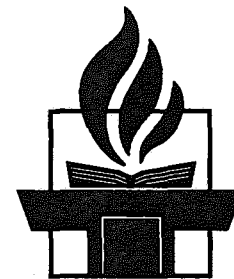


Reformation  
& Revival



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## Book Reviews

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### *Reaching God's Ear*

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C. Samuel Storms

Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, IL (1988)

282 pages, paperback, \$8.95

Through the years, many books have been written about prayer. Almost all tend to be devotional in nature, and most focus on only one aspect of prayer. Seldom do we find a book on prayer that is theological in nature.

Samuel Storms's *Reaching God's Ear* breaks this barrier. He bases his book on the premise that every problem we face in prayer is "traceable to a misconception about God." According to Storms, one must have a proper view of God to understand prayer and to pray effectively. Such an approach separates this book from other contemporary books on prayer.

Our modern approach to prayer is to let our experience control our theology. By beginning with the nature and character of God, Storms has moved our understanding of prayer away from the focus on experience and put the focus where it belongs—back on theology.

Though theologically focused, Storms frequently uses personal experiences and contemporary stories to illustrate each theological truth. Additionally, much of Storms's support material draws heavily on the writings and experiences of the Reformers and Puritans, including Calvin, Luther, Edwards, Warfield, A. A. Hodge and John Owen. The combination of these authors with Storms's contemporary illustrations makes *Reaching God's Ear* a book with appeal to ministers and laypeople alike.

*Reaching God's Ear* contains 16 addresses on prayer that Storms has divided into six basic sections. His first section, "Some Whys and Whats about Prayer," attempts to answer three preliminary questions. In "Why Is Prayer So Difficult?"

Storms indicates that our primary difficulty in prayer arises from inadequate knowledge of God as He is revealed in the Scriptures. Thus, the beginning point in prayer is really God's revelation of who He is. Such an idea is found in the lives of many of history's great prayer warriors. George Mueller, for one, noted that the secret of his prayer life was to saturate himself first in God's Word.

In his chapters "What Does Prayer Mean?" and "What Else Does Prayer Mean?", Storms attempts a definition of prayer by examining several elements of prayer. Here he views prayer as the language of worship, dependence, conviction, love, and contemplation. He also confronts such popular teachings as the "demanding from God" and "name it and claim it" approaches. Especially helpful is his reminder that intercessory prayer is "not first in my placing my burdens on God's heart, but 'God putting His burdens on our hearts.'"

His second section deals with "Prayer and the Trinity." In "Is Anyone Really There?" Storms analyzes three common ideas regarding how God relates to the universe: atheism, deism, and theism. He critiques each in brief and simple terms, providing an excellent exposé of the problems of inadequate views of God.

Section three, "The Christian at Prayer," provides the most practical insights to prayer. His chapter "Answering Your Own Prayers" reminds us to pray to "be enabled to obey." "Praying People Who Please God" examines the heart that God listens to in prayer. Here Storms reminds us:

The answer is not to be found in the so-called mechanics of praying. We should never be flippant in how we pray, but God seems to be far more concerned with why we pray. In other words, the nature of the prayer is more likely to account for the effectiveness than the method. For prayer to function properly, it must proceed from a heart adorned with these spiritual virtues that are pleasing to our heavenly Father.

It is here that Storms's book speaks to our present generation so forcefully, for we tend to look more for right formulas and patterns than right hearts.

Our generation also needs to hear the concepts presented in "Pleasing God with Our Prayers." Here Storms contrasts the modern idea of faith (a power we "conjure up" to force God to act) with biblical faith (a confidence in who God is). Additionally, Storms examines the issue of submission to God's will in our praying. Such submission, he contends, must be based upon a confidence in God's sovereign control over all things. His treatment of the objection "Why pray if God already knows?" provides excellent answers to a difficult question. Finally, he concludes this chapter with a much neglected treatment on the fear of God in our praying.

