

Prayer

by Sadhu Sundar Singh

Prayer is an effort to lay hold of God Himself, the Author of life, and to discover His will for ourselves.

Scripture: Matthew 12:10, Matthew 25:1, John 4:14, John 14:2, Ephesians 2:6

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Sadhu Sundar Singh emphasizes the importance of prayer as a means to lay hold of God Himself, rather than just seeking material blessings. He explains that through prayer, believers can discover God's will for their lives and receive both spiritual and temporal blessings. He compares the life of prayer to breathing in the Holy Spirit, which fills believers with everlasting life and enables them to navigate the challenges of the world without being tainted by sin. Sadhu Sundar Singh also highlights the transformative power of prayer, illustrating how it leads to communion with God, spiritual growth, and the ability to overcome the world, Satan, and self.

Transcript

SECTION I

The Disciple,--Sometimes this question is asked, "Since God is fully aware of our needs, and knows how to supply them in the best way, not for the good only but for the evil, how should we pray to Him about them? Whether our necessities be temporal or spiritual, can we by our prayers alter the will of God?"

The Master,--1. Those who ask such a question show clearly that they do not know what prayer is. They have not lived a prayerful life, or they would know that prayer to God is not a form of begging. Prayer does not consist in an effort to obtain from God the things which are necessary for this life. Prayer is an effort to lay hold of God Himself, the Author of life, and when we have found Him who is the source of life and have entered into communion with Him, then the whole of life is ours and with Him all that will make life is perfect. To evildoers God, out of love for them, gives what is necessary for their life in this world, but their spiritual necessities He does not even show to them, as they have no spiritual life.

Were He to bestow such spiritual blessings upon them, they would not be able to appreciate them. But on those who believe gifts of both kinds are bestowed, especially spiritual blessings, with the result that very soon they pay little regard to temporal blessings, but fix their love on the unseen and spiritual. We cannot alter the will of God, but the man of prayer can discover the will of God with regard to himself. For to men of this kind God makes Himself manifest in the hidden chamber of the heart, and holds communion with

them; and when His gracious purposes are shown to be for their good, then the doubts and difficulties of which they complain pass away for ever.

2. Prayer is, as it were, a breathing in of the Holy Spirit, and God so pours His Holy Spirit into the life of the prayerful that they become "living souls" (Gen. ii.7; John xx.22). They will never die, for the Holy Spirit pours Himself by means of prayer into their spiritual lungs, and fills their spirits with health and vigour and everlasting life.

God, who is Love, has freely bestowed on all men those things which are necessary for both the spiritual and temporal life, but since He offers salvation and His Holy Spirit to all as freely, they are lightly esteemed. But prayer teaches us to value them, because they are as necessary as air and water, heat and light, without which life is impossible. The things for our spiritual life God has freely provided, but men so lightly regard them that they offer no thanks to their Creator; but on the other hand, His gifts of gold, silver, and precious jewels, which are scarce and obtained with great difficulty, they highly esteem, though with such things the hunger and thirst of the body cannot be assuaged, nor the longings of the heart be satisfied. With such folly do men of the world act with regard to spiritual things, but to the man of prayer are given true wisdom and eternal life.

3. This world is like a widespread ocean in which men sink and are drowned, but marine animals carry on their life in the deepest water, because they occasionally come to the surface and, opening their mouths, take in a certain amount of air, which enables them to live in the depths. So they who rise to the surface of this life-ocean, by means of private prayer breathe in the life-giving Spirit of God, and find even in this world life and safety.

4. Although fish spend their whole life in the salt water of the sea, yet they do not themselves become salty, because they have life in them; so the man of prayer, though he has to live in this sin-defiled world, remains free of the sinful taint, because by means of prayer his life is maintained.

5. Just as the salt water of the sea is drawn upwards by the hot rays of the sun, and gradually takes on the form of clouds, and, turned thus into sweet and refreshing water, falls in showers on the earth (for the sea water as it rises upwards leaves behind it its salt and bitterness), so when the thoughts and desires of the man of prayer rise aloft like misty emanations of the soul, the rays of the Sun of Righteousness purify them of all sinful taint, and his prayers become a great cloud which descends from heaven in a shower of blessing, bringing refreshment to many on the earth.

6. Just as the waterfowl spends its life swimming in the water, yet when in flight its feathers are perfectly dry, so men of prayer have their abode in this world, but when the time comes for them to fly aloft they pass from this sin-polluted world and arrive without spot or stain at their everlasting home of rest.

