

## The ScrewTape Letters Prayer and Suffering Letters 4 & 5

Discussion Question:

1. Is it better to pray to God informally with feeling or with a formal structure and plan?
2. How do we know our prayers are successful?

Intentional prayer is when a person's mind and heart is focused and submitted to God.

1. A focused mind towards God during prayer is an essential practice.

*...he may be persuaded to aim at something entirely spontaneous, inward, informal, and unregularised; and what this will actually mean to a beginner will be an effort to produce in himself a vaguely devotional mood in which real concentration of will and intelligence have no part. One of their poets, Coleridge, has recorded that he did not pray "with moving lips and bended knees" but merely "composed his spirit to love" and indulged "a sense of supplication". (p. 15-16)*

*That is exactly the sort of prayer we want; and since it bears a superficial resemblance to the prayer of silence as practised by those who are very far advanced in the Enemy's service, clever and lazy patients can be taken in by it for a long time. (p. 16)*

*At the very least, they can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayer; for they constantly forget, what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do effects their souls. (p. 16)*

2. Prayer needs a submissive heart dependent on God.

*The simplest is to turn their gaze away from Him towards themselves. Keep them watching their own minds and trying to produce feelings there by the action of their own wills.*

*Teach them to estimate the value of prayer by their success in producing the desired feeling; and never let them suspect how much success or failure of that kind depends on where they are well or ill, fresh or tired, at the moment. (p. 17)*

3. Prayer focused on God rejects all unbiblical man made images and concepts of who God is.

*If you look into your patient's mind when he is praying, you will not find that. If you examine the object to which he is attending, you will find that it is a composite object containing many quite ridiculous ingredients. But whatever the nature of the composite object, you must keep him praying to it – to the thing that he has made, not to the Person who has made him. You may even encourage him to attach great importance to the correction and improvement of his composite object, and to keeping it steadily before his imagination during the whole prayer. (p. 17-18)*

*For if he ever comes to make the distinction, if ever he consciously directs his prayers “not to what I think thou art but to what thou knowest thyself to be”, our situation is, for the moment, desperate. (p. 18)*

*Once all his thoughts and images have been flung aside or, if retained, retained with a full recognition of their merely subjective nature, and the man trusts himself to the completely real, external, invisible Presence, there with him in the room and never knowable by him as he is known by it – why, then it is that the incalculable may occur.... this real nakedness of the soul in prayer. (p. 18-19)*

Discussion Question:

1. Does suffering inhibit or encourage personal growth?

Suffering is in fact a “short misery” which can become a catalyst for growth in a Christian's life.

1. The times of suffering on earth is fleeting compared to eternity in the Christian's perspective.

*When I see the temporal suffering of humans who finally escape us, I feel as if I had been allowed to taste the first course of a rich banquet and denied the rest. It is worse than not to have tasted it at all. The Enemy, true to His barbarous methods of warfare, allows us to see the short misery of His favourites only to tantalise and torment us... (p. 22-23)*

<sup>[3]</sup> *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”<sup>[4]</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4 ESV)*

2. Suffering can challenge your values and beliefs to the realization that there is something greater than yourself.

*But, if we are not careful, we shall see thousands turning in this tribulation to the Enemy, while tens of thousands who do not go so far as that will nevertheless have their attention diverted from themselves to values and causes which they believe to be higher than the self. (p. 23)*

*How much better for us if all humans died in costly nursing homes amid doctors who lie, nurses who lie, friends who lie, as we have trained them, promising life to the dying, encouraging the belief that sickness excuses every indulgence, and even, if our workers know their job, withholding all suggestion of a priest lest it should betray to the sick man his true condition! (p. 23-24)*

*One of our best weapons, contented worldliness, is rendered useless. In wartime not even a human can believe that he is going to live forever. (p. 24)*

3. God said that suffering is will be a part of the Christian life.

*The Enemy's human partisans have all been plainly told by Him that suffering is an essential part of what He calls Redemption; so that a faith which is destroyed by war or pestilence cannot really have been worth the trouble of destroying. I am speaking now of diffused suffering over a long period of time. (p. 24)*

<sup>[4]</sup> *Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.* <sup>[5]</sup> *This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering (2 Thessalonians 1:4-5 ESV)\*

The real question is not *whether* we will suffer, but how we will react to suffering when it comes. We can see it as a miserable experience to be endured, or we can offer it to God for His redemptive purposes. This is the great truth Christians know: God will always use what we suffer for Christ's work of redemption if we let Him. (The Faith, Given Once and For All ~ Chuck Colson 2008)