

HOW TO PRAY EFFECTIVELY

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

Prayer is "the deepest impulse of the soul;" "the reaching out of the heart of man toward the heart of God;" "the heart talking with God;" communion with God, committal to God, and cooperation with God. Prayer is an expression of man's sense of helplessness and dependence. The primary thing in prayer is the will of God, discovering and doing it.

Why should we pray? First, because it is a duty—one that we owe to God, to others, and to ourselves. Second, because it is a precious privilege—"ask and ye shall receive." Third, because it pleases God—bringing great joy to Him. Fourth, because it accomplishes so much. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Through prayer we fasten God's omnipotence to our impotence. Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God.

When Moses prayed in that day of Israel's great need, the divine hand was manifested quickly, and something happened. When Daniel prayed with his window opened toward Jerusalem, something happened. When Hezekiah laid Sennacherib's insulting letter before God, one hundred eighty-five thousand 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 not very long until Peter knocked on the door of the house where they had prayed, and they knew that something had happened. When a Christian truly prays, something is sure 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 heareth 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." Prayer changes things.

Prayer is the greatest force in Christian service, and yet the most neglected one. The business of prayer has rules, and by these rules God abides. How would God have us to pray?

I. Sincerely.

"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 never be anxious to be seen or to be heard of men. At the dedication of Bunker Hill Monument one of New England's preacher-orators prayed. Next day a Boston newspaper 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. He always sees through all pretense. In prayer you are dealing with God, and He cannot be deceived. "Sincerely" means "in truth," or "with reality." We must sincerely desire the things for which we ask.

II. 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. Dr. A. C. Dixon wisely 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."

III. Believingly.

"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).

IV. 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).

V. Definitely.

Christ said, "Whatsoever things you desire, pray for them." We must not generalize in vague petitions. If you want something, pray definitely for it.

VI. Forgivingly.

One's love toward God is evidenced by his love toward others. That is why our Lord said: "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).

VII. Submissively.

In Gethsemane Christ prayed submissively, 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). Our Lord's main thought was the will of God. Above everything else, He was concerned with the doing of that will.

When we pray we must be submissive to God's will also. Let's be willing for Him to answer us in His own time and in His own way. God may not give us what we request as soon as we ask for it. He may keep us waiting for a time. He loves us and knows what is best for us. Let us make our wills submissive to His will. In the words of the song, say, "Have Thine own way, Lord!"

VIII. 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 that it is for His glory, for the benefit of others, and for our own ultimate welfare.

IX. Persistently.

For more than sixty years George Mueller prayed for the salvation of two men. One of these men was saved a year before Mueller died, and the other man was saved a year after Mueller had gone to heaven.