

Answers to Two Questions about Prayer

by George MacDonald

Selected Readings from C. S. Lewis, *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1947)

91. *Why Should It Be Necessary?*

“But if God is so good as you represent Him, and if He knows all that we need, and better far than we do ourselves, why should it be necessary to ask Him for anything?” I answer, What if He knows Prayer to be the thing we need first and most? What if the main object in God’s idea of prayer be the supplying of our great, our endless need—the need of Himself! . . . Hunger may drive the runaway child home, and he may or may not be fed at once, but he needs his mother more than his dinner. Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond all other need: prayer is the beginning of that communion, and some need is the motive of that prayer. . . . So begins a communion, a talking with God, a coming-to-one with Him, which is the sole end of prayer, yea, of existence itself in its infinite phases. We must ask that we may receive: but that we should receive what we ask in respect of our lower needs, is not God’s end in making us pray, for He could give us everything without that: to bring His child to his knee, God withholds that man may ask.

106. *Why We Must Wait*

Perhaps, indeed, the better the gift we pray for, the more time is necessary for its arrival. To give us the spiritual gift we desire, God may have to begin far back in our spirit, in regions unknown to us, and do much work that we can be aware of only in the results; for our consciousness is to the extent of our being but as the flame of the volcano to the world-gulf whence it

issues; in the gulf of our unknown being God works behind our consciousness. With His holy influence, with His own presence (the one thing for which most earnestly we cry) He may be approaching out consciousness from behind, coming forward through regions of our darkness into our light, long before we begin to be aware that He is answering our request—has answered it, and is visiting His child.

Thomas Aquinas on Prayer

Summa Theologiæ, 2a2æ, 83, 1 and 2

Hence: 1. The Lord is said to hear the desire of the poor either because desire is the cause of their petition, since a petition is an expression of desire, or to show how quickly the poor are heard, for God hears the poor even before they offer a prayer, as it says in Isaiah, *Before they call, I will answer.*

2. As stated above, the will moves reason to its goal; hence an act of reason can be directed by the will to union with God which is the goal of charity. Prayer motivated by charity tends toward God in two ways: first, in so far as the thing requested is concerned, because when we pray we should ask principally to be united to God, as the Psalmist says, *One thing I ask of the Lord, this I seek, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life*, secondly, in so far as the one praying is concerned, because one ought to approach the person from whom he requests something, either in place when from a man, or in mind when from God. Hence Dionysius says, *when we call upon God in our prayers we unveil our mind in his presence*, and in the same sense Damascene says, *prayer is the lifting up of the mind to God.*