

J.R. Miller:

Almost everyone prays. At least almost everyone is taught in childhood to kneel before God, and with the first lisps of speech to say, "Our Father." And all Christians maintain the habit of prayer with more or less faithfulness.

What is prayer? It is not merely making requests of God. This is part of it; we are to make known our requests to him. We are to bring to him all our needs, small and large; and we are assured that, while nothing is too great to lay upon God "nothing is too small to trouble him with. The God who cares for the birds, feeds the sparrows, and clothes the lilies of the field" cares much more for his children, supplying their needs. In our prayers we are to make requests to God for the things we need.

But prayer is more than this. It includes confession of sins. We all sin against God, and we need every day to ask him for forgiveness.

Then part of all true prayer is thanksgiving "remembering our blessings, other answered prayers.

Prayer includes also communion with God. Our relation to him is that of a child to a father. Surely that child would be lacking in filial affection, who would never care to talk to a father, except when it had some request to make of him, some favor to ask. A large part of loving fellowship between child and father is fellowship, conversation about things in which both are interested. So the Christian who cares to pray only when he has some request to make, is lacking in the truly filial spirit.

Many times, when we come to God in prayer, we have no favor to ask "but merely desire . . .
to be with him,
to commune with him,
to keep ourselves in his love,
to tell him of our love,
to talk to him of our plans, and
to receive into our heart, the blessings which he has to give.

Are prayers answered? Does God in Heaven hear his children when they kneel on earth and speak to him? The Bible assures us that God is the hearer and the answerer of prayer. This does not mean that everything we ask for in prayer is given to us. Often the things we desire, would not be the best things for us. Our judgment is imperfect, our vision is shortsighted, and we cannot tell whether the things we wish for would be good for us or not.

All true praying requires the humble submission of every request to the will and the wisdom of God. We are to trust him more than we trust ourselves. If he sees fit to deny us the things we ask "we should be sure that his way is better than ours.

It is very important that young people get into their heart, at the beginning of their Christian life, this confidence in God. Many people have lost their faith, because their prayers have not been answered. They had misread the promises, supposing that anything they would ask would be given to them. They then made requests which were not granted. In their disappointment they lost their faith, and passed into the darkness of doubt and unbelief. If we understand that every desire we bring, we are to submit to God's wisdom, however important it may be to us, abiding by his decision without murmuring, without fear "we shall never find ourselves in perplexity because of what seems to us to be God's failure to answer our prayers.

"I sometimes think God's tender heart must ache,
Listening to all the sad, complaining cries
That from our weak, impatient souls arise,
Because we do not see that for our sake
He answers not, or answers otherwise
Than seems the best to our tear-blinded eyes."

When God does not give us the things we definitely ask for, it is because he desires to give us something better instead. Paul asked for the removal of his "thorn in the flesh" "some sore bodily trouble. He asked earnestly, three times beseeching the Lord to grant his request. The request was not granted; but instead there came the promise of sufficient grace "more grace, because of the burden of pain and suffering which he was still to

keep. Then he rejoiced in his infirmities, because through them he received more of the strength of Christ.

Jesus himself, in the garden, prayed that the bitter cup might pass from him. It did not pass; but instead, divine grace was given, and he was enabled to accept it without murmuring. His prayer was answered, not by the removal of the cup — but by the strengthening of his own heart, so that he could drink it with quiet submission.

The lesson is very clear. When God does not give us the things we plead for, he will give us grace to do without them; and if we accept his decision sweetly and trustingly — he will enable us to go on rejoicing. Surely it is a better answer to give us strength to continue bearing our load — than it would have been to take it away, leaving us unstrengthened.

What may we bring to God in prayer? We ought to bring everything, not only our spiritual needs, and our sorrows and perplexities — but our business affairs, our friendships, our frets and worries — all of our life. Christ wants us to be his close personal friends. He desires to enter into the most intimate relations with each of us. He wants our confidence at every point. He is interested in everything we do in our daily work, in our plans and efforts, in the children's play, in the young people's problems, pleasures, and studies. We should train ourselves to talk to Christ of everything we are doing.

Anything we do not want to talk to him about — we had better not do. It is a sad day for a boy, when he has done something which he wants to hide from his mother. It is a sad day for any of us, when we have done anything we are not willing to talk to Christ about. We had better ask his counsel concerning everything we are considering.

WHEN should we pray? Part of the pledge which young people all over the world are making these days, is that they will pray every day. We should pray at least twice every day. We should begin the morning at Christ's feet .

..
 seeking blessing from him,
 asking for guidance,
 putting our hand in his,
 entrusting our life to his keeping.

Then when we come to the close of the day, there should be prayer again . . .
 the bringing of the day's work to God,
 the confessing of its faults, sins, and mistakes,
 the laying at our Master's feet of all the work we have done,
 and the committing of ourselves to his keeping for the night.

But besides these formal seasons of prayer, morning and evening — every Christian should be always in the spirit of prayer. We walk with God in our every-day life. Christ is just as close to us when we are at our daily work in the field, in the shop, in the store, or when we are sitting at our desk in school, or are out on the playground — as he is when we are kneeling at his feet in a formal act of prayer. Anywhere and at any time, we may whisper a request, or speak a word of love in his ear — and he will hear us.

That is what Paul means by his exhortation that we be "instant in prayer." He would have us stay all the time so close to Christ, that any moment a word may be exchanged with him — that we may speak to him or he to us.

In time of temptation, when the pressure is sore, almost more than we are able to endure, it is a great privilege to say, "Jesus, help me!"

In some moment of perplexity as to duty, we may ask our Guide to show us what he would have us to do — and he will do it.

If we are in danger, we may run into the refuge of prayer, hiding ourselves close to Christ, as a frightened bird flies to its nest, or as an alarmed child runs to the mother.

Those who learn to pray in this way, communing with Christ continually — are sure of rich blessing in their life. Prayer makes us stronger. It brings the divine life down into our heart. It shelters us amid temptation. It keeps us near the heart of Christ in time of sorrow or danger. It transforms us into the beauty of the Master.

Prayer brings Heaven down close about us, into our heart. Prayer keeps us close to Christ; one who prays

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daily, and continues instant in prayer, will never drift far from him. It is when we begin to omit prayer, that we begin to stray from Christ.

In these wise modern days, many skeptical questions are asked concerning prayer “but a simple faith answers them all. If God is our Father, he surely knows his children and loves them. If this is true, there can be no doubt that he is interested in their life in this world, and is willing to communicate with them” to speak to them, and to hear them when they speak to him. There need, then, be no mystery about prayer; it is only one of the privileges of the children of God.