

Prayer-Meeting Outlines

Livingstone's Life of Prayer

By Robert E. Speer

The whole world knows that Livingstone ended his life in prayer. When his men found him dead in the hut at Ilala, where they had brought him on the last of all his journeys, he was kneeling by his bedside in prayer. That worn figure at prayer is both illustration and appeal in the matter of the relation of prayer and missions. "How thankful I am," says Major Mahan, "that Livingstone was found on his knees! Does it not tell us whence came the power for his self-denial, his courage, his endurance?"

And as his life ended, so it began. While a student at the missionary training school at Ongar he was not a great success as a preacher. One of his fellow students writes:

"One part of our duties was to prepare sermons, which were submitted to Mr. Cecil, and, when corrected, were committed to memory, and then repeated to our village congregations. Livingstone prepared one, and one Sunday the minister of Stanford Rivers, where the celebrated Isaac Taylor resided, having fallen sick after the morning service, Livingstone was sent for to preach in the evening. He took his text, read it out very deliberately, and then—then—his sermon had fled! Midnight dark-

ness came upon him, and he abruptly said: 'Friends, I have forgotten all I had to say,' and hurrying out of the pulpit, he left the chapel."

But he knew how to talk with God. "Each student of Ongar," says the same friend who wrote about his preaching, "had also to conduct family worship in rotation. I was much impressed by the fact that Livingstone never prayed without the petition that we might imitate Christ in all his imitable perfections."

This was his constant prayer. At the age of twenty-six he writes to his sister:

"Let us seek—and with the conviction that we cannot do without it—that all selfishness be extirpated, pride banished, unbelief driven from the mind, every idol dethroned, and everything hostile to holiness and opposed to the divine will crucified; that 'holiness to the Lord' may be engraven on the heart, and evermore characterize our whole conduct. This is what we ought to strive after; this is the way to be happy; this is what our Savior loves—entire surrender of the heart. May he enable us by his Spirit to persevere till we attain it! All comes from him, the disposition to ask as well as the blessing itself.

"I hope you improve the talents committed to you whenever there is an opportunity. You have a class with whom you have some influence. It requires prudence in the way of managing it; seek wisdom from above to direct you; *persevere*—don't be content with once or twice recommending the Savior to them—again and again, in as kind a manner as possible, familiarly, individually, and privately, exhibit to them the fountain of happiness and joy, never forgetting to implore divine energy to accompany your endeavors, and you need not fear that your labor will be unfruitful. If you have the willing mind, that is accepted; nothing else is accepted if that be wanting. God desires that. He can do all the rest."

After he reached Africa, he was always anxious to have people at home praying for him. "You must remember me in your prayers," he wrote to Dr. Bennett, "that more of the spirit of Christ may be imparted to me." He has to go forward for a year away from his wife. "I intend (D. V.) to go next year and remain a twelve-month. My wife, poor soul—I pity her!—proposed to let me go for that time while she remained at Kolobeng. You will pray for us both during that period."

Again he writes:

"But for the belief that the Holy Spirit works, and will work for us, I should give up in despair. Remember us in your prayers, that we grow not weary in well-doing."

And he practised prayer at the same time that he besought it. On July 10, 1845, he writes in his journal:

"Entered new house. A great mercy. Hope it may be more a house of prayer than any we have yet inhabited." And his journals are full of prayers, some brief and some extended. "O, divine love, I have not loved thee strongly, deeply, warmly enough." The cool, self-contained Scotchman poured out his heart at least to God.

Here is a long prayer in his journal of January 14, 1856:

"At the confluence of the Loangwa and Zambezi. Thank God for his great mer-

cies thus far. •How soon I may be called to stand before him, my righteous judge, I know not. All hearts are in his hands, and merciful and gracious is the Lord our God. O Jesus, grant me resignation to thy will, and entire reliance on thy powerful hand. On thy word alone I lean. But wilt thou permit me to plead for Africa? The cause is thine. What an impulse will be given to the idea that Africa is not open if I perish now! See, O Lord, how the heathen rise up against me, as they did to thy Son. I commit my way unto thee. I trust also in thee that thou wilt direct my steps. Thou givest wisdom liberally to all who ask thee—give it to me, my Father. My family is thine. They are in the best hands. Oh! be gracious, and all our sins do thou blot out.

A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On thy kind arms I fall.

Leave me not, forsake me not. I cast myself and all my cares down at thy feet. Thou knowest all I need, for time and for eternity.

"It seems a pity that the important facts about the two healthy longitudinal ridges should not become known in Christendom. Thy will be done! . . . They will not furnish us with more canoes than two. I leave my cause and all my concerns in the hands of God, my gracious Savior, the Friend of sinners.

"*Evening.* Felt much turmoil of spirit in view of having all my plans for the welfare of this great region and teeming population knocked on the head by savages to-morrow. But I read that Jesus came and said: 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations—and lo, *I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*' It is the word of a Gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honor, and there is an end on't. I will not cross furtively by night, as I intended. It would appear as flight, and should such a man as I flee? Nay, verily, I shall take observations for latitude and longitude to-night, though they may be the last. I feel quite calm now, thank God."

