

What Is Prayer

by Watchman Nee

Prayer is not about compelling God to do something, but about aligning our will with His will and working together with Him to accomplish His work.

Scripture: Isaiah 45:11, Matthew 7:7, Matthew 18:18, Philippians 4:6, James 4:2

Topics: "The Mystery of Prayer", "Collaboration with God"

Description

Watchman Nee explores the profound mystery of prayer, emphasizing that it is not merely about the quantity of our prayers but their alignment with God's will. He poses critical questions about the necessity of prayer, highlighting that God's omniscience and omnipotence do not negate the need for human participation in His divine plans. Nee asserts that prayer is a collaborative act between believers and God, where the prayers of the faithful are essential for the fulfillment of God's will on earth. He concludes that prayer does not change God's ordained plans but is a means through which believers express and align with His will, thus enabling God's work to manifest in the world.

Transcript

Prayer is the most wonderful action in the spiritual realm; it is also the most mysterious matter.

Prayer is a mystery. After we present a few questions concerning prayer, we will see how mysterious prayer is. These questions are hard to answer. But this does not mean that the mystery of prayer is unknowable or that the questions concerning prayers are unanswerable. It merely means that those who have the answers are few. For this very reason, there are few who can accomplish works for God in prayer. It is not a matter of how much we pray, but a matter of how much we have prayed according to the principle of prayer. Only those prayers that are prayed according to the principle of prayer are worthwhile.

The first question we will ask is: why should we pray? What is the use of praying? God is omniscient and omnipotent. Why would He work only after we pray? Since He knows everything, why do we have to tell Him anything (Phil. 4:6)? Since He is almighty, why would He not do it by Himself? Why does He need us to pray? Why is it that only those who pray receive, and those who seek find, and those who knock enter (Matt. 7:7)? Why does God say, "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2)?

After asking the above questions, we also want to ask: is prayer contrary to the will of God? What is the relationship between prayer and justice?

We know that God does not do anything that is contrary to His will. If it is His will to open the door, why does He have to wait until we knock before He will open? Why would He not open the door for us according to His will, without us knocking? He knows everything. If He knows that we need an open door, why will He wait until we knock before He opens? If the door should be open, if it is God's will that there is the open door, and if God knows that we need to have the door open, why does He not just open the door? Why do we have to knock? What convenience does it give to God for us to knock on the door?

We also have to ask: Since God's will is to open the door, and since it is His will to have the door open, will God not open the door if we do not knock? Will He allow His will and His justice to be delayed and not accomplished just for the sake of waiting for our prayer? Will He allow His will of opening the door to be limited by our not knocking on the door?

If this is so, then God's will is restricted by us! Is God really omnipotent? If He is, why can He not open the door independent of us? Why must He wait for us to knock before He will open the door? Will God really accomplish His will? If He will, why does the opening of the door (His will) have to be controlled by our knocking on the door (prayer)?

After we have asked these questions, we will see that prayer is indeed a great mystery. Here we can see a principle of God's work. This principle is that God's people have to pray before God will rise up to work. God's will is accomplished by the prayer of those who belong to Him. The believers' prayers accomplish God's will. God will not accomplish His will alone; He will only accomplish His will when His people are sympathetic with Him in prayer.

If this is the case, prayer is nothing but the believers' act of working together with God. Prayer is the union of the believers' will with God's will. The prayer of the believers on earth is an utterance of God's will in heaven. Prayer is not an utterance of our own wishes, a plea for God to yield to our cry and fulfill our own wishes. Prayer is not to compel God to change His will by force or ask Him to do what He does not want to do. Prayer is the believers' utterance of God's will out of their own mouth; it is the believers' request before God that He accomplish His own will.

Prayer does not change what God has ordained. Prayer never changes anything. Prayer only accomplishes what God has ordained. On the contrary, the lack of prayer and the absence of prayer changes things. When God's people do not work together with God, He will allow many of the things ordained by Him to be delayed and not be fulfilled.

"Truly I say to you, Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). These two sentences are very familiar to us. But they refer to prayer. This is why following this, it says, "Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens" (v. 19).

This passage explains clearly the relationship between prayer and God's work. God in heaven will only bind and loose what His children on earth have bound and loosed. Many things that God should bind, He will not bind alone; instead He wants His people to bind them on earth first, and then He binds them in heaven. Many things that should be loosed, God will not loose them alone; instead He has to wait for His people to loose them on earth before He will loose the same for them in heaven. Every action in heaven is directed on the earth! All the moves in heaven are restricted on the earth! God is willing and happy to let all of His works be managed by His people. (I am not saying such words to fleshly persons, for they are

not qualified to hear such words. We should listen carefully, lest the flesh comes in, and we offend God even more.) In Isaiah there is one passage which says the same thing as it says here: "Thus says Jehovah, / The Holy One of Israel and the One who formed him, / Ask Me about the things to come... / And concerning the work of My hands, command Me" (45:11). When we read this, we should be fearful and not allow the flesh to come in. God wants us--the humble human beings--to command Him! His work is carried out through our commanding. Whether it be binding or loosing, all of God's work in heaven is carried out according to our command on earth.

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