Prevailing Prayer

Dwight L. Moody

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Editor's Foreword

More than 130 years have passed since Dwight L. Moody wrote this influential classic. When he wrote *Prevailing Prayer*, Moody combined the solid wisdom of Scripture, insights from some of the greatest minds in the study of theology, stories and testimonies from the people he met, and the artistic expressions of hymn writers and poets.

Though we can't improve on Moody's message, we want contemporary readers to understand its relevance to their lives. This modern adaptation of *Prevailing Prayer* has been edited for clarity with the sole purpose of bringing fresh life to a book that some of today's readers have not yet tasted, simply because they were put off by the language of more than a century ago. Oh, what they have missed! This message on prayer and devotion to the Word of God is as timely as any book written today.

In the process of updating, we have carefully researched any terms that were specific to 1800s' culture and language and explained them with modern terms, while preserving the heart of Moody's message. We have worked to keep Moody's voice present in the text, so readers can enjoy his rich style of communicating.

Every line and phrase of the original text has been studied to understand the meaning and intent. To maintain the accuracy of citations, each excerpt and quote from theologians and preachers has been compared with online archived versions of books that were published long ago. We have updated words from those texts, such as *availeth* to *avails*, or *saith* to *said*. But we have been vigilant about how we handled any modification.

Moody included long excerpts from some of his comrades and other scholars. In order to make the text easier to read and understand, we broke these into shorter sections with paraphrased notes added in between.

Biographical notes have been added where possible, which will help readers identify the specific people whom Moody quoted. This information will provide curious readers with a starting point, should they wish to complement their reading with further research. We have used the *Jubilee Bible* to update the references from Scripture used throughout the book.

It is our sincere hope that by updating this book, it will open doors for more people to experience the great preacher Dwight L. Moody. We are moved by his heart for unity among Christian brothers and sisters. He was ahead of his time when he said, "Oh, may God make us of one heart and of one mind! Let our hearts be like drops of water flowing together. Unity among the people of God is a sort of foretaste of heaven."

After reading this book, we pray you will, *Always rejoice. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

> "Though we may not live to see the answer to our prayers, if we cry mightily to God, the answer will come." – D. L. Moody

Prayer

Prayer was appointed to convey
The blessings God designs to give;
Long as they live should Christians pray,
For only while they pray they live.
And shall we in dead silence lie,
When Christ stands waiting for our prayer?
My soul, thou hast a Friend on high;
Arise and try thy interest there.
If pain afflict, or wrongs oppress;
If cares distract, or fears dismay;
If guilt deject, if sin distress;
The remedy's before you - Pray!
Depend on Christ, thou canst not fail;
Make all thy wants and wishes known;
Fear not; His merits must prevail;
Ask what thou wilt; it shall be done!
– Joseph Hart (1712–1768)

Preface

The two first and essential means of grace are the Word of God and prayer. Conversion comes through these, for we are born again *by the word of God, which lives and abides for ever* (1 Peter 1:23), and *whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved* (Romans 10:13).

By the Word of God and prayer, we also grow. Scripture tells us we should desire, or crave, the pure spiritual milk of the Word so we may grow by it (1 Peter 2:2), and we cannot grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ unless we also speak to him in prayer. It is by the Word that the Father sanctifies us (purifies and sets us apart) but we are also instructed to watch and pray to avoid falling into temptation.

These two instruments of grace must be applied in the right proportion. If we read the Word and do not pray, we may become puffed up with knowledge, without the love that builds others up. If we pray without reading the Word, we will be ignorant of the mind and will of God, and become mystical and fanatical, and liable to be blown around by every wind of doctrine.

The following chapters relate especially to prayer, but in order for our prayers to be about things that are aligned with the will of God, they must be based upon the revelation of his own will to us. *For of him and by him and in him are all things* (Romans 11:36), and it is only by hearing God's Word, where we learn his purposes toward us and toward the world, that we can pray acceptably. This means praying in the Holy Spirit and asking the things which are pleasing in his sight.

These essays are not to be considered exhaustive, but suggestive. This great subject has been the topic of prophets and apostles, and of all good people in all ages of the world. My desire in writing this little book is to encourage God's children to seek by prayer "to move the arm that moves the world," a phrase inspired by James Cowden Wallace's hymn, "There Is an Eye That Never Sleeps."

There Is an Eye That Never Sleeps

There is an Eye that never sleeps
  Beneath the wing of night;
There is an Ear that never shuts
  When sink the beams of light.

There is an Arm that never tires
  When human strength gives way;
There is a Love that never fails
  When earthly loves decay.

But there's a power which man can wield
  When mortal aid is vain,
That Eye, that Arm, that Love to reach,
  That listening Ear to gain.

That power is prayer, which soars on high,
  Through Jesus, to the throne,
And moves the Hand which moves the world,
  To bring salvation down!
    – James Cowden Wallace

The Hour of Prayer

Lord, what a change within us one short hour
   Spent in Thy presence will prevail to make –
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,
   What parched grounds refresh as with a shower!

