

Reflections

thoughts for the journey

OCTOBER 2003—*The Privilege and Power of Prayer*

Prayer is God's idea, not ours. It is his gift to us, and it has a specific role in his plan for our lives and the world. C.S. Lewis certainly believed and taught this. On several occasions, when talking of prayer, he quoted with approval the French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal's famous statement that God "instituted prayer in order to give his creatures the dignity of causality."¹

Some of us may find it hard to believe that God allows human beings to cause real events to happen through prayer. Lewis had no such misgivings. "It may be a mystery why he should allow 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."²

We may well ask: How can God answer our prayers without introducing chaos into his plans for the world? After all, he alone knows what is best in all circumstances and has set his plan accordingly. But, as Lewis notes, "He made his own plan or plot of history such that it admits of a certain amount of free play and can be modified according to our prayers."³

Lewis, of course, is just telling us in his own words what the Bible has long told us about prayer. He is also telling us what he had discovered about prayer in his own experience. And, it was mainly from his experiences that he learned about prayer, for he found little help in books on prayer. We, too, can discover these things in our experience if we will learn to pray.

Developing a healthy prayer life is not easy in the modern world; but neither is it impossible. Busyness, distractions, spiritual laziness, material abundance, self-sufficiency and a host of other things tend to push prayer to the margins of life. But there is a sure way forward. If we wish to embrace the "dignity of causality" and discover the power of prayer in our lives and the world, we will need first of all to recognize afresh the importance of prayer—not just in emergencies but also for all of life. Reading what the Bible says about prayer can help us here. Then we will need to come to a firm decision to make time for daily prayer—not just two or three minutes before rushing off to our busy day but quiet, unhurried time in God's presence each day. Finally, we will want to follow the example of Jesus' disciples, and ask, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1).

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

James 5:16b-18 NIV

¹ *The World's Last Night*, A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., ©1960, p. 9.

² *God in the Dock*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, ©1970, p. 106.

³ *ibid.*, p. 106.