

# Reflections

AUGUST 2020

## Something We Were Created To Do

C.S.

Lewis's book *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, consists of a series of letters to a (fictional) friend. In Letter 21, Lewis addresses a comment made by Malcolm's wife Betty: "all this about prayer and never a word on the practical problem: its irksomeness." An excerpt follows.

The truth is, I haven't any language weak enough to depict the weakness of my spiritual life. If I weakened it enough it would cease to be language at all. As when you try to turn the gas-ring a little lower still, and it merely goes out...

Well, let's now at any rate come clean. Prayer is irksome. An excuse to omit it is never unwelcome. When it is over, this casts a feeling of relief and holiday over the rest of the day. We are reluctant to begin. We are delighted to finish. While we are at prayer, but not while we are reading a novel or solving a cross-word puzzle, any trifle is enough to distract us...

*What can be done for — or what should be done with — a rose-tree that dislikes producing roses?*

The odd thing is that this reluctance to pray is not confined to periods of dryness. When yesterday's prayers were full of comfort and exaltation, today's will still be felt as, in some degree, a burden.

Now the disquieting thing is not simply that we skimp and begrudge the duty of prayer. The really disquieting thing is it should have to be numbered among duties at all. For we believe that we were created "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." And if the few, the very few, minutes we now spend on intercourse with God are a burden to us rather than a delight, what then? ... What can be done *for* — or what should be done *with* — a rose-tree that *dislikes* producing roses? Surely it ought to want to? ...

The painful effort which prayer involves is no proof that we are doing something we were not created to do.

If we were perfected, prayer would not be a duty, it would be delight. Some day, please God, it will be. The same is true of many other behaviours which now appear as duties. If I loved my neighbour as myself, most of the actions which are now my moral duty would flow out

of me as spontaneously as song from a lark or fragrance from a flower...

I must say my prayers today whether I feel devout or not; but that is only as I must learn my grammar if I am ever to read the poets...

I have a notion that what seem our worst prayers may really be, in God's eyes, our best. Those, I mean, which are least supported by devotional feeling and contend with the greatest disinclination. For these, perhaps being nearly all will, come from a deeper level than feeling.<sup>1</sup>

One of the consequences of life after the fall is that, even after we become Christians, our everyday desires often don't match what God requires of us. As you think about your own life over the past several weeks and months, would you like to spend more time in daily prayer and Bible reading?<sup>2</sup>



*"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, 1992), pp. 112-116.

<sup>2</sup> For a helpful article, see Thomas A. Tarrants, III, "Suggestions for Spending Daily Time with God", *Knowing & Doing*, Spring 2018.