7. The ship, quite properly, has its place in the water, but for the water to flow into the ship is both unsuitable and dangerous. So for a man to have his abode in this world is right and good for himself and others, for, keeping himself afloat, he will be able to help them to arrive along with himself at the haven of life. But for the world to find its way into his heart means death and destruction. Therefore the man of prayer ever reserves his heart for Him who formed it to be His temple, and thus both in this world and that which is to come he rests in peace and safely.

8. We all know that without water it is impossible to live; but if we sink beneath it we choke and die. While we need to make use of and drink water, we ought not to fall into and sink beneath it. Therefore the world

and worldly things must be used with discretion, for without them life is not only difficult but impossible. For this very purpose God created the world that men might make use of it, but men should not drown themselves in it, for thus the breath of prayer is stopped and they perish.

9. If by ceasing to live the life of prayer the life of the spirit begins to fail, then those worldly things which are intended to be useful become hurtful and destructive. The sun by its light and heat makes all vegetable things to live and flourish, and also causes them to wither and die. The air also gives life and vigour to all living beings, but itself is the cause of their decomposition. Therefore "Watch and Pray."

10. We ought so to live in this world that though we are in it we are not of it, and then the things of this world instead of being hurtful will be useful, and will help the growth of the spiritual life; but only on this condition, that the spirit ever keeps its face turned towards the Sun of Righteousness. Thus it sometimes happens that in a plot of unclean and filthy ground flowers spring up and flourish, and the sweet scent of the flowers overpowers the evil smell of the place. The plants, turning towards the sun, receive from it light and heat, and the filth instead of being hurtful to the plants fertilizes them and helps them to grow and flourish. So, too, the man of prayer as he prays turns his heart to Me, and receives from Me light and warmth, and amidst the ill odours of this evil world the sweet scent of his new and holy life glorifies Me, and there is produced in him not sweet odours only, but also fruit which shall abide for ever.

SECTION II

1. To pray does not imply that without prayer God would not give us anything or that He would be unaware of our needs, but it has this great advantage, that in the attitude of prayer the soul is best fitted to receive the Giver of blessing as well as those blessings He desires to bestow. Thus it was that the fullness of the Spirit was not poured out upon the Apostles on the first day, but after ten days of special preparation.

If a blessing were conferred upon one without a special readiness for it, he would neither value it sufficiently nor long retain it. For instance, because Saul obtained the Holy Spirit and the kingship without seeking for them he very soon lost them both, for he had set out from home not to obtain the Holy Spirit but to look for his lost asses (1 Sam. ix.3; x.11; v.13-14; xxxi.4).

2. The man of prayer alone can worship God in spirit and truth. Others are like the sensitive plant; during worship, affected by the teaching and presence of the Holy Spirit, they shrivel up, as it were, and bowing their heads become serious, but scarcely have they left the church before they brighten up and go on as before.

3. If we do not take care of a tree or a shrub which bears good fruit or flowers, it will degenerate and go back to its wild state. In the same way, if the believer, through the neglect of prayer and the spiritual life, ceases to abide in Me, he will, because of this carelessness, fall from that state of blessedness, and sinking again into his old sinful ways be lost.

4. When we see a crane standing motionless on the side of a tank or lake, we may suppose from his attitude that he is musing on the glory of God or the excellent quality of the water. But no such thing! He stand there motionless for hours, but the moment he catches sight of a frog or small fish he springs upon it and gulps it down. Just such is the attitude and method of many with regard to prayer and religious meditation. Seated by the shore of the boundless ocean of God, they give no thought to His majesty and love, or to His divine nature that cleanses from sin and satisfies the hungry soul, but are wrapped up in the thought of acquiring some specially desired object, by means of which they may more fully indulge in the

delights of this fleeting world. Thus they turn away from the fountain of true peace, and, immersing themselves in the fading joys of this world, with them also die and pass away.

5. Water and petrol both come from the earth, and though they seem to be alike and even the same, they are in nature and purpose exact opposites, for the one extinguishes fire and the other adds fuel to it. So also the world and its treasures, the heart and its thirst for God are alike His creation. Now the result of the attempt to satisfy the heart with the wealth and pride and honours of this world is the same as if one tried to put out a fire with petrol, for the heart can only find ease and satisfaction in Him who created both it and the longing desire of which it is conscious (Ps. xlii.1,2). Therefore whoever now comes to Me I will give to him that living water so that he will never again thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life (John iv.14).

