We usually place value on prayers being answered, but in the above verse, Jesus places value on prayers being rewarded. There is a difference which has a great bearing on our lives. This week, Author and Bible teacher, Charles Price, tells us the nature of the reward of prayer, and talks about reluctance to pray as well as the need for intercessory prayer.

Prayer is, of course, the communication part of our relationship with God, and is paramount to the Christian life. It involves a perpetual state of heart, mind and spirit that remains unceasingly aware of God’s presence. Prayer becomes the setting for God to speak, and to show us things, not only in relation to what we are praying about, but things about ourselves. Prayer is to come from the heart, presenting openly and honestly with thanksgiving our petitions before God.

There are three significant ways in which prayer is rewarded. The first is that it brings us into intimate communion with God. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He began with, "Our Father in heaven..." This is the first time in the Bible that God is ever addressed as 'Father' in a personal way. God is called 'Father' in the Old Testament in a metaphorical sense, and as the Father of creation, but in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks 17 times of God as Father in an intimate way. This was radically new to the Jewish people as no one ever addressed God as their Father. But when Christ becomes our Saviour, God becomes our Father in that we become united to Christ, and share in His sonship with all the privileges a child has with their father.

The second reward is that prayer brings us into alignment with God. The communion with God in the first two clauses - "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name", leads to alignment with God in the second two clauses - "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth…" This is not about a middle road between our will and God's will, but about being totally aligned with the will and purposes of God. Our communion and alignment with God are intricately connected, because we will not know God's will if we are not in communion with Him. In coming to know God, we can confidently pray for God's will to be done, whatever the issue, because He is sufficient for any situation, and we know we can trust Him.

The third reward prayer brings is provision from God. There are three personal requests: "Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." This presents our physical, moral and spiritual needs. Physically, God provides today what we need for today. We are not to stockpile our blessings, but learn to live with a fresh dependence on God for what we need that day. Morally, though we cannot put every relationship right because it takes two people, we can be forgiving of others as God is forgiving of us. Spiritually, the closer we come to God, the more we can be sure Satan will try to lure us away. Without God's protection, we are no match for Satan, but we stand in the strength of Christ against him.

Intimate communion with God, alignment with God, and provision from God are received from Him, not as an answer, but as a reward. The answers are secondary to the value of our prayers.
Praying is about being alone with God, behind closed doors where our hearts are most earnest and genuine before Him. It is not a mechanism by which we come to God. There are no rules, no hoops we have to jump through, no mediator we need, other than the Lord Himself. Prayer is a matter of the heart, and we are all blessed with the incredible privilege of voicing our hearts and minds directly with God.

Sadly, there are many people who are reluctant to pray. It is not easy to be exposed, to have our hearts open and naked before God. Some of us are frightened of this sense of intimacy, and keep things buried inside as a protection or defence mechanism. When God wants to go deeper and deal with the strongholds in our lives, the best defence against that is not to pray. But nothing is hidden from God. Henri Nouwen, author of 39 books on spirituality, writes this about prayer: “Prayer is no easy matter. It demands a relationship in which you allow the other to enter into the very center of your person. You allow Him to speak there, to touch the sensitive core of your being and allow Him to see so much that you would rather leave in darkness, to let Him into that place where your life gets its form. And that is dangerous to us and it usually calls for defence.”

It is in that secret place of communion with God our hearts are scrutinized. Sometimes our lack of communion with Him is a defence against parts of our hearts we would rather leave untouched, because some of our sins we actually enjoy. Though we know they always pay a bitter price in the end, in our weakness, we still hold on to them. We all battle with sin and temptation, but if we cherish sin, accept it, tolerate it, defend or rationalize it, rather than battle with it, we will lose touch with God. Sin gives its rewards only for a season, but when we come to God in prayer, our sin is dealt with, and the reward is huge.

The one place we can be absolutely disarmingly honest about our hearts is alone with God. He will not be shocked; it will not be out of His depth. In our reluctance to pray, we not only deprive ourselves of intimacy with God, but all that He would otherwise do in our lives. Prayer is both the cause and effect of our intimacy with God. We may have to wrestle with getting into that place of being alone and honest with Him, but it is what opens the door for deeper fellowship, and paves the way for God to work in our lives.

It is also from the heart and hub of our prayer, communion and alignment with God that we are able to minister to the world. This involves intercessory prayer and is actually not a simple thing at all. Oswald J. Smith's book entitled, “I Have Walked Alone with Jesus,” is a book of daily readings, and his entry on January 1st reads: “Intercessory prayer is without doubt not only the highest form of Christian service but also the hardest kind of work. To the person who is not an intercessor, such a statement seems absurd. Prayer to most people is looked upon as an easy occupation – that’s because they know nothing at all of the ministry of intercession. Their prayers for the most part are centered upon themselves, their loved ones, their own personal interests and an occasional petition for the perishing world. Their prayer life is spasmodic; it is considered a side issue and is readily neglected if other things demand attention. Such a person is in no way affecting the kingdom of Satan – hence prayer, so called, is easy.

Prayer-less work will be powerless and fruitless. If Satan can keep us so busy we do not have time to pray, he will have accomplished his purpose. Intercessory prayer is work. It is battle, and the world we live in today desperately needs the work of the Holy Spirit. We can turn on the news at any time and are given plenty of reason to make intercessory prayer a must in our lives.

However, we cannot make the mistake of thinking prayer is powerful. It is God alone who is powerful, and the measure of our prayer lives will be to the measure of our fruitfulness and intimacy with Him.