Nine days later he was threatened again. On January 23 he writes:

"To thee, O God, we look. And, oh! Thou who wast the man of sorrows for the sake of poor, vile sinners, and didst not disdain the thief's petition, remember me and thy cause in Africa. Soul and body, my family and thy cause, I commit all to thee. Hear, Lord, for Jesus' sake."

He was accused by some of abandoning the missionary cause when he began his exploration and some spoke of him as "secularized." But would that all of us were as secularized as the man who wrote thus in his diary of March 6, 1859:

"Teaching Makololo Lord's Prayer and Creed." "Prayers as usual at 9.30 A. M. When employed in active travel my mind becomes inactive and the heart cold and dead, but after remaining some time quiet the heart revives, and I become more spiritually minded. This is a mercy which I have experienced before, and when I see a matter to be duty I go on, regardless of my feelings. I do trust that the Lord is with me, though the mind is engaged in other matters than the spiritual. I want my whole life to be out and out for the Divine glory, and my earnest prayer is that God may accept what his own Spirit must have implanted—the desire to glorify him. I have been more than usually drawn out in earnest prayer of late—for the expedition—for my family—the fear lest ———'s misrepresentation may injure the cause of Christ—the hope that I may be permitted to open this dark land to the blessed gospel. I have cast all before my God. Good Lord, have mercy upon me. Leave me not, nor forsake me. He has guided well in time past. I commit my way to him for the future. All I have received has come from him. Will he be pleased in mercy to use me for his glory? I have prayed for this, and Jesus himself said, 'Ask, and ye shall receive,' and a host of statements to the same effect. There is a great deal of trifling frivolousness in not trusting in God. Not trusting in him who is truth itself—faithfulness—the same yesterday, to-day, and forever! It is presumption not to trust in him implicitly, and yet

this heart is sometimes fearfully guilty of distrust. I am ashamed to think of it. Ay, but he must put the trusting, loving, childlike spirit in by his grace. O Lord, I am thine, truly I am thine. Take me. Do what seemeth good in thy sight with me, and give me complete resignation to thy will in all things."

Every fresh need was to him a fresh occasion of prayer, and toward the end of his life he seems to have made each birthday an occasion of some special prayer of consecration. On his fifty-ninth birthday, March 19, 1872, he writes:

"*Birthday*.—My Jesus, my King, my Life, my All; I again dedicate my whole self to thee. Accept me, and grant, O gracious Father, that ere this year is gone I may finish my task. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen. So let it be.—David Livingstone."

On the first of May, just one year precisely before his death, he finished a letter for the *New York Herald*, and asked God's blessing on it. It contained the memorable words afterwards inscribed on the stone to his memory in Westminster Abbey: "All I can say in my solitude is, may Heaven's rich blessing come down on every one—American, English, Turk—who will help to heal this open sore of the world."

As Dr. Blaikie, his biographer, says: "Amid the universal darkness around him, the universal ignorance of God and of the grace and love of Jesus Christ, it was hard to believe that Africa should ever be won. He had to strengthen his faith amid this universal desolation. We read in his journal:

"13th May.—He will keep his word—the gracious One, full of grace and truth; no doubt of it. He said: 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out'; and 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will give it.' He *will* keep his word; then I can come and humbly present my petition, and it will be all right. Doubt is here inadmissible, surely."

And he took great comfort from the prayers which he asked of the people at home. In his famous paper on "Missionary Sacrifices," he wrote:

"It is something to be a missionary. He is sometimes inclined, in seasons of despondency and trouble, to feel as if forgotten. But for whom do more prayers ascend?—prayers from the secret place, and from those only who are known to God. Mr. Moffat met those in England who had made his mission the subject of special prayer for more than twenty years, though they had no personal knowledge of the missionary. Through the long fifteen years of no success, of toil and sorrow, these secret ones were holding up his hands. And who can tell how often his soul may have been refreshed through their intercessions?"

And having lived and loved in a long life of prayer, he died, as we have seen, in the act of prayer. The faithful black men had brought him through the swamps and rain to Chitambo's village, in Ilala, where they laid him under the eaves of a house while they built for him a little hut.

"Then they laid him on a rough bed in the hut, where he spent the night. Next day he lay undisturbed. He asked a few wandering questions about the country—especially about the Luapula. His people knew that the end could not be far off.

Nothing occurred to attract notice during the early part of the night, but at four in the morning, the boy who lay at his door, called in alarm for Susi, fearing that their master was dead. By the candle still burning they saw him, not in bed, but kneeling at the bedside, with his head buried in his hands upon the pillow. The sad, yet not unexpected truth, soon became evident; he had passed away on the furthest of all his journeys, and without a single attendant. But he died in the act of prayer—prayer offered in that reverential attitude about which he was always so particular—commending his own spirit, with all his dear ones, as was his wont, into the hands of his Savior, and commending *Africa*—his own dear *Africa*—with all her woes and sins and wrongs, to the Avenger of the oppressed and the Redeemer of the lost."

So,

He climbed the steep ascent of heaven,
Through peril, toil, and pain;
O God! to us may grace be given
To follow in his train.

As he prayed, so also may we! Do not his missionary successors in all lands have a right to expect of us such prayer as he relied upon to sustain him?

