

## C.S. Lewis on How to Enjoy Prayer

By

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While working on our online course, “C.S. Lewis on Christianity,” I was surprised to learn that the young Lewis shared many of my same struggles with prayer.

As a young boy, Lewis was taught that prayers offered in faith would be granted. Naturally, he worked hard to produce by sheer force of will a firm belief that his prayers would produce a certain predetermined result. When that failed, he worked hard to ensure that every single word of his prayer was sincere. The burden of this practice was in large part responsible for Lewis abandoning the faith when he was 13 years old.

When I had similar views on prayer, I questioned the practice altogether. If my prayers went unanswered, I wondered if their apparent failure was due to my lack of will or sincerity.

### Lewis’s New Understanding

Fortunately, Lewis returned to Christianity as an adult and articulated his new understanding of prayer. His explanation has enriched my life, which is why I want to share it with you.

Lewis makes a distinction between contemplation and enjoyment. He says that contemplation is what we do when we are thinking about something from the outside, while enjoyment is what we do when we are fully immersed in something. He paints an analogy to help us understand the difference.

Lewis asks readers to imagine themselves in a dark shed with a beam of light coming in through a crack in the door. He says that contemplation is like looking at the beam of sunlight that comes into the shed. We are contemplating the beam, because we are looking at it from the outside. Enjoyment, on the other hand, is like

stepping into that beam of sunlight and allowing it to rest on our face so that we can look along the beam, through the crack in the door, to the world outside. Lewis says we need to look along our prayers to the God we are praying to, rather than just look at our prayers.

### The Experience of Prayer

Lewis encourages us not to focus on ourselves and the intensity or sincerity of our prayers, but instead to fully immerse ourselves in the experience of our prayer and enjoy the fact that the Holy Spirit is speaking through us and for us with an Almighty God who loves us deeply. In this way, Lewis urges us to enjoy our prayers and not to merely contemplate them.

For his understanding of prayer, Lewis draws from Romans 8:26, which says: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.”

In his mature thought, Lewis understood prayer less as man speaking to God and more as God speaking to and for man, and man learning to participate in the divine cycle of God creating, sustaining, and redeeming the world.

This subtle yet profound distinction in how to approach prayer has enriched and transformed my prayer life. I hope it does the same to yours.