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LEARNING TO PRAY

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Luke 11:1

INTRODUCTION: Jesus was praying in a certain place. The disciples were with him and listened to him. When He had finished one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray." This request suggests several things. First, there must have been an obvious difference between their praying and His. Their prayers, like most of the prayers one hears today, must have been, for the most part, perfunctory, stereotyped, listless, and cold. They could see the difference and were greatly impressed. They wanted to improve in their prayer life.

Another thing, we have to learn to pray. Prayer is an art. Somebody has said that by the very constitution of our nature we are praying creatures, so that we pray by instinct. And there is truth in the statement. Wherever you find men, you will find religion, and wherever you find religion you will find men praying - they are seeking to contact the god they worship and fear. This very instinct is implanted in human nature. Irreligious people - so called - will call upon some god in a crisis.

But the instinct to pray is the very norm of the Christian life. Every Christian prays to the true God who is his Father. He prays by instinct. Prayer is a part of the birth pangs, or rather, the

cry of the new born.

But the instinct to pray is raw and uncultivated and undisciplined. Prayer is the most rudimentary of the Christian attitudes and needs to be improved upon. Unless we learn to pray, we will continue to pray by mere instinct. We will instinctively turn to God in prayer when we are in need, when we are in danger or in a crisis. In times of trouble we turn to the true God just as instinctively as a hurt or frightened child seeks the refuge of its mother's arms.

When we pray by instinct and not as a matter of habit, our prayers are apt to be self-centered. We may never get beyond the begging stage. Jules Romains observed people in church as they bowed their heads in silent prayer, wondered what they were saying, and surmised that they were presenting such pleas as these:

"O God of heaven, vouchsafe to heal my leg! to fill my shop with customers. Help me to find out if my servant John is robbing me! O God, cure my sore eyes! Save me, O God, from being drunk so often!

"Lord, let my son pass his examination! Help me to make

her fall in love with me! My God, if only I could get some work! My husband makes a martyr of me, Let me die!

Another danger, when we pray by mere instinct, is that it is likely to be spasmodic and occasional. This kind of prayer is during the storm; when the winds cease, and the sun shines, the praying stops. As soon as the danger is past or the pressure relieved or the sickness gone the prayer ceases. When we pray by mere instinct, we are always driven to our knees by a situation that has us licked. And there can never be any joy in such praying. It is always and only a time of

agony. I am not saying we should never pray in a time of crisis, but that is not the only time to pray. There is a joyful time to pray as well as a time of need.

This leads us to say that there are other kinds of prayer besides begging. We are beggars and God wants us to ask Him for blessings. But to beg is not all of praying. Other forms of prayer are adoration, thanksgiving, intercession, and confession.

A general definition of prayer makes it intercourse with God. In prayer we talk to the unseen but real God.

THE FEAST OF THE LORD

John 2:9-10, "When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now."

We have been to the devil's house and have seen four tables at which his guests were seated. We saw that in feasting his guests, he gave the good wine first and after that which is worse. We are going to see that the principle is reversed at the table of our Lord, and when we come into the land Beulah, and enter the city of the great King, we shall exclaim, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now."

It is common in scripture for our experiences, our joys and sorrows, our good, and our afflictions, to be spoken of under the figure of

a cup. Matthew 20:22, "But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able," Matthew 26:39, "And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." See also John 18:11, Psalm 116:13, and Psalm 23:5.

It is good for us to remember that all our experiences are the Father's cup and we ought to drink His cup without murmuring. He puts in the cup what is best, not what tastes best. Our doctor gives us some bitter medicine, but we take his word for what is best; and shall we not take our Father's word for what is the best experience for us.

Now let us take a trip through the banqueting hall of our Heavenly Father and look at some of the tables, the guests, and their experiences:

I. The table of outward providences. At this table we see the poor and afflicted and despised. The first cup is the cup of bitterness--the worst wine first. Christ will have no disciples dazzled with first appearances. He begins roughly with them. The first course of the Redeemer is affliction, sorrow, poverty and want.