Section four deals with "Jesus and Prayer." In two of the three chapters included in this section Storms effectively addresses the importance of the sinlessness of Christ and the struggle of the prayer that Jesus prayed in Gethsemane. Both provide apt discussions of important but difficult theological issues. The third chapter, "Lord, Teach Us to Pray," provides only a brief treatment of the Lord's Prayer with a few new insights.

Section five, "Paul and Prayer," is much shorter than the other sections. Here Storms uses Paul's experience to discuss the importance of prayer from a burdened heart and prayer from a heart of thanksgiving.

The final section, "Related Issues and Problem Passages," may be the best section in the book. Here Storms tackles such knotty issues as "Does prayer really change things?" in the chapter titled "The Power of Prayer," the enigma of unanswered prayer in "When God Says 'No'," the sin unto death in "Prayer and the 'Sin Unto Death,'" and corporate prayer in "Prayer and the 'Law of Agreement.'"

Storms concludes this section on related issues with the chapter "Does God Hear the Prayer of a Jew?" Unfortunately,

it is here that Storms departs from his otherwise thorough analysis evidenced in previous chapters. Rather than seriously examining any passages that might indicate that God may hear the prayers of non-believers (e.g., Cornelius in Acts 10, Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel, etc.), Storms propounds the doctrine of salvation through Jesus alone and concludes that prayer must also be through Jesus alone. Perhaps equally revealing is the dramatic drop in footnote references, from the average of eleven per chapter to only two (one of which makes reference to his own book, *The Grandeur of God*).

In all, Storms's book is a refreshing change from the light devotional books on prayer that fill the shelves of bookstores today. With the exception of his chapter on the Jews, Storms has thoroughly researched each topic (with over 200 total footnotes) and presented honest theological answers to questions about the nature and practice of prayer. As such, *Reaching God's Ear* is one contemporary book on prayer that will challenge and inspire its readers in their understanding and practice of prayer.

*Jim Ehrhard*

### ***Mighty Prevailing Prayer***

Wesley L. Duewel  
Zondervan: Grand Rapids (1990)  
336 pages, paperback, \$11.95

**T**he book inspires and convicts! It motivates the believer to new depths of intercession.

In a time when the typical American church is prayerless, Duewel seeks to stab us wide awake regarding the magnitude of our sin and the solution to our problem. He provides

examples and illustrations on virtually every page which will challenge the reader and illuminate his priorities in the light of God's call to prayer.

Plain speaking seems in short supply. Preachers seem timid and fearful of offending their hearers. Duewel believes this must be corrected immediately. He takes a radical approach, getting at the root of the problem at the very outset of his treatment. After outlining what he means by prevailing prayer in the first few pages Duewel writes:

God intends your praying to secure divine answers. Prayer is not just God's diversion to keep from being lonely. He delights in your fellowship. He always draws nearer when you pray. Also, prevailing prayer is one of the most important ministries in God's kingdom plans (p.13).

He adds to this:

Prevailing prayer is God's priority strategy for our age and dispensation. The history of the church can never be fully written until Christ in eternity reveals the mighty hidden prayer involvement of all His praying people. What a joy that revelation will bring to Christ's prayer partners (p.13-14).

In a helpful elaboration of the scope and meaning of prevailing prayer he comments:

The scope of prevailing prayer is as broad as Christ's church and as extensive as God's world. There is nothing within God's will that is outside the purview of prevailing prayer. Prevailing prayer is intercession intensified—intercession until the answer is received (p.15).

Duewel shows us that such prayer *is* the great need of the church in this hour. Then he cuts right to the heart of the matter and titles chapter four "Prayerlessness Is Sin." He

says no sin is easier to commit than the sin of prayerlessness. Which one of us would not concur with him? It is, he says, "a sin against man and a sin against God."

Some of the chapter titles which follow will demonstrate the flow of the author's thought and approach. These include such titles as: "The Prevailing Christ," "Why Is Prevailing Necessary?," "The Dynamic of Desire" (and also of fervency and importunity), "The Dynamic of the Spirit," and "The Dynamic of Perseverance."

On the whole the book teaches the subject with balance. There are a few times when Duewel's lack of a strong understanding of God's sovereignty over all decisions and plans shows through, but these generally do not detract from the value of this devotionally useful treatment.

