

**Agnes Sanford**  
**(1897-1982)**

Agnes Sanford, born in China as the daughter of a Presbyterian missionary, lived for years in New Jersey as the wife of an Episcopalian rector. Her approach to healing through prayer has been uncomplicated and very confident of God's loving power to heal. She does not concern herself with complex questions of creed, denomination, or belief structure. Her approach is Christ-centered and church-centered. She has taught widely in many settings; she has been the instrument of many healings; and her books on healing prayer have sold in the millions around the English-speaking world.

In the following selection, taken from her much-loved book, *The Healing Light*, notice how Agnes Sanford concentrates on the practicality of prayer. Her recommendations are not ethereal and fanciful but exceedingly down to earth. When she recommends that we conduct experiments in prayer, she is not suggesting that we put God to the test. Instead, she wants us to put our own wavering faith to the test. She knows that we are afraid to petition God for specific things because we are afraid of being disappointed. Therefore, she gently guides us through an orderly process that requires us, at least for the moment, to have faith and to exercise that faith in a disciplined way. At the same time her approach is wonderfully childlike. Follow her, as she follows Jesus, in the experience of healing prayer.

## THE HEALING LIGHT

### *Experiments in Prayer*

The One who knew said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Happy, that is, are those people who know that their spiritual power is small, that their creeds are imperfect, that their instruction concerning God and man is incomplete. Happy are those who know that they do not know all of truth. For only those who admit their spiritual poverty are willing to learn.

One way to understand a hitherto unexplored force of nature is to experiment with that force intelligently and with an open mind. This book suggests, for those willing to learn, a method so simple that it is childlike, as the more profound truths are apt to be. It is an experimental method. One decides upon a definite subject for prayer, prays about it and then decides whether or not the prayer-project succeeds. If it does not succeed, one seeks a better adjustment with God and tries again. This is the method of the men who have discovered and harnessed the forces of God's world – the scientists.

### *Producing Results*

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The scientific attitude is the attitude of perfect meekness. It consists in an unshakable faith in the laws of nature combined with perfect humility toward those laws and a patient determination to learn them at whatever cost. Through this meekness scientists have learned how to conform to the laws of nature, and by so doing have achieved great results. Through the same meekness those who seek God can produce results by learning to conform to His laws of faith and love.

### *Four Simple Steps into Prayer*

The first step in seeking to produce results by any power is to contact that power. The first step then in seeking help from God is to contact God. "Be still and know that I am God."

Let us then lay aside our worries and cares, quiet our minds and concentrate upon the reality of God. We may not know who God is or what God is, but we know that there is something that sustains this universe, and that something is not ourselves. So the first step is to relax and to remind ourselves that there is a source of life outside of ourselves.

The second step is to connect with this life by some such prayer as this: "Heavenly Father, please increase in me at this time Your life-giving power."

The third step is to believe that this power is coming into use and to accept it by faith. No matter how much we ask for something it becomes ours only as we accept it and

give thanks for it. "Thank You," we can say, "that Your life is *now* coming into me and increasing life in my spirit and in my mind and in my body."

And the fourth step is to observe the operations of that light and life. In order to do so, we must decide on some tangible thing that we wish accomplished by that power, so that we can know without question whether our experiment succeeded or failed.

### *The Value of Specific Requests*

Many Christians are afraid to do this. A working woman once told me that she asked God to send her two pairs of rubbers for her sons, to protect their feet from rain and slush. That night, she said, the ground froze over solid and for two days the boys walked to school dry-shod. Upon the third day a neighbor gave her two pairs of rubbers for her sons.

"Oh, but I would never *dare* do that!" cried a young man to whom I repeated this. "Because – what if the rubbers didn't come?"

If the rubbers weren't forthcoming, he implied – there was no God. But if he had turned on an electric light and it had failed to shine, he would not have said, "There is no electricity!" He would have said, "There is something wrong with this lamp."

Let us understand, then, that if our experiment fails, it is not due to a lack in God, but to a natural and understandable lack in ourselves. What scientist would be discouraged if his first experiment failed? Since we intend with His help to heal our shortcomings, to repair our wiring, we need not fear to test His power by prayer.

A pair of rubbers might not be the simplest objective, nor a new coat, nor a larger home. We might be mistaken concerning our need of these things. Moreover, the attaining of such things in prayer involves the swaying of more minds than ours, and is rather difficult for a first experiment. Let us choose one of the very simplest of prayer-experiments, remembering always that it must be tangible; that is, it must be something that we can put the finger on and say either "This has been done," or "This has not been done."

How strange it is that people who fear to do this do not hesitate to pray for the most difficult objectives of all, such as the peace of the world or the salvation of their souls! If they have so little confidence in prayer that they do not dare to test their powers of contacting God by praying for an easy thing, it is probable that their cosmic intercessions are of little force. If everyone who prayed for the peace of the world had enough prayer-power to accomplish the healing of a head cold, this would be a different world within twenty-four hours.

*An Objective That is Simple and Personal*

All the cattle on a thousand hills are His, all the rubbers in all the world are under His control, and sufficient power to heal the head colds of all humanity flows at His command. Let us not be afraid then, to choose for our first prayer-experiment an objective that is simple and personal. This objective must of course be in accordance with God's will, for it is as difficult to make God's power operate contrary to His will as it is to make water flow uphill. A wise engineer studies the laws of flowing water and builds his water system in accordance with those laws. A wise scientist studies the laws of nature and adapts his experiments to those laws. And a wise seeker after God had better study the laws of God and adapt his prayers to those laws.

There is no great mystery concerning the will of God, in so far as it applies to our small selves. God's will is written into His nature, and the nature of God is love. Therefore, when we pray in accordance with the law of love, we are praying in accordance with the will of God.

## BIBLE SELECTION

Matthew 8:5-10, 13 (NRSV)

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour.

## BREATH PRAYER

(Inhale) "Nurture within me, Jesus ..."

(Exhale) "... a childlike faith in you."

## JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. What prevents you from expressing specific prayer requests? Is it fear? The experience of unanswered prayers? Discouragement?
2. What sincere new experiment in prayer are you open to trying next week?
3. Optional Stretch Exercise: Pray specifically for someone you know who is ill. Offer wholehearted prayers for their recovery. Consider sending a card or text to let them know that you are holding them in your prayers, especially for their healing.

## REFLECTIONS FROM RICHARD J. FOSTER

*In the introduction Emilie Griffin speaks of Agnes Sanford using terms like "practicality," "down to earth," and "childlike." This I found to be true, not only in her writings, but in all she was and did. I had the privilege of being in Agnes Sanford's home and hearing her speak on numerous occasions, and I was always instructed by her good sense.*

*Once, for example, after a full and intensive week of teaching on healing prayer to a distinguished group of doctors and ministers she explained that she now intended to go home and work in her garden and urged us to engage in some similar task. We needed, she explained, rest from all our prayer work.*

*This kind of practicality is a special grace to us, for everyone who takes the ministry of prayer seriously is sorely tempted toward spiritual gluttony. Rest and play and good conversation are proper complements to the work of prayer.*

*More than once I saw Agnes Sanford praying with great intensity and power one moment and laughing at a homespun joke the next. Such experiences freed me to be at home with God. I believe it will do the same for you.*

Excerpts taken from *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines* (Richard Foster and Emilie Griffin, Editors. Harpercollins, 2000.)