

PROPER PRAYER

Prayer is a subject of interest to almost everyone. Go to any religious bookstore and you will find dozens of titles on what to pray for, how to pray, individual prayer, group prayer, effective prayer, hindrances to prayer, adventures in prayer. Prayer has been described as “the mightiest force in the world.” Just as there are laws in the realm of nature, so the scriptures reveal the spiritual laws governing effectual prayer.

How can we be sure that God will answer our prayers? It is not enough that we affirm our belief in prayer. Countless parents have prayed for protection of their sons on the battlefield and the recovery of their children from illness or injury...only to suffer heartbreaking loss.

On the other hand, there are thousands who are eager to testify that God has answered their prayers for protection and healing. Other thousands will testify to the wonderful manner in which God has given them other special blessings for which they asked. We do not presume to give specific answers in individual instances as to why some suffer so much more than others in this valley of tears or to the seeming randomness...some prayers answered, others not.

To the Christian, in the daily experiences of life, prayer is a necessity as well as a privilege. Prayer is also practiced widely by the followers of all the various heathen religions. The desire to pray is an acknowledgment of our dependency upon a Higher Power, the expression of a realization that we need help from some source outside of and higher than ourselves. Doubtless God is pleased with the sincere desire of all who draw near to him in prayer, because to this extent at least, it is a recognition of his sovereign power.

The scriptures indicate that there are proper and improper things for which to pray. The Apostle James wrote: “*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.*” (James 4:3) From this we see that it is vitally important to find out what we have the privilege of asking God to give us. Prayer is not a “magic genie” to provide us with everything we wish or desire.

There is a divine purpose in prayer which must be kept in mind if we are to understand why some prayers go unanswered. God did not design prayer as a means of finding out how he should manage his affairs here on earth. He is not looking for us to tell him what he should do. He has his own fixed plans and purposes, and if we are to receive the riches of his blessing, it is essential that we order our lives in harmony with his will.

“Prayer changes things,” they say, but it does not, however, change the plans of God. How little confidence we would have in a God whose opinions could be swayed or his plans changed by the eloquence, persistence or pleading of his people’s prayers. True prayer brings the tiny cogs of our lives into cooperation with the forward progress of the wheels of God’s eternal purpose.

Jesus tells us the conditions upon which we may expect an answer to our prayers. He says” *“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) To abide in Christ means to be a member of his body, with him as our Head. This means that his thoughts, as revealed in God’s Word, have become our thoughts, his plan our plan. If our wills have been wholly surrendered to God, we will have no will of our own. Our prayers will not be requests for what we want, but only for those things which are in harmony with his will. By thus praying in harmony with the Lord’s will we can be assured of favorable answers.

When asked by the disciples for instruction on how to pray, Jesus gave them not a form to repeat, but an idea or example of how to arrange their prayers. He did not say, Pray this prayer, but *“after this manner pray ye.”* Jesus indicated the proper method of approach to God in reverence—*“Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name.”* (Matthew 6:8, 9) This is a privilege which belongs to those who have repented of their sins, accepted Jesus as their personal Savior, and devoted their lives to God in full consecration to do his will. Such have received God’s spirit of sonship and have become his children.

When we follow the example of the Lord’s prayer, our requests will not be so much on our own behalf as they will be for the blessing and benefit of others. This is indicated in the opening petition, *“Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”* (Matthew 6:10) *“Thy Kingdom come”*—the answer to this prayer will be an answer to many of the prayers which people have prayed throughout the centuries.

Time...God’s due time...is another key to the subject of prayer. *“Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time (the gospel age) have I heard thee (the Church, the Bride of Christ), and in a day of salvation have I helped thee; and I will preserve thee and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth (during the millennial age), to cause to inherit the desolate heritages: That thou mayest say to the prisoners (death’s captives), Go forth; to them that are in darkness (in the tomb), Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the sun smite them; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them”* Isaiah 49:8-10

The Bride will actually share with Christ in the work of answering the prayers of the groaning creation (Romans 8:19-22, Psalms 102:19-22). The seemingly unanswered prayers for health, life, security and peace will be answered in the resurrection morning...in the Kingdom which will be the *“desire of all nations.”* (Haggai 2:7) *“Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”* (Psalm 145:16) *“O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.”* Psalm 65:2

As we continue to pray, *“Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,”* let us also pray, *“May thy will be done more fully in me.”*

THY WILL BE DONE

My Lord, Thy will not mine be done:
Whatever path Thy love shall choose for me,
Through desert sands, or if beside the sea,--
Thy will be done!

Oh, may Thy will in me be done:
Should "harvest" labor be for me Thy will,
Or if I may but suffer and be still, --
Thy will be done!

My Father, let Thy will be done:
If sweet the cup thou pourest for me to drink,
I'll praise Thee, but if bitter, I'll not shrink, --
Thy will be done!

Forever may Thy will be done:
I would not choose, I leave it all with Thee,
The pilgrimage, if short or long it be, --
Thy will be done!