

## AN ENCOURAGING VOICE FROM THE PAST

Read [John 14:7-14](#)

[John 14:13-14 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>13</sup>“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

<sup>14</sup>“If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”

DURING THE EARLY YEARS OF THE 20TH CENTURY, the Lisu tribespeople in southwest China experienced a remarkable movement of God. Many among the thousands who came to Christ were borne into the presence of God by the prayers and work of **Mr. J. O. Fraser**, a missionary of the **Overseas Missionary Fellowship**, formerly called the **China Inland Mission**. **Mr. Fraser**, like **J. Hudson Taylor** before him, saw that the success of his missionary work rested on the prayer support of those back home in England. In a letter written to encourage their continued prayers, he suggested that the “**prayer of faith**” follows certain guidelines. The letter, quoted here, emphasizes and amplifies the principles we have considered in this prayer series over the last year.

**TANTSAN, YUNNAN, CHINA**

**OCTOBER 9, 1915**

**MY DEAR FRIENDS:**

The Scriptures speak of several kinds of prayer. There is intercession and there is supplication; there is labor in prayer and there is the prayer of faith; all perhaps the same fundamentally, but they present various aspects of this great and wonderful theme. It would not be unprofitable to study the differences between these various scriptural terms.

There is a distinction between general prayer and definite prayer. By definite prayer I mean prayer after the pattern of [Matthew 21:21-22](#) and [John 15:7](#), where a definite petition is offered up and definite faith exercised for its fulfillment.

[Matthew 21:21-22 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>21</sup>“And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen.”

<sup>22</sup>“And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

[John 15:7 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>7</sup>“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

Now faith must be in exercise in the other kind of prayer also, when we pray for many and varied things without knowing the will of God in every case.

In *general prayer* I am limited by my ignorance. But this kind of prayer is the duty of us all ([1 Timothy 2:1-2](#)), however vague it has to be.

**1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup>“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,  
<sup>2</sup>for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”

I may know very little, in detail, about the object of my prayer, but I can at any rate commend it to God and leave it all with Him. It is good and right to pray, vaguely, for all people, all lands, all things, at all times. But *definite prayer* is a very different matter. It is in a special sense “**the prayer of faith.**” A definite request is made in definite faith for a definite answer.

Take the case of a Canadian immigrant as an illustration of the prayer of faith. Allured by the prospect of “**golden grain**” he leaves home for the Canadian West. He has a definite object in view. He knows very well what he is going for, and that is wheat. He thinks of the good crops he will reap and of the money they will bring him—much like the child of God who sets out to pray the prayer of faith. He has his definite object too. It may be the conversion of a son or daughter; it may be power in Christian service; it may be guidance in a perplexing situation, or a hundred and one other things—but it is definite. Consider the points of resemblance between the cases of the prospective Canadian farmer and the believing Christian:

**1. The breadth of the territory.** Think of the unlimited scope for the farmer in Canada. There are literally millions of acres waiting to be cultivated. No need, there, to tread on other people’s toes! Room for all—vast tracts of unoccupied land just going to waste, and good land too. And so it is with us, surely. There is a vast, vast field for us to go up and claim in faith. There is enough sin, enough sorrow, enough of the blighting influence of Satan in the world to absorb all our prayers of faith, and a hundred times as many more. “**There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.**”

**2. The government encourages immigration.** Think also of the efforts of the Canadian government to encourage immigration. All the unoccupied land belongs to it, but settlers are so badly needed that they are offered every inducement—immigration office established, sea passages and railway fares reduced, and grants of land made free! And God is no less urgently inviting His people to pray the prayer of faith: “*Ask—ask—ask,*” He is continually saying to us. He offers His inducement too: “**Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.**” All the unoccupied territory of faith belongs to Him. And he bids us to come and occupy freely. “**How long are ye slack to go in to possess the land?**”

**3. There are fixed limits.** Yet this aspect of the truth must not be overemphasized. Blessed fact though it be that the land is so broad, it can easily be magnified out of due proportion. The important thing is not the vastness of the territory but how much of it is actually assigned to us. The Canadian government will make a grant of 160 acres to the farmer-immigrant, and no more. Why no more? Because they know very well he cannot work anymore. If they were to give him 160 square miles instead of 160 acres he would

not know what to do with it all. So they wisely limit him to an amount of land equal to his resources.

And it is much the same with us when praying the **prayer of definite faith**. The very word “**definite**” means “**with fixed limits.**” We are often exhorted, and with reason, to ask great things of God. Yet there is a balance in all things, and we may go too far in this direction. It is possible to bite off, in prayer, more than we can chew. There is a principle underlying **2 Corinthians 10:13** which may apply to this very matter: “**According to the measure of the province [limit] which God apportioned to us as a measure**” (A.S.V.).

**2 Corinthians 10:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup> “**But we will not boast beyond *our* measure [limit], but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.**”

Faith is like muscle, which grows stronger and stronger with use, rather than rubber, which weakens when it is stretched. Overstrained faith is not pure faith; there is a mixture of the carnal element in it. There is no strain in the “**rest of faith.**” It asks for definite blessing as God may lead. It does not hold back through carnal timidity, nor press ahead too far through carnal eagerness.

I have definitely asked the Lord for several hundred families of Lisu believers. There are upward of two thousand Lisu families in the Tantsah district. It might be said, “Why do you not ask for a thousand?” I answer quite frankly, “Because I have not faith for a thousand.” I believe the Lord has given me faith for more than one hundred families, but not for a thousand. So I accept the limits the Lord, I believe, has given me. Perhaps God will give me a thousand; perhaps He will lead me to commit myself to this definite prayer of faith later on. This is in accordance with **Ephesians 3:20**: “**above all that we ask or think.**” But we must not overload faith; we must be sane and practical. Let us not claim too little in faith, but let us not claim too much either.

Remember the Canadian immigrant’s 160 acres. Consider, too, how the Dominion Government exercises authority in the matter of location. The government has a say as to the *where* as well as the *how much* of the immigrant’s claim. He is not invited to wander all over the prairie at his own sweet will and elect to settle down in any place he chooses. Even in regard to the position of his farm he must consult the government.

- 1) **Do we always do this in our prayers and claims?**
- 2) **Do we consult the heavenly government at the outset, or do we pray the first thing that comes to mind?**
- 3) **Do we spend time waiting upon God to know His will before attempting to embark on His promises?**