

ASKING  
IN  
PRAYER

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## INTRODUCTION TO ASKING

I am indebted to many people for the thoughts expressed in these pages. There is nothing original here, except perhaps whatever thoughts are foreign to the mind of God. If I have misrepresented Him in any way, I hope He will forgive me.

I believe that praying can be taught. Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. They said,

“Lord, teach us to pray,  
as John also taught his disciples.”

Luke 11:1

This request apparently pleased Jesus, for He set about to teach His disciples to pray. He began by repeating for them (Luke 11:2-4) parts of a sample prayer that He had given them earlier (Matthew 6:9-13). The earlier prayer, as recorded in the gospel of Matthew, is often referred to as “the Lord’s prayer.” It goes like this:

“Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.  
For Yours is the kingdom and the power  
and the glory forever. Amen.”

Matthew 6:9-13

Just before Jesus gave this prayer to His disciples, He had said to them,

“In this manner, therefore, pray:”

Matthew 6:9

So He appears to have given this prayer to His disciples in order to show them what a proper prayer should be like. There is no indication here that He intended for His disciples to repeat the words of this prayer over and over by rote.

The essence of this sample prayer is that it was not a recitation of the prayers of David or of some other inspired person. Rather, it was the expression of a heart devoted to God.

If praying consisted of repeating “the Lord’s prayer,” on any and every occasion, there would have been no need for Jesus to teach His disciples to pray, for a simple recitation of the “the Lord’s prayer” would satisfy every need. Real praying, however, is not as simple as that.

I sympathize with Jesus’ disciples for their wanting Him to teach them to pray. I myself have often felt that my prayers were inadequate. When I was young, only occasionally did I remember to thank the Lord for His blessings. My prayers have always been short and generally lacking in content. The Apostle Paul was speaking also for me when he wrote,

“For we do not know  
what we should pray for as we ought.”

Romans 8:26

I suspect that I am not alone in this. I fear there are some members of the Lord’s church that hardly pray at all. I realize that this is a strong accusation, but I cannot escape the suspicion that it is true.

My brother George and I were raised by a mother who worked very hard to support us. She made every effort to teach us

to be honest and to do what is right. She also taught us to say grace at the table and to pray at night before going to sleep.

However, the bit of praying that I did as a child, or as a teenager, was very self-centered. Only when I got sick or was in trouble did I really pray. At other times I mostly forgot about God.

Many people over the years have helped me to appreciate the value of prayer. One of them was W.W. Stirman, an elder of the Columbus Avenue Church of Christ, in Waco, Texas, who had a profound influence on me. He used to take me aside and speak to me about spiritual things, and I became very fond of him. I liked to sit beside him at church and to try to reach the bass notes with him when we sang. A part of what I remember about W.W. Stirman was the wonderful prayers that he prayed. He spoke very respectfully to God and seemed to be on intimate terms with Him.

My own prayer life improved considerably when I enrolled in Abilene Christian College (now Abilene Christian University) at Abilene, Texas in 1939. I enjoyed associating with the fine young people there, some of whom planned to become gospel preachers. It was a joy for me to sit at the feet of godly teachers such as R.C. Bell, Charles Heber Roberson, Paul Southern and others. A little of their spiritual thinking rubbed off on me, and I began to pray more, but still not as much as I should.

My greatest step forward in praying came in 1944 when I married a praying girl, Helen Elaine Hinds from Pueblo, Colorado. I tell about this in chapter twenty-two of this book.

In 1949 Elaine and I went to Germany to do evangelistic work. Our first location was Munich, Germany, where Jack and Kay Nadeau had begun to work. Jack and Kay were very glad to have us as co-workers. One of the first things Jack did was to ask us to pray with him. I am ashamed to say that I was taken aback by this. I was not in the habit of praying with anyone except with my wife. Until then most of my praying had been done in private, or with my wife, or at church. I did not realize that prayer has a place in the daily fellowship of God's people. When Jack asked me to pray with him, I resented it; because it seemed to me that he

was implying that I stood in need of prayer. Of course, I did stand in need of prayer, but I was too proud to acknowledge it. Not only was I proud, but I was also inexperienced in praying. I have long since repented of my attitude and the Lord subsequently granted me several opportunities to pray with my dear friend and beloved brother, Jack Nadeau. Once I had the privilege of visiting Jack and his wife Kay in their home in Lubbock, Texas, where we prayed together. I also had the privilege of praying with Jack when he was on his deathbed, in the home of one of his daughters, in Arlington, Texas. There, I heard him speak longingly and confidently of heaven. I once asked Jack how he had learned to depend so heavily upon prayer. He said to me, "It was the only thing I knew to do."

During the first few years of our stay in Germany, my spiritual life was in a nosedive. Shortly before we went to Germany, I had finished four years of advanced theological studies at the Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I was very proud of this. I thought of myself as something of an intellectual. (That is not to say that I was really an intellectual. I just thought of myself that way. A person does not have to be much of an intellectual in order to have intellectual pride.) During that time, I found that the devil was getting at me with temptations in unexpected ways. I could not understand how or why it was happening. Previously, I had been shielded. What was wrong? I prayed and prayed about it. Finally, I came to see that my pride and my aspiration of scholarly attainments were holes in my Christian armor, through which flaming arrows of the evil one were coming. I repented of my pride and abandoned my desire to compete with the scholars of the world. I resolved just to preach the gospel. This I have sincerely tried to do. For that reason, this little book, written now in my retirement, makes no pretense at being an intellectual or scholarly work.

Many of the German people whom Elaine and I came to know in Germany were from a 'pietistic' background. They had a profound respect for prayer. We tried to teach them the plan of

salvation and the identity of the Lord's church, and they taught me to have a closer walk with God.

Our living in Germany was helpful in another way, too. While Elaine and I were still in the United States, we had brethren and friends, who were surrounding and encouraging us. After we were cut off from them, it became necessary for us to seek a new source of encouragement. This we found largely by reading the Bible and by praying. Our learning to depend more completely on God for help and encouragement is one of the main blessings that we received from doing evangelistic work abroad.

I am still in the learning process. I do not claim to be an expert on prayer. If I were forced to choose between being an expert on the subject of prayer or being good at praying, I would choose the latter, because it is more valuable. I hope, however, that these pages on prayer will be useful to someone.

If some of the comments here should happen to encourage others to pray more (and to live up to their prayers), I will be glad. May the Lord grant it.

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