

# PRAYER OR SPIRITUAL SLOTH

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How can we encourage one another to pray? I am not really concerned to urge us to say our prayers or to come to prayer meetings; I have in mind a person who must pray, and who knows that this is an expression of his or her union with Christ before the Father.

Many things could be said. In fact, all the gospel and all the Scripture, and all the example of those who have gone before serves this end—but I hope to say one thing that may be an encouragement at the moment.

At times a stupor settles over us. I am not concerned to ask what may have caused this stupor—so many things can cause it—but to give some reason to be done with it.

There is an unbelief which says that life cannot be any different from what it is and that we can only work with what we have already—and the result is sloth—spiritual sloth. On the other hand, there is the belief of prayer which talks to God about what he has proclaimed and expects there to be a fulfilment of his word and a participation in its outworking.

Prayer is the refusal to accept weakness as a limit of endeavour or to accept the status quo as normal. It is the joy in God which chooses to let life be determined by the promise of God and to regard our persons as the agents of the new creation.

Praying is what we do when we believe that the grace of God is more potent than any sin of ours or of any other person; it is the determination to be thankful rather than angry; it is allowing life to be controlled by the second Adam rather than the first.

Then let us put on all the armour of God and pray with all prayer and supplication at all times. Let us find our joys in God. Let us persevere in prayer—especially when that very prayer shows us the pain of God—and let us wait for the peace which is real peace and not a panacea.

Let us be aware that the alternative to praying is not just the absence of praying but the preparing of a seed bed of fighting ( see James 4 ). Our spirits cannot stand the futility of powerlessness without finally being roused to a stoush with someone over something.

Prayer is work, a task to be done like many others. But this work is not burdensome; rather it is the casting of the burden we already feel in life before the Father. It is the work which makes all other work what it should be—a simple rendering of service to another. The great longings of life cannot be satisfied by the work of our own hands or by the labours of others for us; our 'pot' must be filled by God and then poured out into the rest of life. So prayer is the first work and the great work which prevents any other work from becoming a slavery—or the ragings of a false Messiah—a form of slavery in which everything must succeed.

Prayer is breathing the air of heaven; it is the acknowledgment of God being who he really is—our Father, and the only way, finally, to acknowledge our humanity as sons. It is the cry of our weakness but the only way to avoid the sin of indulging our weakness.

To pray is to say 'No' to the despair of this present world and 'Amen' to the 'Yes' of Christ. And so, it is the way to say 'An end' to all peevishness and open the door to joy.

Do we pray just because it is the right thing to do? Not with any truthfulness. Do we find it a simple thing to pray? I certainly do not. But God has promised that he will raise up a people who call upon him in truth. All of his dealings with us are to this end.

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