How to Obtain Fulness

of Power

In Christian Life and Service

By R. A. Torrey

Author of “How to Bring Men to Christ,”

“How to Study the Bible for Greatest Profit,”

“The Baptism with the Holy Spirit,” etc.

*“God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.”—*Ps. lxii. 11.

*“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”—*Eph. vi. 10.

*“Ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you.”—*1 John. ii. 14.

*“Strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man.”—*Eph. iii. 16, R.V.

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PREFACE

From many earnest hearts there is rising acry for more power: more power in our personal conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil, more power in our work for others. The Bible makes the way to obtain this longed-for power very plain. There is no presumption in under­taking to tell “How to obtain Fulness of Power in Christian Life and Service”; for the Bible itself tells, and the Bible was intended to be understood. The Bible statement of the way is not mystical nor mysterious, it is very plain and straightforward. If we will only make per­sonal trial of “The Power of the Word of God,” “The Power of the Blood of Christ,” “The Power of the Holy Spirit,” “The Power of Prayer,” “The Power of a Surrendered Life,” we will then know “The Fulness of Power in Christian Life and Service.” We will try to make this plain in the following chapters.

The present volume has been written partly in response to a request from some who have used the author’s book “How to Bring Men to Christ,” that he would write another book for use in the training of those who have come to Christ. But the book has also another and far more important purpose. There are many who do not even know that there is a life of abiding- rest, joy, satisfaction, and power; and many others who, while they think there must be something beyond the life they know, are in ignorance as to how to obtain it. This book is written to help them.

CHAPTER IV

THE POWER OF PRAYER

“Power belongeth unto God,” but all that belongs to God we can have for the asking. God holds out His full hands and says: “Ask, and it shall be given unto you . . . if ye, being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7:7, 11.) The poverty and powerlessness of the average Christian finds its explanation in the words of the apostle James: “Ye have not, because ye ask not.” (Jas. 4:2.) “Why is it,” many a Christian is asking, “that I make such poor progress in my Christian life?” “Neglect of prayer,” God answers. “You have not because you ask not.” “Why is it there is so little fruit in my minis­try?” asks many a discouraged minister. “Neg­lect of prayer,” God answers again. “You have not because you ask not.” “Why is it,” many, both ministers and laymen, are asking, “that there is so little power in my life and service?” And again God answers: “Neglect of prayer. You have not because you ask not.” God has provided for a life of power, and a work of pow­er on the part of every child of His. He has put His own infinite power at our disposal, and has proclaimed over and over again, in a great variety of ways in His Word, “Ask and ye shall receive.” Thousands upon thousands have taken God at His word in this matter, and have always found it true. The first Christians were men of tremendous power. What power Peter and John, for example, had in their lives. What power they had in their work! There was op­position in those days,—most determined, bitter and relentless opposition; opposition in compar­ison with which that which we encounter is but as child’s play,—but the work went right on. We constantly read such statements as these: “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:47.) “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.” (Acts 4:4.) “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Acts 5:14.) The apostles themselves explain the secret of their resistless power when they say: “We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.” (Acts 6:4.) But it was not only the leaders who had power in life and service; so had the rank and file of that early church. What a beautiful picture we have of the abounding love and fruitfulness of that early church! (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-37; 8:4; 11:19, 21.) The secret of this fulness of power in life and service is found in Acts 2:42: “They continued steadfastly . . . in prayers.” God delights to answer prayer: “Call upon me,” He cries, “I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” (Ps. 50:15.) There is a place where strength can always be renewed; that place is the presence of the Lord: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Is. 40:31.)

