

# I Ask, Lastly, Whether You Pray Because Prayer Is One of the Best Means of Happiness and Contentment

by J.C. Ryle

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*The habit of taking everything to God in prayer is the best means of cheerfulness in a world filled with sorrow.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 50:15, Psalm 55:22, Philippians 4:6

**Topics:** "The Power of Prayer", "Finding Happiness in God"

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## Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the necessity of prayer as a means to find happiness and contentment in a sorrowful world, where sin inevitably brings suffering. He encourages believers to cast their burdens on God, as prayer is the key to alleviating sorrow and finding peace amidst life's trials. Ryle illustrates how biblical figures turned to prayer in their times of distress, highlighting that Jesus is always ready to help those who seek Him. He warns those who do not pray of the dangers of remaining prayerless and urges them to approach God earnestly for salvation. Ultimately, Ryle reassures that true happiness is rooted in the state of the heart, not external circumstances.

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## Transcript

We live in a world where sorrow abounds. This has always been the state since sin came in. There cannot be sin without sorrow. And until sin is driven out from the world, it is vain for any one to suppose they can escape sorrow.

Some without doubt have a larger cup of sorrow to drink than others. But few are to be found who live long without sorrows or cares of one sort or another. Our bodies, our property, our families, our children, our relations, our servants, our friends, our neighbours, our worldly callings, each and all of these are fountains of care. Sickness, deaths, losses, disappointments, partings, separations, ingratitude, slander, all these are common things. We cannot get through life without them. Some day or other they find us out. The greater are our affections the deeper are our afflictions, and the more we love the more we have to weep.

And what is the best means of cheerfulness in such a world as this? How shall we get through this valley of tears with the least pain? I know no better means than the habit of taking everything to God in prayer.

This is the plain advice that the Bible gives, both in the Old Testament and New. What says the Psalmist? "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me." Psalm 50:15. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." Psalm 55:22. What says the apostle Paul? "Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6,7. What says the apostle James: "Is any afflicted among you? let him pray." James 5:13.

This was the practice of all the saints whose history we have recorded in the Scriptures. This is what Jacob did when he feared his brother Esau. This is what Moses did when the people were ready to stone him in the wilderness. This is what Joshua did when Israel was defeated before the men of Ai. This is what David did when he was in danger in Gethsemane. This is what Hezekiah did when he received the letter from Sennacherib. This is what the church did when Peter was put in prison. This is what Paul did when he was cast into the dungeon at Philippi.

The only way to really be happy in such a world as this, is to ever casting all our cares on God. It is trying to carry their own burdens which so often makes believers sad. If they will tell their troubles to God, he will enable them to bear them as easily as Samson did the gates of Gaza. If they are resolved to keep them to themselves, they will one day find that the very grasshopper is a burden.

There is a friend ever waiting to help us, if we will unbosom to him our sorrow—a friend who pitied the poor and sick and sorrowful, when he was upon earth—a friend who knows the heart of man, for he lived thirty-three years as a man among us—a friend who can weep with the weepers, for he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief—a friend who is able to help us, for there never was earthly pain he could not cure. That friend is Jesus Christ. The way to be happy is to be always opening our hearts to him. Oh that we were all like that poor Christian slave who only answered when threatened and punished, "I must tell the Lord."

Jesus can make those happy who trust him and call him, whatever be their outward condition. He can give them peace of heart in a prison, contentment in the midst of poverty, comfort in the midst of bereavements, joy on the brink of the grave. There is a mighty fullness that is ready to be poured out on every one that will ask in prayer. Oh that people would understand that happiness does not depend on outward circumstances, but on the state of the heart.

Prayer can lighten crosses for us, however heavy. It can bring down to our side One who will help us to bear them. Prayer can open a door for us when our way seems hedged up. It can bring down One who will say, "This is the way, walk in it." Prayer can let in a ray of hope when all our earthly prospects seem darkened. It can bring down One who will say, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Prayer can obtain relief for us when those we love most are taken away, and the world feels empty. It can bring down One who can fill the gap in our hearts with himself, and say to the waves within, "Peace; be still." Oh that people were not so like Hagar in the wilderness, blind to the well of living waters close beside them.

I want you to be happy. I know I cannot ask you a more useful question than this: DO YOU PRAY?

And now it is high time for me to bring this tract to an end. I trust I have brought before you things that will be seriously considered. I heartily pray God that this consideration may be blessed to your soul.

1. Let me speak a parting word to THOSE WHO DO NOT PRAY.

I dare not suppose that all those who read these pages are praying people. If you are a prayerless person, suffer me to speak to you this day on God's behalf.

Prayerless reader, I can only warn you but I do warn you most solemnly. I warn you that you are in a position of fearful danger. If you die in your present state, you are a lost soul. You will only rise again to be eternally miserable. I warn you that all professing Christians you are utterly without excuse. There is not a single good reason that you can show for living without prayer.

