

# *When You Pray Do You Follow Through?*



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## WHEN YOU PRAY DO YOU FOLLOW THROUGH?

*Scripture: James 5:16*

When I first began preaching years ago, I had a great enthusiasm for the power of the Gospel and this has never lessened through the years. I had been brought up to believe that people need not remain as they are - that by the grace of Jesus Christ they could be changed. This I have tried to preach. This I still believe. This I hope to continue to preach.

I am quite aware of all the complicated problems that confront a person living in the modern world. Yet still I say that in my humble judgment - and this is based on considerable experience and observation - anyone who will really pray and follow through on his prayers will experience that endless wonder known as the power of God. He will discover that his life can be rich and wonderful indeed.

Some time ago in a city where I was staying overnight after delivering a speech, I had retired to my hotel room and was just about asleep when the telephone bell rang. The man on the wire was a stranger. Apologizing for his late call, he explained he had heard your talk tonight and having a bad time of it. Of course I know without you or anybody else telling me that my main problem is myself. I get in my own way. I need to do something about myself, that's for sure. But what I want to ask is whether you will pray for me."

"Of course," I said. "What's more, I will do it right now." From something in the man's voice I sensed real need as well as deep sincerity. "You listen and I will offer a prayer." I think he was surprised, but he agreed and as I concluded the prayer his reverent "Amen" echoed my own.

After a moment he said, "That helps. I needed that. Thanks a lot." Then he added, "I will get busy and follow through on that prayer."

When he had rung off I sat there reflecting upon his remark, "I will get busy and follow through on that prayer." It was perhaps an unusual thing to say, but showed real perception. Prayer should have its follow through. And I began to ask myself: I really follow through on my prayers? How often have I prayed "gimme" kind of prayers or desperation kind of prayers or bewildered kind of prayers with nothing happening as a result? Having prayed, do I believe that God has heard? Do I leave it with Him? Or do I shut out answers by continuing to expect the worst? Do I try to do something about the thing myself? Or do I just sit and wait? I think everyone could ask himself these same questions. When you pray do you follow through?

In the Book of James there is a very interesting description of what kind of prayer gets results. This writer, James, states "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." *Effectual* could be taken to mean *efficient* praying in the right way. *Fervent* is akin to *enthusiastic* means putting oneself into it. *Righteous* is usually taken to mean *good*, but it might also mean *right-minded*. Therefore, the text might be paraphrased in some such fashion as *the efficient, enthusiastic prayer of a right-thinking man avails much.*

How do you follow through on a prayer? I think a most important factor is to believe in and yield yourself to the power of God. Reach high in your mind to God and really yield yourself to His power. Then He lifts you up above defeat, weakness, frustration, bewilderment, in a way that is past human understanding.

A great many people today think of Christianity as a nice, perhaps intellectual, but dull kind of thing. Well, it is intellectual and is nice, but it is not dull. Many of our churches have become so polite formal, so dull that people attending services get the notion that Christianity is a lifeless thing. It isn't lifeless. It's tough, it's vital, it's alive, it's life-changing, it's tremendous!

How come that so many churches neglect this power, especially in the presence of conditions and situations such as we face today? This country is rife with paganism and wickedness and sin. The churches have available the cure for all these evils, but seem to be afraid of it. As individuals we have available to us through Jesus Christ the power to overcome our weaknesses, master difficulties, rise above defeats - but we seem to be afraid to take it, to give our lives to it, to accept it, to live on it. And it is really a tragic thing to live and die without ever knowing this power of Jesus Christ to change our lives.

There came into my hands the other day a book entitled *THE CROSS AND THE SWITCHBLADE\**. It is the story of a country preacher from Pennsylvania who saw one day in a news magazine a picture of some teenage boys who had brutally murdered another teen-ager, a fifteen-year-old by the name of Michael Farmer. They

*\*by Reverend David Wilkerson with John and Elizabeth Sherrill \$4.95 pub. by Bernard Geis Associates.*

had stuck a knife in him and left him to die in a weed grown lot in the Bronx - apparently for no other reason than sheer hate. When this Pennsylvania preacher, David Wilkerson, saw that picture he wept and it seemed as though the Lord said to him, "Go to New York and win these teen-age gangs to Christ."

What a commission! Wilkerson had never been in New York before. But he went. He found he couldn't see the boys who had committed that murder because the authorities wouldn't let him. So he decided he would go out to the toughest gang area of Brooklyn, a section reputed to have the toughest juvenile gangs in the city. He went and looked things over.

