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DESTINY IMAGE® PUBLISHERS, INC.

P.O. Box 310, Shippensburg, PA 17257-0310

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For a U.S. bookstore nearest you, call 1-800-722-6774.

For more information on foreign distributors, call 717-532-3040.

Or reach us on the Internet: www.destinyimage.com.

ISBN 10: 0-7684-2662-6

ISBN 13: 978-0-7684-2662-5

Previously Published: *Your Personal House of Prayer*
by House to House Publications

ISBN: 978-1-886973 87-9

For Worldwide Distribution, Printed in the U.S.A.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 / 12 11 10 09 08

Dedication

I dedicate this book to our Lord Jesus Christ, our teacher and model for prayer, and to my wife LaVerne and my family. To everyone who reads this book—may you find great joy in daily prayer.

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Lord, Teach Us To Pray

LIKE JESUS TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES

My wife, LaVerne, and I and a small team of young leaders pioneered a new church in rural Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in 1980 that grew into a church of more than 2,300 within ten years. It was a miracle. I had no seminary training. I had been a chicken farmer in love with Jesus, who just wanted to lead young people to Christ. In 1996, we felt we should decentralize our church into eight local churches in Pennsylvania and start a worldwide church planting movement. Today, by the grace of God, our family of churches, DOVE Christian Fellowship International, spans six continents of the world.

Despite this amazing growth, for much of my life I struggled to grow in my prayer life. Certainly, I prayed every day. I sometimes went to all-night prayer meetings. I preached about prayer, and yet I knew there was something desperately missing in my prayer life. Then I had an experience that changed my life in prayer.

Six years ago I went to Uzbekistan and met with leaders of the underground church where persecution happens in the form of fines, loss of jobs, interrogation, and imprisonment. More often than not, when I find myself in these settings, I feel that they have so much more to teach me than I can teach them, but they are typically very eager to receive biblical instruction and training.

On this particular occasion, after our team of three Christian leaders had taught from the Scriptures, they asked us questions.

One question penetrated to my core. "Tell us about your personal prayer life," one of the Uzbek Christian leaders asked. "How much time do you spend with the Lord each day?" I was suddenly uncomfortable and deeply convicted by God. I deferred the question to one of the other team members to avoid further embarrassment. I knew immediately I had been weighed in the scales and found wanting. I left Uzbekistan with a deep conviction that I must learn to pray. I fervently believed in prayer, at least I thought I did. As I said, I taught on prayer, I went to all-night prayer meetings, I prayed daily, and I knew the importance of prayer in a Christian's life. I saw countless answers to prayer in my life and in the lives of others. But prayer seemed to be such a chore for me.

I couldn't help but think that those people who raved about how they loved to pray must have a special gift from God to pray. Prayer was certainly not a joy for me. It was hard work, and although I had seasons of victory in prayer, for the most part, I wasn't as consistent at it as I knew I personally needed to be.

I scanned back through my memory of the several times I had visited Seoul, Korea, and experienced passionate prayer at Yoido Full Gospel Church, one of the largest churches in the world, where believers prayed in unison in a swell that seemed to go directly to Heaven. I remembered sitting under Pastor Cho's tutelage as he exhorted us to pray for a minimum of one hour each day. I visited this church's "Prayer Mountain" where thousands of believers spent hours in prayer, many in seclusion. I was challenged, but I came home each time finding it hard to spend an extended time in prayer.

My life was so busy; it seemed much too difficult to set aside daily time specifically for prayer. Whether I liked it or not, I was one of those Western Christians whom Pastor Cho described as vigorously taking notes on his "church growth methods," but apathetically laying their pencils down when he spoke on "prayer."

PRAYER INVOLVES ACTION

I finally came to a place where I realized I didn't really believe in prayer—or I would do it!

Suppose you were told that you had a life-threatening illness and a well-known doctor claimed to have a cure. You simply needed to submit to His guidance and prescription. If you really believed in this doctor and in his treatment, you would willingly take action immediately and do whatever he told you to do. You would act on that which you believed. You would visit him at his office to start the process immediately! On the other hand, if you didn't really believe it, you would say, "Well, let's think about it and consider it some more. Perhaps we can discern if this doctor and his cure is really as good as he claims it to be."

