



By Elder Brent H. Nielson
Of the Seventy

I Need Thee Every

If the Savior of the world felt the need for constant prayer, how much greater is our need?



Prayer is more than a quick morning and evening ritual, more than an acknowledgment for a few seconds each day that God is there, and more than a cry for help.

On August 20, 1974, I was serving as a full-time missionary in northern Finland. I had been in the country only 13 days, and I was overwhelmed with my new calling and with learning a complex language in a faraway place. But that afternoon I had the opportunity of a lifetime.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985), who was scheduled to speak that evening at a conference, asked our mission president if he could spend the afternoon with the full-time missionaries. About 30 of us gathered in a small chapel in Oulu, Finland, to spend the afternoon with the prophet.

President Kimball began the meeting by asking the missionaries to share their testimonies. Afterward, he told us that his new calling as President of the Church had come to him unexpectedly. He had thought that President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) would serve for many years as President of the Church.

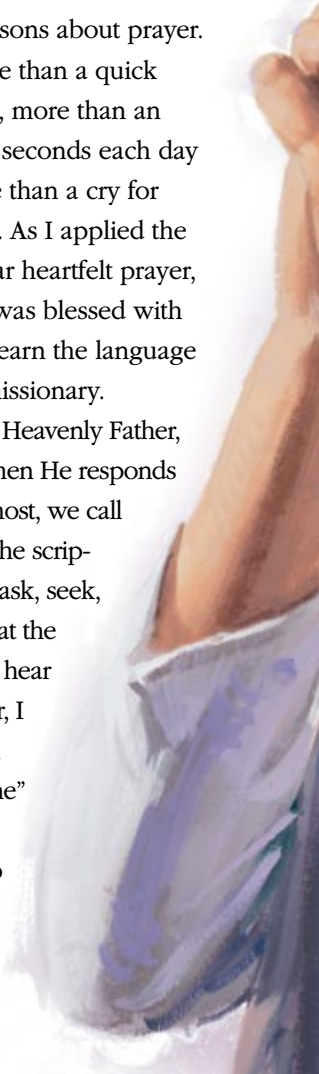
President Kimball then expressed his great need for constant prayer and communication with Heavenly Father in his new calling. He said that his favorite hymn was “I Need Thee Every Hour.” I will never forget him reciting the words of the hymn with his distinctive voice:

*I need thee, oh, I need thee;
Every hour I need thee!
Oh, bless me now, my Savior;
I come to thee!¹*

I was struck at that moment with the realization that if this great, humble prophet felt the need for constant communication with the Lord, then certainly a new missionary like me had an even greater need. As I returned to our apartment that evening and for many days thereafter, I poured out my heart to Heavenly Father in prayer, asking Him to lift me up in my new assignment. As I did so I learned some important lessons about prayer. I learned that prayer is more than a quick morning and evening ritual, more than an acknowledgment for a few seconds each day that God is there, and more than a cry for help when I was in trouble. As I applied the important practice of regular heartfelt prayer, the heavens opened and I was blessed with the revelation I needed to learn the language and fulfill my calling as a missionary.

When we speak with our Heavenly Father, we refer to that as prayer; when He responds by the power of the Holy Ghost, we call that revelation. Throughout the scriptures, we are encouraged to ask, seek, and knock. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

