

PRAYER

"The Lord is far from the wicked; but He heareth the prayer of the righteous." Proverbs 15:29.

"And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Luke 18:1.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James 5:16.

No subject which has to do with the Christian life and Christian service is more important than the subject of prayer. The first sign of the life of faith is prayer, and all advancement in the Christian life, and all success in Christian service are conditioned on the prayer habit. Christian life begins with prayer, is made strong by prayer, and is consummated by prayer. Most of us know more about prayer than we are practicing.

I. What Is Prayer?

1. "It is the turning of the soul Godward."
2. "The human spirit seeking contact with the Divine Spirit."
3. "The deepest impulse of the human soul."
4. "The reaching out of the heart of man toward the heart of God."
5. "The heart talking with God."
6. Prayer is communion with God, committal to God, and cooperation with God. Prayer implies two things, namely, that man is dependent, and that man is capable of fellowship with God. Prayer is an expression of man's sense of helplessness and dependence. It also implies that God is interested in him and his welfare. The primary thing in prayer is God's will rather than man's.

II. What Are Some Elements of Prayer?

1. Adoration.

This is the act of approaching God with a becoming sense of His goodness, greatness, majesty, and glory. Adoration includes reverence, esteem, and love.

2. Confession.

This is both public and private.

3. Thanksgiving.

We should be more thankful for what God gives us.

4. Intercession.

Prayer reaches its highest in intercession, which is the act of one pleading for another. This is both a privilege and an obligation, the neglect of which is sin.

5. Petition.

This means definite requests for definite objects.

III. Why Pray?

We need a new conviction of the indispensable values of prayer. He will never pray as we should until we see prayer as a necessity, indispensable to the life we have undertaken to live.

1. It is a duty.

(1) One we owe to God. A prayerless life dishonors the father-child relationship.

(2) One we owe to others. It brings so many blessings to them.

(3) One we owe to ourselves. Prayer is to the soul what breathing is to the body, what steam is to the engine, what gasoline is to the car, and what water is to the garden. It is as necessary to the soul as food is to the body. Through it we get renewed strength, heavenly wisdom, greater love, and a closer walk with God. However, we should never forget that prayer is costly.

a. It costs time.

Time is needed to prepare our hearts, to banish our worldly thoughts, and to compose our wayward hearts. Time spent in prayer is always profitable. We must take time to pray.

b. It costs thought.

c. It costs toil.

It really costs us physical energy to pray aright. While it takes something out of us physically, prayer always contributes to us spiritually. Satan will use every means possible to keep us from praying.

2. It is a precious privilege.

Man only is permitted to ask of God. "Call on me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee." "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally." "Ask and ye shall receive." Prayer is the greatest resource of any life. The mightiest thing any Christian can do is to pray. One trembles to think what would happen if God's people should really give themselves to prayer.

3. It pleases God.

It brings joy to His heart when His children pray.

4. It accomplishes so much.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." By prayer we harness God's omnipotence to our impotence. Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God.

When a Christian prays, something happens. This is not an imagination, but a glowing reality. When Moses prayed in that great day of Israel's need, the Divine hand was very soon manifest, and something happened. When Daniel prayed with his window opened toward Jerusalem, something happened. When Hezekiah laid Sennacherib's insulting letter before God, 185,000 corpses became the eloquent demonstration that something had indeed happened. When the saints of the early church cried unto God for Peter's deliverance from prison, it was but a very few minutes until the knock of the liberated prisoner on the door without became the astonishing revelation that something had happened. When a Christian gets on his knees, the angels and the demons know that something is going to happen. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." I John 5:14-15.

Tennyson said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Mary, Queen of Scots, declared that "she was more afraid of the prayers of John Knox than she was of all the armies of England." Surely then there is a power in prayer to be reckoned with that most of us have not yet realized. It is power of the Holy Spirit pulsating in the life of the individual who is in tune with God. In Exodus 17 we read that Israel fought with the Amalekites, and as long as Moses' hands were held up before God, Israel prevailed. Elijah prevailed with God on Mount Carmel because of God's willingness to hear and answer prayer. George Mueller of Bristol, England, asked God to help him provide for thousands of homeless children. God heard his prayer and year after year supplied the need of that great orphanage.

"Prayer changes things." Prayer can change your life. Prayer changes circumstances. We accomplish more by praying about our circumstances than by complaining about them. Prayer will conquer adverse circumstances for us.

We need to pray for the salvation of souls. "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Paul said, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved." John Knox cried, "Give me Scotland or I die." Hudson Taylor said, "The nearest way to a man's heart is by God's teaching, our visits, and our entreaties, but the Spirit of God in answer to our prayers will bring them to their knees in conviction and conversion. The ages have proved that intercession is the mightiest weapon God has put into the hands of His children. Mueller prayed every day for sixty years for the souls of two men. As he lay on his death bed one of them was saved, and the other was saved after Mueller passed away. God was richly honored by such persistent faith.

God's child can conquer everything by prayer, but he has no power without it. Dr. William Evans related an experience in a hotel in Great Britain. He said that he was unable to get the gas to light in a grate on a cold day. It was the law of the gas company that a shilling had to be placed in a certain slot before the gas would come on and heat could be produced. It was either a shilling or no heat. With us, it is prayer or no power.

The prayer that God can answer must come from the heart and lips of one who knows Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour, it must be made in faith, it must be made to God in the name of Christ, it must be made in an unselfish spirit, it must be for something that is needed, it must be coming from a life that is being lived in obedience to God's commands and will, and it must be prayed by one who is willing to help God answer his own prayer. Show me someone who really knows how to pray, and I will show you someone who is successful in the Lord's service. Our success in the Lord's work depends entirely upon our prayers. No praying means no results, little praying means few results, and much praying of the right sort means great results.