

**DEVELOPING A HEALTHY
PRAYER LIFE**

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31 Meditations on Communing with God

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and
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Developing a Healthy Prayer Life

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FOREWORD

I wish this book had fallen into my hands fifty years ago when I was a young Christian, but now I have it and have profited from it, realizing that its lessons, basic, true, and energizing, are relevant for disciples of the Lord Jesus at every age. I am thinking this moment of a housewife to whom I spoke earlier this week. She has just begun to attend the congregation and has the simplest faith. She is beginning to read Christian books; she is strong in her moral convictions, but her understanding of the faith is only beginning to be shaped. I promised that I would give five Christian books to her to help her first steps in this new pilgrimage. This book will certainly be one of them.

Alexander Whyte once said that if you wanted to humble a Christian you asked him about his praying. Ah, yes. One chats on about praying, its challenge and our struggles, but even today, as our journey draws to a close, we feel like a man picking up a pebble on the shores of a vast ocean. How little we know of communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! We can define what prayer is. We can make our confession in the words of that immense statement, "It is impotence reaching out to omnipotence." Yet we are not left to stumble on blindly and find our own way. There is

much instruction in the Bible's plain teaching on the nature of praying, warnings about hypocritical praying, and the examples of the psalmists, the apostles, and our Lord Himself. After the way of salvation, the theme most common in Scripture is the nature of true praying. Why is all this full detail given us if we did not need to be educated, strengthened, and stimulated to pray and not grow weary?

The cry from so many congregations is that the pulpit should be simpler. True, but not at the cost of simplistic repetition, wearying the people of God, telling the congregation what they have long known with no fresh stimulation. That is bad instruction. Should there not be one fresh thought in each sermon? Is that too much to ask? That is where this book is deceptive. Its stated aim is the instruction and encouragement of new Christians in their praying, and in this it succeeds admirably. The authors say, in effect, "We write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father" (1 John 2:13). But in speaking to them, their parents in the faith, old, mature Christians, overhear as it were, read, and are much helped as I have been.

I thank God for this book, and am glad that it will be the beginning of a new series of books, each of which contains thirty-one short meditations on a given subject—sufficient for a month's worth of daily devotionals. I hope that future books in this series will maintain the same standard of warmth, freshness, and lucidity, eminently suited to take the new-born generation of believers through the twenty-first century. I pray that this and future books will be greatly used, and become a classic series for new believers.

I pray that God will use *Developing a Healthy Prayer Life* exceedingly abundantly above what I am thinking now. The

authors have vast experience in Christian nurture and communication. I have nothing but hope that since they have been given by Heaven (I believe) a conviction of the need for such plain, affectionate books and the grace to write them, that God the Holy Spirit will take and use them for the good of His people this whole world over.

—GEOFF THOMAS

Introduction

WHAT IS PRAYER?

You are about to embark on a journey through a most important part of Christian life and experience, the development of a healthy prayer life. So what is prayer?

Prayer is the act of forging a connection between two specific points: our human needs and the resources of God offered to us in Christ. You can start at either point, and reach to the other in prayer.

True Christians have discovered that God, in Christ, offers them grace, mercy, pardon, peace, life, and love. This is revealed in the gospel, or “good news” of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:2–4). And true Christians have experienced how much they need these things; indeed, how the heart cries out for them in prayer (Ps. 84:2).

Prayer identifies the desires of the heart and expresses them to God. It can be silent or spoken. It can be as simple as “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13) or as detailed as the high-priestly prayer of Christ (John 17), in which He poured out everything He wants God the Father to give to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It can even take the form of a song. The Psalms are called “the prayers of David” (Ps. 72:20).

Christian prayer embraces God’s will as revealed in Scripture for its rule or guide. The goal is to ask for things

in harmony with what God wants for us. God's covenant promises, sealed with the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 11:25), are the surest foundation for prayer (2 Cor. 1:20). When divine and human wills agree according to God's rule, prayer will surely be answered (1 John 5:14–15).

Christian prayer develops as believers come to trust in Christ more and more for all they need or are called to do, even to know how to pray or to ask for grace to keep on praying. We have no claim on God but must rely entirely on the merit and prayers of Christ and the indispensable aid of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26). That is why Christ commands us to “ask in my name” (John 15:16; 16:24).

Christian prayer is also part of our repentance from sin. In prayer, we confess our sins, asking God to forgive those sins and to provide the strength we need to forsake them and kill them. From God's perspective, a sin truly confessed is a sin forgiven (Ps. 32:5). What's more, the same God who forgives sin cleanses from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Finally, Christian prayer is an act of worship (Ps. 65:1–2). As we come to know God in Christ, we are moved to praise Him as Almighty God and our Father in heaven. As we experience God's work in our daily lives, we learn to thank Him for the many good and perfect gifts He offers us as mercies from His fatherly hand (James 1:17). We also learn to rejoice in trials, hardships, loss, and sorrow, since these come to us not by chance but according to God's will to accomplish His purpose for us (Rom. 8:28, 29).

We have much to learn to have a truly healthy prayer life. Pray for grace to open your heart to the Word and Spirit of God to receive the counsel of these meditations with a teachable mind and a moldable conscience. Begin now by praying for an understanding heart and grace to grow in the knowledge of Christ.