6. Men try in vain to find peace in the world and the things of the world, for experience plainly shows that true peace and satisfaction are not to be found in them. They are like the boy who found an onion and began peeling off its skins in the hope of finding something inside it, just as one finds in a box on taking the lid off. But his was an altogether futile expectation, since he found nothing but the last skin, for an onion is nothing but a collection of skins. And this world and all that belongs to it has been proved to be vanity of vanities (Eccles. xii.8), until men discover the true fountain of peace (Isa. lv.1; Jer. ii.13; Rev. xxii.17).

7. The world is like a mirage, and the truth seeker, hoping to find something to satisfy his thirsty spirit, starts off in search of it but meets with nothing but disappointment and despair. The water of life cannot be found in man-made tanks or cracked cisterns; but those who approach Me in prayer with a pure heart will find in Me, who am the source of the living water, that from which they may obtain satisfaction, invigoration, and eternal life (Isa. lv.1; Jer. ii.13; Rev. xxii.17).

A woman was traveling along a mountain track, carrying her child in her arms, when the child, catching sight of a pretty flower, made such a spring out of its mother's arms that it fell headlong down the mountain side, struck its head upon a rock, and died on the spot. Now it is perfectly clear that the safety and sustenance of the child were to be found in its mother's bosom, and not in those fascinating flowers which were the cause of its death. So acts the believer whose life is not a life of prayer. When he catches sight of the fleeting and fascinating pleasures of the world he forgets My love and care which are far greater than those of the mother, and, neglecting that spiritual milk which I provide for him, leaps out of My arms and is lost.

9. The sustenance which the mother provides is so arranged that it cannot be obtained without some effort on the part of the infant. So also My children whom I bear in My bosom cannot obtain without seeking, the spiritual milk which is able to save their souls. And as the child does not need to be taught, but knows by instinct where and how to obtain its food, so those who are born of the Spirit know by a spiritual instinct, and not from worldly philosophy or wisdom, how to pray and to obtain from Me, their spiritual Mother, the milk of eternal life.

10. I have infused into man's nature hunger and thirst, that he may not in sheer heedlessness regard himself as God, but that day by day he may be reminded of his needs and that his life is bound up with the life and existence of Someone who created him. Thus being made aware of his defects and necessities, he may abide in Me and I in him, and then he will ever find in Me his happiness and joy.

SECTION III

1. To pray is as it were to be on speaking terms with Me, and so by being in communion with and abiding in Me to become like Me. There is a kind of insect which feeds upon and lives among grass and green leaves and becomes like them in colour. Also the polar bear dwelling among the white snows has the same snowy whiteness, and the tiger of Bengal bears upon its skin the marks of the reeds among which it lives. So those, who by means of prayer abide in communion with Me partake, with the saints and angels, of My Nature, and being formed in My image become like Me.

2. When for but a short time I drew Peter, James, and John into communion with Me upon the Mount, I showed them somewhat of My glory, and of all the saints two only, Moses and Elias, appeared to them; they were so captivated with that brief glimpse of heavenly glory that they wished to erect three tabernacles in order to live there (Matt. xvii.1-5). How wonderful, then, will be the happiness of those who abide in Me, and with saints and angels innumerable enter into their longed-for heaven, and share with Me My full glory which knows no loss nor shadow of change (John xvii.24; James i.17). The man of prayer shall never be alone, but he shall abide with Me and My holy ones for ever (Matt. xxviii.20; Zach. iii.7-8).

3. It is not a great thing to control and make use of wild animals, lightning, the wind, and light, and other powers of nature, but to gain the mastery over the world and Satan and self, with all its passions, is of a truth a most momentous and necessary thing. Upon those only who live a life of prayer do I bestow the power to overcome all the might of the enemy (Luke x.17,20), so that even while they live in this world they abide with Me in the heavenly places (Eph. ii.6), and Satan being below and they above he is never able to reach them, but they abide for ever with Me in safety and without a tremor of fear.

Although men have now obtained control over the powers of nature they are not to travel beyond the bounds of the air, while the man of prayer, having mastered Satan and self, can range at will the everlasting heavens.

4. Just as the bee collects the sweet juice of the flowers and turns it into honey without injuring their colour or fragrance, so the man of prayer gathers happiness and profit from all God's creation without doing any violence to it. As bees also gather their honey from flowers in all sorts of different places and store it in the honeycomb, so the man of God gathers sweet thoughts and feelings from every part of creation, and in communion with his Creator collects in his heart the honey of truth, and in enduring peace with Him at all times and in all places, tastes with delight the sweet honey of God.

