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Heart Cry

In the words of Thomas Carlyle,

"Prayer is and remains always the native and deepest impulse of the soul of man."

This instinct of prayer is universal, and idolatry is a proof of it. Among the most depraved tribes and savage peoples are found idols to which prayers and sacrifices are offered. The instinct of prayer is thus expressed in ways that allow how far man has wandered from the primeval knowledge of God, but the instinct is undeniably there. What the fin is to the fish, the wing to the bird, and air to the lungs, so is this instinct of prayer native to man, and it wells up towards heaven as the water of a fountain gushes out.

This instinct of prayer is released in times of crisis. Men will boast loudly that they do not believe in God, but when they are faced with some danger, or sorrow, or bitter frustration, their instinct to pray shatters their opinions and rises to God as a lamentable cry. The French atheist Voltaire, when traveling in the Alps was overtaken by a severe storm. Taken off his guard and surprised out of his habit as a poseur, he cried to God for mercy and help. Dr. Knox, a former Bishop of Manchester, preaching on the sands at Blackpool, told the story of a miner who was fond of airing his unbelief. One day in the mine there was a fall of coal dangerously near to the boasting atheist, and at once he cried out, "O God, save me!" One of his mates at once said, "Ay, there's naught like cobs of coal to knock th' infidelity out of a man." Another man who had lost faith in God admitted to a minister of religion that each day he

practiced what he called "self-reflection" as a means of satisfying his instinct of prayer.

The instinct of prayer must be developed; otherwise it remains but a fitful impulse. The instincts of construction, curiosity, pugnacity, reproduction, and so on, are immensely powerful, and their proper use is intended for a full life, which by the grace of God will be a blessing to others. As Prof. McDougall reminds us: "Each instinct is a great source or spring of the psycho-physical energy that supports our bodily and mental activities." We must, therefore, understand that prayer is based upon our relationship to God, not just that kinship of man and God due to the fact of creation, but the spiritual relationship made possible by the salvation provided in Christ. In other words, we must be born again by the Spirit of God through faith in the Lord Jesus, and so "receive the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Hence our Lord's teaching, "When ye pray say, Our Father." Only as the recipients of divine grace and members of the family of God can we know what it means really to pray.

Christian prayer is an art into which we must put all the forces of personality. Intellect, emotion and will must cooperate in this greatest effort of the human spirit. Prayer must be in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. At once we see that there are some prayers we dare not offer. In Psalm 106 we have a reference to an episode in the history of Israel, the graves of lust, and these words are used: "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul."

How foolish of men to pester

God with selfish petitions, the granting of which would mean spiritual harm. 'All things work together for good to them that love God"--that is, our highest good; and this is utterly different from worldly success or material prosperity. Our heavenly Father's plan takes in eternity as well as time, and we can count upon His wisdom when His answer to some of our prayers is "No" instead of "Yes."

Prayer is a splendid discipline for us. By prayer God becomes our contemporary. When Wordsworth complains:

Me this unchartered freedom tires;

I feel the weight of chance desires, he goes on to appeal to duty to regulate the vain and contradictory desires that strive within his soul.

It is best to appeal to God, and to count upon the indwelling Spirit to maintain an inward serenity. So our Lord Himself lived upon earth in constant touch with the throne.