

The Power and Passion of Prayer

Introduction

Martyn Lloyd-Jones once wrote: “Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God” (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 2:45).

Commentator J. Oswald Sanders adds this lofty view of prayer:

No spiritual exercise is such a blending of complexity and simplicity. It is the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try, yet the sublimest strains that reach the Majesty on high. It is as appropriate to the aged philosopher as to the little child. It is the ejaculation of a moment and the attitude of a lifetime. It is the expression of the rest of faith and of the fight of faith. It is an agony and an ecstasy. It is submissive and yet importunate. In the one moment it lays hold of God and binds the devil. It can be focused on a single objective and it can roam the world. It can be abject confession and rapt adoration. It invests puny man with a sort of omnipotence (*Effective Prayer* [Chicago: Moody, 1969], 7).

The essence of prayer is simply talking to God as you would to a beloved friend—without pretense or flippancy. Yet it is in that very attitude toward prayer so many believers have trouble.

Because communion with God is so vital and prayer so effective in the fulfillment of God’s plan, the enemy attempts constantly to introduce errors into our understanding of and commitment to prayer. Every generation faces the necessity to reprioritize and purify a corrupted or confused perception of prayer. For many, prayer has been replaced with pragmatic action. Function overrides fellowship with God; busyness crowds out communication. For others, prayer lacks a sense of awe and respect. Their efforts are flippant, disrespectful, and irreverent. Then there are those who believe prayer is designed to make demands and claims on God. They attempt to force Him to do what they believe He should do for them. Finally, for some prayer is nothing more than a routine ritual.

You may hold prayer with the utmost respect, yet you find your own practice lacks purpose and vitality, so you don’t spend time with God like you know you should. While there are many reasons Christians struggle to pray, I believe there is one overriding factor.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

It is the highest activity of the human soul, and therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man's true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life ... Ultimately, therefore, a man discovers the real condition of his spiritual life when he examines himself in private, when he is alone with God ... And have we not all known what it is to find that, somehow, we have less to say to God when we are alone than when we are in the presence of others? It should not be so; but it often is. So that it is when we have left the realm of activities and outward dealings with other people, and are alone with God, that we really know where we stand in a spiritual sense (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 2:45).

Alone with God—such an opportunity should be the Christian's one great desire. How sad that so many believers spend brief amounts of time with Him, or don't go to Him at all, because they have so little to say.

It is my prayer for you that when you have completed your journey through this time in prayer, you'll rediscover the power and passion that time spent alone with God can bring. I also hope you'll understand that prayer is not an attempt to get God to agree with you or provide for your selfish desires, but that it is both an affirmation of His sovereignty, righteousness, and majesty and an exercise to conform your desires and purposes to His will and glory.

Setting our hearts on God

For Christians prayer *is* like breathing. You don't have to think to breathe because the atmosphere exerts pressure on your lungs and forces you to breathe. That's why it is more difficult to hold your breath than it is to breathe. Similarly, when you're born into the family of God, you enter into a spiritual atmosphere wherein God's presence and grace exert pressure, or influence, on your life. Prayer is the normal response to that pressure. As believers we have all entered the divine atmosphere to breathe the air of prayer. Only then can we survive in the darkness of the world.

Unfortunately many believers hold their spiritual breaths for long periods, thinking brief moments with God are sufficient to allow them to survive. But such restricting of their spiritual intake is caused by sinful desires. The fact is, every believer must be continually in the presence of God, constantly breathing in His truths to be fully functional.

Because ours is such a free and prosperous society, it is easier for Christians to feel secure by presuming on instead of depending on God's grace. Too many believers become satisfied with physical blessings and have little desire for spiritual blessings. Having become so dependent on their physical resources, they feel little need for spiritual resources. When programs, methods, and money produce impressive results, there is an inclination to confuse human success with divine blessing. Christians can actually behave like practical humanists, living as if God were not necessary. When that happens, passionate longing for God and yearning for His help will be missing—along with His

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empowerment. Because of this great and common danger, Paul urged believers to “**pray at all times**” ([Ephesians 6:18](#)) and to “**devote yourselves to prayer**” ([Colossians 4:2](#)). Continual, persistent, incessant prayer is an essential part of Christian living and flows out of dependence on God.