

Why Should We Pray

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By H.A. Ironside

I want to devote one paper to a question that keeps coming up again and again, namely, “Why pray at all?”

It is objected by some who pretend to great spiritual insight that, inasmuch as the believer is already “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” there is no need for prayer in this present dispensation of grace, save in the character of communing with God. Faith, we are told, simply appropriates the blessings that are already ours, and does not ask for what God may be pleased to withhold. And as to material things, we need not pray for them because it is written, “He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Therefore prayer is both unnecessary and even impertinent.

But to both these objections we may answer, that we are distinctly commanded not only to pray, but to “pray without ceasing” and to “pray in the Spirit.” Moreover, we are definitely told, “Be careful (anxious) for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

There can be no question, one would say, but that prayer is both a privilege and a duty, as well as a healthful spiritual exercise; although it certainly has no merit in itself, nor should we for a moment think of it as a means of propitiating God and covering offenses, as some have held all down the ages.

But if God knows all our needs, and has already promised to supply them according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus, why are we expected to pray, as we become conscious of those needs ourselves? And, moreover, if He gives according to His unchanging purpose, what place can prayer have in the divine economy?

The answer surely is that *prayer is part of God's purpose*. He is it who, by His Spirit, stirs the hearts of His people to cry mightily unto Him for those very blessings, spiritual or material, which He in sovereign grace has already provided for. And the great reason for this is, He would have us know beyond all doubt that we have to do with the Living God.

When George Muller, the great 19th Century apostle of prayer, founded the Ashley Down Orphan Houses, and decided not to solicit from man, but to bring every need in prayer to God, he declared that his particular reason for this method was to demonstrate to a materialistic age that God lives and hears prayer. And surely no greater proof of this has ever been given than that revealed in Muller's Journals.

If a certain matter is put on my heart by the Spirit of God, a matter that no other person on earth can possibly be cognizant of, and I entering into my closet, shut the door, and tell it to my Father who

is in heaven, and the answer comes from a source perhaps least expected, how can I doubt that a living God heard and answered?

And, moreover, what parent does not know the joy of having provided beforehand for some need of his child, only to have his heart thrill with gladness when the son or daughter comes, perhaps timidly, pleading for the very thing parental love and forethought had already procured or decided on? Surely, we need not have difficulty in understanding how our gracious God, whose Fatherly love transcends any mere human emotion as the sun outshines the candle, delights thus to anticipate our needs, according to the word, “Before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear.”

May I be permitted, without being charged with spiritual egotism, to relate to His glory one such incident out of many in my personal experience.

On a given occasion a few years back, three very definite needs were pressing on my heart, all in connection with service for the Lord. I had in fact assumed sometime before certain responsibilities for missionary work—peculiar obligations which I felt must be met; and yet I could not see just how to meet them, nor did I feel free to mention them to any other person, save God Himself.

For days I had prayed and sought to quietly trust, but the burden increased in weight. Then one night, awakened from sleep, I began to ask why the answer was so long delayed. To my aroused heart and exercised conscience, God my Father, by His Spirit, brought to light certain things wherein I realized I had not only been slothful and slack, but had unquestionably grieved the divine indwelling Guest. After a season of confession and self-judgment, I was able to pray with liberty for what had been burdening me before. The next morning every need was met, and singularly enough, the human instrument used lived on the other side of the continent and could know nothing of the circumstances. Yet his gift of love was exactly sufficient to meet the three particular needs that I had spread before the Lord; and, above and beyond that, he himself designated with careful precision the three avenues of disbursement and the amounts to go to each cause. Could I doubt that the living God had heard my cry?

But, someone objects, if the money was already four days upon its way, and the letter was to be delivered in the morning whether you prayed or not, how does that prove prayer was answered? It proves far more than that. It proves that God had foreseen the need, had provided for it ahead of time, but did not let the provision come to me until in self-judgment; I had been brought to cry to Him about it.

And that is what I would press on my reader. To have received the required amount apart from prayer would have filled the heart with a glad recognition of a Father’s love, but to receive it in such a

way, after prayer, literally thrilled one's being with the knowledge that, through prayer, one was in direct touch with the living God.

Modern unbelief seeks to account for every such occurrence on a purely human plane, and a misnamed psychology would teach that the only real value there is in prayers is in its reflex action upon the mind of him who prays.

But the word of God refutes all such atheistical reasoning, and proves through prayer and its answers that there is One on the other side—a Divine Intelligence, infinite in love as in wisdom, holiness and justice, who takes a personal interest in each one of His children—One who numbers the very hairs of our head, as the Son of God our Savior has declared, and has ordained prayer as a means of definitely revealing Himself to them.

“Prayer opens heavy doors all hinged with unbelief;
Prayer sheds a scented balm to assuage an aching grief:
Prayer knows no coward fear.
Notes every falling tear
Counts every blessing here,
Knows life is brief.

Prayer storms the hostile camps of sin and doubt and care,
Wrestling the whole night through, alive to do and dare:
Prayer meets Thee face to face,
Sensing Thy throne of grace,
Makes a trial a hallowed place,
If Thou art there.

Prayer changes grief to joy as bud must change to flower:
Prayer yearns to bring each soul in touch with Thy great power
Prayer looks not for reward,
Save but Thy smile, dear Lord;
Sure of Thy matchless word,
Prayer gilds each hour.”

—Ruth Salwey

No one who has ever known what it is thus to come to God in earnest wrestling about some definite matter, and received the answer, can do other than recognize the blessedness of having to do with the *living* God.