

LIFT UP YOUR EYES AND PRAY

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished" (Isaiah 51:6).

There is not a subject which has to do with the life and service of a Christian that is any more important than the subject of prayer. All advancement in the Christian life and all successes in Christian service are conditioned on the prayer habit.

I. What Is Prayer?

Dr. William Lyon Phelps said, "Prayer is the preface to Christian living; the text of the new life sermon; the putting on of the armor for battle; the pilgrim's separation for his journey." In his book, "The Meaning Of Prayer", James Montgomery has more simply defined prayer when he said, "Prayer is the sincere desire of the heart, spoken or unuttered." Prayer has also been defined as, "The human spirit seeking contact with the Divine Spirit," and as, "The reaching out of the heart of man toward the heart of God." Prayer is an expression of man's sense of helplessness and dependence.

We should correct the age-old idea that prayer is simply making a request of God, always asking for something. It is infinitely more than that -- it is communion with God, committal to God, companionship with God, and cooperation with God. Even though we do not have any request to make of God, we should still want to talk with Him. Where there is real and vital communion, prayer takes on a different meaning.

II. Our Exemplar In Prayer.

Much of the earthly life of Christ was given to meditation and prayer. To Him prayer was not a mere formality, but a most vital experience. His inherent sinlessness did not warrant His neglecting to pray. Having heard their Lord pray on various occasions, the disciples felt their own incompetency in this high and holy task. On one occasion, one of them said: "Lord, teach us to pray." This request was an acknowledgment of need and a confession of ignorance. It was an expression of a desire to know how to pray, the necessity of being taught to pray, a willingness to be taught, and a plea to the One Who is able to teach us. This prayer should be our deep desire. We will never learn to pray more effectively unless we have a desire or longing to do so. So far as we have any record, "Lord, teach us to pray," is the only thing that the disciples ever asked Him to teach them. They knew that when they really learned to pray that the power of God would be at their disposal.

To Christ prayer meant communion with the Father, which He considered to be something which was too precious to be missed, and commitment to His Father's business, which He knew to be too important and necessary to be neglected. If Christ felt the need of prayer so highly, and was never too busy to pray, we, His followers, should be faithful in our prayer life. Prayerless Christians can neither hinder the work of Satan nor advance the cause of Christ.

In response to the request, "Lord, teach us to pray," Christ gave His disciples the Model Prayer. This Model Prayer is so simple that a little child can understand it, and, yet, it is so profound that its depths are unfathomable though a scholar spend a lifetime in the study of it.

The first lesson that Christ teaches in this remarkable prayer is that of a right conception of the One to Whom we pray. Our conception of Him will determine both

the nature and the expectancy of our prayers. We are to think of God as "our Father." He is perfect in His knowledge of us and in His love for us. God is eager to answer our prayers when we ask for the things which are in accordance with His blessed will. He will provide for us and protect us from harm.

The petition, "Hallowed be thy name," stands first in the Model Prayer as if to teach us that we must come before God with reverence for His perfect holiness and godly fear on account of our utter unworthiness. To hallow God's name is to set it apart from all abuses and use it reverently.

In the statement, "Thy kingdom come" we find a two fold meaning -- it is a prayer for a kingdom of grace and an anticipation of a kingdom of glory. The first is personal and claims a present experience; the second is prophetic and anticipates the future. No one can truly pray, "Thy kingdom come in the world" until first he has prayed "Thy kingdom come in my heart." It is a prayer for His rule in the region of the mind, heart, and will. This prayer is an acknowledgment of our utter dependence upon God. If the kingdom is ever to come, it will do so through God's power. "Thy kingdom come" means "Lord, come into our hearts; take the throne there; rule there; make us completely Thine." It means that God's will rather than our own may be done. Do we really want that?

"Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth." Only human beings resist the will of God. Multitudes of them are in rebellion against God and refuse to do His will. God's will is revealed to His children through the Holy Scriptures and by the Holy Spirit. The two things of preeminent importance with reference to God's will are the discovery and the doing of it. We are to do his will to avert self-injury, to secure happiness, to express our love for God, and to glorify God.

"Give us day by day our daily bread." This is the first petition in the prayer in which the suppliant asks anything for himself. This is another acknowledgment of dependence on God, the giver of the blessings which we enjoy, including the breath of life, vigor of mind, and strength of body. We do not have anything which we have not received. It is both our privilege and duty, as children of God, to pray for temporal blessings. God knows exactly what we need to make us more Christlike and to make us vessels unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use.

"And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." Just as we need to go to God for daily bread so we should ask Him for daily mercy for daily sin. This prayer is concerned with the sins of the children of God which mar their fellowship with Him. Nobody will ever find forgiveness for sins committed unless he shows forgiveness to other people. Until we forgive, God simply cannot forgive us. In order to receive forgiveness we must forgive.

"And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." This is a prayer for protection in the future, an expression of a longing to be emancipated from the power of sin. It is a request that God not lead us into a period of testing because we are so prone to break down under the trial. Unless the Lord matches the onslaughts of Satan with His omnipotent strength, we shall be defeated. He will enable us to overcome temptations.

Each of our prayers should be for the things which are in accordance with God's will, and as a pledge to do all within our power to bring about the answer to our prayers. We must be willing to put action with our prayers. One requisite of true praying is that we are willing to cooperate with God in answering our requests.

The Hill Of Prayer

The Master climbed the hill of prayer
And left behind a world of care
To breathe that rich, faith-scented air --

For God was waiting for Him there.

Should we not climb the hill of prayer?
Hard are the burdens that we bear.
Let us advance! The vision's fair,
For God is waiting for us there."

-- H. Victor Kane