In the olden time, when the best of God's people were at the table, he served them worst, for they wandered about in sheepskins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy, and they kept on drinking of these bitter cups for many a day, but afterwards he brought out sweeter cups for them. After the cup of affliction comes, the cup of consolation and finally the cup of everlasting bliss. The poor saint comes to die. He will never again drink of the cup of poverty--he will be rich forever more. The sick saint comes to die. Never again will he be troubled with disease. The persecuted saint comes to the

river of death, and on the other shore is the land of glory and a throne.

In outward circumstances, the best things come last. Two martyrs once burned; one of them lame, the other blind, and when tied to the stake, the lame man threw his crutch down and said to the other, "Cheer up, brother, this is the sharp physic that shall heal us; I shall not be lame after another hour, nor shalt thou be blind."

As to outward circumstances, the child of God is like the Crusaders. The Crusaders started off on their journey and had to fight their way through miles of enemies, and much through leagues of danger. When the armies of the Duke of Bouillon came in sight of Jerusalem, they sprang from their horses, clapped their hands, and cried, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem." They forgot all their toils, and all their wounds, for there was Jerusalem in sight.

II. The cup of inward experience. This is such a bitter cup at first—it is the cup of conviction. It is the first cup for every saint. When Paul drank of it, it made him blind for three days. But this cup is followed by the cup of loving forgiveness. What relief came to our convicted soul when we learned that Christ died for our sins—even for us; that he was punished for us, that the guilt of our sins were upon him, and he bare them in his own body on the tree. This cup is made up of faith and hope and love. Faith in the Redeemer's blood as all-sufficient to make us accepted with God; hope for a better world than this one which lieth in the wicked one; love for the Saviour that makes us glad when

the Lord's day comes—a day of feeding on His word in the company of kindred spirits. But there is still another and better cup, the happiest experience of all, when we shall awake in His likeness and be like Him. A saint was once dying, and another said to him, "Farewell, brother, I shall never see you again in the land of the living." "Oh," said the dying man, "I shall see you in the land of the living that is up yonder; where I am going; this is the land of the dying."

WHY DOES GOD SAVE THE BEST WINE UNTIL LAST?

He gives us the worst wine first to give us an appetite for the best. At the old feasts of the Romans, men used to drink bitter things, and all sorts of obnoxious mixtures to make them thirsty. Now, in this world, God is giving His children bitter mixtures to make them thirsty, that they may take deeper draughts of heaven.

Heaven would not be so sweet to us if we had not first dwelt on earth. Heaven will mean more to us than to the angels who always behold the face of God. Who enjoys best the sweet rest of the night? Is it not the laborer who comes home tired and exhausted? Who understands best the joy of peace? Is it not the man who has dwelt in the land of war? Or rather the boy who has gone over the top in the face of canister and shell and poison gas? Who knoweth best the sweetness of joy? Is it not the man who has passed through a world of sorrow? To whom will Heaven be the real "Home Sweet Home?" Will it not be the man or woman whose home has been broken up by sin or death? To whom will heaven be the real land of rest? Is it not the man who labors under the load and burden of

sin.

We ought to be satisfied with our Father's arrangement and plans for us. He saves the good wine—the happiest experiences for the last. If you have to drink a bitter cup, be comforted in the thought that there will be a sweeter cup to come.

By: C. D. Cole

SACRIFICE

Whatever God demands and commands calls for sacrifice on our part.

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If there will be room for regret in heaven, it will not be because we sacrificed so much here for the gospel's sake, but rather that we did not sacrifice more.

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That which we have not worked and sacrificed for, we generally esteem lightly.

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Some newspaper correspondents go out alone, love alone, suffer and die alone, to get the news at the scene of battle, or for fame, fortune, and material wealth; should we, the followers of Christ, not be willing to sacrifice, to pay the same price, for winning precious souls for Christ?

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"The greater the cost and the sacrifice in going forth to the aid of others, the deeper the wound when that aid is rejected" (Penn Lewis).

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The more we come to appreciate the sacrifice of Christ, the less we think and talk about our own sacrifices.

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It is great to live; it is greater to live for others; it is greatest to live for God.

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"We deserve liberty only so long as we are willing to sacrifice for it" (Benjamin Franklin).

God is waiting and willing to bless the soul and the church that repents.

