



To Pray or Not to Pray...

The following is an excerpt from A.W. Tozer's book entitled *Keys to the Deeper Life*. This short, impactful book is one of the very best I have found on the subject. I highly recommend that you purchase it immediately and study it carefully (buy the "revised and expanded" version). Time is of the essence my friends.

Emphasis added is mine.

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Many prayer meetings are being called these days. And no wonder, for the need is great. But if my observation is correct **much effort is wasted; very little comes of them.**

The reason is that motives are not sound. Too many praying persons seek to use prayer as a means to ends

that are **not wholly pure**. Prayer is often conceived to be little more than a technique for self-advancement, a heavenly method of achieving earthly success.

Every kind of personal religious project these days is being made the object of prayer.

Some of these projects are unscriptural, or at least extra-scriptural, and many of them have no higher motive than to relieve the promoter of the unpleasant task of earning an honest living and to enable him to float about the world at the expense of the hard-pressed saints. Yet he may circularize his mailing list begging for the prayers of God's people and call prolonged prayer meetings to try **to gain the blessing of God upon activities God did not originate and will not own.**

The Scriptures are very clear about the place of prayer in the economy of God.

Prayer was practiced by every believing soul from righteous Abel to John the Revelator, and it has been the vital breath of the church through the long centuries of her struggle on earth. Of prayer, properly understood, hardly too much can be said. **This piece deals with prayer that is improperly understood and wrongly used.**

The Scriptures are clear about the potency of prayer.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," wrote the inspired James, *"availeth much."* With this the whole Bible and Christian experience agree: **Prayer is effective. When it is not answered something is wrong.**

The same apostle who affirmed the effective power of prayer admitted also that prayer is

sometimes ineffective: *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."*

In spite of the difficulties surrounding prayer, it is still the highest activity in which a human being can engage. Knowing all about prayer and all about **people** our Lord said, *"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."*

Reasons for Failure

This effort to discover the reasons for our leanness in prayer is **intended not to discourage praying but to find the causes back of our ineffectual prayers and remove them.** There is no virtue in continuing grimly to pray on when there are factors present that make our prayers of no effect. **We should pray on, but we must pray aright, or our prayers will continue to be fruitless.**

We need only to listen to the average prayer to discover what is wrong.

Even in specially called prayer meetings where, it would be supposed, the most spiritual persons in a community are present, **many of the prayers are little more than pious monologues on current events. They are suggested by the newscasts rather than inspired by the Spirit.** They cover the earth like clouds without rain, promising much and delivering little.

To pray effectively we must want what God wants - that and only that is to pray in the will of God. And no petition made in the will of God was ever refused. *"This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him"* (1 John 5:14, 15)

Furthermore, to pray effectively we must pray **within the context of the world situation as God sees it.** Not what the world thinks about itself should influence us, but what God thinks about the world.

Prayer that slavishly follows the day-by-day development of world news may quite easily be wasted. Most world events as reported by various news media are like ping-pong balls being batted back and forth. They are lively enough, they make an attention-getting racket, but they lack significance.

Surely the God Who presides over history knows how few things matter. But He knows also what things do matter; and **if we are spiritual enough to hear His voice, He will lead us to engage in the kind of praying that will be effective.**

For some years I have had a growing conviction that the world situation as God sees it presents two major goals to be reached by praying people, two objects at which to aim our prayers.

One is that **the glory of God be seen again among men,** and the other **that the church be delivered from her present Babylonian captivity.**

For several generations the evangelical Christian world has run on hearsay. We look back pensively to the Fathers who met God in brilliant and satisfying encounter. We quote them lovingly and try to draw what spiritual nourishment we can from **the knowledge that the High and Lofty**

One once manifested Himself to wondering men. We pore over the record of His self-revelations to men like Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Isaiah. We read with longing hearts how once *"the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."* We read the stories of Edwards and Finney, and our hearts yearn to see again a shining forth of the glory of God.

Our Obligation

I believe we are under positive spiritual obligation to pray effectively till the present veil is torn away and the face of God is seen again by believing men.