How little time the average Christian spends in prayer! We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activi­ty but we accomplish little; many services but few conversions; much machinery but few re­sults. The power of God is lacking in our lives and in our work. We have not because we ask not. Many professed Christians confessedly do not believe in the power of prayer. It is quite the fashion with some to contemptuously contrast the prayers with the doers—forgetting that in the history of the Church the real doers have been prayers, that the men who have made the glorious part of the Church’s history have been without exception men of prayer. Of those who do believe theoretically in the power of prayer, not one in a thousand realizes its power. How much time does the average Christian spend daily in prayer? How much time do you spend daily in prayer? It was a master-stroke of the devil when he got the Church and the ministry so generally to lay aside the mighty weapon of prayer. The devil is perfectly willing that the Church should multiply its organizations and its deftly contrived machinery for the conquest of the world for Christ, if it will only give up praying. He laughs softly, as he looks at the Church of today, and says under his breath: “You can have your Sunday-schools, and your Y. M. C. A’s, and your Y. W. C. A’s, and your Y. P. S. C. E’s, and your B. Y. P. U’s, and your Epworth Leagues, and your W. C. T. U’s, and your Boys’ Brigades, and your Institutional Churches, and your Men’s Clubs, and your grand choirs, and your fine organs, and your brilliant preachers, and your revival efforts, even if you do not bring into them the power of Almighty God, sought and obtained by earn­est, persistent, believing, mighty prayer.” The devil is not afraid of machinery; he is only afraid of God, and machinery without prayer is machinery without God. Our day is character­ized by the multiplication of man’s machinery and the diminution of God’s power sought and obtained by prayer. But when men and women arise who believe in prayer, and who pray in the way the Bible teaches us to pray, prayer ac­complishes as much as it ever did. Prayer can do today as much as it ever could. Prayer can do anything God can do; for the arm of God re­sponds to the touch of prayer. All the infinite resources of God are at the command of prayer. Prayer is the key that opens wide the inexhaust­ible storehouses of divine grace and power. “Ask and it shall be given you,” cries our Heavenly Father, as He swings wide open the doors of the divine treasure-house. There is only one limit to what prayer can do; that is what God can do. But all things are possible to God; therefore prayer is omnipotent.

Christian history and Christian biography demonstrate the truth of what the Word of God teaches about prayer. All through the history of the Church, men and women have arisen in all ranks of life who believed with simple, child­like faith what the Bible teaches about prayer and they have asked and they have received. But what are some of the definite things that prayer has power to do?

1. Prayer has power to bring a true knowl­edge of ourselves and our needs. There is nothing more necessary than that we know our­selves, our weakness, our sinfulness, our selfish­ness; how that in us, that is to say in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing. (Rom. 7:18.) Lives of power have usually begun with a revelation of the utter powerlessness and worthlessness of self. So it was with Isaiah. In the year that king Uzziah died, he was brought face to face with God, and saw himself, and cried out: “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips.” (Is. 6:1-5.) Then a life of power began for Isaiah and God sent him forth to a mighty work. (Is. 6:8, 9.) It was so with Moses. He met God at the burning bush, and was emptied of his former self-confidence, saw his utter unfitness for the Lord’s work, and then the Lord sent him as a mighty man of power. (Ex. 3:2, 5, 11. Comp. Ex. 2:11-15.) It was so with Job. It was after Job met God, and cried concerning himself: “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,” that the Lord turned the captivity of Job, and that he received power to intercede for his friends, and to bear abun­dant fruit. (Job 42:5, 6, 10, 12.) It is needful if we are to have fulness of power, that we get a view of ourselves as we are by nature. It is in prayer that we get it. If we sincerely pray the Psalmist’s prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts “(Ps. 139:23), He will do it. There will come a true revelation of self as God sees us, a conse­quent utter emptying of self, and room will be made for the incoming of the power of God. It is not enough to pray this prayer once for all. It needs to be repeated daily.

2. Prayer has power to cleanse our hearts from sin; from secret sin and from known sin. (Ps. 19:12, 13.) In answer to David’s prayer after his disastrous fall, God washed him thor­oughly from his iniquity, and cleansed him from his sin. (Ps. 51:2.) Many a man has fought for days and months and years against some sin that has been marring his life, and sapping his spiritual power, and at last has gone unto God in prayer, and held on to God, and would not let Him go until He blessed him; and he has come out of the place of prayer a victor. In this way sins that seem unconquerable have been laid in the dust. In this way the secret sin that the sinner himself scarce discerned, but that has robbed him of power, has been discovered in all its real hideousness, and rooted out. Of course, as seen in the previous chapter, it is the Holy Spirit who sets us free from sin’s power, but the Holy Spirit works in our lives in answer to our prayers. (Luke 11:13.)