One mark of Wesley Duewel's books, most of which are extremely useful, is that he quotes repeatedly from great teachers and leaders in church history. In this volume he does a better job of documenting many of these very valuable resources in endnotes. A very fine bibliography and fairly thorough index are also included. I believe this book goes beyond Duewel's earlier work, *Touch the World Through Prayer*, in laying before the reader the subject at hand. With only modest reservations concerning better ways to state certain truths theologically, I would highly commend this popular treatment which is so needed in a time when revival tides are out and the church needs to seek God for genuine awakening.

*Editor*

**Abba Father: The Lord's Pattern for Prayer**

R. Kent Hughes  
Crossway: Wheaton, IL (1986)  
117 pages, paperback, \$5.95

**K**ent Hughes, senior pastor of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois has once again given us a practical, basic, and biblically faithful exposition of Scripture. His commentaries have set a significant standard for the modern pulpit in their faithfulness to the text and their straightforward, plain style. They are filled with the insights of the best scholarship without being "pedantic, dry and lifeless!" This little book on the Lord's Prayer falls into the same category.

In eight chapters Hughes studies each phrase, word, and petition in the Lord's Pattern Prayer. Hughes speaks of the importance of the Lord's Prayer in his introduction when he writes:

The Lord's Prayer has been, and remains, the greatest prayer of the church. The church's best minds have consistently treated it so and have used it to preach countless sermons on prayer and basic Christian doctrine (p.13).

Hughes adds, in directing us to this study:

The sad irony is that the Lord's Prayer is more often mindlessly repeated than prayed. Each Sunday morning in countless churches, more people "say" the Lord's Prayer than pray it. . . . The obvious problem for all of us is that "familiarity breeds contempt," or more appropriately here, "surface familiarity breeds contempt." Some of us learned the Lord's Prayer at a tender age. We cannot count the times we have repeated it. We repeated it as children. We repeat it as adults. The Lord's Prayer is one of the beautiful things of our life. But there is a danger in our familiarity with its beauty. It can become just beautiful words—so that we, too, "say" the Lord's Prayer without actually praying (p.15).

At the heart of Hughes's exposition is the observation that this familiar model for prayer sets before us a radical truth: Christians can approach the God of sovereign power

just as a trusting child seeks out a caring father as daddy. Indeed, this is one of the marks of the believing heart, for we cry, "Abba," precisely because we have been given the Spirit, who is the Spirit of prayer, in our hearts. All too often we who handle the Word of God regularly, especially as preachers and teachers, forget this basic and important truth.

How do we grow? Learn to trust? Pray as we should? By leaning on God as "Abba" or Daddy! His fatherly character can be trusted and His heart toward us will always be merciful. Our chief problem in prayer often lies right here—we simply forget who He is and how much He delights in our coming to Him as our Father. Kent Hughes helps us simply, but with some profound observations along the way, to see afresh who He is and how we are to come to Him in prayer as children. I warmly commend this book, especially to anyone who plans to teach or preach on this portion of Scripture.

*Editor*

### *A Brief Review of Six Books on Prayer*

The six books listed below are significant samples of some recently published works on prayer. Three of these are easily considered "classics" and were written by men who lived in other days. Three are modern treatments of this important subject. I cannot verify that all are still in print, but all could be found through used dealers by those who, like me, peruse such lists frequently.

#### **The Secret of Communion with God**

Matthew Henry

Fleming H. Revell: Old Tappan, NJ (1963) OP

Few authors carry an automatic guarantee with their name. Matthew Henry is one of them. This little book is a serious attempt to get Christians to make private prayer a priority. The first chapter is titled, "Showing How to Begin Every Day with God." What Spurgeon says of his commentaries—"pious and pithy, sound and sensible, suggestive and sober, terse and trustworthy," applies to this book. I urge all to find it, to buy it, and to read it.

