

The Importance of Prayer

An informed Protestant commentator says that "many Christians today, including theologians openly acknowledge that their prayer life is virtually nonexistent."

A rather sad observation, but not too surprising. Many Christians are spiritually poverty-stricken. Ours is not a time of spiritual power. But it should not puzzle us that many find it difficult to pray these days.

The vertical relationship with God is de-emphasized while the horizontal relationship with God is stressed to such an extent that little room is left for prayer. We have to be with it in the here and the now. We apparently don't need to tap any more the fountain of spiritual life giving waters in order to get the strength to be the doers of the faith.

Yet, thoughtful Christians know that they cannot do without prayer. When Christians scan the affairs of men and of nations with a discerning spirit, they cannot help but pray. The needs of the world make them turn to God.

Furthermore, they study the Scriptures and discover that God commands them to pray. Yes, the Almighty God tells them to pray! They have no choice in the matter. And why shouldn't they pray? If God is their Father through Jesus Christ, the Lord, shouldn't there be regular conversation?

Prayer is miraculous. Imagine human beings talking with the Almighty God! Yes, Christians do converse with God. Prayer is never a one way communication. Of course many prayers have no address and are like telegrams sent to nowhere.

You have desperate people who send up a quick prayer. They consider prayer just like a button you need to push in case of fire, an emergency measure. Others consider God like a grocery store. You send in your list of wants and there will be automatic delivery.

How is it possible that small, finite men are allowed to talk with the Almighty and infinite God? Why does God still bother to listen to His creatures? Why is it that God can listen to each one of us individually while at the very moment that we are praying thousands of fellow Christians around the world are praying?

There have always been questions, intellectual difficulties, and personal trials to challenge the people as they try to pray. We find the greatness of God so hard to grasp. But prayer is beautiful, real and yet mysterious. We commune with the Almighty God who is there, and not with a man. We forget this so often. We try to pull God into our system of thought. He has to follow our wishes and has to conform to our thought pattern, as if He were like one of us.

Prayer has always sustained Christians. They have always considered it as important as the air they breathe. They knew that without prayer spiritual life withers and dies. No

exuberant relationship with God was considered possible without this daily prayer fellowship.

The Reformer Martin Luther wrote:

"Though I am sinful and unworthy, still I have the commandment of God, telling me to pray, and His promise, that He will graciously hear me, not on account of my worthiness, but on account of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Martin Luther was a very busy man, but he was a man of much prayer. Adoniram Judson, one of the greatest American missionaries, was emphatic in his insistence upon prayer. He remarked: "Be resolute in prayer. Make any sacrifice to maintain it. Consider that time is short and that business and company must not be allowed to rob thee of thy God."

Miss Helen Willis, a missionary who was able to operate a Christian bookshop in Shanghai until April 1958, wrote a book, *Through Encouragement of the Scriptures: Ten Years in Communist Shanghai*, after she was expelled. She tells how communists' hated and feared prayer.

One charge against her was that she had supplied information used by the imperialists as prayer topics. She tells of a young man in the far west of China, an only son, who prayed for his widowed mother with an incurable disease in Shanghai. In prison he was told that he would be released if he stopped praying; but he would not.

How we need this spirit of prayer today! Spiritual vitality can only come through persistent prayer. Much prayer is needed! Never think that praying is a waste of precious time! We can pray with assurance and confidence, and make our petitions for others and ourselves, but only when we go to the right address. When we come in trust to God through Jesus Christ, we will be heard. Like the disciples we should plead: "Lord, teach us to pray."

Johan D. Tangelder
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