

promise, and day and night she cried to God. The girl's sufferings were indescribable, and the end seemed near. One day the mother knelt by the bedside, and clasping her daughter in her arms, she wrestled with God with a mighty faith, like Jacob of old. And the demon was dethroned. The girl sent for her husband and children, confessed to them and to God with deepest contrition of heart, and died. How many more souls we might win to Christ if we would only really pray!

## **The Privilege and Necessity of Prayer**

Do you pray? This may be an unusual question, but it is certainly a very vital one. The necessity for prayer is taken for granted; yet if the truth were known, it would be surprising to find how many of those whose names are on the church book do not pray.

I asked a young friend, who has been all her life among Christian people, "Do you pray?"

She answered, "No."

"Have you never said any prayer at all?"

"Yes, I suppose I have prayed four or five times in the last ten years."

How strange that intelligent being should be born in a Christian land where from childhood they hear of God, live a lifetime, and die without talking to their Creator! He gives them life, health, food, clothing, and friends. They breathe His air, enjoy His sunshine and rain, birds and flowers, sea and land. They see and experience a thousand evidences of His power and countless tokens of His love; yet they do not talk with Him. They do not thank Him for His unfailing kindness, nor seek Him for His help.

But the question in which we are particularly interested is: Do YOU pray?

Prayer is absolutely essential to spiritual life. One might be saved and not read the Bible. He might be blind or unable to read. One might be saved without going to church. He might be where there was no church, or an invalid who could not attend public service. But if he is saved, he must pray. Prayer is the cry of the soul to God. Even the thief suffering and crying on the cross prayed, and his prayer was answered. In the statement of the conditions on which God promises to save men, prayer comes first: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near." Isaiah 55:6.

Do you neglect anything on which all your earthly prosperity depends, as lightly as you do prayer? In these days most people are convinced of the importance of education, and great effort and sacrifice as made to secure it. Are you seeking to develop a broad, well-disciplined, noble mind? If so, you cannot afford to neglect prayer.

Do you have friends and acquaintances whom you love, and over whom you desire to exert an influence for good? You cannot do this without prayer.

Have you some talent, some natural give, which places you in a position of strong leadership? Prayer will determine largely whether this will prove a blessing or a curse.

Have you means at your command for which you are responsible and the expenditure of which requires wisdom and judgment? How can you meet these responsibilities without disastrous mistakes, unless you pray? You know that the judgments of God are in the land, and thinking men and women believe that great and solemn events are just before us. In view of these things, do you pray?

I do not ask whether you SAY your prayers. I do not ask if occasionally you make a formal call upon God, nor if you respond when asked to open a public service with prayer. I do not ask if you cry to God when some great crisis overtakes you, and you stand in the presence of disaster or death. I ask, Do you pray? Do you converse with God as friend with friend? Do you look up into His face, and whisper words which you want no human ear to hear, and which He alone can understand? Do you LINGER in sweet communion with Him, like a lover at the gate, reluctant to say farewell, and cherishing as unspeakably precious every moment alone with Him? Would you rather miss food or work or study or friends or rest than the quiet hour with Him? Do you hurry away from human society when your duties are done, that you may enjoy the sweet companionship, the comfort, the counsel, the reproof, the love of your Saviour? Do you pray?

Why should we pray? Our first answer to this question may well be, "Because there is a God." Man is by nature a worshipping being. He will worship, and both the Scriptures and human experience show that he becomes LIKE what he worships.

Among the elements which constitute real prayer to God are worship, praise, confession, petition, and intercession. It requires no argument to show that it is reasonable and for their own best interest for men to worship God. The worship of the Creator produces a noble and beautiful character in contrast to degradation, ignorance, superstition, and sensuality, which result from the worship of anything but the true God.

One of the fundamental elements of a beautiful character is gratitude. One is considered rude and selfish who does not express or manifest gratitude for the little common courtesies of life. Yet we all revel in the pure air, sunshine, rain, birds, flowers, fruits, and a thousand beauties of nature and joys of life, for which we expend no effort or care, but which come as loving gifts from God. He also provides the necessities food, clothing, health, home, friends, protection; and beyond the material numberless blessings, He gives peace, rest and happiness to those who fear Him. Who can help singing His praise, and expressing continual gratitude and thanks to Him? This is why we pray.

We are in a world where sin has entered as an intruder. We have all suffered inexpressibly, but God has suffered most of all. Sin is rebellion in His home, and results in destruction to some of His children. Infinite love constrained Him to give His Son as a substitute to suffer the penalty of sin for every sinner. Having paid the penalty, He offers eternal life to each one who will meet the conditions.

One condition is that man fully and freely acknowledge his guilt, and make confession of his sins. This is why we pray, confessing our iniquities and transgressions to the One who alone can and will cleanse us from sin.

Sin robs us of all spiritual blessings, and oppresses us in numberless ways, materially as well as spiritually. God has infinite resources to supply our every need, and He has chosen to establish a very intimate relationship between Himself and His children, by supplying their needs in response to their petitions. "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Matthew 21:22. So we pray because we are conscious of need. One who never really prays is saying by his course, "I do not need God. I can get along without Him. The things I desire most I can obtain without His help."

The story is told of a little girl whose way led through a dark wood. On entering it she prayed for the Lord to keep her from harm, and on reaching the other side, she said, "Thank you, Lord; now I can go the rest of the way alone." The story is probably not true, for a little child who trusted God enough to call upon Him for help, would want Him to go all the way. But does not the story illustrate the attitude of many? Could we not all truly say, "When I become careless or negligent about prayer, I soon find I am drifting; my experience is most satisfactory when I pray most earnestly and often"?

God says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." Ps. 50:15. Do you ever have any trouble? Then that is one reason why you should pray.

Again He says: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and

the prayer of faith shall save the sick." James 5:14, 15. It is a great mistake to let physicians and nurses, treatments and sanitariums, rob us of our sense of the need of God and of prayer for the sick. God has given us means to aid nature in the restoration of the sick, but they were never intended to come between us and our Healer.

So if we are ever sick, or have friends who are sick, it is another reason why we should pray.

God has made us His ambassadors to our fellow men. As such we urge His claims upon them, and then as Christ's own representatives we plead the cases of these men at the throne of grace, and urge the merits of our Master in their behalf. There is surely no greater privilege or joy than that of intercession for those who are dear to us, but who are unsaved. It is our solemn duty to represent those who are bound to us by the ties of affection or influence before the heavenly mercy seat. And in God's great plan He has promised to do for them what He could not do if we did not pray.

So we might go over an almost endless list of reasons for prayer. Paul thus embraces them all: "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Phil. 4: 6, 7.

## **When, Where, and How to Pray**

At one time Paul pointed out two fundamental human weaknesses, one characteristic of women and one of men. The former [women] are warned against the adornment of the external and physical, in contrast to the inner, spiritual being. The latter [men] he exhorts to "pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." 1Tim 2:8.

It is inherent in the nature of man to trust himself; and to trust self is to doubt God. The more abundant a man's supply of health, education, wealth, or talent, the greater his temptation to trust in his own endowments or possessions, and close his eyes to his need of God.

No man can truly pray who is self-sufficient, for real prayer springs from the consciousness of the soul that it is weak, inadequate, and incomplete, apart from God. God has all that man needs, and longs to supply his needs. But He can do this only on condition that man will be His friend and not His enemy. The basis of prayer, therefore, is friendship between God and man, springing from God's love to man and man's consciousness of his utter need of God, and his willingness to yield to and obey God.