A SANE TECHNIQUE
Acts 2:43-47

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." These of whom this is written had just become members of the Church. Under the guidance of the apostles, they began at once to form certain habits. They were taught a technique for the practice of their religion. Just as we have fixed habits of rising each morning, going to breakfast and going to business, so these had fixed religious habits. Therefore they grew in grace. Blessed is the man who has a settled and intelligent technique for the daily practice of his religion.

Save us, O Lord, from trying to live our religious lives at haphazard. Give us the wisdom to fortify and strengthen ourselves by healthful religious habits. Amen.

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"Lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." That sounds like a horrible and unthinkable possibility. Who would be so mad as to fight against God? Who would be so heartless as to fight Infinite Love. The answer is—you and I. There is not one of us that has not engaged in this costly conflict time and again. When God has called us to surrender lives, we have insisted upon having our own way at least in part. When He has asked us for a soldier's courage, we have often clung to a coward's ease.

Give us to realize, O Lord, that to win against Thee is surely to lose. Help us to see that it is only as we give over the fight that we become victorious.

Amen.
"And when he was baptized." What then? What effect did this open confession of faith have upon the life of Simon, the sorcerer? Actually, it had none at all. He had been a self-seeking pagan before his baptism. He was a self-seeking pagan still. He coveted the power of God upon his life, but only that he might use that power for himself. It never occurred to him to long for this power that he might be useful to others. Therefore in spite of his baptism, Peter had to say to him, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

Save us, O Lord, from a form of godliness without the power. Save us from seeking merely to use Thee. Give us the wisdom to dedicate ourselves to Thee that Thou mayst use us.

Amen.
PREVENTIVE PRAYER
Acts 12:5

"But prayer was made:" James has just died a martyr's death. Simon Peter is safely locked in prison and Herod has fixed the day for his execution. The powers of Rome are behind Herod so that Simon's doom seems an absolute certainty. But something happened that upset Herod's plans. What was it? When all seemed lost, prayer was made. Under such circumstances we moderns would perhaps appoint a committee. We would exert political pressure. But those old saints had only one weapon: They resorted to united, persistent, definite prayer, with the result that a tragedy that seemed an absolute certainty was never allowed to happen. Prayer is a great cure, but its best use is as a preventive.

Thou art teaching us afresh, O Lord, that it is not by might nor power, but by Thy Spirit alone that we can win. Amen.
"But God."
These are words that we read in Scripture again and again. Man in his pride is constantly assuming that he has the final word. But the final word is always with God. When Annas and his allies had seen Jesus die upon the Cross, they were sure that they were through with Him. "But God."
what is the rest of the sentence? "But God raised Him from the dead." Again and again through the troubled centuries all has seemed lost. But always over against such tragedy has stood the eternal God. At times you and I feel that there is little hope for our becoming our best or for our helping in the building of a better world. But these dark days come only when we lose our grip on God. We are weak; I know, "But God..."

We thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou wilt not fail; not be discouraged. Give us so to wait on Thee that we may renew our strength; and so run and not be weary, and walk and not faint. Amen.

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THE ART OF GETTING UP
Acts 14:19-23

"He rose up;" Thus it is written of Herod's Paul. This dauntless saint had just been knocked down and left for dead. But even while his enemies and friends were saying, "That is the last of him," he rose up to renew the battle. The other day I saw a mother with a little chap who was learning to walk. He let go his mother's hand only to fall again and again. But after each fall he rose on his own power to renew the struggle. At last he came to the only muddy place in the road. Here he went down, splashing his clean suit, his clean face, and even his mother's temper. Then looking at him with indignation, she asked, "What are you going to do next?" "I am going to get up," came the wise answer. The finest philosophy of life is in that.

We thank Thee, O Lord, that no failure need be final. Give us after every defeat and fall the courage to get up and start anew. Amen.
A SANE INVITATION
Acts 13: 1-15

"If you have anything encouraging to say to the people, speak." What a wise invitation that is! Recently I listened to a sermon by a brilliant minister. He told us what was wrong with the world, but he left us completely in the dark as to what, if anything, was to be done about it. No man has the right to preach a discouraging sermon either publicly or privately. This is not to ignore what is wrong. But always over against the wrong, however great and seemingly strong, there is the fact of Almighty God. Therefore, "If you have anything encouraging to say, speak." If not, at least, have the wisdom to keep silent.

We thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast not given us the spirit of fearfulness, but of power and of love and of sanity. Give us the courage to encourage others.

Amen.
WITH TEARS
Acts 20:25-35

"I ceased not to warn...with tears." A certain minister who sat beside me at a banquet some years ago warned me earnestly against emotionalism. I listened, for he spoke with authority. Both he and his hearers were constantly as tearless as tombstones. But it would seem that Paul sometimes let his emotions get the better of him. There was a time, I am confident, when he was made of sterner stuff; I have an idea that he witnessed the stoning of Stephen without a tear. But that was before the strong and tender Christ had taken captive his heart. Since that experience, along with a deep joy, there were always tears in his heart, if not on his cheeks.

Save us, Lord, from the tragedy of hearts without tenderness.
Give us always to rejoice with them that do rejoice and to weep with them that weep." Amen.
"This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar." Evidently Paul's appeal to Caesar was a mistake. It kept him in chains when he might have gone free. I am not forgetting that God made this blunder to work for good. But even that did not cancel the fact that Paul's appeal was not wise. Always when the saints appeal to Caesar, when they fix their faith on the visible ruler or the visible state, they are headed for trouble. Even when Caesar gives a favorable response, "Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold."

"Save us Lord from our vain confidence in Caesar. Help us always to find our sufficiency in Thee. Amen.

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NEW MANAGEMENT
Like 5:1-8

"Master we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net." Simon Peter had followed the vocation of fishing from his boyhood. Generally speaking, he knew when and where to fish. He knew fish were to be taken at night if at all. But in spite of the fact that he had just come from a night of fruitless toil, in spite of his weariness, he makes another effort. Having thus ventured, he met with success where only failure was to be expected. How did it come about? He cast his net at the command of the Master. Peter's fishing business had come under new management.

We thank Thee, Lord, that Thou canst change our defeat into victory. Give us to do our work day by day under Thy leadership. Amen.
"Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Paul had just assured the hapless crew and passengers that they were going to be saved. "Be of good cheer," he had shouted above the roar of the storm. But though he was certain that God would make good His promises, he knew that He would not and could not do so unless these met certain conditions. For one thing, they must hold together. That thought is surely for your day and mine. We are all in the same boat. We are part of one world. As isolated individuals and nations we cannot be saved. Our only hope lies in learning to live together.

We pray Thee, O God, that we may learn from our tragic past and our bloody present, Give us to act on the principle that unless all nations are safe, every nation is in danger.

Amen.