#### **The Theology of Prayer**

Benjamin M. Palmer

Sprinkle Publications: Harrisonburg, VA (1980)

352 pages, hardback

This book is a formal and analytical study of the subject of prayer by a nineteenth-century Presbyterian theologian. The teachings of this book, which are very clear and orthodox, are more for the head than the heart. I confess that the book was informative, but it did not move me to pray. Nevertheless, I recommend this volume as a basic book on what it actually claims to be—a study of the theological aspects of prayer.

#### **The Still Hour**

Austin Phelps

The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh (1984) OP

I was first introduced to this book in a rather unusual way. A dear brother was preaching in my own church a few years ago and suggested to me that we begin each day by reading a chapter in Phelps's book and then praying together. What a blessing this proved to be! Phelps, who taught in a seminary about one hundred years ago, obviously wanted to make prayer warriors out of his own pupils. He was a

gifted teacher, and I am sure he was an effective one. A unique, challenging, and thought-provoking book.

### ***All the Prayers of the Bible***

Herbert Lockyer

Zondervan: Grand Rapids (1973)

297 pages, hardback

This book is part of the fairly well-known "All" series of the late Dr. Lockyer. The edition of this book that I own is listed as the twelfth printing. I am not surprised that this book is popular. I consider this a basic tool which is essential today for those who wish to study prayer from a biblical perspective. Lockyer's commentary on the various prayers of the Bible is solid and insightful.

### ***Prayer: Asking and Receiving***

John R. Rice

The Sword of the Lord Publishers: Murfreesboro, TN (1956)

The late John R. Rice was a well known fundamentalist evangelist who still wields a great influence in American Christianity through his many writings kept in print by The Sword of the Lord, which he began. Rice takes the position that "Prayer is not praise, adoration, meditation, humiliation nor confession, but asking" (p. 46). He teaches that prayer is one thing only—"getting things from God." I strongly disagree with Rice's viewpoint, yet still consider this book worth reading since it provides some interesting examples of answered prayer.

### ***Handle With Prayer***

Charles F. Stanley

Victor Books: Wheaton, IL (1982)

Dr. Stanley is the well-known pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia. I found some unsound theological concepts in this book, such as the notion that God gave Christ to die for us because we were "so worthy in the eyes of God" (p.53). I believe the author is generally more orthodox in his theology than this statement indicates, but, as in other books from Dr. Stanley, unusual inconsistencies sometimes enter into his writing. At the same time helpful comments like this one also occur: "When God answers our prayers, He either answers with yes, no, or wait."

*John F. Thornbury*

### ***The Language of the Heart***

Bill Mills

Leadership Resources International: New Lenox, IL (1992)

P.O. Box 413 60451

203 pages, paperback, \$8.95

This new book, subtitled *Knowing Joy & Communion in Prayer*, is designed to supplement a local church conference on prayer taught by the author. The book stands alone and thus can be read with profit with or without the conference. It displays the kind of material covered in the actual conference setting, all of which will help local churches understand and practice prayer in a deeper way.

What is prayer? Is it a mechanism we use to get God to act? Mills says positively not! He argues, rather convincingly I believe, that prayer is the foundation for an intimate relationship of communion with the Father. Like several other books reviewed in this issue, this one approaches its subject through a careful exposition and application of the Lord's Prayer.

The strength of this book is its emphasis upon prayer as relationship. In the opening chapter, titled "Intimacy," the author writes:

This relationship with God as His children is rooted in His grace and mercy. There is no goodness or potential that we can bring to God which would cause Him to love us or to be gracious to us. . . . That we could be God's children is a thought far too wonderful for our minds to grasp. To once have been His enemy, and now by His grace to be His child is a beautiful, precious gift. God has sought intimacy with us by pursuing us in our sin and redeeming us through the blood of His own Son. He continues to seek that intimacy through the fellowship of prayer. God has opened the way and invited us into His presence. May we come with responsive hearts to Him, crying, "Abba, Father" (pp. 35, 37).