The second object at which our prayers should be aimed is **the restoration of the spiritual life of the church.** We must continue to pray that she should cease her disgraceful fornication with the world and return to her first love and her true Lord. Her living has degenerated, her tastes have declined, her standards have sunk to the bottom. **Nothing short of a radical reformation can save her. Only those with anointed eyes are able to see her plight and only those with Spirit-filled hearts can intercede for her effectively.**

Now, even if we concentrate upon these vitally important items it is still entirely possible to ask amiss and gain nothing but leanness and utter disappointment. Why?

The problem is self. Selfishness is never so exquisitely selfish as when it is on its knees. Self is the serpent in the garden, the golden wedge in the tent of Achan, and **it renders every prayer ineffective until it is identified and repudiated.**

Self turns what would otherwise be a pure and powerful prayer into a weak and ineffective one. I may, for instance, pray earnestly for the glory of God to be manifested to this generation of men, and spoil the whole thing by my secret hope that I maybe the one through whom He manifests the glory. I may cry loudly to God that the church be restored to her New Testament splendor, and secretly dream that I may be the one to lead her in; thus, I block the work of the Spirit by my impure motive. **My hidden desire for a share of the glory prevents God from hearing me.**

So self, all bold and shameless, follows me to the altar, kneels with me in prayer and destroys my prayer before it is uttered. It is possible to want the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt, but to want to be known as the Nehemiah who rebuilt them. It is possible to want the prophets of Baal defeated, but to dream of being the Elijah who stands dramatically on the mount to call down the fire for all the world to see. My strong desire for a new reformation within the church may be rendered void by my secret desire to be known as another Luther. Did you ever pray that the armies of the Lord might win in the mighty struggle against the flesh and the devil and catch yourself daydreaming about riding up front in the open car when the grateful church stages a tickertape parade to welcome the returning heroes?

If you are a minister, have you ever dreamed of a sea of eager faces hanging on your every word?

If you are a Christian businessman, have you ever let your mind wander over your mighty prayers for success in business, the dramatic answer, the proud testimony, maybe the book with your picture on it? Then you know what it is to be hit where it hurts worst; you know what it is to be attacked where you are most defenseless.

Too often we pray for right things but desire the answer for wrong reasons, **one reason being a desire to gain a reputation among the saints.** Long after every hope of getting on the cover of *Time* magazine has ebbed away from our hearts, we may still harbor the unconfessed desire to get on the cover of *Christian Life*. That is, if the world will not appreciate our sterling worth, then the church will! If we cannot enjoy the reputation of being a great statesman or actor or ballplayer, we will settle for a big reputation as an unusual Christian. **That is to desire flesh instead of manna; and God may send leanness to our souls as a result.**

The Peril of Prayer

Nothing is so vital as prayer, yet **a reputation for being a mighty prayer warrior is probably the most perilous of all reputations to have.** No form of selfishness is so deeply and dangerously sinful as that which glories in being a man of prayer. **It comes near to being self-worship; and that while in the very act of worshiping God.**

What then shall we do?

We must deny self, take up the cross and count ourselves expendable.

We must cease to exercise the world's judgments and try to think God's thoughts after Him. We must reckon ourselves dead to gain and glory and allow ourselves to become inextricably involved with the cross of Christ and the high honor of God.

Then our prayers will be something like this:

O God, *let Thy glory be revealed* once more to men: through me if it *please Thee*, or without me or apart *from* me, it matters not. Restore Thy church to the *place of moral* beauty that becomes her as the *Bride of Christ*: through me, or apart from me; only *let this prayer* be answered. O God, **honor whom Thou wilt. Let me be used or overlooked or ignored or forgotten.**

Prayer is still the greatest power on earth if it is practiced in the true fear of God. It is our solemn obligation to see that it is so practiced.

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**Keys to a Deeper Life; A.W. Tozer; Chapter 5 Touching Heaven in Prayer
Scripture verses quoted are from the King James version.**