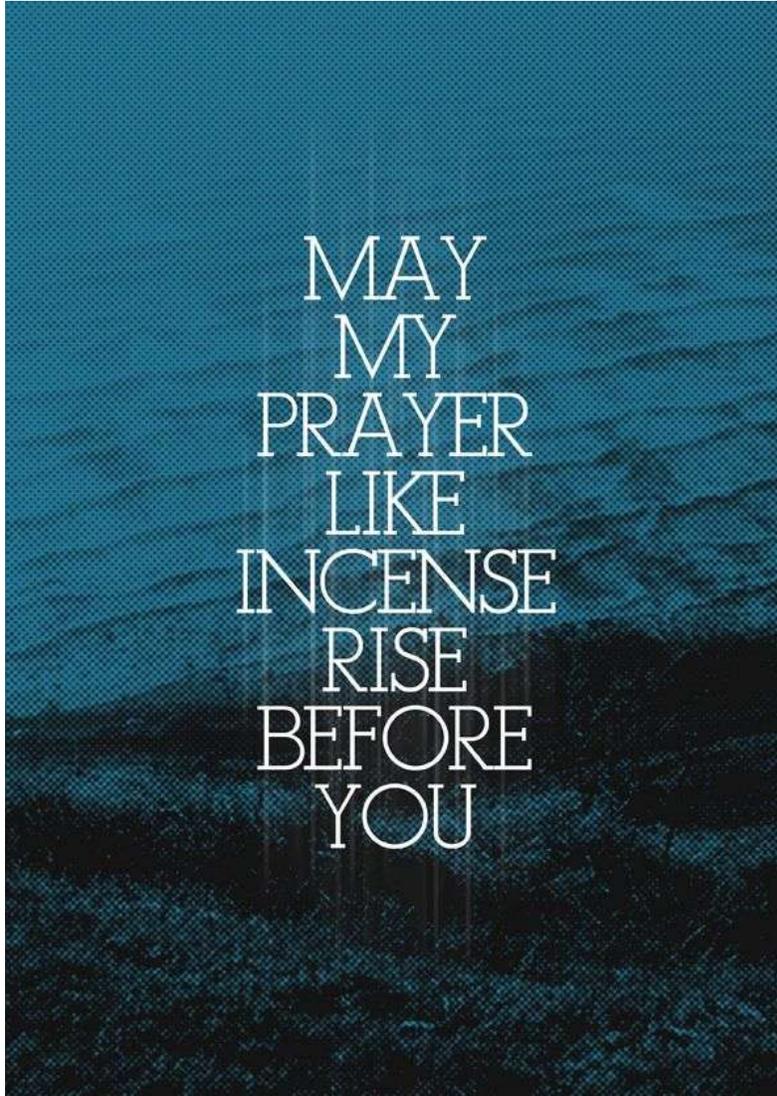


## THE INCENSE WHICH PLEASURES THE LORD

[Psalm 141:2](#) “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

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Faith without prayer is as impossible as living without breathing. A Christian prays because it is the most natural thing for him to do, it is his business, his work, and his calling. Faith is the mother and prayer the daughter. We cannot imagine children not talking to their parents, neither can we think of a child of God not praying to the heavenly Father. One of the first things we teach our children to do is how to pray.

Prayer has been likened to the heart-beat, and a person who does not pray is spiritually dead. Prayer is like the crying of a new baby, is the proof of

life. In our text David compares prayer to the burning of incense in the religious service.

## THE INCENSE WHICH PLEASURES THE LORD

### 1. THE MATERIAL

Incense is a fragrant substance which is burnt especially in religious services. Frankincense came from Arabia and India and is a white gum with a very sweet smell when burned. Only the purest of the gums are used in religious ceremonies. One of the gifts of the wise men to the child Jesus was this costly frankincense.

Our hearts are as this material or gum. Incense is dead and lifeless if not used with fire. The natural condition of man's heart is dead in trespasses and sins. Spiritually man is by nature dead and lifeless, so that from his heart there can arise no prayers to God in heaven. The heathen and unbelievers may say prayers, but God does not accept them nor answer them, for they come from unconverted hearts. Some great change must take place in the heart if there is to be an incense of prayer.

### 2. THE FIRE

Live coals brought from the altar of burnt offerings were used to ignite the incense. The thought behind this ceremony was that first an offering must be made to God, so that all sins would be taken away by the sacrifice (a picture of the Messiah to come), then an approach could be made to the throne of God by the prayer of incense. The incense was kept burning all day long, and if the fire went out it had to be rekindled, since there could be no sweet-smelling incense without fire.

Unless our hearts are set on fire by the Holy Spirit we cannot pray to God. We must be born again, we must be converted to the faith in Christ, we must go to the altar of Calvary for the fire to set our hearts aglow. Expect no smoke from the incense without the fire. Our hearts should like those of the Emmaus disciples, who said, "Did not our hearts burn within us?" We beseech the Lord to give us hearts that are alive and burning with faith and love to Christ our Savior for His sacrifice on the altar of Calvary. There will be much smoke ascending up to God from such glowing hearts. Once our hearts are burning, we pray the Lord to keep them ever glowing by the fire of His Holy Spirit.

### 3. THE SMOKE

Unpleasant odors from the animals and the smell of blood, no doubt, permeated the temple or tabernacle. Incense sweetened the air and neutralized the offensive odors. On a quiet day when there was little or no wind, the smoke of the incense would ascend up to heaven in a straight column and finally disappear from view.

David in our text compares the burning of incense with prayer, a thought often found in the Bible. The burning of incense by Zacharias was the signal for prayer, for we are told in Luke 1:10 that “the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the time of incense.” In [Rev 8:3-4](#) we read, “And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer: and there was given unto him much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand.” Prayer, like the smoke of incense, lifts the soul of a child of God upward toward the glorious throne on high.



Because prayer is an act of worship it must be directed to the true God only, to the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Spirit. A prayer to anyone else is idolatry and is an abomination in the sight of the Lord. Our prayers, like incense, must be “before thee,” to God alone.

Gum, fire, smoke, in that order. Prayer always follows faith in our hearts. As soon as Paul was converted we read, “Behold, he prayeth.” We are God’s children by faith in Jesus Christ and hence want to talk often and pray fervently to our Father in heaven. Our lives frequently become sour and evil smelling by all the troubles and misery in this evil world, but the incense of prayer can sweeten our lives again and give us new courage and strength. The sweet smell of prayer neutralizes the bad odors of this wicked world. With faith in Jesus and pleading in His name, our prayers ascend the throne of God as Jesus has promised us in the Gospel lesson, “Verily,

verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." Such a prayer is indeed the sweet incense which pleases the Lord. With the cross of Jesus before our eyes, our prayers are to God as the sacrifice of Noah, of which it is said, "The Lord smelled a sweet savor." The Lord is pleased with our prayers and expects us to converse with Him as children do with their parents.



"And the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice," says the psalmist of his prayer. Paul expresses a similar thought in his first letter to Timothy 2:8; "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." We lift up our hands in prayer at home and in church, we pray in the morning and evening, at noon and at night; for the life of a believer is a life of prayer. Our final prayer is that we all be saved through the grace of God in Christ. And He will certainly answer our pleas for the sake of His dear Son. AMEN

PRAYER. O Lord, unto Thee do we lift up our hands in prayer. Let our prayers be acceptable in Thy sight, not because of any worthiness in us, but solely because of the merits of Jesus our Savior. In His name only dare we approach Thy throne of grace and mercy. Hear us and help us, Thou only true God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, ever one God, world without end. AMEN.