While serving as a bishop and stake president, I



Hour

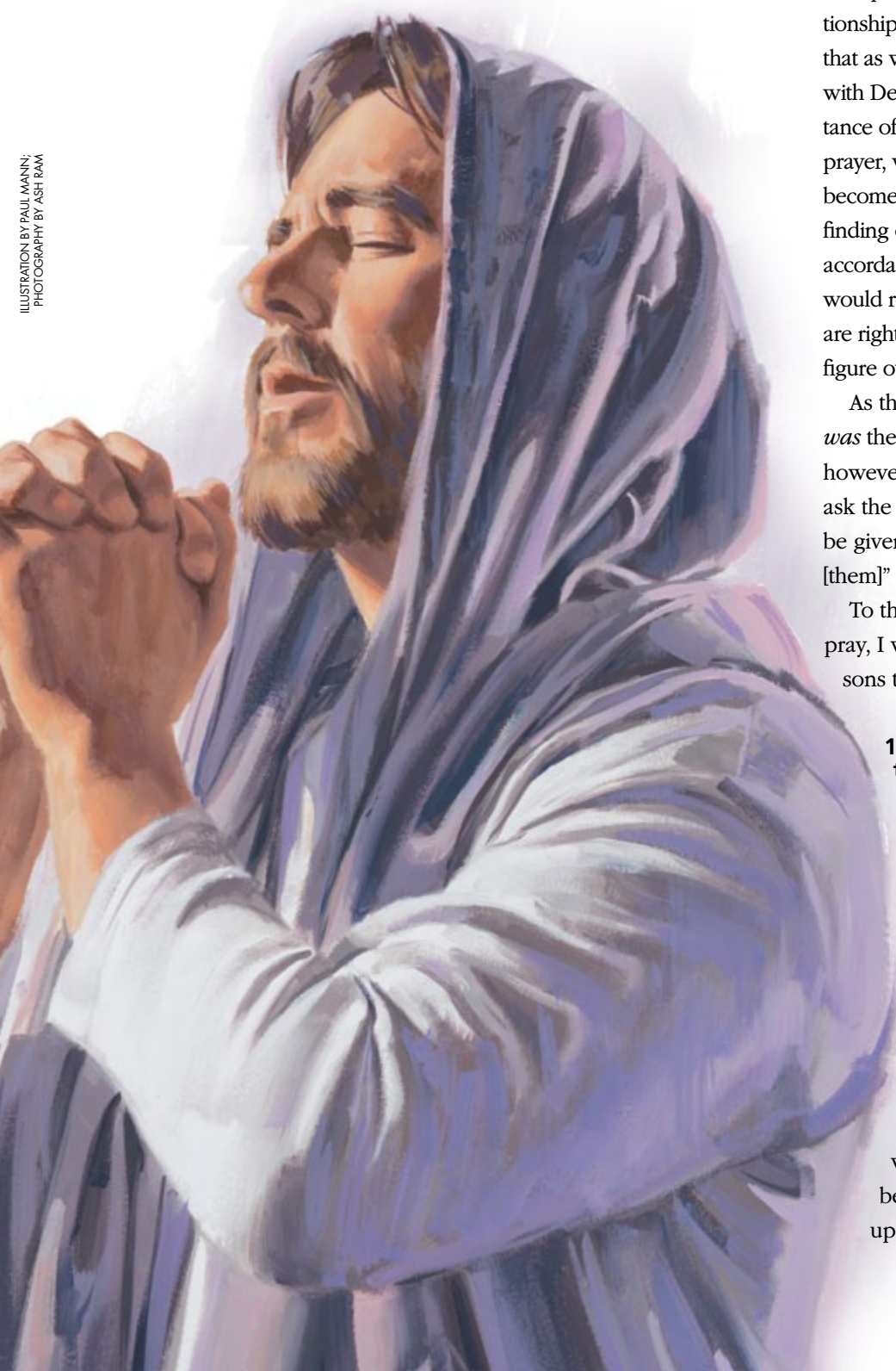


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occasionally met with members who were experiencing difficulty in their lives. As we talked together, I would often inquire about their patterns of prayer and their personal relationship with their Heavenly Father. I observed that as we become casual in our relationship with Deity² and as we minimize the importance of constant communication through prayer, we may begin to feel overwhelmed, become confused, and even be deceived, finding ourselves doing things that are not in accordance with God's will. Many members would respond to my question by saying, "You are right, I need to pray more. But now let's figure out how to solve my problem."

As they began to understand that prayer *was* the answer to many of their difficulties, however, they learned that "whatsoever [they] ask the Father in [the Son's] name it shall be given unto [them], that is expedient for [them]" (D&C 88:64).

To those who might ask why they should pray, I would respond with four simple reasons that have helped me:

1. The Lord has commanded us to pray.

After Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, an angel told them, "Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore" (Moses 5:8).

When the brother of Jared became casual in his relationship with Deity, the Lord chastised him because "he remembered not to call upon the name of the Lord" (Ether 2:14).

