

The Marvel and Mystery of Prayer - I

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The optic nerve is very tiny, but because of it, we can see the sun and the moon and the stars, the faces of those we love, and all the wonders of earth.

Prayer is the optic nerve of our spiritual nature.

Primary fact or delusion

Why, then, do some sever that nerve if it is to their great and eternal loss?

Prayer is either the primary fact or the worst delusion of life. It is either the supreme privilege of existence or it is the final evidence of life's absurdity.

If there is no God, the life of human beings is poor, nasty, solitary, brutish—and short. If there is no God, prayer is self-deceit and whimpering folly. And if there is no God, life has no meaning, for its end is nothingness.

But the primary fact, as we study all nations, all countries, all climes, is that the most elemental fact about human beings next to breathing and eating and drinking

Prayer is a primary fact of life because the idea that God exists has persisted with the human race throughout history. It is therefore natural for us to pray.

Prayer is an expression that we are not self-sufficient, and that we are asking God to help us.

and loving, is praying. It is the most natural impulse of humanity alongside its physiological activities.

Natural for us to pray

Praying is not like trying to grow palm trees in the arctic. It is not like having snow in summer. It's rather like the way wine blows its cork: fermentation below, neat event above. And that's the way it is with every human soul.

It is as true as the fact that if any one of us were living alone for long enough, someone unexpectedly entering the house would find us talking to ourselves.

Voltaire, who said he did nothing but tip his hat to the Almighty, prayed in an alpine blizzard. During a great storm, Thomas Payne (who wrote books against the Bible), was found on his knees while on a ship carrying him across the Atlantic.



Mesa security

In an interesting book called *Death Comes to the Archbishop*, we are told about the Lakota Indians.

In the last century, they built their homes on the mesas, those high, rocky tablelands with precipitous slopes. Because of different Indian tribes to the north and south—and their periodic manhunts—the Lakotas sought safety on the mesas. There, where there was only a rocky staircase to the top, they could easily defend themselves. They worked hard, and brought soil to the top of the mesas. Some ravines held water, and soon there were crops and flowers. The Lakotas found what every human being is looking for—security.

We are not self-sufficient

Prayer is the mesa of the human heart, and people who speak about it with derision are assuming the fallacy that we are self-sufficient.

I know of no more stupid fallacy than that: to assume that we are self-sufficient in a world where microbes are stronger than human beings, and where death and violence can await us around any curve on the freeway, at any intersection, any bend in the road. To assume that we are self-sufficient is a form of madness.

If there is a loving heavenly Father—and we need not doubt that until rocks rush to form a Taj Mahal or computers without fingers or electricity can churn out a Bible—he would want to talk to us. Because talking must always be a two-way street, all the great characters of the Bible were praying people. Abraham, Elijah, Jeremiah—all the prophets—Samuel, Hannah, Peter, and Paul, were all praying people. No wonder then that the Bible talks about prayer 350 times.

What prayer is

What, then, is prayer?

Prayer is need finding a voice.

Prayer is embarrassment looking for relief. It is the slipping through an open door to find our best Friend in the universe.

(Remember, if we lived under the constant benediction of the supreme fact of the universe that God is love, our lives would be in constant peace.)

Prayer is slipping through a door that God has opened. Prayer is spilling out the heart. Prayer is telling God what upsets us, what concerns us. It's telling God when we're grateful for his help, when we need his guidance, when we want his forgiveness, when we've been stupid and fearful and anxious. And when we've messed everything up. Prayer is the little child going to the father and spilling it all out.

Prayer is a sharing with God

A Russian peasant said of prayer, "I lean my elbows on the windowsill and I look at him and he looks at me." Prayer is a sharing.

Phillips Brooks, the great preacher who wrote, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," saw a little boy standing on tiptoe, trying to press a buzzer outside the door of a house.

Being a man of great benevolence, Phillips lifted the boy up so he could press the button. Then the boy cried, "Now scoot!" and wriggled out of his arms and scooted. Phillips Brooks was left standing at the door to explain.

Prayer is not pressing the doorbell, then scooting. Prayer is listening as well as talking. Prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse, wherein are stored all the treasures of omnipotence.

