

Does Prayer Change Things?

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R. C. SPROUL

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Chapter One

The Place of Prayer

What is the goal of the Christian life? It is godliness born of obedience to Christ. Obedience unlocks the riches of the Christian experience. Prayer prompts and nurtures obedience, putting the heart into the proper “frame of mind” to desire obedience.

Of course, knowledge is also important because without it we cannot know what God requires. However, knowledge and truth remain abstract unless we commune with God in prayer. The Holy Spirit teaches, inspires, and

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illuminates God's Word to us. He mediates the Word of God and assists us in responding to the Father in prayer.

Simply put, prayer has a vital place in the life of the Christian. One might pray and not be a Christian, but one cannot be a Christian and not pray. Romans 8:15 tells us that the spiritual adoption that has made us sons of God causes us to cry out in verbal expressions: "Abba! Father!" Prayer is to the Christian what breath is to life, yet no duty of the Christian is so neglected.

Prayer, at least private prayer, is difficult to do out of a false motive. One can preach out of a false motive, as do the false prophets. One can be involved in Christian activities out of false motives. Many of the externals of religion can be done from false motives. However, it is highly unlikely that anyone would commune with God out of some improper motive.

We are invited, even commanded, to pray. Prayer is both a privilege and a duty, and any duty can become laborious. Prayer, like any means of growth for the Christian, requires work. In a sense, prayer is unnatural to us. Though we were created for fellowship and communion with God, the effects of the fall have left most of us lazy and indifferent toward something as important as prayer. Rebirth

quickens a new desire for communion with God, but sin resists the Spirit.

We can take comfort from the fact that God knows our hearts and hears our unspoken petitions as well as the words that emanate from our lips. Whenever we are unable to express the deep feelings and emotions of our souls or when we are completely unclear about what we ought to be praying, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. Romans 8:26–27 says: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” When we don’t know how to pray or what to pray for in a given situation, the Holy Spirit assists us. There is reason to believe from the text that if we pray incorrectly, the Holy Spirit corrects the errors in our prayers before He takes them before the Father, for verse 27 tells us that He “intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Prayer is the secret of holiness—if holiness, indeed, has anything secretive about it. If we examine the lives of the great saints of the church, we find that they were great people of prayer. John Wesley once remarked that he didn’t

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think much of ministers who didn't spend at least four hours per day in prayer. Luther said that he prayed regularly for an hour every day except when he experienced a particularly busy day. Then he prayed for two hours.

The neglect of prayer is a major cause of stagnation in the Christian life. Consider the example of Peter in Luke 22:39–62. Jesus went to the Mount of Olives to pray, as was His custom, and told His disciples, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” The disciples fell asleep instead. The next thing Peter did was try to take on the Roman army with a sword; then he denied Christ. Peter did not pray, and as a result he fell into temptation. What is true of Peter is true of all of us: we fall in private before we ever fall in public.

Is there a right and wrong time for prayer? Isaiah 50:4 talks about the morning as the time when God gives the desire to pray on a daily basis. But other passages give times of prayer during all hours of the day. No part of the day is set apart as more sanctified than another. Jesus prayed in the morning, during the day, and sometimes all night long. There is evidence that He had a time set aside for prayer; however, considering the relationship Jesus had with the Father, we know that communion between them never stopped.

The Place of Prayer

First Thessalonians 5:17 commands us to pray without ceasing. This means that we are to be in a continual state of communion with our Father.

Prayer, then, is central and crucial in the life of the Christian. Let us look further into this vital but neglected and misunderstood Christian discipline.

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Is there power in prayer?

When a Christian prays, does it make any difference? Does it change anything? Though our prayers do not change God's mind, He ordains prayer as a means to accomplish His will. We can be confident that prayer does change things—including our own hearts.

In this booklet, Dr. R.C. Sproul argues that prayer has a vital place in the life of the Christian and calls us to come before God's presence with joy and hope. Dr. Sproul shares practical wisdom and helps us understand the purpose, pattern, practice, prohibitions, and power of prayer.

The Crucial Questions booklet series by Dr. R.C. Sproul offers succinct answers to important questions often asked by Christians and thoughtful inquirers.

Dr. R.C. Sproul was founder of Ligonier Ministries, founding pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and first president of Reformation Bible College. He was author of more than one hundred books, including *The Holiness of God*.



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