We can only imagine the wonderful lessons the brother of Jared must have learned during that three-hour discussion.

In our day the Lord has instructed priesthood holders to “exhort [members of the Church] to pray vocally and in secret” (D&C 20:47).

2. We pray for forgiveness, to avoid temptation, and to conquer Satan.

During His earthly ministry, the Savior taught His disciples to pray. His prayer included this important statement:

“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:12–13).

He taught his senior Apostle, Peter:

“Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:31–32).

It is no surprise that as the Savior visited those who had been spared from destruction on the American continent, he taught:

“Behold, . . . ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.

“Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name” (3 Nephi 18:18–19).

Through modern revelation the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that prayer would allow him to conquer Satan and escape his servants. “Pray always, that you may come off conqueror; yea, that you may conquer Satan, and that you may escape the hands of the servants of Satan that do uphold his work” (D&C 10:5). The Prophet was also taught:

“And again, I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations—

“Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances” (D&C 52:14–15).

3. We pray to give thanks and to request temporal and spiritual blessings.

We pray to give thanks for our blessings. Through modern revelation we learn that we “must give thanks unto God in the Spirit for whatsoever blessing [we] are blessed with” (D&C 46:32).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “Temporal and spiritual blessings follow proper prayer. As all the revelations show, the portals of heaven swing wide open to those who pray in faith; the Lord rains down righteousness upon them; they are preserved in perilous circumstances; the earth yields her fruits to them; and the joys of the gospel dwell in their hearts.”³

Alma prayed for the people of Gideon, stating, “And



now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children, according to your faith and good works, from this time forth and forever” (Alma 7:27).

The Bible Dictionary offers this statement about prayer’s purpose: “The object of prayer is not to change the will of God, but to secure for ourselves and for others blessings that God is already willing to grant, but that are made conditional on our asking for them.”⁴

Is it possible that the Lord has blessings in store for us that He is waiting for us to request? Those who make prayer a constant part of their lives will testify that the portals of heaven swing wide open to them.

4. We pray to receive personal revelation.

Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah grew up together as close friends. Fourteen years after the sons of Mosiah went to preach the gospel to the Lamanites, Alma met his friends on their way to Zarahemla. In my scriptures I have written “revelatory process” beside the scriptural account of their reunion. Alma was happy to see the sons of Mosiah, but “what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; . . . and they had searched the scriptures diligently. . . .

“But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation” (Alma 17:2–3).

Revelation comes as we follow this important pattern. Our prayers, when combined with fasting and pondering the scriptures constitute the revelatory process. Ponder the following verse: “If thou shalt ask, thou

shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal” (D&C 42:61).

The Savior’s Example

Perhaps the most instructive counsel on prayer occurred as the resurrected Savior visited the Nephites. As He ministered to the people, He prayed after almost everything He did. He healed the sick, and then He knelt and prayed (see 3 Nephi 17:15). After the multitude was baptized, the Savior “departed out of the midst of them . . . and bowed himself to the earth” and prayed (3 Nephi 19:19). He taught the people to pray, and then He “turned from them again, and went a little way off and bowed himself to the earth; and he prayed” (3 Nephi 19:27).

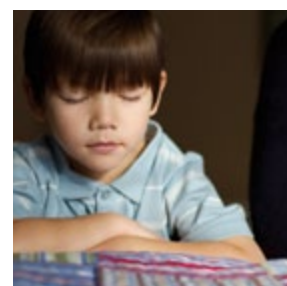
If the Savior of the world felt the need for constant prayer, how much greater is our need? The Savior clearly understood, as did President Kimball many years ago in Finland, that prayer is essential to our earthly existence.

Nearly four decades have passed since I met President Kimball in Finland, but his simple, powerful instruction remains etched in my memory:

*I need thee, oh, I need thee;
Every hour I need thee!
Oh, bless me now, my Savior;
I come to thee!* ■

NOTES

1. *Hymns*, no. 98.
2. See *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 135.
3. Bruce R. McConkie, “Why the Lord Ordained Prayer,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1976, 9.
4. Bible Dictionary, “Prayer.”



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