

## Elder Howard W. Hunter

Henry Ward Beecher once said, "It is not well for a man to pray cream and live skim milk." (*Proverbs From Plymouth Pulpit*, ed. William Drysdale, New York: Appleton, 1887, p. 192.) That was a century ago. There is now before us a danger that many may pray skim milk and live *that* not at all.

### Need for prayer

Our modern times seem to suggest that prayerful devotion and reverence for holiness is unreasonable or undesirable, or both. And yet, skeptical "modern" men have need for prayer. Perilous moments, great responsibility, deep anxiety, overwhelming grief—these challenges that shake us out of old complacencies and established routines will bring to the surface our native impulses. If we let them, they will humble us, soften us, and turn us to respectful prayer.

If prayer is only a spasmodic cry at the time of crisis, then it is utterly selfish, and we come to think of God as a repairman or a service agency to help us only in our emergencies. We should remember the Most High day and night—always—not only at times when all other assistance has failed and we desperately need help. If there is any element in human life on which we have a record of miraculous success and inestimable worth to the human soul, it is prayerful, reverential, devout communication with our Heavenly Father.

"Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation," the Psalmist sang.

"Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray.

"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." (Ps. 5:1-3.)

Perhaps what this world needs, as much as anything, is to "look up" as the

Psalmist said—to look up in our joys as well as our afflictions, in our abundance as well as in our need. We must continually look up and acknowledge God as the giver of every good thing and the source of our salvation.

### "Hallowed be Thy Name"

Jesus looked up throughout the course of his ministry. He prayed constantly and sought faithfully the divine direction of his Father in heaven. Furthermore, he acknowledged that the work and the will he came to fulfill was his Father's, not his own. He, more than any other in this world's history, was willing to humble himself, to bow down, and to give honor and glory to the Most High.

Reverence and adoration were frequently declared in prayer by the Master and were beautifully expressed in the Sermon on the Mount when he gave this counsel: "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." (Matt. 6:9.)

"Probably no other words in the Lord's Prayer have been so frequently slurred and overlooked as 'Hallowed be thy name.' They lie . . .," as one writer said, "in the valley between the great name of God and the glorious Kingdom for which we are looking and waiting. We slide over them as though they were only a parenthesis and hasten on to ask for bread and deliverance from our greatest foe." (Charles Edward Jefferson, *Character of Jesus*, Salt Lake City: Parliament Publishers, 1968, pp. 313-14.)

Jesus was careful to place the petition "Hallowed be thy name" at the very forefront of his prayer. Unless that reverent, prayerful, honorable attitude toward God is uppermost in our hearts, we are not fully prepared to pray. If our first thought is of ourselves and not of God, we are not praying as Jesus taught.

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It was his supreme hope that our Father's name and station would be kept beautiful and holy. Living always with an eye single to the glory of God, he urged men everywhere to so speak, and act, and live, that others seeing their good works might glorify their Father in heaven.

### Reverence

The reverence of the Savior for our Father and the understanding of his love made the whole world hopeful and holy. Even the temple where Jesus taught and worshipped in Jerusalem was built in such a way as to establish respect for and devotion to the Father. Its very architecture taught a silent but constant lesson of reverence. Every Hebrew was privileged to enter into the outer courts of the temple, but only one particular class of men could enter into the inner court or holy place. Into the innermost sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, only one man was permitted to make his way, and this was limited to only one special day each year. In this way a great truth was taught: that God must be approached carefully, respectfully, and with great preparation.

In the process of moral decline, reverence is one of the first virtues to disappear, and there should be serious concern about that loss in our times. Love of money had warped the hearts of many of Jesus' countrymen. They cared more for gain than they did for God. Caring nothing for God, why should they care for his temple? They converted the temple courts into a marketplace and drowned out the prayers and psalms of the faithful with their greedy exchange of money and the bleating of innocent sheep. Never did Jesus show a greater tempest of emotion than in the cleansing of the temple. Instantly he became a venging fury, and before the miscreants knew what was happening, their coins were rolling over the temple floor and their flocks and herds were in the street.

