

Challenging Christians to Pray



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Biblical Optimism

When trials come, never falter, never quit; be resilient and proceed prayerfully.

Blessed optimism is not to be confused with the modern-day positive thinking or the latest name it-and-claim-it charade. Jesus said, “peace I leave with you, my peace, I give unto you...Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). His peace is not escapism, but real steadiness and calmness beneath the troubled waters of life. The presence of God does not overlook our circumstances; it overrides them. In recent years we have seen a steady rise in fear and mistrust among people of all ages. Our society is afraid of its own shadow. Fear has introduced a sense of negativism and a feeling of abandonment, which negate hope, faith and love. The new negativism is brilliantly reflected in our literature, visible in our politics, and clearly seen in our religious attitude. As a result, noble goals have been abandoned and spiritual motives overlooked or ignored. Certainly, these are trying times for many. Into a world of spite, confusion, fear, frustration and doubt, Jesus brings a message of hope, love and faith. Our faith in Jesus Christ is not a gullible optimism, nor a make-believe farce, but a powerful force that sustains us as we travel through life’s journey. What a comforting thought!

The man who trusts in God can never be a pessimist. His sinful past is under the blood of Jesus Christ and his carnal nature has been subjugated by the power of the Holy Spirit. The believing person is secured in his knowledge that the best is yet to come. There is a blessed optimism in Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Christian faith teaches that God inspires believers and offers them hope for the future. When Dr. James Guthrie, the Christian martyr was facing execution by his tormentors, he looked through his prison window and said, **“This is the day which the Lord hath made: I will rejoice and be glad in it.”** That is Christian or Biblical optimism in its finest! Friend, God is neither frustrated nor He is in a quandary as we are. When trials and severe testing come, we must do what we need to do—ride it out! This is a radical idea for a generation enamored of its own imagined power to micro-manage the situation, but sometimes it is the perfect will of God for us to stay calm and composed without taking the matter into our own hand.

Ours is no absentee God; but a living Presence deeply involved in human affairs. Remember, no one buried our God in the rubbles; and let’s not treat our Heavenly Father like a helpless automation! May we never forget that we have a solid foundation, one that can withstand against any recrimination from Satan. Our faith in Christ is our foundation, and we desperately need this foundation as we face the future. Apostle Paul was extremely an optimistic person; he rejoiced in the Lord when he had every reason to complain. The words of Dr. William Barclay, the famous British theologian come to mind, **“If I wake up in hell... I still believe.”** What a positive affirmation of the power and the Presence of the living Christ! To the early Christians life was an exuberant expectation, always filled with undying hope, but never despair. A Victorious Christian always looks to God and never majors on the word impossible. He simply learns to trust in God and always does whatever it takes to please his Lord and Master. **May we live each day as though Christ died yesterday, arose this morning, and is coming back tomorrow!**

An increasing problem in the world is sadness, loneliness, discouragement or low spirit. Despite technological advances, people are increasingly lonely and struggle with face-to-face interaction. The enemy uses discouragement as an effective weapon to derail many from their walk with the Lord. There are many looking for a hurricane while only a few looking for the sunshine. Many are crepe hangers but only few see the beautiful roses. Robert Browning, the English poet and playwright once said, **“Tis looking downward that makes one dizzy.”** So why look down when we can look up! When worried about the world’s future, let’s pause and reflect the Glory of God.

Joy produced by faith in God is priceless. Our God is holy and undivided Trinity, manifested to us in Jesus Christ. God is transcendent Father, indwelling Spirit, and Incarnate Word. There is nothing to worry about the unknown future, if you are in Christ and Christ is in you. Dear ones, let’s put down the phone and pick up the Bible and read what God is saying to us in these days of uncertainty! Let us focus on the Lamb of God who does have the whole world in His hand. Cheer up, my brothers and sisters, **troubles may come, and troubles may go, but we trust in Jesus.** That’s something to celebrate! We do not know what the future may hold, but we do know who’s in charge of the future! When things don’t go as we expect, we should remember that Jehovah is in control. As I’m reminded daily when situations arise, pleasant or unpleasant, the wisest response on my part is very useful from God’s point of view: **“Calm down, my child and rest in My promises.”** God is on His throne, and everything is working out for His glory! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom that has no frontiers! Let’s base our faith on God’s power and greatness, not on man’s fleeting existence!

--- Matthew Skariah

The Prayer Closet

**Jesus said, “when thou prayest, enter into thy closet...
pray to thy Father which is in secret...”**

Just imagine, we have been given the privilege of worshipping the Lord in our prayer closet. The prayer closet speaks death to the person of self and pleasure. In private prayer, we come to know how insignificant we really are when compared to the holiness of God. Those who do much for God are the ones who spend much time in their prayer room. Today, we depend too much on the arm of the flesh. The tenacity to stand, to fight, to conquer and to drive the foe from the field will be discovered in the prayer closet. Private prayer is free from hidden motives, traps, or pride that could hinder its effectiveness. In this personal encounter with the Father reveals more about us and our daily walk with Him.

In religion, we are often persuaded to think that noise is far better than silence, and flamboyancy is far more appealing than the ministry of obscurity. Let us listen quietly and cultivate silence! God speaks in silence. Waiting silently on the Lord helps us deepen our relationship with Him and renew our passion. Imagine, God, the Creator asks us to wait in His presence with a sense of awe and pure delight. Every life needs an altar! What we whisper in our prayer closet shall be reverberated from the housetop. Yes, when we pray in our prayer closet, others may not see or applaud but the impact of our prayers will be felt around the world. Does not the rebellion of our nation and the world, ever **moving toward God’s judgment** propel us to plead with God for renewal, salvation and restoration! Some observers believe that what they describe as the current worldliness among believers prompts reflection, humility, and prayer for renewed focus and spiritual revitalization.