Then he got a boy to stand at a street corner and play "Onward Christian Soldiers" on a horn. And the gangs gathered around. Wilkerson got up on a box and tried to talk to them. But they assailed him with all kinds of obscenities they swaggered, they ridiculed him, he knew he wasn't getting anywhere with them. So he stopped speaking and closed his eyes and asked the Holy Spirit to take over. Since he couldn't reach those boys with his words, he asked for the power of God to reach them. Almost miraculously they became quiet and four of them came forward and took Wilkerson by the hand and said they would follow Jesus. The members of these gangs, mind you were boys who carried knives and guns, many of them were drug addicts, sadists, stabbers, immoral to the extreme, tough, mean, full of hate. But the power of God won these four.

And the book goes on dramatically to tell of David Wilkerson's further work among the juvenile delinquents. After a while he decided he would hold a meeting in a certain prize-fight arena in the Bronx - a revival meet-

ing. He got the meeting started and the hall gradually filled up. The gangs were there in their outlandish leather jackets marked with their gang emblems. And when a Gospel singer tried to sing, they got up and danced suggestively in the aisles. They hurled all kinds of epithets at the singer, tried to make dates with her for after the meeting, taunted her with other suggestive remarks. Finally she had to stop. Wilkerson concluded that no human being could do anything with these boys. As before, he bowed his head for three minutes, praying and giving the problem to the Holy Spirit. The hall grew quiet.

"Now," he said, "we're going to take up the offering. And I'm going to appoint you, Nicky, and anybody you suggest, to take up the offering." This Nicky was a boy who, as Wilkerson knew, hated himself, hated the world, hated preachers. But Wilkerson handed Nicky and his friends some ice cream cartons for taking the offering.

This was what Nicky was waiting for. Creduously, he saw his opportunity to clean up. He whispered to his gang, "We'll lift this offering and then get going."

The preacher instructed him, "Now, when you've taken the offering, Nicky, bring it down this aisle and go around in back of the stage and bring it out here to me and we'll dedicate it to the Lord Jesus Christ." Nicky laughed and grimaced. And the preacher knew perfectly well that when Nicky passed behind the curtain he could either come around and present the offering or just leave by the back door - with the money. Everybody present knew it too. And Nicky, with sixteen stabblings to his record, was known as one of the toughest boys from Brooklyn to the Bronx. As he and his helpers came through the aisles the other boys dug deep and shelled out. And he got a huge offering. He and his gang then disappeared behind that

curtain.

One minute passed. The hall was deathly still. Two minutes passed. Boys began to snicker. Three minutes passed. They began to laugh and catcall. Then they froze. For the preacher all the time had been putting Nicky in the hands of Jesus. He turned around and there came Nicky - grudgingly, rebelliously, but he came. And he said, "Okay, Preach. Here's your money." The audience was aghast. And Wilkerson knew that he was aboard the power.

Then he started his sermon. But again he saw he was not reaching the boys. And a boy in the front row, a former tough who had had his life changed, called out, "Don't try so hard, Preach. Let Jesus talk to them." That's what you call spiritual insight. And again Wilkerson yielded the meeting to Jesus. A hush fell over the great congregation of delinquents.

When finally he gave the call for all who would accept Jesus Christ to come forward, he was astonished to see the Nicky, cigarette hanging out of the corner of his mouth, smoke coming out of his nose and out of the other corner of his mouth, come forward and stand at the altar.

He asked, "What do you want, Nicky?" "What do you think, Preach? I'm giving my heart to Jesus."

And the preacher thought of the hatred, the drinking, the dope, the stabbings. And he asked himself, "Can you change this boy?" He asked aloud, "Do you mean it, Nicky?"

"What's the matter with you, Preach?" Nicky answered. "I'm giving my heart to God. Can't you get it?"

From then on, gang boys thronged to Wilkerson and were changed. Some of them later became ministers and

many became good Christian laymen, leading others to Jesus Christ. The work is still going on. Who says the ancient power of the Gospel doesn't still prevail?

I gave a speech not long ago before a church convention, in which I said that the great problem of this day is sin and that the cure of sin is the redemptive power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I was told afterwards that a minister whose church is in a swanky section of one of our big cities had remarked, "Does Peale think I'm going to preach about sin in my pulpit? My people

don't want to hear about sin." But since when are the wishes of the members of the congregation determinative of the message of the pulpit? It is the duty of the pulpit to preach to the people what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. The great tradition of Christianity demands that there be tough-minded men in the pulpit, men who believe in something and preach accordingly.

no matter how many people there may be who do not like it. The minister must do the best he can, then leave the matter to God.

