

Prayerless Praying

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There is much prayerless praying. The attitude and semblance of prayer are in it, but there is no real praying, no projecting of the desires with vigor and in a flame to heaven. The form and show are seen, but the substance and being of prayer are entirely absent. Prayers have been said, the performance gone through, but no real praying has been done. As far as any real benefit is secured, the turning the crank of a praying machine would have done as well. Prayerless prayers are not only a perversion, a waste, a delusion, but they manufacture unbelievers by the score. They get no answers and produce no gracious results. They are vain performances, and others recognize their emptiness and barren results. Men hear of the prodigious benefits secured by prayer, of the matchless good promised in God's word to prayer, and they mark at once the great gulf between the results promised and results realized...

Prayerless praying lacks the essential element of true praying; it is not based on desire and is devoid of earnestness and faith. Desire burdens the chariot of prayer, and faith drives its sense of need; there is no ardency because there is no vision, strength, or glow of faith. There is no mighty pressure to pray, no holding on to God with the relentless, despairing grasp, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." There is no utter self-abandon, lost in the throes of a desperate, pertinacious, and consuming plea, "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book," or, "give me Scotland or I die." Prayerless praying stakes nothing on the issue, for it has nothing to stake. It comes with empty hands, indeed, but they are listless hands as well as empty. They have never learned the lesson of empty hands clinging to the cross; this lesson to them has no form or comeliness.

Prayerless praying has no heart in its praying. The lack of heart knocks the bottom out of praying and makes it empty. Heart, soul, and life must be in our praying; the heavens must feel the force of our crying in order to have sympathy for our bitter and needy state. A need that oppresses us, and has no relief but in our crying to God, must be voiced through praying.

Prayerless praying is insincere. It has no honesty because we express in words what we do not really want in heart. Our prayers give formal

utterance to things to which our hearts are not only not hungry, but for which they really have no taste. We heard that eminent and saintly preacher, now in heaven, Dr. Jefferson Hamilton, speak abruptly and sharply to a congregation that had just risen from prayer with the question and statement, “What did you pray for? If God should take hold of you and shake you and demand what you prayed for, you could not tell him to save your life what the prayer was that has just died from your lips.” So it always is, prayerless praying has neither memory nor heart. A mere form, a heterogeneous mass, an insipid compound, a mixture thrown together for its sound, but with neither heart nor aim, is prayerless praying. A dry routine, a dreary drudge, a dull and heavy task is this prayerless praying.

But prayerless praying is much worse than either task or drudge, it divorces praying from living. It utters its words against the world but with heart and life runs into the world. It prays for humility, but nurtures pride; it prays for self-denial, while indulging the flesh. In gracious results, nothing exceeds true praying, but better not to pray at all than to pray prayerless prayers, for they are but sinning and the worst of sinning is to sin on our knees.

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