Mills goes on to argue, in one of the best chapters in the book, that a full understanding of God as our Father means "Our God is a Sovereign who ordains all that comes to pass" (p.41). He shows, properly, that God works out *everything* according to His plan and purpose, but He is not the author of evil. "This truth stretches our minds and our hearts far beyond what we can grasp, but we must deal with these teachings from the Word of God" (p.41). He tells the story of a major automobile accident in his own life and powerfully reflects upon it by saying:

I know that God was not the source of the evil in that auto accident, but He had ordained that it should happen as part of His sovereign plan for our lives and our ministry. He purified and deepened our love for Him and for one another in that time. There are no accidents in the lives of God's children; everything comes from our Father's hand. Karen and I learned two great lessons in the midst of that battle,

even before God healed me:

- God can do whatever He chooses to do.
- Whatever God chooses to do is right (p.47).

He insightfully concludes, regarding evil and God:

If the smallest incident in God's universe was out of His control, we would live as victims of fate and chance. We are secure and free because our Father is in sovereign control over every detail of our lives. The process is in His hands, and the result is our good, and His glory (p.48).

If this is true, why should we pray? The author's argument follows the line of reasoning used by careful theologians long before. In essence he reasons that we should pray because God uses prayer to change both us and our circumstances; i.e., prayer is a *means* of God's purpose being accomplished in our lives and in this world. He writes:

Prayer changes things. Prayer changes people. Prayer even changes the world and what takes place in the heavenlies, but prayer does not change God. He is always the same. "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed" (Mal. 3:6).

On the personal level we pray, ultimately, because God "has commanded us to pray!" (p. 59). Precisely! God is not limited by us, our praying, or our working for Him. We are disobedient when we do not pray, and we fail to participate actively in pursuing God's glory by not praying. When the church is stirred to seek God afresh, evidence begins to accumulate that His mercy is about to break with blessings upon our heads.

Chapters dealing with prayer in terms of hope, warfare, dependence, confession, intercession, and worship follow.



All in all they follow the general path of the Lord's Prayer, phrase by phrase in the best expositional style.

I encourage the reader to get this book. Read it thoughtfully with a pen in hand. Look up the texts, ponder them, and pray for a renewal in your own prayer life. A conference on prayer by this author would benefit any church. Write to the address above for both the book and information about a conference. (You can also phone Leadership Resources at (815) 485-4900, or FAX an order to (815) 485-4995.)

*Editor*

### *Help Us to Pray*

John Thornbury  
Evangelical Press: Darlington, Co. Durham, England (1991)  
109 pages, paperback, \$8.95

**R**arely does a pastor serve the same congregation for any length of time. The author of this helpful book has served the same church for 27 years and has done so very effectively. This in itself has helped to make him both reflective and pastorally sensitive in his writing. Once again his mature style and profitable content are displayed in written form for the benefit of the larger body. More such writers are needed, i.e., effective, working pastors who give to the church out of the overflow of their ministry.

Thornbury builds his approach around the request made of our Lord Jesus in Luke 11:1, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." His observation is that our Lord began then to instruct His disciples, and therefore us, in the hows and wherefores of a dynamic prayer life. The author's carefully honed powers of observation then guide

him as he seeks to follow, very plainly, the teaching of the text. Would to God that more preachers would develop such skills and use them to give to their flock God's Word, instead of their own opinions. The first chapter is an example of what I mean.

Chapter One deals with prayer as "Pattern: Jesus, Our Example." Here Thornbury urges the reader to look at Jesus in prayer. He notes several simple but profound things about our Lord's prayer life. Consider these as they apply to your life. He notes:

- Jesus prayed before important events.
- Jesus prayed before His suffering and death.
- Jesus prayed for others.
- Jesus prayed with submission.

The very profundity of such material is that when read meditatively it allows the text to wash over one's soul with good effect.

This is followed by chapters on such matters as privilege, position, praise, priority, petition, purity, preservation, persistence, promises, and power.