3. Prayer has power to hold us up in our goings, and give us victory over temptation. “Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my foot­steps slip not,” cried David. (Ps. 17:5.) That is a prayer God is ever ready to hear. Jesus himself said to His disciples, as the hour of trial drew nigh: “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.” (Luke 22:40.) But the dis­ciples did not heed the warning. They slept when they should have prayed, and when the temptation came in a few hours, they failed ut­terly. But Jesus Himself spent that night in prayer, and when the next day the fiercest temp­tations that ever beset a son of man swept down upon Him, He came off gloriously triumph­ant. We can come off victorious over every temptation, if we will prepare for it, and meet it by prayer. Many of us are led into defeat and denial of our Lord, as Peter was, by sleep­ing when we ought to be praying.

4. Prayer has power to govern our tongues. Many a Christian who has desired fulness of power in Christian life and service, has found himself kept from it by an unruly tongue. He has learned by bitter experience the truth of the words of James: “The tongue can no man tame.” (Jas. 3: 8.) But while no man can tame it, God can and will, in answer to believ­ing prayer. If one will earnestly and believingly pray with David: “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3), God will do it. Many and many an unruly tongue has been brought into subjection in this way. Tongues that were as sharp as the pierc­ings of a sword, have learned to speak words of gentleness and grace. True prayer can tame the unruliest tongue by which man or woman was ever cursed, because true prayer brings into play the power of Him with whom nothing is impossible.

5. Prayer has power to bring us wisdom. The word of God is very explicit on this point: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (Jas. 1:5.) No promise could be more explicit than that. We can have wisdom, the wisdom of God himself, at every turn of life. God does not intend that His children shall grope in darkness. He puts His own infinite wisdom at our disposal. All He asks is that we ask, and ask in faith. (Jas. 1:6-7.) Many of us are stumbling on in our own foolishness, instead of walking on in His wisdom, simply because we do not ask. He greatly desires us to know His way, and is willing to make it known upon our asking. Oh, the joy of knowing and walking in God’s way! And we can all have this joy for the asking. (Ps. 86:11; 25:4; 143:10; 119:33.)

6. Prayer has power to open our eyes to behold wondrous things out of God’s word. (Ps. 119:18.) It is wonderful how the Bible opens up to one who looks to God in earnest believing prayer to interpret it to him. Diffi­culties vanish, obscure passages become clear as day, and old familiar portions become luminous with new meaning, and living with new power. Prayer will do more than a theological educa­tion to make the Bible an open book. Only the man of prayer can understand the Bible.

7. Prayer has power to bring the Holy Spirit in all His blessed power and manifold gracious operations into our hearts and lives. “If ye then being evil,” says Jesus, “know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!” (Luke 11:13.) It was after the first disciples had “continued in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14), that “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:4.) On another occasion “*when they had prayed,* the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 4:31.) When Peter and John came down to Samaria and found a company of young con­verts who had not yet experienced the fulness of the Holy Spirit’s power, “they prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost.” “And they received the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 8:15, 17.) It was in answer to prayer that Paul expected the saints in Ephesus “to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:14, 16), and that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,” would give them “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.” (Eph. 1:16,17.) It is manifestly prayer that brings the fulness of the Spirit’s power into our hearts and lives. One great reason why so many of us have so little of the Holy Spirit’s power in our lives and service, is because we spend so little time and thought in prayer. We “have not, because we ask not.”

Every precious spiritual blessing in our own lives is given by our Heavenly Father in answer to true prayer. Prayer promotes our own spiritual growth and our likeness to Christ as almost nothing else can. The more time we spend in real, true prayer, other things being equal, the more we shall grow in likeness to our Master. One of the saintliest, and most Christlike men that ever lived was John Welch, the son-in-law of John Knox, the great Scotch reformer. He is said to have given one-third of his time to prayer, and often to have spent a whole night in prayer. One who knew him well, speaking of him after his departure to be with Christ, said of him: “He was a type of Christ.” Many illustrations could be given of the power of prayer to bring our lives into conformity with Christ’s. In prayer we gaze into the face of God, and “reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” (2 Cor. 3:18, R.V.)

