

Article 4

"I Must Pray Differently"

by

William Nevins

Some time ago I felt strongly the necessity of praying *more*, and I expressed that impression in an article entitled, "I Must Pray More." Now I feel that I must not only pray more, but *differently*; and that my praying more will not answer any good purpose unless I also pray differently. I find that *quality* is to be considered in praying as well as *quantity*, and, indeed, the former more than the latter.

We learn from Isaiah chapter 1 that it is possible to make many prayers, or to multiply prayer (as it is in the margin) and yet not be heard. The scribes and Pharisees made long prayers, but their much praying availed them nothing; while the single short petition of the publican was effectual to change his entire prospects for eternity. It was because it was prayer of the *right kind*. It is a great error to suppose that we shall be heard for our much speaking.

Let me, however, say that while length is not by itself any recommendation of prayer, yet we have the highest and best authority for continuing a long time in prayer. We know who it was that, "rising up a great while before day," departed into a solitary place and there prayed; and of whom it is recorded in another place that he "continued all night in prayer to God." Certainly they should spend a great deal of time in prayer, who are instructed to "pray without ceasing." It is in the social and public worship of God that long prayers are out of place.

But to return from this digression. I must pray differently; and I will tell you one thing which has led me to think so. I find that I do not pray *effectually*. It may be the experience of others as well as of myself. I do not obtain what I ask, and that though I ask for the right sort of things. If I asked for temporal good and did not receive it, I should know how to account for it. I should conclude that I was denied in mercy, and that my prayer, though not answered in kind, was answered in better kind. But I pray for spiritual blessing, for what is inherently and under all circumstances good, and do not obtain it. How is this? There is no fault in the hearer of prayer, no

unfaithfulness in God. The fault must be in the offerer. I do not pray right. And since there is no use in asking without obtaining, the conclusion is that I must pray differently.

I find, moreover, that I do not pray as they did in old time, whose prayers were so signally answered. When I compare my prayers with those of the patriarchs, especially with that of Jacob, and with the prayers of the prophets, those for instance of Elijah and Daniel; when I compare my manner of making suit to the Saviour with the appeals made to him by the blind men and by the woman of Canaan; and above all, when I lay my prayers alongside of His who "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears," I perceive such a dissimilarity that I thence conclude I must pray differently. But in what respects? *How* differently?

1. I must not speak to God at a distance. I must *draw near* to him. Nor that alone. I must stir myself up to *take hold* of him (Isa. 64:7). Yes, I must take hold of his strength that I may make peace with him (Isa. 27:5). I have been satisfied with *approaching* God. I must, as it were, *apprehend* him.

2. I must not only take hold of God in prayer, but I must *hold fast* to him and not let him go except he bless me. So Jacob did. There were two important ingredients in his prayer--faith and perseverance. By the one he took hold of God; by the other he held fast to him till the blessing was obtained.

3. I must be *more affected* by the subjects about which I pray. I must join tears to my prayers. Prayers and tears used to go together much more than they do now. Hosea says that Jacob "wept and made supplication." Hannah wept while she prayed. So did Nehemiah, and David, and Hezekiah; and God, in granting the request of the last mentioned, uses this language: "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears."

But a greater than all these is here. Jesus offered up prayers "with strong crying and tears." Some think it *unmanly* to weep. I do not know how that may be; but I now it is not *unchristian*. It is thought by some that men must have been more addicted to tears than they are now. But it is my opinion that they *felt* more, and that is the reason they wept more. Now I must feel so as to weep; not by constraint, but in spite of myself. I must be so affected that God shall see my tears as well as hear my voice; and in order to being so affected, I must meditate. It was while David mused that the fire burned, and then he spoke with his tongue in the language of prayer. And we know that which melted his heart affected his eye, for in the same

psalm, the thirty-ninth, he says, "Hold not thy peace at my tears."

4. There are other accompaniments of prayer which I must not omit. Nehemiah not only wept and prayed, but also *mourned*, and *fasted*, and *made confession*. Why should not I do the same?

5. I must *plead* as well as pray. My prayers must be more of the nature of *arguments*, and I must make greater use than I have ever done of certain pleas. There is one derived from the *character* of God: "For thy *name's sake*, pardon my iniquity. Have mercy on me *according to thy loving-kindness*." Another is derived from the *promises* of God: "Has he said, and shall he not do it; or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Another is drawn from the past doings of God: "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old." I must also plead Christ more in my prayers. The argument is drawn out to our hands by Paul: "He that spared not his own Son . . . *how shall he not* with him also freely give us all things?"

6. But again, I must *cry* unto the Lord. Crying expresses more than praying. It expresses earnest, fervent prayer. This is what they all used to do. They cried to God. The psalmist says, "I cried with my *whole heart*." I must cry with my whole heart, yea, *mightily*, as even the Ninevites did; else those heathen will rise up in the judgment and condemn me.

7. I must seek the Lord in prayer, feeling as did Job when he said, "O, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!" And this I must do, as Judah is once said to have done, with my "whole desire." Yea, I must *search* for him with all my heart. I must even *pour out my heart* before him, as the psalmist on one occasion exhorts. I must "keep not silence, and give him no rest," as Isaiah directs; "night and day praying *exceedingly*," as Paul says he did.

8. And I must pray in the *Holy Ghost*, as Jude exhorts. We need the Spirit to help our infirmities and to make intercession for us. Nor should we be satisfied with any prayer in which we have not seemed to have his help.

Finally, I must alter and alter my prayers till I get them right, and I must not think them right until I obtain the spiritual blessings which they ask. If I pray for more grace and do not get it, I must pray differently for it till I do obtain it.

Oh, if Christians prayed differently as well as more, what heavenly places our closets would be. What interesting meetings prayer-meetings would be. What revivals of religion we should have--how frequent, numerous, and pure. What a multitude of souls would be converted. What joyful tidings we should hear from our missionary stations and from the heathen world. Oh, what times we should have. The millennium would be on us before we knew it.

Practical Thoughts by William Nevins (American Tract Society, New York, 1836). **Note:** The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.