Now in most American congregations today we have no stabbers. And I am sure that in the great majority of churches you would not find anybody who is a drug addict. Most of us are refined, you see. We're ladies and gentlemen. We're cultivated; we're cultured. But don't

forget that the old Adam isn't far beneath the surface of all this culture. This is true even among those who have been the best educated and have had the most advantages. The so-called upper classes in this country aren't as pure as some people would let you think.

If any man is honest with himself he knows the sin that is in him, he knows the weakness that is in him. And he ought also to know he should confess it to God and ask

Him to forgive him and release him from it. And the Lord who loves will respect him for his honesty. So will any good minister respect him. I've had the worst things confided to me by people who conclude "by saying" "You'll never speak to me again. You thought I was a fine person."

"I think you're finer now than I ever thought you were before, because you have the sincerity and courage to come clean about your wrongdoing and want God to change you. I say to them.

So when you pray, never forget those juveniles. No power on earth could reach those kids except the power of God. And that power can reach you, too. So don't be defeated; don't be weak; don't be wicked. Remember there is the power of God to help you follow through on your prayers. If a person will really pray and will surrender up the things that he thinks and does and says, it is incredible what can happen to him.

I would like to share with you the experiences related in a letter I recently received from a man I've never met. He is a resident of another city and he was getting near the bottom and couldn't find any way to stop the descent. Not even thoughts of my wonderful wife and kids could stop him from going down and down. I went to my Roman Catholic Church and asked for help. But I couldn't seem to get through, though they tried to help me. I had no job. I was spending my savings like water. I had no self-respect and no hope.

"One day in July I went down to the lakeshore hoping to get some relief from the oppressive heat. In a public park I got to talking with another man about this and that. He was a friendly sort and after we had chatted awhile I told him I was so discouraged that I had a hard

knot in my stomach that wouldn't go away and it was driving me crazy.

"He'd been reading a paperback and when I told him this he pushed the book over to me and said, 'If you really want to get rid of that knot in your stomach, read this.'

"Well, the book was one of yours. I didn't really read it then. I just leafed through it, caught a couple of significant lines and I started to think. After a bit of silence I got up and went and stood for a long time looking at the lake. And I began to pray.

"'God,' I said, 'that book tells me nothing that I haven't heard a thousand times before and yet I've never believed before. It says that You are right here beside me and 'if I ask You for help I'll get it. Okay, here goes. God, I need Your help desperately. Please give it to me now - not later - now.'

"I'm prepared to swear on the Bible that it was at that exact moment that the knot in my stomach disappeared and left me with a sense of incredible peace.

"I immediately went and got myself a copy of your book, took it home and read it until three o'clock the next morning, pausing frequently to practice some of your suggestions for communication with God. I've been practicing them ever since and I'm reborn.

"I'm forty-five years old," he goes on to explain. "I've been all around the world and I've sinned as much as most men, maybe more. That's not a boast, just a statement. As a Roman Catholic I had been to confession, been forgiven, but had never really believed in that forgiveness. I carried my sins around like a sack on my back. Even though I thought it possible that they might have been forgiven, I just couldn't believe that they had

also been forgotten. Now it's as though they had vanished beyond recall. I feel pounds lighter."

Then he tells part of the payoff, so to speak, he had prayed, he had gotten a result. Now he was following through: "There is a man I had hated with a deadly hate for fifteen years. I tell you honestly that if I could have murdered him and got away with it I would have done so cheerfully. Yesterday I was not only able to forgive him but also to ask God to help him by forgetting the original reason for my hatred. And I know it has worked. For this reason, too, I feel further pounds lighter. I am walking on air."

Now friends, this is the reason we believe with all our hearts, not in any dull, nice, liturgical, sacerdotal kind of a Gospel, but in a Gospel of power that can reach out in a public park by a lakeshore and touch a hard-bitten, tough, defeated man and give him power and life again. Whatever your problem or trouble may be, really pray about it. Then follow through on your praying: believe in God's power, yield yourself to it, and start at once to live differently, in accordance with His will, so that you may be lifted from defeat to victory, from weakness to strength, from sadness to joy. Ask yourself, "If I follow through when I pray?"

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we ask Thy blessing upon all who receive this message that into our weakness may come Thy strength, that into our ineffective lives may come Thy incredible power, that into our dissatisfaction may come Thine inexpressible delight. This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.