In his chapter on "Position: The Believer's Relationship to God," Thornbury relates a poignant account of how he learned about relationship to his own father. He writes:

The term "father" has a special meaning to me personally. I recall when I was a child of about thirteen or fourteen my father had taken me out into a field to play baseball with me. In the game of baseball one player hits a ball and another catches it. On this particular day, my father, who was then in his mid-thirties, was throwing the ball up, smacking it with his bat, and I was trying to catch it with my fielder's glove. Suddenly I noticed that a man, who was a very prominent citizen in the community in fact, had driven up to the edge of the road and was watching very intently. Finally he stepped out of his car and said to my father in my hearing,

"If more dads would do like you, Jeff, there would be fewer juvenile delinquents." At the time I did not know the meaning of "delinquent." But I made it my business to find out. At the end of this day I had learned two things: I learned what a delinquent was, and I learned that I would never, never, become one if I could possibly help it, simply out of love and respect for my father (p. 30).

In sermon after sermon and book after book I have seen men try to deal with the question, "Should we forgive those who have not acknowledged their sins and expressed regret for them?" Some say yes, some say no, and others are just confused and muddled. I found Thornbury again simple, helpful, and on target. He writes in response to this question, in his chapter "Purity: Forgiving and Being Forgiven," and says:

There seems to be a difference between flagrant, obvious violations of God's law and offenses which are based more or less on human weaknesses. As to the former we cannot, as agents of the gospel, be indifferent to open rebellion against God. Forgiveness in such cases clearly requires repentance. But many of the causes of offense in human relationships relate to slights and inconveniences which should simply be overlooked. That is no doubt what Jesus had in mind when he admonished the disciples to "turn the other cheek" (Matt. 5:39) (p. 70).

Jesus is teaching that, in its extreme form, an unforgiving spirit is inconsistent with a genuine experience of conversion. He is warning that someone who cannot forgive his brother has a spirit that is totally foreign to the very spirit of the gospel. Although any of God's children can, at times, be guilty of harboring resentment and ill will, Jesus is clearly showing the dangerous consequences of such

a spirit. Persistent, inveterate, unbending, callous ill will towards others cannot reside forever in the bosom of one of God's children. As C. H. Spurgeon put it (in a message on Eph. 4:32), "You must forgive or you cannot be saved" (p. 70).

The book abounds with such simple, short, profoundly wise observations.

Finally, in the last chapter (11), Thornbury takes up the issue of power. How I wish charismatics and non-charismatics alike would read and understand this chapter. We are so badly polarized and so polemicized that we are missing some vital lessons on the work of the Spirit, especially as His work relates to true revival. Here Thornbury relates observations concerning these words of our Lord:

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Luke 11:11-13).

While acknowledging, properly, that the Holy Spirit is personally and perpetually given to all who truly believe, the author writes:

Certainly those who are saved by God's grace should not engage in prayer for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit any more than they should pray for justification. Those are blessings which they enjoy by virtue of their union with Jesus Christ through faith. But they certainly can and should pray for a fuller and more powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The New Testament makes it clear that the Holy Spirit occupies the body of the Christian like a temple (1 Cor. 6:19). But there are other aspects of the Spirit's ministry that not only admit of degrees of fulness,

but also are conditional, based on the Christian's level of obedience and submission (p. 104).

Thornbury finishes his consideration of power with a few words regarding revival and the ministry of the Spirit. He tells the story of a man rebuking him many years ago about his zeal for reformation and revival. The man stated rather matter-of-factly, "These are the 'last days' during which, according to the Scriptures, times will get steadily worse." Thornbury's reply is worth our consideration:

Here is a case of gross misapplication of Scripture. It is true that the Bible teaches that towards the end of the age times of terrible apostasy will take place and evil men will wax worse and worse. But it is a grave mistake to allow prophetic speculation to rob Christians of the benefits of plain promises of the Word of God. Neither this gentleman nor anyone else can say dogmatically where we are in the final scheme of things. He may be right. . . . But when it is used to spread fatalistic pessimism among the ranks of those who are seeking to bring about spiritual reformation, the truth of Jesus' return is being distorted. No one knows the day or hour in which the Savior will come back to earth. What we do know for sure is that God wants His people to seek His face, turn from their sins and plead for the power of the Holy Spirit. The promise of Luke 11:13 that God will give the power of the Spirit to those who ask cannot be annulled by theories as to God's prophetic timetable (p. 108).

