

# What is the Meaning of Prayer?

by STUART ALLEN

It is not possible to over emphasize the importance of prayer, if we accept what the Word of God teaches on this subject. We state a true fact when we say that all the great men of God in the Scriptures and since have been men of prayer. A prayerless life is an unfruitful life. Yet all believers at times have felt the poverty of their prayer life. This was true even of the Apostles, for, realising their inadequacy, they asked the Lord Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1), and we remember that the Son of God frequently withdrew to a quiet place to commune with the Father. If He felt the need of prayer, what about ourselves?

The Apostle Paul stated, "we know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom.8:26), yet from the Scriptures it is evident that his life was soaked in prayer. Can it be that our poor prayers ever give God delight? The answer is "Yes". The Psalmist connects his praying with the symbolism of incense, which in the Old Testament was specially fragrant. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Take fragrant spices ... and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of the perfumer'" (Exod.30:34,35 N.I.V.), and this fragrance covered the work of Aaron, the high priest, in the Tabernacle. The words of the Psalmist were "Let my prayer be directed (see margin) before Thee *as incense*" (Psa.141:2). We find the same association in Revelation 8:3,4, "another angel came and stood at the altar ... and there was given unto him *much incense*, that he should offer it with the *prayers of all saints* upon the golden altar". The incense was a symbol of the fragrance of Christ, and if our prayers are covered with His fragrance, they are a delight to the Lord. God loves to hear His people pray and He is far more ready to listen than we are to pray to Him.

However, some may say, "I never seem to get any answers to my prayers". This is wrong, because all prayer is answered when we realise that when God says "no", it is just as much an answer as when He says "yes". Too often we only pray when we are experiencing some great problem or danger, or when we badly want something. We can be sure of one thing, that our heavenly Father loves us too much to give us any thing that will be to our lasting hurt. The baby sees the light glistening on a sharp razor blade and wants to handle it, but who would be so unkind as to give it to the infant?

If we want the answer "yes" to our prayers we must take heed to the guidance of Holy Scripture. The Apostle John gives us the key when he writes, "And this is the confidence that we have in Him (Christ), that, *if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us*" (1 John 5:14). Prayer is not the means of trying to force God to give us something that we want. Some seem to think that if they worry the Lord by constantly praying for something, they will finally get it. But He is too wise and too kind to give us anything that is contrary to His will. The children of Israel in the Old Testament became tired of the heavenly food (the manna) that God gave them every day. They longed for flesh food, and they kept demanding it from their leader, Moses. The Psalmist tells us what the result was, "In the desert they gave in to their cravings; in the wasteland they put God to the test. So He gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them" (Psa.106:14,15 N.I.V.). This was a terrible answer to their continued prayer and they had to learn the hard way as we sometimes have to do, if we constantly press God to give us things just because we want them very much. If we subject all our praying to His will, we cannot go wrong.

We shall be greatly helped in our prayer life if we continually make thanksgiving for all the Lord's goodness and love that we experience day by day. Surely we shall not have to think very long before we remember how indebted we are to Him. Prayer is not only asking for certain things, *it is praise and thanksgiving*, and if we constantly maintain a thankful spirit, we shall not go far wrong. Forgetfulness so often leads to spiritual declension.

Perhaps the highest form of prayer is intercession for others. Here self is left out and we are remembering someone else's needs. If we carefully study Paul's prayer life, we shall be impressed by how frequently he was bearing up others in prayer. At the same time he greatly valued prayer for himself and the great responsibility he had with the tremendous truth that Christ had entrusted him with, which he was faithfully passing on to others. He wrote "I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me (he was a prisoner at Rome) will turn out for my deliverance" (Phil.1:19 N.I.V.). And to Philemon he wrote, "Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers" (Philemon 22).

Can we say that prayer for others is realised? The answer is "yes" if it is all subject to the Lord's will. There is much more that we could say on this supremely important subject of prayer, but it is not possible in this leaflet. We cannot finish without stressing the need of prayer for the revelation of the Holy Spirit to give understanding of the Word of God. This does not come through cleverness or special education. The writing of the Word itself was the result of the Holy Spirit inspiring faithful men to write it (2 Pet.1:19-21), and He alone can explain it. The Lord Jesus, referring to the future work of the Holy Spirit declared, "He will guide you into all truth", and "He shall glorify Me" (John 16:13,14).

The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2, declared that the things God had prepared for His redeemed are not known by any human being, but "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit" (1 Cor.2:9-11), and further on "the things of the Spirit ... are *spiritually discerned*" (1 Cor.2:13,14). The work of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary for the revelation and understanding of truth, and that is why in Ephesians 1, the Apostle states that the Father had given the Ephesian believers "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" which led to the "enlightening of the *eyes of their understanding*". This certainly refers to the work of the Holy Spirit (see the N.I.V. here). He is the great revealer of truth, and it is to Him that we must look if we want a real knowledge of the Scriptures with all their wealth of revelation concerning God's great redemptive purpose, which will involve a new heaven and earth in which Christ will be supreme.

One is sometimes asked how often should one pray, and the answer is in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing". The Apostle Paul declared again and again that he never ceased praying, specially for others (Rom.1:9; 1 Thess.1:3; 5:17; Eph.1:16; Col.1:19; and 2 Tim.1:3). So we should constantly pray and give thanks (Eph.5:20), and "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col.4:2).

If we want to discover the spiritual treasures that are found in God's Word, we must look to the Holy Spirit, the Revealer of truth, to do for us what was expressed by the Psalmist when he asked for his eyes to be opened in order that he might know "the wondrous things in God's law", which of course means His Word (Psa.119:18).

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

.....  
This, and many other publications are obtainable from :

The Berean Publishing Trust

52a Wilson Street,

LONDON EC2A 2ER

England

(Write for a free catalogue)