

Reader's Digest

November, 1944: p. 27

So, You're A Skeptic About Prayer?

Percy Waxman

*There, in the jungle night, where cold
stars glisten —
Brave men can talk with God, and God
will listen.*

DR. LIVINGSTONE once tried to describe ice to an African chief only to be greeted with an outburst of derisive laughter. The African never having *seen* ice refused to believe a word that Livingstone was saying. The world is full of skeptics about prayer who, like that African savage, refuse to believe in the reality of anything beyond the evidence of the five senses.

A psychologist, in discussing some of the widely publicized "miracles" of the war, puts it this way: "God may be likened to an electric dynamo. We can receive the power of this dynamo by attaching ourselves to it by prayer; or we can prove it has no influence in our lives by refusing to attach ourselves to it by prayer. The choice is ours."

A famous physicist was asked how he would explain the phenomenon if he saw a bar of steel floating in the air. "Why," said the physicist, "if I happened to witness such a thing I would know that it proved the temporary suspension of one of nature's laws."

But when Thomas Huxley, the great biologist, was asked the same question he replied: "If I saw steel floating in the air I would know that it proved the existence of a law of nature about which *I* happened to be ignorant."

Today indisputable proofs of the power of prayer are pouring in from every quarter of the globe. It is not surprising that men should turn to a Power outside themselves in their hour of need. The only surprising thing is that we think it surprising. These praying soldiers, sailors and

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aviators of ours are merely following the example of Washington who knelt to ask for aid in the snows of Valley Forge and of Lincoln who, in the darkest days of the Civil War, declared: "Without the assistance of that Divine Being Who attends me I cannot succeed; with that assistance I cannot fail." There is hardly a being on earth who does not possess some kind of spiritual yearning, some unformulated inner sense that there is a Power to which he instinctively turns.

When Major Allen Lindberg of Westfield, New Jersey, was pilot of a Flying Fortress forced down at sea while on his way to Australia, he and his crew of nine were given up for lost.

"We just had time to shove off on two rubber rafts, without a crumb of food or a drop of water," Major Lindberg reports. "The boys were pretty worried — all except Sergeant Albert Hernandez of Dallas, our tail gunner. Right away that lad started praying, and pretty soon he startled us by announcing that he knew God had heard him and would help us out."

Drifting beneath a broiling sun with lips too cracked and tongues too swollen to join Hernandez in singing hymns, the men continued praying just the same. Three days later just before nightfall they saw the outline of a small island and soon after that the unbelievable spectacle of three canoes filled with naked men coming toward them. Their rescuers turned out to be Australian aborigines — black-skinned, kinky-headed fishermen from the mainland several hundred miles away. They told Lindberg that the day before they had been homeward bound with their catch, when a strange urge impelled them to change their course, and steer for this uninhabited and worthless bit of coral. And from that atoll they had spied Lindberg and his companions.

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity." Thus John Flavel summed up the matter in the 17th century. That spiritual fact is being discovered by many men who have not been in the habit of praying, yet in their hour of need have recognized the hand of God stretched toward them. Whatever perils may confront humanity, faith in a Power above and

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beyond ourselves can dispel fear and doubt from the mind. As Dr. Alexis Carrel once said: "Prayer, our deepest source of power and perfection, has been left miserably undeveloped."

Condensed from *Cosmopolitan*

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(*Hearst's International-Cosmopolitan*, March, '44)

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