Since the goal of this journal is reformation and revival, it is fitting that the last paragraph of Thornbury's book be added:

A. W. Tozer once said in a lecture to Christian college students that when we desire a blessing and pray for it we

may very well get it. When we are determined to receive a blessing from God and pray for it we probably will get it. But when we are desperate for a blessing from God we will surely get it. Whether God's people are desperate yet for a spiritual awakening is uncertain. But the needs of our generation are desperate. The church generally is in a desperate condition of compromise and lukewarmness. May God give to us such holy strivings for the Spirit's power that we are desperate in our urgencies of prayer. May we say like Jacob of old, "I will not let You go unless You bless me" (p.109).

*Editor*

### *Pray with Your Eyes Open*

Richard L. Pratt, Jr.  
Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Phillipsburg,  
NJ (1987)  
199 pages, paperback, \$6.95

### *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?*

Douglas F. Kelly  
Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publisher, Inc: Brentwood, TN (1989)  
217 pages, paperback, \$8.95

The authors, faculty colleagues, teach at Reformed Theological Seminary. Douglas Kelly is professor of theology on the Jackson, Mississippi campus while Richard Pratt is associate professor of Old Testament at the Orlando, Florida, extension campus.

We expect books on prayer to 1) Realistically convey to the reader what the Bible says about prayer; 2) Reinforce our belief that God answers prayer; 3) Satisfy our curiosity

about the amazing answers to prayer God gives to certain individuals and congregations (we admit at this point that our curiosity may not be Spirit-motivated); 4) Teach us how to pray, assuming we have a Spirit-directed desire to want to know.

With all the books on prayer written for this generation by contemporary authors, it is amazing that so many in our congregations (even among ministers) remain prayerless souls.

We continue to be moved and inspired by reading the prayers of the saints in past centuries. Our hymns by Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley are prayers, often of praise and devotion. The lack of such verse from modern writers is a commentary on the level of spiritual life in our age. Our contemporary praise songs cannot compare with the old hymns in quality of verse, in reference to Christ and His cross, in transport of delight in fellowship with God, or in the biblical view of man's need and spiritual poverty.

The saints of past centuries may have had their books about prayer, but they certainly had fewer than we. They wrote their prayers, not because they were stirred by books on prayer in their libraries, but because *they knew God*. Brother Lawrence spent more time in the kitchen than in the monastery library, in the company of pots and pans and floor mops, not with books on prayer. He and others wrote for the benefit of themselves, their contemporaries, and us. They did not copyright their prayers; they did not demand financial remuneration for each use of their prayers by scattered congregations.

We need books such as these by Pratt and Kelly to counter the careless saying we hear so often: "Prayer Changes Things." The words give credit to the praying person (or at least to his prayers) rather than to the God who answers prayer. They even permit a considerable tolerance in choosing or defining what sort of God fits our fancy to pray to.

This reviewer believes these books have value, if we remember that in our reading time, and in our praying, it is the Spirit of God who motivates our praying in order ultimately to glorify God, not bring gratification to the one who prays.

Richard Pratt's book, *Pray with Your Eyes Open* (he refers to the eyes of the heart [p. vii]), does not disappoint the reader who looks for biblical encouragement to pray in the plan of God rather than for personal satisfaction only. Right off, in the first of three parts of the book, "Looking at God," we are invited to a "Fascination with God's Character" and "Fascination with God's Actions." The involvement with God's character and actions, shown by writers of the Bible text, especially the Psalmists, enlarges our focus (because God is eternal) and limits our focus (because we pray according to God's will, not ours). Eleven pages in two appendixes give us comprehensive lists of "Names, Titles and Metaphors for God" and "The Attributes of God," all very helpful in encouraging us to pray the quality of these names and attributes into our prayers.

In part two, "Looking at Ourselves," the author helps the reader "to explore how the Bible presents the relevance of prayer for the modern world. In many ways, the key to this issue is to discover how prayer relates to different aspects of our lives and how it fits in moments of happiness, joy, sadness, grief, and pain" (p. 67).

How should we then pray to God whose immutable decrees have determined all that happens in the universe, down to the smallest details of each life? Pratt says, "Thankfully, nothing can thwart God's sovereignty over His world. In this sense, therefore, it is impossible for prayer to change God" (p. 109).