We kneel – and all around us seems to lower;
   We rise – and all, the distant and the near,
Stands forth in sunny outline brave and clear;
   We kneel: how weak! – we rise: how full of power!

Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
   Or others – that we are not always strong;
That we are ever overborne with care;
   That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, while with us is prayer,
   And joy, and strength, and courage, are with Thee?
      – Richard Chenevix Trench (1807–1886)

Chapter 1

The Prayers of the Bible

Those who have left the deepest impression on this sin-cursed earth have been men and women of prayer. You will find prayer has been the mighty power that has moved not only God, but also man.

Old Testament Prayers

Abraham was a man of prayer, and angels came down from heaven to converse with him. Jacob's prayer was answered when he wrestled with God at the place he named Peniel, which means "face of God." His meeting with the Lord resulted in Jacob having a mighty blessing, and even his brother Esau's heart was softened towards him. The Lord gave Samuel as an answer to Hannah's prayer for a child. Elijah's prayer closed up the heavens for three years and six months, and when he prayed again, the heavens gave rain.

The apostle James calls the prophet Elijah *a man subject to passions like unto ours*. James also says, *the effectual prayer of the righteous is very powerful* (James 5:16-17). Elijah was an extraordinary man, but his story testifies to the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit rather than to any power he had within his human nature.

I am thankful that those men and women who were so mighty in prayer were just like us. We are apt to think that those prophets and mighty men and women of old were different from what we are. They lived perhaps in a darker age, but they were similar in nature to us.

We read about another occasion where Elijah prayed, and this time brought down fire on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal cried long and loud to their gods, but no answer came. The God of Elijah heard and answered his prayer and God demonstrated his power (1 Kings 18). Let's remember that the God of Elijah still lives. The prophet was taken up from earth to heaven by a whirlwind in a chariot of fire, but his God still lives, and we have the same access to him that Elijah had.

We have the same permission to go to God and ask the fire from heaven to come down and consume our lusts and passions – to burn up our impurities and let Christ shine through us.

Scripture is full of examples. Elisha prayed, and a dead child came back to life. Some of us have children who are spiritually dead in sin and who have wandered from God's truth. We can do as Elisha did by asking God to raise them up from spiritual death in answer to our prayers.

Manasseh, the king, was a wicked man, and had done everything he could against the God of his father. The Lord allowed him to be taken into captivity. Yet in Babylon, when he humbled himself and cried to God, the Lord heard his cry, and took him out of prison and restored him to the throne at Jerusalem. *Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.Likewise, he took away the strange gods and the idol out of the house of the Lord and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord and sacrificed upon it sacrifices of peace and of praise and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel* (2 Chronicles 33:13, 15-16).

Surely if God answered the prayer of wicked Manasseh, he will hear ours in the time of our distress. Isn't this a time of distress for so many people we know? Aren't there many around us whose hearts are burdened? As we go to the throne of grace, let's remember God answers prayer!

Look again at Samson. He prayed, and his strength came back, so that he killed more of the enemy at his death than during his life. If those who have been backsliders will return to God, they will see how quickly God will answer prayer.

Job prayed, and his captivity was turned around. Light came in the place of darkness, and in answer to prayer, God made him even more prosperous than he was before.

In Daniel 9, we read that Daniel prayed to God to ask for forgiveness and restoration for Jerusalem. While he was still praying, Gabriel came to offer wisdom and understanding. Gabriel said, *At the beginning of thy supplications, the word went forth, and I have come to teach it unto thee; for thou art a man greatly beloved: therefore understand the word, and understand the vision* (Daniel 9:23).

Three times that message came to Daniel from heaven in answer to prayer. The secrets of heaven were revealed to him, and he was told that God's Son was going to be put to death for the sins of his people.

New Testament Prayers

In Acts 10, Cornelius, who was a centurion in the Italian regiment, prayed to God regularly. During one of those prayers, he had a vision and saw an angel of the Lord. The angel told him to summon the apostle Peter. When Peter arrived, Cornelius said, *Now therefore we are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God* (Acts 10:33).

Although Cornelius was a worshipper of the true God, he lacked faith in Christ. Peter taught the truth about how Jesus had been crucified and raised from the dead. *While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, that also on the Gentiles the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out* (Acts 10:44-45).

In answer to prayer, this great blessing came upon Cornelius and his household, and they received the truth and were baptized. The Holy Spirit was mutually at work in both Cornelius and Peter.

Prior to going to Cornelius, Peter had gone up to his rooftop to pray in the afternoon, and he had a vision of a sheet being let down from heaven with all kinds of animals in it, including those considered to be unclean for Jews. Although he was uncertain of the meaning of the vision at the time, it would become clear to him later that God had removed the barrier between Jew and Gentile and between clean and unclean. Peter obeyed when God sent him to preach the message to Caesarea. When Cornelius prayed to God without ceasing, the angel sent Peter with a message of deliverance for him and his family and friends.

All through the Scriptures you will find that when believing prayer went up to God, the answer came down. I think it would be a very interesting study to go right through the Bible and see what has happened while God's people have been on their knees calling upon him. Certainly, the study would greatly strengthen our faith – showing, as it would, how wonderfully God has heard and delivered, when the cry has gone up to him for help.

