

"Prayer in the Christian Life"

(J. R. Miller, 1903)

What place should prayer have in a Christian's life? Should we pray little or much? Should we confine our praying to certain days—Sundays, for example; or to certain hours or moments of our days—mornings, for example? Should we pray only about certain things, certain affairs, certain portions of our life? Are there things we have no permission to take to God in prayer? Should we pray only in certain places—in our accustomed room at home, or in places 'set apart for divine worship'? Is there any place, where we may not pray?

There is a verse of Paul's which seems to answer all these questions. "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17. That means, pray always and everywhere. There is nothing we may not take to God in prayer—asking for His help. There is no hour of the day when we may not turn to God—and find Him ready to hear and bless us. The gates of prayer are never shut!

To pray without ceasing—is to do everything with prayer. This does not mean that every piece of work we undertake, must be begun with a 'formal act' of prayer—stopping, kneeling down, and offering a spoken petition. To pray without ceasing is—to have the heart always in converse with God. It is to live so near to God—that we can talk with Him wherever we go—and seek His help, His wisdom, His guidance. God is our Father, with infinite love in His heart for us, ready and eager to help us and bless us in every way!

True prayer is not a matter of times and places. Wherever we go—we are with God. Whatever we are doing—our hearts may go out to Him. "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath—the Christian's native air!"

There is no habit that we should more sedulously form, than that of talking with God about everything we do. We are often told that we should begin every day with prayer. That is very needful and beautiful. The first face our eyes see in the morning—should be Christ's! His too, should be the first voice we hear; and to Him, our first words should be spoken! Ten minutes in the morning, yes, two minutes, spent really with Christ, will change all our day for us.

It is often said that we should 'count that day lost' in which no kindness is done, no deed of love to anyone, no help given. But sadder far—is a day without prayer! It is a day without God, without heaven's light shining into it—a day unblest! That morning you forget to pray—is a sad morning for you!

We should form the habit of praying at every step, as we go along through the day. That was part of Paul's meaning when he said, "Whatever you do, in word or in deed—do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." He would have us include every word we speak—as well as every deed we do. Think what it would mean to have every word that passes our lips winged and blessed with prayer—always to breathe a little prayer before we speak, and as we speak. This would put heavenly sweetness into all our speech! It would make all our words kindly, loving, inspiring words—words that would edify and minister grace to those who hear. We can scarcely think of one using bitter words, backbiting words, unholy words—if his heart is always full of prayer; if he has trained himself to always pray before he speaks.

But we are to do all our deeds, also, in the name of the Lord Jesus. That means that we should do everything for Him, to please Him. If we could get this lesson learned, if we would really pray without ceasing—how beautiful our lives would be! How well we would do all our work!

Only think of a man in business doing all his day's business in a spirit of prayer—breathing a little prayer as he makes a bargain, as he writes a business letter, as he talks with other men. Think of a woman amid her household cares—taking everything to God for His blessing, for His approval, for His direction. These are not by any means, impossible suppositions. Indeed, this is the way a Christian is to live, should always live—doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus!

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." (Phil. 4:6)

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." (Eph. 6:18)

It is well for us to learn this lesson—to take everything to God in prayer, to pray as we go from task to task. We may form the habit of putting up little 'sentence prayers' continually. When you feel an inclination to speak bitterly, or to answer sharply; when you have been stung by another's speech or act; when you are tempted to refuse a request for help, to do some selfish thing, to pass by a human need, to speak an untruth—lift up your heart in the prayer, "Jesus, help me to do Your will." Or if you meet a sudden temptation and are in danger of being swept away, look up and cry, "Jesus, save me!" We do not know what we miss—by leaving God out of so much of our life!

We often wonder . . .
why we fail,
why so little comes of our efforts,
why we do not get along better with people,
why we are not happy,
why joy is so lacking in our experience,
why we are so easily fretted and vexed,
why we are so discontented,
why we fall so easily into surliness and bad temper.
It is because we cease to pray!

It is impossible to tell of the blessing of such a spirit and habit of prayer. Those who have not learned to "pray without ceasing" have no conception of what they are missing. If we all had learned this lesson—what a company of overcoming Christians we would be! The world would have little power over us—we would tread it under our feet! We would be strong—where now we are so weak. We would be victorious over temptation, where now we fail so sadly. If you knew that Christ was always actually walking with you—how strong you would be! There is no lesson we need to take more to heart—than this lesson of unceasing prayer! All the best things of Christian living—are the fruit of silent meditation.

Life is not easy for any of us. We can live nobly, purely, Christly—only by being much with Christ! We will rob ourselves of Divine blessing, of beauty of character, of power in service—if we fail to make room in all our busy days—for quiet retreats from the noise and strife, where we may sit at Christ's feet—to hear His words, and lie on His bosom that we may absorb His spirit, to prepare us for the toil of the day!

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