It is useless to say you know not how to pray. Prayer is the simplest act in all religion. It is simply speaking to God. It needs neither learning nor wisdom nor book-knowledge to begin it. It needs nothing but heart and will. The weakest infant can cry when it is hungry. The poorest beggar can hold out their hand for alms, and does not wait to find fine words. The most ignorant person will find something to say to God, if they have only a mind.

It is useless to say you have no convenient place to pray in. Any person can find a place private enough, if they are disposed. Our Lord prayed on a mountain; Peter on the house-top; Isaac in the field; Nathaniel under the fig-tree; Jonah in the whale's belly. Any place may become a closet, an oratory, and a Bethel, and be to us the presence of God.

It is useless to say you have no time. There is plenty of time, if people will employ it. Time may be short, but time is always long enough for prayer. Daniel had the affairs of a kingdom on his hands, and yet he prayed three times a day. David was the ruler over a mighty nation, and yet he says, "Evening and morning and at noon will I pray." Psalm 55:17. When time is really wanted, time can always be found.

It is useless to say you cannot pray till you have faith and a new heart, and that you must sit still and wait for them. This is to add sin to sin. It is bad enough to be unconverted and going to hell. It is even worse to say, "I know it, but will not cry for mercy." This is a kind of argument for which there is no warrant in Scripture. "Call ye upon the Lord," saith Isaiah, "while he is near." Isaiah 55:6. "Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord," says Hosea. Hosea 14:1. "Repent and pray," says Peter to Simon Magus. Acts 8:22. If you want faith and a new heart, go and cry to the Lord for them. The very attempt to pray has often been the quickening of a dead soul.

Oh, prayerless reader, who and what are you that you will not ask anything of God? Have you made a covenant with the dead and hell? Are you at peace with the worm and fire? Have you no sins to be pardoned? Have you no fear of eternal torment? Have you no desires after heaven? Oh that you would awake from your present folly. Oh that you would consider your latter end. Oh that you would arise and call upon God. Alas, there is a day coming when many shall pray loudly, "Lord, Lord, open to us," but all too late; when many shall cry to the rocks to fall on them and the hills to cover them, who would never cry to God. In all affection, I warn you, beware lest this be the end of your soul. Salvation is very near you. Do not lose heaven for want of asking.

2. Let me speak TO THOSE WHO HAVE REAL DESIRES FOR SALVATION, but know not what steps to take, or where to begin.

I cannot but hope that some readers may be in this state of mind, and if there be but one such I must offer them affectionate counsel.

In a journey there must be a first step. There must be a change from sitting to moving forward. The journeyings of Israel from Egypt to Canaan were long and wearisome. Forty years pass away before they crossed the Jordan. Yet there was some one who moved first when they marched from Ramah to Succoth. When does a person really take their first step in coming out of sin and the world? They do it the day when they first pray with their heart.

In every building the first stone must be laid, and the first blow must be struck. The ark was one hundred and twenty years in the building. Yet there was a day when Noah laid his axe to the first tree he cut down to form it. The temple of Solomon was a glorious building. But there was a day when the first huge stone was laid deep in mount Moriah. When does the building of the Spirit really begin to appear in a person's heart? It begins, so far as we can judge, when they first pour out their heart to God in prayer.

If you desire salvation, and want to know what to do, I advise you to go this very day to the Lord Jesus Christ, in the first private place you can find, and earnestly and heartily entreat him in prayer to save your soul.

Tell him that you have heard that he receives sinners, and he has said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." Tell him that you are a poor vile sinner, and that you come to him on the faith of his own invitation. Tell him you put yourself wholly and entirely in his hands: that you feel vile and helpless, and hopeless in yourself: and that except he saves you, you have no hope of being saved at all. Beseech him to deliver you from guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin. Beseech him to pardon you, and wash you in his own blood. Beseech him to give you a new heart, and plant the Holy Spirit in your soul. Beseech him to give you grace and faith and will and power to be his disciple and servant from this day forever. Oh, reader, go this very day, and tell these things to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you are really in earnest about your soul.

Tell him in your own way, and your own words. If a doctor came to see you when you were sick you could tell him where you felt pain. If your soul feels its disease indeed, you can surely find something to tell Christ. Doubt not his willingness to save you, because you are a sinner. It is Christ's office to save sinners. He says himself, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:32.

Wait not because you fell unworthy. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Waiting comes from the devil. Just as you are, go to Christ. The worse you are, the more need you have to apply to him. You will never mend yourself by staying away.

Fear not because your prayer is stammering, your words feeble, and your language poor. Jesus can understand you. Just as a mother understands the first lisplings of her infant, so does the blessed Saviour understand sinners. He can read a sigh, and see a meaning in a groan.

Despair not because you do not get an answer immediately. While you are speaking, Jesus is listening. If he delays an answer, it is only for wise reasons, and to try if you are in earnest. The answer will surely come. Though it tarry, wait for it. It will surely come.

Oh, reader, if you have any desire to be saved, remember the advice I have given to you this day. Act upon it honestly and heartily, and you shall be saved.

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