

PRAYER

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

For time immemorial men have prayed. Men have prayed in the privacy of the closet and in the public place, and under circumstances of all sorts. They have prayed for various things: Hezekiah for lengthened life, Hannah for a son, Elijah for rain, David for mercy, Daniel for help, Bartimaeus for sight, and Paul for grace. They have prayed in morning, at noon, and at night. They have prayed in childhood, in youth, in manhood or womanhood, and in old age.

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. The 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. Those who have made the greatest impact on the world and left the best influences behind them have been men and women of prayer. If we are to please God and to influence people properly, we must understand the meaning of prayer and learn to pray.

I. What is Prayer?

1. Definitions of Prayer.

- (1) "Prayer is the turning of the soul God-ward."
- (2) "Prayer is the reaching out of the heart of man toward the heart of God."
- (3) "Prayer is the human spirit seeking contact with the Divine Spirit."
- (4) "Prayer is the native and deepest impulse of the soul."
(Carlyle)
- (5) "Prayer is the converse of the soul with God."
- (6) "Prayer is weakness leaning on Omnipotence."
- (7) "Prayer is an avowal of our creature dependence."
- (8) "Prayer is laying hold on God's highest willingness."
(Archbishop Trench)

2. 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. Particular confession is more frequently used in private praying. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I John 1:9.

- (3) Thanksgiving.
In thanksgiving the thoughts are turned to what God has done for us and the soul praises Him for a gift. We should be more thankful for what God gives us.
- (4) Intercession.
Intercession is the act of talking with God for another or others. Many have been saved, healed, blessed, and made a blessing because consecrated men and women have interceded in their behalf. 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 making definite requests for specific blessings. "Let your request be made known unto God."
- (6) Dedication.
Prayer is more than merely asking God for something. It is putting ourselves at God's disposal to do what He wills in and with and through us. In real prayer we dedicate ourselves to more faithful obedience of Him.

II. Why pray?

1. It is a duty.
 - (1) A duty we owe to God.
It honors the Father-Child relationship.
 - (2) A duty we owe to others.
It brings so many blessings to them.
 - (3) A duty we owe to ourselves.
Through prayer we get renewed strength, heavenly wisdom, greater life, and a closer walk with God.
2. It is a 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.
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. Prayer changes circumstances. We accomplish more by praying about our circumstances than by complaining about them. God's child can conquer everything by prayer, but he has no power without it. Our success in the Lord's work depends upon our prayers. No praying will mean no results, little praying will mean few results, and much praying of the right sort will mean great results.

III. How would God have us to pray?

1. Pray without hypocrisy.

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." Matthew 6:5. In prayer we must not be anxious to be seen or heard of men. At the dedication of Bunker Hill Monument one of New England's preacher-orators prayed. A Boston newspaper next day said, "It was one of the finest prayers ever delivered to a Boston audience."

Hypocrisy is play acting. Prayer is not acting a part before God. God sees through our pretense. Once Jesus refused to grant a sign on demand. "And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting Him. And He sighed deeply in His spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation." Mark 8:11-12. Once Jesus refused to give His credentials to those who opposed Him. But Jesus never refused an earnest request for physical or spiritual help. In prayer you are dealing with God. You cannot deceive God. Prayer as prayed from hypocritical hearts and lives of sham are as dust clouds that bring no rain--or empty wells from which no water is drawn.

2. Pray sincerely.

"In truth" means "sincerely," or "with reality." We must sincerely desire the things for which we ask.

3. Pray privately.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Matthew 6:6. Shut out everything and everybody except God and you. We need to get into the private place with God before we go into the public place for God. We need to hide ourselves with God before we show ourselves for God. Dr. A. C. Dixon said, "Prayer may be public or private, but it must always be secret in the sense that it is a personal transaction between the soul and God."

4. Pray in faith.

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Hebrews 11:6.

To the father of the demoniac boy, Jesus said, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Mark 9:23--24.

5. Pray earnestly.

6. Pray intelligently.

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." Psalm 19:14.

7. Pray definitely.
Jesus teaches us to be definite in our praying. If we want sickness taken away, pray for that definitely. "Whatsoever things you desire, pray for them!" is what Jesus said. "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." We should not generalize in vague petitions.
8. Pray with importunity.
This means to pray with urgency of request, to solicit persistently, to plead with persistent entreaties, to be pressingly solicitous.
9. Pray submissively.
We are willing that God should answer in His own time and in His own way. God may keep us waiting for a time. God loves us and knows what is best for us.

Submissively Jesus prayed in Gethsemane saying, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Matthew 26:39. Christ's main thought was God's will. Submissive praying is endeavoring to make our wills cooperative with His eternal good will.

"Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter,
I am the clay.
Mould me and make me
After Thy will,
While I am waiting,
Yielded and still.

"Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Search me and try me,
Master, Today!
Whiter than snow, Lord,
Wash me just now,
As in Thy presence
Humbly I bow.

"Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Wounded and weary,
Help me, I pray!
Power--all power--
Surely is Thine!
Touch me and heal me,
Saviour divine!

"Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Hold o'er my being
Absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit
Till all shall see
Christ only, always,
Living in me!"

10. Pray forgivingly.
Our love toward God is evidenced by our love toward others. That is why we are enjoined to put away all envies and jealousies when we approach the mercy seat. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither shall your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." Mark 11:25--26.
11. Pray in the name of Christ.
"If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." John 14:14. Repeatedly Jesus said, "Abide in Me." This means that if we want God to answer our requests, we must live in Him. We must put the wishes, and aims, and purposes of God first. There must be no selfish motive on our part, but faith, adoration, submission, and confidence.
12. Pray in accordance with God's will.
13. Pray expectantly.
The faith of expectancy is not just believing that God can do what we ask, but that He will do what we ask, provided it is for His glory, for the good of others, and for our ultimate welfare.
14. Pray persistently.
For more than sixty years George Mueller prayed for the conversion of two men. One of these men was converted a year before Mueller died, and the other a year after his death.