

How Can I Cultivate Private Prayer?

The gospel produces a praying people. Christ died to bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). God calls sinners into union with Christ by the gospel (1 Cor. 1:9) so that in Christ we can have fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3). God has forged in Christ an unbreakable link between the human needs of His people and His infinite resources. Yet it is not God's will that those resources flow to us without our hearts of His children so that they cry out in prayer to the Father (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Indeed, they not only cry out to God (Ps. 57:2) but they also cry out for God (Ps. 84:2). He is their greatest desire (Ps. 73:25).

Christian prayer is a holy communication between the believing soul and heaven, a spiritual exchange of the desires and praises of God's children for the blessings of their Father in heaven. The Westminster Shorter Catechism expresses it well: "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God (Ps. 62:8), for things agreeable to his will (1 John 5:14), in the name of Christ (John 16:23), with confession of our sins (Ps. 32:5-6; Dan. 9:4), and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies (Phil. 4:6)." John Bunyan echoed that definition effectively: "Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to His Word for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God."

Prayer is a crucial part of the Christian life and deserves our careful attention and cultivation. Praying is as natural to true Christians as breathing is to a living

child. When God's people pray, they breathe forth the living motions of their faith, repentance, submission, obedience, hope, and love. However, just as a child needs to grow, so believers in Christ need to grow in their praying. Indeed, a child's breathing can be dangerously hindered by illness, and at times the prayer life of a believer can be constricted and enervated by spiritual diseases. Therefore, we do well to examine ourselves and emulate the disciples, who said, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Felicity Houghton writes, "Prayer is the way by which Christians express and develop the relationship that God Himself has chosen to make with them as their Father through Jesus Christ...As often as I pray, I still find I need to be taught how to pray."