There can be no gainsaying of the fact that prayer is as natural to the human organism as the rising of the sun is to the cosmic order. Samuel Johnson was once asked what the strongest argument for prayer was, and he replied, "Sir, there is no argument for prayer." Now Johnson did not mean by this that prayer is irrational, far from it, he meant, rather, to stress the fact that prayer is first of all a native tendency. Prayer is indigenous to the human spirit. It represents a throbbing desire of the human heart. As [Thomas] Carlyle stated in a letter to a friend: "Prayer is and remains the native and deepest impulse of the soul of man." We often try to call prayer "absurd and presumptuous". But a yearning so agelong and deep-rooted cannot be slain by a couple of adjectives. Men have often tried to dismiss it by affirming that pressing rigidity of natural law makes it impossible. But such a declaration is unconvincing, for there is something deep down within us that makes us know that God works in a paradox of unpredictable newness and trustworthy faithfulness. And so even the most devout atheist will at times cry out for the God that his theory denies. Men always have prayed and men always will pray.

Although prayer is native to man, there is the danger that he will misuse it. Although it is a natural outpouring of his spirit, there is the danger that he will use it in an unnatural way.

1. Never make prayer a substitute for work and intelligence
   (1) (a) There are three ways to cooperate with God: prayer must be a supplement and not a substitute
   (b) The would-be musician
   (c) The Farmer
   (d) Passing an exam
   (e) Calling a doctor when sick
   (f) Prayer for civil rights

2. Prayer is no substitute for intelligence
   (a) Knowledge of classics of culture didn’t come through prayer
   (b) Creative insights of medical science didn’t come through prayer
   (c) Knowledge of astronomy

3. We make God a cosmic bell hop a universal errand boy
   In that dramatic scene when the Israelites are confronted with the Red Sea in front and the Egyptian armies behind, Moses goes away to pray. God says, "Go Forward."

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1. Fosdick, *The Meaning of Prayer*, p. 1. "Samuel Johnson once was asked what the strongest argument for prayer was, and he replied, 'Sir, there is no argument for prayer.'" Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was a British poet, critic, and essayist.
II Never make pray for anything which if done would injure somebody else
1. Don't pray for God to help you get even with your enemy
2. The white man often prays to God to help him oppress the Negro
3. Don't pray that your country will win the war

III Never pray for God to change the fixed laws of the universe

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 166, “The Misuse of Prayer”

“What Shall We Do to Be Saved?”

[1948–1954]

Intro I would like to set forth the thesis this evening that the question “What Shall we do to be saved?” is but a collectivized extension of the question What shall I do to be saved? The process of social salvation is the same as the process of individual salvation.

I The first thing necessary for individual salvation is an honest recognition of one’s estranged and sinful condition. One can never be saved until he recognizes the fact that he needs to be saved. Christian theology has always insisted that man is a sinner, that there is something wrong with human nature. The whole doctrine of original sin came into being to explain this wrongness in human nature.

a. No one can ever get well until he recognizes that he is sick
b. The story of the This same thing is true in the

ADf CSKC Sermon file, folder 102

1 Cf Acts 16:30

“O That I Knew Where I Might Find Him!”

[1951–1954]

King argues in this handwritten sermon that seeking God is difficult due to the “cruelties of nature,” the “ambiguities of history,” and the prevalence of modern scientific achievement. Despite these challenges to knowing God, King maintains, “In Jesus we have the clearest picture of what God is like.” Referring to his “recent Seminary days,” he reminisces, “Everyday I would sit [on] the edge of the campus by the side of the river and watch the beauties of nature. My friends in this experience I saw God.”