



DUTY OR DELIGHT?

Could prayer be more than
...a formula or ritual of words?
...a way to get things from God?
...a now and then activity?
...a duty?

Could prayer be the language of a LOVE
RELATIONSHIP? Could prayer be
exciting, intimate, and joyful?

Many believe that by offering many prayers, they have a greater chance to get God's favor. Hence the invention of objects of worship, of already made prayers that are

imposed. Often, people think that they need to obey special rituals, like washing their hands or feet, or to be in a special place or in a special position, at special times, in order for God to hear them. They repeat the same prayers time and again, most often as a routine, without really meaning them or even thinking about what they say, having their minds on other business.

But the Lord warns us: "When you pray, do not multiply vain words". (Mt 6: 7) Prayer is a heart-to-heart affair, a moment of sweet communion, between a child and his Heavenly Father. As a child talks to his parents in a simple, uncomplicated way and asks them what he needs in a straightforward and simple way, I always trust that God, Who is my Father, loves me and listens to me.

I would not be a good believer if I did not pray, just as the son would not be a good son if he did not speak to his parents. We can characterize prayer as "an immense joy" of speaking to God, a filial joy as children feel towards their parents when they manifest their affection to them. Without this intense pleasure of relating to God as a child to his father, the prayer will lack the power of faith, which comes as a result of expecting an answer with a childlike trust.

Prayer is a privilege and a joy which moves us to deeper obedience and intimacy with our Father. It should be both a duty and a delight. It should be natural, spontaneous and free from rituals.

One writer explains it that way: "As for me, prayer is the best part of my day. For half an hour . . . maybe an hour . . . sometimes more, we talk. He teaches; I listen. I cry; He comforts. I question; He answers. It hasn't always been that way for me. My quiet time with God used to be the most important **duty** of my day. I planned for it with admirable discipline. I felt **guilty** if I missed it. Now, prayer is the **cherished highlight** of my day. I eagerly anticipate my time of communion with God and am genuinely disappointed if something interferes. Somewhere along my spiritual journey, prayer evolved **from a duty to a delight**. If you have not yet made that switch, let me share these suggestions with you:

Get personal. "We have almost forgotten that God is a Person and, as such, we can cultivate a relationship with Him as with any person. In the deep of His mighty nature He thinks, wills, enjoys, feels, loves, desires and suffers as any other person may." (A.W.Tozer)

Close the gap. I've come to realize that while God is always present, His underlying desire is to be close to us; and because He is holy, He calls us to be holy also. Being more like God calls for prayerful self-examination. Is anything keeping us at a distance from God—like unconfessed sin, ongoing disobedience, unresolved fractures in relationships? Has the Holy Spirit been grieved or quenched? Seek His forgiveness, and allow Him to transform you into His image.

Let Him Talk. In our daily quiet time together, I used to spend a lot of time talking to God about the things that were concerning me. Gradually, I realized that it was nearly all about me. My doubts and fears, my needs and my problems were consuming our daily conversations. My prayer time was just an egocentric monologue. Even though the Lord invites us to pour out our hearts to Him, we need to let Him do some of the talking! He will give us insight in our situations and concerns if we will shift from talking to listening to His still small voice. He will give us perspective if we allow Him to share His heart with us.

Be a pleasure-seeker in your relationship with God. The more I study God's Word, the more clearly I see that relationship with Him is far more about pleasure than we are comfortable to realize and admit. God gives us "drink from [His] river of delights" (Ps. 36:8). He calls us to delight ourselves in Him (Ps.37:4). He wants the full measure of His joy to be in us. God brings pleasure into the most unlikely places: joy in adversity, delight in obedience, gladness in weakness and even acceptance in loss.

He even calls us to share in the delight He takes in us (Ps.149:4,5). Perhaps this is the greatest challenge: to embrace the humbling truth that we bring great pleasure to God. In the words of C.S. Lewis, "To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in . . . seems impossible, our thoughts can hardly conceive this view. But so it is."

Hush! A.B. Simpson wrote that "the heart in which God loves to dwell is a quiet one, where the voice of passion and the world's loud tumult is stilled, and His whisper is watched for with delight and attention." Sometimes my heart swarmed with hurry, worry, or discontentment, and the Holy Spirit was merely an onlooker, relegated to an out-of-the-way corner. I've begun to pay more attention to the living conditions I'm offering my inner Guest, and to cultivate quietness there. I want to make my inner being a place in which He loves to dwell.

Never sign off. Communion with God is a 24-hour experience. It's like a two-way radio that's always left on, making us immediately present to God and He to us. God, however, knows that my faculties are limited, and that, unlike Him, I'm not able to focus completely on several things at once. Sometimes I'm focused on work, engrossed in a book, or immersed in conversation with a friend. But I've learned that I don't disconnect from Him to do these things. He joins me in them. Increasingly, I am aware that He, and my conversations with Him, pervade the dailyness of my life.

These are the things that have moved me toward a deeper communion with God. They have caused me to enjoy that communion. I encourage you to try them. You're not the only one who will be blessed by the change. There's Someone who longs to see you move from duty to delight in your prayer life. God WANTS us to delight in and desire Him, and to know that our relationship with Him brings Him pleasure.

My favorite verse on that subject is Jer. 30:21: "*For who is he who will devote himself to be close to Me?*" declares the LORD".