

Prayer

by William MacDonald

The best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity and requires us to be genuine, sincere, and specific in our requests.

Scripture: Nehemiah 2:4, Psalm 66:18, Matthew 18:19-20, John 14:13-14, John 15:7, Philippians 4:6, Hebrews 10:22, James 4:3, 1 John 3:22, 1 John 5:14-15

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "Sincerity in Prayer"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes the profound nature of prayer, asserting that true prayer arises from deep necessity and sincerity. He highlights the importance of approaching God with a genuine heart, avoiding hypocrisy, and being willing to act on our prayers. MacDonald encourages believers to pray simply and boldly, aligning their requests with God's will, and to maintain a close relationship with Him through confession and obedience. He also stresses the value of persistent and specific prayer, suggesting that prayer should be a continuous attitude rather than limited to set times.

Transcript

The only completely satisfactory book that has ever been written on the subject of prayer is the Bible. All other treatments leave us with a feeling that there are depths that have not been reached and heights that have not been scaled. In this booklet, we cannot hope to improve on the efforts of others. All we can do is to summarize some of the important principles of prayer, especially as they have to do with the subject of Christian discipleship.

1. The best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity. We have all proved this to be true. When our lives are serene and placid, our prayers are apt to be dull and listless. When we reach a crisis, a moment of danger, a serious illness, or a heavy bereavement, then our prayers are fervent and vital. Someone has said that "the arrow that is to enter heaven must be launched from a bow fully bent." A sense of urgency, of helplessness, of conscious need is the womb from which the best prayers are born.

Unfortunately, we spend most of our lives trying to cushion ourselves from necessities. By the use of clever business methods, we provide comfortable reserves against every imaginable contingency. Through sheer human cleverness, we reach the stage where we are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. Then we wonder why our prayer life is shallow and lifeless and why no fire falls from heaven. If we truly walked by faith instead of by sight, then our prayer life would be revolutionized.

2. One of the conditions of successful prayer is that we must "draw near with a true heart" (Hebrews 10:22). This means that we must be genuine and sincere before the Lord. There must be no hypocrisy. If we are to meet this condition, then we will never ask God to do something when we have it in our own power to do it. For instance, we will never ask Him to raise up a certain amount of money for a Christian project if we ourselves have surplus funds that could be used in this way. God is not mocked. He does not answer prayers if He has already given us the answer, and we are not willing to use it.

In the same connection, we should not pray for the Lord to send others on His errands if we are not willing to go ourselves. Thousands of prayers have been uttered in behalf of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. But if all who prayed had been willing to be used of the Lord in reaching these people, then perhaps the history of Christian missions would have been more encouraging.

3. Prayer should be simple, believing and unquestioning. It is all too possible to become absorbed with the theological problems connected with prayer. This serves only to dull the spiritual senses. It is better to pray than to solve all the mysteries connected with prayer. Let the doctors of divinity spin their theories concerning prayer. But let the simple believer storm the gates of heaven with childlike trust. It was Augustine who said, "The unlearned take heaven by force, and we with all our learning rise not above flesh and blood."

I know not by what methods rare,
But this I know--God answers prayer.
I know not when He sends the word
That tells us fervent prayer is heard;
I know it cometh soon or late,
Therefore we need to pray and wait.
I know not if the blessing sought
Will come in just the guise I thought.
I leave my prayers with Him alone,
Whose will is wiser than my own.

--Lola C. Henson

4. For true power in prayer, hold nothing back. Be surrendered to Christ. Go all out for Him. Forsake all to follow the Savior. The type of devotion that crowns Christ Lord of all is the kind that He loves to honor.

5. God seems to place a special value on prayer when it costs us something. Those who rise early in the morning enjoy fellowship with the One Who likewise arose early to receive His instructions for the day from His Father. Likewise, those who are in such deadly earnest that they are willing to pray through the night enjoy a power with God that cannot be denied. Prayer that costs nothing is worth nothing; it is simply a by-product of a cheap Christianity.

