. *He is the Head*. All understanding centres there. What judgment has the arm? What comprehension has the foot? All the power to know lies in the head. Why should the member have a brain of its own when the head fulfils for it every intellectual office? Here, then, must the believer rest his comfort in sickness, not that he himself can see the end, but that Jesus knows all. Sweet Lord, be thou forever eye, and soul, and head for us, and let us be content to know only what thou chooseth to reveal.

Evening August 14th, C.H. Spurgeon

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CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE:

GRACEOPCSHEBOYGAN.COM



The Quest for Assurance

A new Adult Sunday School class, starting **Sunday, August 9**

Pastor De Jong will be teaching on the topic of assurance -
can you truly know that you are a Christian and are heaven-
bound when you die?