

*Even if we doubt...we can pray*

**Summary:** Chapter 1-7.

Our first lessons in learning to communicate have stressed the importance of listening to and recognizing the various voices within us, and the necessity of admitting our own need for spiritual or physical healing, for love, for acceptance, for being what God wants us to be and where He has planned for us to be.

Then there is the need to be childlike, to be willing to have old patterns broken, fears healed, and forgiveness become reality. We need the childlike attitude of simplicity and honesty which rests completely in the loving intentions of our Father. As we begin to speak to Him from our hearts, we experience His blessing of healing upon us.

Perhaps you long to do this, but feel like such a hypocrite—trying to believe God loves you when you know perfectly well you don't even love yourself, let alone anyone else. So how can God—who

apparently knows everything about everybody—love you?

Faith and doubt coexist to some degree within everyone, both for those who profess some belief in Christianity, and for those who do not.

The conversation in the jet plane (chapter 3) prompted me to think deeply about many things I'd simply taken for granted. I began to realize that facing doubt and uncertainty, especially with regard to what one believes about God, is a part of life, just as life is a part of prayer.

Those insinuating questions about God's intentions toward me, and the whole human race, were not easy to forget. In fact, I haven't forgotten them, for at the time, and for the first time in my life, I was experiencing doubt about God's love for me. As a teen-ager I'd never been plagued with so-called doubts. Now, however, I found myself unable to forget the ideas presented to me on that plane trip.

Later I repeated some of these "questions" to my friend, Eugenia Price. I'll never forget her answer: "If you'd lived a great portion of your life as an agnostic as I have, you'd know what it's really like to live without God. I never want to go through those years again. I know there's a God and I know He loves me!"

Also I remember a statement made by Bill Starr, director of Young Life Campaign. "You haven't begun to know what you believe until you have had a few doubts."

What fallacy in our thinking makes us tell young people not to doubt, when facing doubts is often the beginning of maturity?

As for myself, after the experience related, I learned more about the truth of God's love than I ever before knew. And, increasingly I realize how

much more there is to learn! There was a time when people with serious doubts and questions about God disturbed me; now I can smile with understanding while assuring them they are on the road to new discoveries.

Questions which today seem to disturb many religious people are: Does one have to be a Christian to pray? Can God hear the prayer of an unconverted person? Doesn't the Bible say God hears only one prayer from the sinner— "Be merciful to me a sinner"?

These questions became the focal point of very strong emotional reactions among the more than 700 women attending a weekend conference near Detroit, where I appeared as one of the speakers.

In chapter 2 I have written of my own discovery concerning how very much our Father loves people. As for "sinners," their path is already obstructed by stumbling blocks of doubt. They can't believe in God's love for them, nor in God's willingness to hear them. If those bearing the name "Christian" also insist that God refuses to hear people until they have been converted—how can any person ever be encouraged to approach God? Each must be assured that God's love reaches out to him personally, that any sincere prayer initiated in his heart will be heard by God.

At the conference mentioned, I began to understand in a very clear way why more non-Christian people do not feel "worthy" to approach God in prayer. It may, in part, be attributed to the dogmatism and bigotry of Christian people having no real message of love to give, and no real love in their hearts for the person still outside the doors of the church.

Does it disturb you to think that God might be

bigger than you think He is? That He might be the kind of God who would hear the prayer of an unconverted man or woman?

This concept did deeply disturb many of the women, and one woman in particular, who came to speak with me personally. Realizing her questions could not be resolved in a ten-minute conversation, I suggested, "My dear, go back to your room and talk with your Lord about this. What I say or don't say has nothing to do with what you believe. Truth, however, can at times be very painful, especially when love and theology appear to contradict one another." (I was remembering some of the things which had earlier disturbed me before I discovered what the Bible really says.) "Take time," I continued, "to read and to think. God will reveal to you the truth."

Sometimes we speak the truth dogmatically, as if there were no possible relationship between "what I believe" and "what you believe." Despite every indication to the contrary, separately held truths need not invalidate one another. Such lack of understanding may not only block our own thinking but hinder those hesitant to approach Jesus Christ.

However, whether we unintentionally (dogmatically) block our thinking or unintentionally (unlovingly) hinder others, there is an all-wise, all-loving God who has already completed His plan and His purpose in history. There will be nothing that can hinder His love from eventually coming through to you and to me.

When I think of the varying beliefs I have held in my lifetime, and remember that my Father God loved me through each phase with an everlasting love—I am at His feet in heart-worship. What a great God! The slowness and blindness and obsti-

nancy of religious dogma does not hinder a loving God from loving those who hold such tenets.

The initiative of God, the eternal planning of God, the loving kindness of God shown to us through Christ—these tell us that He is willing to wait for every one of us. Our learning process is slow. It is painful to change an opinion. But God waits, because He knows what He has done for us.

I've been reading the first chapter of Ephesians in the *Paraphrased Epistles, Living Letters*, by Kenneth N. Taylor, (Tyndale House, Wheaton, Ill., 1962), and it is as though I had never read it before—so fresh and clear is the truth regarding the riches of God's concern and care and love for us.

Long ago before He made the world God chose us to be His very own, through what Christ would do for us; He decided then to make us holy in His eyes, without a single fault—we who stand before Him covered with His love. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And He did this because He wanted to! Now all praise to God for His wonderful kindness to us and His favor that He has poured out upon us, because we belong to His dearly loved Son. So overflowing is His kindness towards us that He took away all our sins through the blood of His Son, by Whom we are saved; And He has showered down upon us the richness of His grace—for how well He understands us and knows what is best for us at all times.

Ephesians 1:4-8

*True or false?*

Mark them for yourself, and give your reasons. Many persons take the opposite view from you. Could you tell them, or convince them of your view-

point? Could you see their viewpoint? What about God's viewpoint?

- ..... One has to be a Christian in order to pray.
- ..... The only prayer God hears from a sinner is, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."
- ..... God loves the converted more than the sinner.
- ..... God couldn't possibly love me as I am.
- ..... God is for me, not against me.
- ..... God loves me, even if I don't love myself.