8. But prayer has not only power to pro­mote our own spiritual growth into the likeness of Christ; prayer has also power to bring the fulness of God’s power into our work. When the apostolic church saw themselves confronted by obstacles that they could not surmount “they lifted up their voice to God with one ac­cord.” (Acts 4:24.) “And when they had prayed” the power came that swept all obsta­cles before it. (Acts 4:31-33; 5:14.) Do you desire the power of God in your S. S. class, in your personal work, in your preaching, in your training of your children? Pray for it. Hold on to God until you get it. “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” (Luke 18:1.) I shall never forget a sight I once witnessed. A woman of limited experience in public speak­ing was called upon to address an audience fill­ing the old Tremont Temple in Boston. It was a notable audience in its makeup as well as in numbers. Many of the leading clergymen of all evangelical denominations were there, also many men prominent in philanthropic and political affairs. As the woman spoke the audience was hushed, swayed, melted and moulded. Tears coursed down cheeks unwonted to them. The impression made upon many was not only salutary, but permanent. It was an address of marvelous power. The secret of it all lay in the fact, known only to a few, that that woman had spent the whole of the previous night on her face before God in pray­er. It is related of John Livingstone that he spent a night with a few like-minded in prayer and religious converse. On the next day he preached in the Kirk of Shotts with such pow­er that 500 persons dated their conversion or some definite uplift in their spiritual life from that sermon. A mother once came to me in great distress about her boy, one of the most incorrigible children I ever knew. “What shall I do?” she cried. “Pray.” She did with a new definiteness and earnestness and faith. The change came soon, if not immediately, and the change continues to this day. We can all have power in our work, if we will only believe God’s promises regarding prayer, and meet the conditions of prevailing prayer, and lay hold upon God with an importunity, a holy boldness, that will not take no for an answer.

9. But the man of prayer can not only have power in his own life and service, he can have power in the life and service of others. Prayer has power to bring salvation to others. “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.” (1 John 5:16.) Prayer avails for the salvation of others where every effort for their salvation fails. There is little doubt that Saul of Tarsus, the most dangerous human enemy the church of Christ ever had, became Paul the apostle in answer to prayer. There have been countless instances where men and women seemingly past all hope have been converted in most direct and unmistakable answer to prayer.

Prayer will bring blessing upon a church. It will settle church quarrels, allay misunderstand­ings, root out heresy and bring down gracious revivals from God. Dr. Spencer tells, in his “Pastor’s Sketches,” how a great revival was brought down upon his church by the prayers of a godly old man who was shut up in his room by lameness. In Philadelphia during the pastorate of Dr. Thomas Skinner, three men of God came together in his study to pray. “They literally wrestled in prayer.” From this meet­ing sprang up a powerful revival in that city. One of the most notable, wide-spread and en­during revivals ever known in this land, accord­ing to the account given by Mr. Finney, arose from the prayers of a humble woman who had never seen a revival, but was led to lay hold of God for this. One of the greatest needs of the hour is that some of God’s children should de­vote themselves to calling upon God until He visits this land again with a mighty outpouring of His Spirit. There have been in times past great revivals without very much preaching, and with almost no machinery. There has never been a great and true revival without much pray­er. Many modern so-called revivals are gotten up by man’s machinery. Genuine revivals are brought down by prayer.

Prayer will bring wisdom and power to ministers of the gospel. Paul was a matchless preacher and worker, but he so deeply felt the need of the prayers of God’s people, that he asked for them from every church to which he wrote save one (the backslidden church in Galatia). It has been demonstrated again and again that prayer can transform a poor preacher into a good one. If you are not satisfied with your pastor, pray for him. Keep on praying for him and you will soon have a better minister. If you think your present minister a pretty good one, you can make him far better by more prayer. Little do many Christians realize how much they have to do with the powerful or pow­erless preaching their pastor gives them by their prayer or neglect of prayer.

But the power of prayer reaches across the sea and around the earth. We can contribute to the conversion of the heathen and the evangelization of the world by our prayers. The prayers of believers in America have brought down the power of the Spirit in India and China. Doubtless more men and more money are needed for foreign mission work, but the greatest need of foreign mission work is prayer. It is a sad fact that much money given to foreign mission work has been largely wasted. There has not been enough intelligent prayer back of the giving.

There is mighty power in prayer. It has much to do with our obtaining fulness of power in Christian life and service. The one who will not take time for prayer may as well resign all hope of obtaining the fulness of power God has for him. It is “they that wait upon the Lord” who “shall renew their strength.” (Is. 40:31.) Waiting upon the Lord means something more than spending a few minutes at the beginning and close of each day running through some stereotyped form of request. “Wait upon the Lord.” True prayer takes time and thought, but it is the great time-saver. At all events if we are to know fulness of power we must be men and women of prayer.