The New Testament often links prayer with fasting. Abstinence from food can be a valuable aid in spiritual exercises. From the human side, it promotes clarity, concentration and keenness. From the divine standpoint, it seems that the Lord is especially willing to answer prayer when we put that prayer before our necessary food.

6. Avoid selfish prayers. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). The primary burden of our prayers should be the interests of the Lord. First we should pray, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Then we may add, "Give us this day our daily bread."

7. We should honor God with great requests because He is a great God. "Let us have faith to expect great things from God.

Thou art coming to a King,

Large petitions with thee bring

For His love and power are such

Thou canst never ask too much.

--John Newton

How often have we grieved the Lord by expecting so little of Him. We have been content with such scanty triumphs, with such poor attainments, with such feeble longings after higher things, that we have not impressed those around us with the thought that our God is a great God. We have not glorified Him in the eyes of men who know Him not by lives that arrested attention and awakened inquiry as to the power by which they were sustained. Too often it has not been said of us, as was said of the apostle, 'They glorified God in me'--E. W. Moore.

8. In praying, we should first make sure we are in the will of God. Then we should pray, believing that He will hear and answer. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14, 15).

To pray in the Name of the Lord Jesus means to pray in His will. When we truly pray in His Name, it is the same as if He were actually uttering the request to God, His Father. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13, 14). "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (John 16:23). "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:19, 20). "To ask, 'In His Name,' means to be taken by the hand and led to prayer by Him; it means, may I say, His kneeling by our side and His desires flowing through our heart. That is what it means. 'In His Name.' His Name is what He is, His nature, and therefore to pray in the Name of Christ must mean to pray according to His blessed will. Can I pray for evil in the Name of the Son of God? What I pray for should really be an expression of His nature. Can I do that in prayer? Prayer should breathe the power of the Holy Spirit, the mind of Christ, the desires of Christ in us and for us. The Lord teach us more and more to pray in His Name. We should not think of closing a prayer, without the very words: 'In the

blessed Name of our Lord,' but then the whole supplication should be infiltrated by, permeated by the blessed Name of Jesus--all according to that Name"--Samuel Ridout.

9. If our prayer life is to be truly effective, we must keep short accounts with God. By that, we mean that sin must be confessed and forsaken as soon as we are conscious it has entered into our lives. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). We must abide in Christ. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). The person who abides in Christ stays so close to Him that he is filled with a knowledge of the Lord's will. He can thus pray intelligently and be assured of answers. Again, the abiding life demands that we obey His commandments. "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22). A right state of soul is necessary if our prayers are to be heard and answered (1 John 3:20).

10. We should not only pray at certain stated times during the day; we should develop the attitude of prayer, so that we look to the Lord as we are walking along the street, driving in a car, working at a desk, or serving in the home. Nehemiah is a classic example of this spontaneous type of prayer (Nehemiah 2:4b). It is a good thing to "dwell in the secret place of the most High" instead of making occasional visits there.

11. Finally, our prayers should be specific. It is only as we pray for definite matters that we can see definite answers.

Prayer is a marvelous privilege. By this means, we can, as Hudson Taylor said, learn to move man through God. "What ministries are in our hands for working miracles in the wonder realm of prayer! We can take sunshine into cold and sullen places. We can light the lamp of hope in the prison-house of despondency. We can loose the chains from the prisoner's limbs. We can take gleams and thoughts of home into the far country. We can carry heavenly cordials to the spiritually faint, even though they are laboring beyond the seas. Miracles in response to prayer!"--J. H. Jowett.

To this, a writer named Wenham adds his testimony: "Preaching is a rare gift; prayer is a rarer one. Preaching, like a sword, is a weapon to use at close quarters; those far off cannot be reached by it. Prayer, like a breechloader, has longer range, and under some circumstances is even more effective."

Lord, what a change within us one short hour

Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make,

What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,

What parched grounds refresh, as with a shower!

We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;

We rise, and all the distant and the near

Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear;

We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power!

Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,

Or others, that we are not always strong,
That we are ever overborne with care,
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy, and strength, and courage are with Thee?
--Trench

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