The reason for the tempest lies in just three words: "My Father's house." It was not an ordinary house; it was the house of God. It was erected for God's worship. It was a home for the reverent heart. It was intended to be a place of solace for men's woes and troubles, the very gate of heaven. "Take these things hence;" he said, "make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." (John 2:16.) His devotion to the Most High kindled a fire in his soul and gave his words the force that pierced the offenders like a dagger.

How careful Jesus was for even the name of his Father is illustrated in what he said regarding oaths. The religious leaders of his day had a certain form of prayer and reverence that was often circumscribed and shallow. They paid such high respect to the letters that spelled God's name that they would never take them upon their lips, but they used in their oaths the names of things that were creations of God. The Savior's adoration for his Father was so reverent that it extended to all things created by and possessed of the Father. The religionists of the day were in the habit of swearing by heaven, but this to Jesus was profane because heaven was where his Father dwelt. They sometimes swore by the earth, but this to him was irreverent also because the earth was his Father's footstool. Here indeed is a sensitive, reverential heart. He felt so keenly the majesty and dignity of the Eternal Father that all created things reflected his glory. Nothing was to be treated irreverently or dragged down into vulgarity or converted into jest.

### Need for reverence today

There are wide areas of our society from which the spirit of prayer and reverence and worship has vanished. Men and women in many circles are clever, interesting, or brilliant, but they lack one crucial element in a complete life. They do not look up. They do not offer up vows in righteousness, as the

requirement is stated in the Doctrine and Covenants, "on all days and at all times." (D&C 59:11.) Their conversation sparkles, but it is not sacred. Their talk is witty, but it is not wise. Whether it be in the office, the locker room, or the laboratory, they have come too far down the scale of dignity who display their own limited powers and then find it necessary to blaspheme those unlimited powers that come from above.

Unfortunately we sometimes find this lack of reverence even within the Church. Occasionally we visit too loudly, enter and leave meetings too disrespectfully in what should be an hour of prayer and purifying worship. Reverence is the atmosphere of heaven. Prayer is the utterance of the soul to God the Father. We do well to become more like our Father by looking up to him, by remembering him always, and by caring greatly about his world and his work.

Dr. Alexis Carrel, recipient of the Nobel Prize in physiology and medicine, once said, "Today as never before, prayer is a binding necessity in the lives of men and nations. The lack of emphasis on the religious sense has brought the world to an age of destruction. Our deepest source of power and perfection has been left miserably undeveloped." (*Reader's Digest*, March 1941, p. 36.)

If men are no longer awed by the thought of a holy God and are, as Mormon said of the people of his day, "without principle, and past feeling" (Moro. 9:20), then we face a fearful time. A number of years ago, President David O. McKay made this statement: "We are living in a troublous age. Many people in the Church, as millions in the world, are stirred with anxiety; hearts are heavy with feelings of foreboding. For the third time in half a century lowering war clouds threaten world peace. O foolish man! Will he never profit by the experiences of the past! . . . It is the duty of the members of the Church to hold aloft true spiritual stan-

dards. Then we shall be better prepared for any eventuality." (*Conference Report*, April 1948, pp. 64-65.)

### Basic exercises of our spirit

Prayer, reverence, worship, devotion, respect for the holy—these are basic exercises of our spirit and must be actively practiced in our lives or they will be lost. One of our LDS chaplains once wrote to a Church leader about the need for reverential faith, or the need to keep looking up. "In combat," he said, "I learned that a chaplain, if he will, can be the spark plug in the nerve center of a group of men who suddenly realize that they need something from above and beyond. A word here, a word there, a nod there, a prayer with this man, a story with that one, a smile and a comforting arm—all work wonders in teaching men sanity and stability where insanity and instability are the order of the day." (Harold B. Lee, "Prayer," Address to Seminary and Institute Faculty, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, July 6, 1956, p. 19.)

The Lord gave to Moses a code of laws often referred to as the Holiness Code of Behavior. There is an instruction in that code that is fitting to this occasion today. The Lord said, "Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy." (Lev. 19:2.)

"It is not well for man to pray cream and live skim milk." It is worse yet to pray skim milk and live *that* not at all. We must look up, be prayerful, and like Christ, understand the true meaning of "Hallowed be thy name."

May the Lord bless us to be reverent, prayerful, full of worship and devotion, until we re-enter the holy presence of him who is our Father, I pray in the name of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Following Elder Howard W. Hunter's remarks, the Choir sang the