

## The Ability to Pray

It should not surprise us that many Christians find praying difficult. For some time now the life line between God and the believer has been greatly deemphasized while the social, the horizontal, mission has been stressed.

You have to be with-it, and be where the action is. The solving of local and world problems seem to be of more importance than a personal relationship with God through prayer.

Meditation is out. Involvement is in. Some developments in theology do not lend themselves to prayer. I imagine that it is difficult to pray to "the ground of being" as some are wont to describe God. Of course, the very rapidity of living makes prayer rather difficult. Praying costs time and who is ready to spend time when there are so many demands made on you already?

The act of prayer is in itself not easy. It is more than "having a little talk with Jesus," or to present a grocery list of needs to God. One theologian observes that "in matters of prayer, we are only too apt to deceive ourselves because, generally speaking, man does not enjoy praying." (Romano Guardine, *Prayer in Practice*.)

The basic foundation and incentive for prayer cannot be found in one's temperament or character. A life characterized by prayer, while founded upon the living faith in God who is known through Jesus Christ, still requires discipline and effort.

Have you ever felt dissatisfied with your prayer life, and longed to know more and more what it is truly to pray? If you have - it is an encouraging sign. The apostle Paul said: "We know not what we should pray for as we ought."

We need to be taught how to pray and what to pray for. May the church of Jesus Christ learn to draw again from its power resource prayer. Prayer will flourish when faith is strong and when we come to grips with the Bible.

When we have learned anew the depth and the riches and the power of prayer we will also become more effective in our service for God. Prayer will drive us to action.

"There is a place where heaven's resistless power  
Responsive moves to thine insistent plea;  
There is a place, a silent trysting hour,  
Where God Himself descends and fights for thee.  
What is the place? Dost thou ask, `Where?'  
O soul, it is the secret place of prayer."

Do you pray every day? Can you honestly say that personal communion with God is a vital part of your life? If so, you are probably an exception rather than the rule. An

informed Protestant commentator says that "many Christians today, including theologians, openly acknowledge that their prayer life is virtually nonexistent." (Donal G. Bloesh. *The Reform of the Church*.)

Prayer is an essential component of the Christian faith. Numerous books and articles have been written on the subject. But to write and read about prayer is much easier than to do it. If prayer would be practiced more intensely, then the Christian church would have a more joyful and dynamic appearance.

Prayer has been given many definitions. I like the one that calls it "a window facing heaven." When a man turns to God through Jesus Christ the windows of heaven are thrown wide open. He can commune openly and freely with his God. Unfortunately, the windows can become smeared and dirty and the vision of heaven clouded. Actually, this happens so often. And if there is one thing we need in our time is a vision of God and heaven.

The church has never fared well when it was too busy to get down on its knees before the Almighty. The Christians who counted most in the sight of God and have made great contributions to the church were all men of prayer. They maintained communion with God. They were in the habit of praying at particular times in the day.

Luther was distinguished for the urgency and frequency of his prayers. He sensed the presence of God so deeply that even in company of friends he would break out into petitions. He once remarked: "None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience."

Consider the church father. Augustine, and his famous *Confessions*, one of the most remarkable works in literature, a book in which the religious experience of one of the greatest of human minds is expressed.

In this autobiography you find much mention of prayer. It is intermingled with numerous prayers, so natural was it for this great scholar and saint to pray.

The key to the understanding of the men who were of great beneficial influence to the church must be sought in prayer.

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Nov. 1973