The lack of perseverance in our prayer room holds back the blessings of God. The prayer program of the church cannot await the arrival of a famous religious personality. Let us cry mightily unto the God of Heaven: **Oh, Lord, my house is in ruin, please come and repair it!** The ministry of the prayer closet is the steadfast, unflinching desire to sacrifice personal comforts and not be sidetracked by obstacles that are placed in our path. It is in the prayer closet we come to know God and ourselves better than any of our earthly friends. Those who pray don’t waste precious time debating on religious protocols. Prayer is more about knowing God than getting things or enlarging one’s territory. Seeking God’s face is not a matter of five minutes asking Him to bless us. It means waiting in His presence until we’re inebriated with His glorious majesty.

The healing power of prayer is immeasurable. Let's rise to higher spiritual realm than we have known before! Prayer is inestimable. So, keep on praying, incessantly. The moral climate of America needs our prayers now. So, let's live prayerfully, not fearfully. Let's cry out to our father and we will be heard. Suffice to say, there is a loving Father who waits to hear from His children. Dear Lord, build the fires of passion in our hearts and set our lives ablaze with Your majestic presence as we wait upon You! Pastors and Christians should prioritize private prayer. True prayer is always satisfying and uplifting. What's the secret of the prayer closet? Perseverance and passion, of course!

**The more we enjoy God's presence in the prayer closet,
the more we long to be in God's presence.**

--- Matthew Skariah

Known For Their Faith And Passion

The early Christians had a unique passion for souls. They demonstrated firm conviction and confidence as they declared their faith in settings that were often unreceptive to their message. Just imagine the impact of having a group of believers who are like-minded in faith and passion, and their surrender to the will of God, we have a situation that becomes the talk of the world! In earlier years Christians turned the world upside-down; today, the world turns us upside-down. Harnack, the German theologian and historian was profound when he said, **"The Church influenced the world most, when it was most unlike the world."** The power of Pentecost propelled the Church into action. The inception of the Holy Spirit moved the Church out of the comfort-zone into the witness stand. Grieving for a lost world, they caught the fire and became mighty witnesses for Christ. They were no longer fearful or timid as they proclaimed the power of the risen Christ with boldness.

The power of Pentecost shook the world with conviction. "They were pricked in their hearts." (Acts 2:37) According to Lake and Cadbury's commentary, a praying Church caught the world's attention, and people were cut to the heart. The hearers were convicted by the power of God and causing them to cry out, "What must we do?" The influence of the Holy Spirit was so strong, and the individuals involved were unable to resist its impact. The preaching at Pentecost unraveled the sins of those who heard it. But today, a social gospel has taken the place of the resurrection gospel. For example, Stanly High, former roving editor for the Reader's Digest, once delivered a scathing criticism of the shyness of much modern preaching. He stated, **"That in too many Protestant churches he got a pat on the back when he really needed a swift kick in the pants!"**

If it seems that the world is not talking much about Christians today, it may be because we Christians have become famous for things other than our faith and love for souls. Believers have a unique place in world evangelization. Regardless of our spiritual talents, regardless of our financial resources, the task of sharing the gospel includes us. There is a special place waiting for us—but will we accept it? We grow while we sacrifice. Our light shines brilliantly while we light the lamp of others. **"He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39).** When a Christian becomes sacrificial, he becomes an authentic disciple!

Beloved, time has come for all of us to put the wheels of evangelization in motion. Our Lord Jesus could come at any moment. Are we doing everything we can to fulfill the Great Commission before His return? We expect the Lord to be faithful to us; but doesn't it take the same commitment on our part to be faithful to Him! May God give us an undying passion for souls, is my earnest prayer!

**Social concern for mankind is not the same as 'soul passion'
for those who perish without Christ.**

--- Matthew Skariah

Wealth Beyond Measure

In modern Christianity many seem to be doing well because they accept the social yardstick of success, and not the Biblical one. It seems that so much of the present-day prosperity teaching focuses way too much on our material wealth and individual performance, and way too little on the sovereign will of God. What are we going to say to our persecuted brothers and sisters the world over who are being lynched, ostracized, falsely imprisoned or even put to death unjustly? They are requesting that Christians, especially in America, pray for them, but their appeals have not received widespread response. Are they being persecuted because of their lack of faith? We need to be careful when we twist the Word of God to advance our own agenda to gain fleeting wealth. Yes, God blesses His children, and many use their blessings to support God's kingdom work. For instance, consider Job, who, once regarded as a prince of the desert, sat on his bed of affliction and declared, **"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him; but I will maintain mine own ways before Him"** (Job 13:15). **John Welch, the Scottish intercessor is known for having prayed, "Give me Scotland, or I die,"** rather than simply asking for personal success, and no wonder his prayer enthralled millions of believers into a spirit of true intercession. Christians are not the wealthiest people on earth, but they have wealth unsurpassed beyond human calculation! We should place our trust in God and regard Him as the focus of our worship and adoration. When we have Christ, we've wealth beyond comprehension and He is sufficient for all our needs.

I'm currently reflecting on Amy Carmichael, the beloved Irish missionary to India, and her inspiring words, **"If I covet any place other than the dust at the foot of the cross, I know nothing of Calvary love."** What a majestic expression of one's love for her Lord and Master! Wasn't it the same Amy Carmichael who said, **"Make me thy fuel, O flame of God."** Master, please let us see things from your perspective rather than the perspective of the world! Jesus said, **"Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life..."** (John 6:27)

It's very fitting to close this article with the profound words of C.S. Lewis, "Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither."

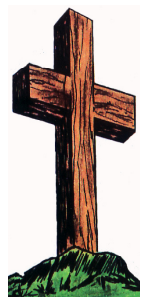
--- Matthew Skariah



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