5. Now is the time to obtain and keep in the vessels of our hearts the oil of the Holy Spirit, as the five wise virgins did (Matt. xxv.1-13); otherwise like the five foolish ones we shall meet with nothing but grief and despair. Now also you must collect the manna for the true Sabbath, otherwise there will be nothing left you but sorrow and woe (Ex. xvi.15,27). "Pray, therefore, that your flight may not be in the winter," that is, in time of great distress or the last days, "or on the Sabbath day," that is, the reign of a thousand years of eternal rest, for such an opportunity will never occur again (Matt. xxiv.20).

In the same way as climate produces a change in form, colour, and the habits of growth in plants and flowers, so those who maintain communion with Me undergo a development of their spiritual nature in habit, appearance, and disposition; and putting off the old man they are transformed into My own glorious and incorruptible image.

With my finger I wrote upon the ground the sinful state of each of those who, regardless of their inner vileness, brought the woman taken in adultery for condemnation, so that they left her one by one and went away abashed and ashamed. With My finger, too, I point out in secret to My servants their wounds of sin,

and when they repent, with a touch of the same finger I heal them; and in the same way as a child grasps his father's finger and by it help walks along with him, so I with My finger lead My children along the road from this world to their home of rest and everlasting peace (John xiv.2,3).

7. Oftentimes men pray to the Father in My name, but do not abide in Me, that is, they take My name into their mouths and on their lips, but not into their hearts and lives. That is the reason why they do not obtain what they pray for. But when I abide in them and they in Me, then whatever they ask from the Father they receive, because they pray under the direction of the Holy Spirit in that condition. The Holy Spirit shows them what will glorify the Father and be best for themselves and for others. Otherwise they will get such an answer as a bad son got from a governor whom his father had served with great courage and honour. When the son presented a petition in his father's name and asked for some employment and favour, the governor pointed out to him his evil life and habits, and said, "Do not petition me in your father's name, but first go and act according to his example. Let his high worth be not on your lips only, but carry it into your life, and then your petition will be accepted."

8. Between the prayers of those who worship and praise Me with their lips only and of those who do so from their heart there is a very great difference. For instance, one who was a true worshipper was constantly praying for another that his eyes might be opened and that he might accept the truth, while the other was a worshipper in name only often prayed in his enmity against My true worshipper that he might be struck blind. Finally the prayers of the true worshipper were heard by the loving will of God, and he who was formerly only a hypocrite received spiritual sight. With his heart full of joy this man became a true believer, and a sincere and lasting brother of My true servant.

9. Prayer makes things possible for men which they find impossible by other means, and they experience such wonderful things in life as are not only opposed to the rules and opinions of worldly wisdom, but are held to be impossible altogether. Scientific men do not recognize that He who set all created things in order and made laws for them, cannot be imprisoned behind the bars of his own laws. The ways of the great Lawgiver are inscrutable, because His eternal will and purpose is the blessing and prosperity of all His creatures, and the reason the natural man cannot grasp this fact is because spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. ii.14).

The greatest of all miracles is the new birth in man, and to the man who has experienced this miracle all others become possible. Now in very cold countries a bridge of water is a common sight, because when the surface of a river is frozen hard the water beneath still flows freely on, but men cross over the icy bridge with ease and safety. But if one were to speak of a bridge of water spanning a flowing river to people who are constantly perspiring in the heat of a tropical clime, they would at once say that such a thing was impossible and against the laws of nature. There is the same great difference between those who have been born again and by prayer maintain their spiritual life, and those who live worldly lives and value only material things, and so are utterly ignorant of the life of the soul.

10. He who desires by prayer to obtain from God the blessing of a spiritual life must believe and obey without questioning. The man who came to Me with a withered hand, when I commanded him to stretch out his hand instantly obeyed, and so his hand became whole as the other (Matt. xii.10-13). But suppose instead of that instant obedience he had begun to argue and say, "How can I stretch out my hand? If I had been able to do that, why should I have come to Thee? First of all heal my hand, and then I shall be able to stretch it out." All this would have been considered very reasonable and to the point, but his hand would never have been healed.

He who prays must believe and be obedient, and stretch out to Me in prayer his weak and withered hands, and then it will be for Me to give him spiritual life, and according to his need it shall be granted to him (Matt. xxi.22).

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