Why pray when God already knows and controls everything?  
The same question may be asked of other areas of life. Why

go to the doctor? Why work a job? Why spread the gospel? The reason we do all these things is that God has established these actions as vital creaturely means for accomplishing His purposes. The same is also true of prayer. Prayer is one of the many secondary causes through which God fulfills His plan (p. 110).

Commenting on Moses' prayer following Israel's rebellion against God (Ex. 32), the author writes:

We must remember that Moses did not alter the eternal decrees of God; his prayer did not take God by surprise, nor did it force God into doing something He had not planned. Yet, this text illustrates that God uses prayer as an effective means of fulfilling His purposes. He has chosen to use the petitions of His people as instruments of change. Prayer is a powerful human effort that can significantly affect not only the lives of individuals but the very course of world history (p. 112).

In the third part of this book, "Looking at Our Communications," Pratt discusses first "Form and Freedom in Prayer," and shows the values and dangers of reading prepared prayers in worship services:

Form, like freedom, has advantages and disadvantages. By using prepared prayers, we may achieve a balance and expression in our communication with God that will please Him greatly. Yet, we may also fall victim to insincerity and irrelevance if we are not vigilant to pray from our hearts and in the light of our current circumstances (p. 133).

In the chapter "Communicating Petitions" the author discusses "building a case" when bringing requests to God, as did many Bible characters in their praying.

In the final analysis, it is the people who know God who

know how to pray, and the people who know how to pray know God. For Bible saints, godliness and prayer were inseparable. That is why this book is important; prayer is first brought into focus in the great plan of God for the world and the church and the Christian. Without considering God, His decrees, and His plan for the believer, prayer is not much more than an exercise of the mind engaged in whatever subjective benefit may be gained.

Douglas Kelly's book also bases the exercise of prayer on biblical certitudes. Each of the opening chapters relates to a part of our Lord's model prayer taught to His disciples, by which, says Kelly, "we should be able to discern the very heart of the biblical theology of prayer" (p. 5).

In part one (of three parts), "If God Already Knows," the author deals in chapter one with the thought, "Prayer Depends on Who God Is," and relates the discussion to the first line in the Lord's prayer—"Our Father which art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9, KJV). Chapter two, "Prayer and the Praise of God," relates to the words, "Hallowed be Thy name." "Prayer and the Purposes of God" are tied in with the petitions, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

Part two of this book, "Why Pray?" begins with chapter four, "Prayer Changes Us," and addresses the final petitions of the prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

While chapter four deals with "the corporate needs and destiny of the people of God, and in particular . . . [with] . . . what God is doing *in* His people," chapter five, "Prayer Changes Others," discusses what God is doing *through* His people" (p. 125).

Part two's second chapter, "Prayer Changes Others," has a helpful study on the results of intercession, in which the author first recounts Moses' experience in standing in the

gap for Israel in her sin (Ex. 32; Ps. 106), God's search for a man who would "stand in the gap" (Ezek. 22:30), and our Lord's present ministry of interceding for His church (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:24-25) (pp. 125-32). The author follows with the statement that "the sin of the Western world is deism" (p. 133). (The book's editor erroneously titled this section, "Practical Atheism.") "If we really believed that God was intervening in this world all the time, in answer to the prayer of His people, and if we were convinced that it is our prayers that change the course of lives as well as nations, would not hundreds of thousands of believers be giving top priority to standing in the gap and interceding?" (pp. 133-34).

In part three, the author deals with "The Challenge to Persevere," "Wrestling in Prayer," and "When God Appears to Say No."

Two appendixes give "A Suggested Plan for Bible Reading" and "A Suggested Plan for Prayer."

Pratt quotes nearly five hundred Scripture texts in his book while Kelly cites only a few. Pratt's book includes some 50 illustrative silhouette-and-line drawings, and at the conclusion of each chapter a list of review questions and prayer exercises.

Both books are to be commended for their faithfulness to the Scriptures in relating the Christian's prayer life to our God to whom we pray.

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