For some time, this is the way I responded to prayer. I believed in prayer in my head, but there was a lack of action to it. I was a busy man, traveling and writing and speaking.

On one occasion, I heard a well-known Christian leader say that he does not need to pray very much because he has a team of intercessors who pray for him. It sounded like a great plan to me! I, too, had an excellent team of intercessors praying for me daily. So I depended on my intercessors to do much of the praying for me. I more or less took the attitude, "Well, they are praying, so they can do the hard praying, and I'll preach and write and train Christian leaders!"

I finally came to the realization that if I really believed in prayer, I must take action. It's a fairly simple deduction. If we believe in prayer, we will follow up on the belief through the action of prayer. Dr. E. Stanley Jones emphasizes this common sense logic:

In prayer you align yourselves to the purpose...of God and He is able to do things through you that He couldn't do otherwise. Some things are left open, contingent upon our doing them. If we do not do them, they will never be done...except as we pray.¹

When I visit many of the nations and cities of the world where believers are experiencing unprecedented revival, in every case, I find a people who make prayer a top priority. Two years ago, I was ministering in Manaus, Brazil, where 10,000 new believers were baptized in one day just a few months before I arrived. They were experiencing revival of this magnitude as a result of passionate prayer.

This past year, I was asked to minister at The Vine in Goinonia, Brazil, a church that grew from a handful of people to over 21,000 in eight years. They knew how to pray! It's little wonder why they are experiencing exponential growth.

I have been privileged to minister to some of the most influential leaders of the underground church in China. I noticed that leaders of these underground churches came one half hour early to each meeting to pray. No one asked them to come. They just came and stood and prayed fervently for at least thirty minutes before our meetings began. It should be no surprise that more than 25,000 people are coming to faith in Christ every day in the nation of China! The Christians have learned to pray.

I've experienced powerful prayer meetings in East Africa many times. My African brothers and sisters know how to pray! A few years ago, I was in South Africa, near Johannesburg, where people were giving their lives to Christ every week at every service. The pastor invited me to join him so I could experience the secret of the revival. An hour before the service, the pastor led the prayer meeting by walking around the auditorium as hundreds followed him, crying out to the Lord in prayer.

I ministered in Durban, South Africa, in the midst of a Muslim stronghold. One of the pastors took me to the upper room of the building, and showed me their secret. They had dedicated this room for prayer as believers met to intercede day after day for their city and their nation.

I was recently in Bulgaria in Eastern Europe. There was an immeasurable sense of God's presence in their Sunday morning service. I experienced one of their secrets—they met in small

groups all over the auditorium, long before the service began, to passionately pray.

This past year I was asked to minister at a missionary conference in Waco, Texas, at Antioch Community Church. More than two thousand had gathered together to receive their marching orders from the Lord. Moreover, there was a deep sense of God's presence. And again, there was a deep dedication to prayer.

Everywhere I see God moving in a sovereign way, I see a common thread that runs through it. It is prayer! In these revivals and sovereign moves of God, God's people have learned to pray. And yet, Christians often struggle with their prayer lives more than any other area.

"LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY..."

In fact, it is an age old struggle. Two thousand years ago, Jesus' disciples seemed to have had the same problem in discovering a passion for prayer. In Luke 11:1-4, one of His disciples came to Jesus with a request, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1).

There is nothing else recorded in the Gospels that the disciples requested Jesus to teach them. They never asked Him to teach them to perform miracles, heal the sick or to multiply bread and fish. But they asked Him to teach them to pray. Why?

The disciples knew Jesus prayed to His Father daily with a distinct intimacy, and they wanted it too! They had watched their Master rising up early in the morning to spend time with His Father. They saw Him going alone to pray late at night. Furthermore, they watched His life firsthand as He spoke with great wisdom, performed miracles and knew moment by moment what the Father was calling Him to do. They witnessed Jesus praying often and consistently, and they saw the results:

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed (Mark 1:35).