



## June 2018 – *WHY PRAY?*

In May 1945, C.S. Lewis published an essay in which he addressed a “case against prayer” which he believed had, “in the last hundred years, intimidated thousands of people.”<sup>1</sup> An excerpt follows.

The case against prayer (I mean the “low” or old-fashioned kind) is this. The thing you ask for is either good — for you and for the world in general — or else it is not. If it is, then a good and wise God will do it anyway. If it is not, then He won’t. In neither case can your prayer make any difference. But if this argument is sound, surely it is an argument not only against praying, but against doing anything whatever?

In every action, just as in every prayer, you are trying to bring about a certain result; and this result must be good or bad. Why, then, do we not argue as the opponents of prayer argue, and say that if the intended result is good God will bring it to pass without your interference, and that if it is bad He will prevent it happening whatever you do? Why wash your hands? If God intends them to be clean, they’ll come clean without your washing them. If He doesn’t, they’ll remain dirty (as Lady MacBeth found) however much soap you use. Why ask for the salt? Why put on your boots? Why do anything?



We know that we can act and that our actions produce results. Everyone who believes in God must therefore admit (quite apart from the question of prayer) that God has not chosen to write the whole of history with His own hand. Most of the events that go on in the universe are indeed out of our control, but not all. It is like a play in which the scene and the general outline of the story is fixed by the author, but certain minor details are left for the actors to improvise. It may be a mystery why He should have allowed us to cause real events at all; but it is no odder that He should allow us to cause them by praying than by any other method.

Pascal says that God ‘instituted prayer in order to allow His creatures the dignity of causality’. It would perhaps be truer to say that He invented both prayer and physical action for that purpose...<sup>2</sup>

The argument that prayer is somehow unnecessary or doesn’t make any difference is antithetical to many passages in Scripture. If we allow ourselves to be influenced by it, our failure to pray may mean missed blessings both for ourselves and for other people for whom we could have prayed. James said, “You do not have, because you do not ask” (4:2, ESV). Let us be thankful for God’s gift of prayer and commit or recommit ourselves to spending daily time with God in prayer.

*“Lord, teach us to pray...”*

LUKE 11:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, (“Work and Prayer” in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 105-106 (footnote omitted).