

Unanswered Prayer

Prayer Tool: The Prayer of Relinquishment

What?

The Prayer of Relinquishment invites God's will to be done above our own desires. This prayer tool explains its importance.

Why?

"God creates everything out of nothing – and everything which God is to use he first reduces to nothing." Soren Kierkegaard

Bible reference:

"Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'" Luke 1:38

A quick introduction to the Prayer of Relinquishment

The prayer of relinquishment (sometimes known as 'prayer of holy indifference'), is for those whose prayer lives have matured to the place where, despite our circumstances, we are prepared to ask for God's will above all else – nothing more and nothing less.

This is a grace-inspired place, one that we cannot attain by ourselves. In saying 'Yes' to Jesus, He graces us with strength to choose to die to our own desires, to our own attachments, to our own ego-gratifications, by abandoning ourselves wholly to His mysterious ways.

Mary's poignant prayer in response to the angel's announcement is one of the best examples in scripture of the prayer of relinquishment.

Ruth Haley Barton notes: '...she expressed a profound readiness to set aside her own personal concerns in order to participate in the will of God as it unfolded in human history...'¹

¹ Ruth Haley Barton, <https://transformingcenter.org/2011/12/advent-4-mary-and-the-prayer-of-indifference/>

Blood, sweat and tears

Make no mistake, the prayer of relinquishment is no quiet, candle-lit contemplation. This is full-bodied prayer - literally blood-sweat-and-tears prayer - and all roads lead us to the garden of Gethsemane.

“Not my will but yours be done” was the example Jesus taught us; the choice to have your own will so broken – more accurately crucified – you are prepared to give up the very thing you value the most for the greater good; the greater love.

Do it: The Prayer of Relinquishment

In some ways we should pray the prayer of relinquishment every day, resolving in our hearts to, “reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God” (Romans 6:11) in the inevitable trials and temptations of the day.

However, experience informs us that there are certain seasons of life when God brings us to poignant destiny-shaping moments. The decisions that we make in prayer before God in these moments are key to unlocking the next part of His plan for our lives.

“Now I know”

If we reflect on a life of following Jesus whole-heartedly, we should discern a handful of ‘now I know’ moments; seasons of life where God has brought us to the end of ourselves.

Leaving a job; letting a terminally ill spouse or friend ‘go’; handing a wayward child over to the Lord; leaving home for the mission field - this is letting go, relinquishing prayer and it does not come easy.

We count the cost, we struggle for days, the words may even stick in our throats and the only prayer we can actually say is, ‘is there any other way Father?’

Nevertheless, because Jesus Himself has pioneered a way for us, through His grace we allow our clenched fists to be opened. We offer up to Him our freshly yielded hearts and we find a way to say those life-changing words:

‘Not my will, but Yours be done.’

As we get up from our knees, setting our face like a flint towards a greater good we still may not yet see, we find strength to go through whatever it takes for the affirming and confident words of the Father ring in our ears: “Now I know.”

Books on the Prayer of Relinquishment

- A Godward Life – John Piper
- Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home – Richard Foster