Look at Paul and Silas in the prison at Philippi:

But at midnight as Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard

them, then suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking out of his sleep and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had fled.

But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.

Then he called for a light and came inside and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? (Acts 16:25-30)

The jailer and his whole family were baptized. That one conversion has probably done more than any other recorded in the Bible to bring people into the kingdom of God. So many have been blessed in seeking to answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

It was the prayer of those two godly men that brought the jailer to his knees, and that brought blessing to him and his family.

There are other examples in the New Testament. Consider the story of Stephen in Acts 7, who was stoned to death for carrying out the work of Jesus Christ and for angering the members of the Sanhedrin when he defended his actions with truth.

Just before they dragged Stephen out of the city to stone him, *he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God* (Acts 7:55-56).

While they were stoning him, Stephen was *calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, impute not this sin to their charge. And having said this, he fell asleep in the Lord* (verses 59-60).

When Stephen had testified before the Sanhedrin in his defense, right before he gave his long speech indicting Israel's leaders for rejecting God's messengers in the past – and now rejecting Jesus – God's presence was evident. Scripture says, *Then all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as the face of an angel* (Acts 6:15).

Remember too how the face of Moses shone as he came down from Mount Sinai with the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments in his hand; he had been in communion with God. *When Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come near him* (Exodus 34:30), and Moses had to put a veil over his face.

In the same way, when we get really into communion with God, he lifts up his countenance – his image – upon us, and instead of our having gloomy looks, our faces will shine, because God has heard and answered our prayers.

Paul demonstrates this idea of how we reflect the glory of God, in the same way a mirror reflects an image, when the Holy Spirt transforms us from within. *Therefore we all, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord with uncovered face, are transformed from glory to glory into the same likeness, even as by the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The Prayers of Jesus

I want to call special attention to Christ as an example for us in all things – in nothing greater than in

prayer. We read that Christ prayed to his Father for everything. Prayer preceded every great crisis in his life.

Let me share a few examples from Scripture. I never noticed until a few years ago that Christ was praying at his baptism. *Jesus also being baptized and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him* (Luke 3:21-22). Another great event in his life was his transfiguration, when Jesus *took Peter and John and James and went up into the mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering* (Luke 9:28-29).

Just after Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and angered the scribes and Pharisees, *he went out into the mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God* (Luke 6:12). This is the only place where it is recorded that the Savior spent a whole night in prayer. *And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom he also named apostles: Simon (whom he also named Peter) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon (called Zelotes) and Judas the brother of James and Judas Iscariot* (Luke 6:13-16).

What was about to take place? When he came down from the mountain, Jesus gathered with *the company of his disciples and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those that were tormented with unclean spirits were healed* (verses 17-18). Many people gathered around him to touch him because healing power went out from him, and he healed them all.

Following this, Jesus preached that great discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount – the most wonderful sermon that has ever been preached to mortal men. Probably no sermon has done so much good, and it was preceded by a night of prayer. If our sermons and messages are going to reach the hearts and consciences of the people, we must spend a considerable amount of time in prayer to God, that there may be power with the words we deliver.

In the Gospel of John, we read that when Jesus stood by the grave of Lazarus, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.And I knew that thou hearest me always, but because of the people who stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me* (John 11:41-42). Notice, before he spoke the dead to life he spoke to his Father. If our spiritually dead ones are to be raised, we must first get power with God.

The reason we so often fail in moving our friends is that we try to win them without first getting power with God. Jesus was in communion with his Father, and so he could be assured that his prayers were heard.

We read in the twelfth chapter of John about when some Greeks came to speak with Jesus and he shared about what was to happen soon. I think this is one of the saddest chapters in the whole Bible. He was about to leave the Jewish nation and to make atonement for the sins of the world. Listen to what he said: *Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this have I come in this hour* (John 12:27). Then Jesus prayed, *Father, clarify thy name, Then there came a voice from the heaven, saying, I have clarified it and will clarify it again* (verse 28).

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, saying, *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him* (Luke 22:42-43). In that account of the memorable prayer of our Lord in the garden of

Gethsemane, it says, *he withdrew from them about a stone's cast and kneeled down and prayed* (verse 41). He was almost under the shadow of the cross, the iniquities of mankind were about to be laid upon him, one of his twelve disciples was going to deny him and swear he never knew him, and another was going to betray him for thirty pieces of silver – all were to forsake him and flee.

His soul was beyond sorrowful just as it was in John 12, and he prayed. When his soul was troubled, God spoke to him. I would draw your attention to the recorded fact that four times an answer came right down from heaven while the Savior prayed to God.

The first time was at his baptism, when the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon him in answer to his prayer. The second was on the Mount of Transfiguration, where God appeared and spoke to him. The third was when the Greeks came desiring to see him, and they heard the voice of God in response to his call. Again, when he cried to the Father in the midst of his agony, a direct response was given. I don't doubt these things are recorded so we would be encouraged to pray.

We read in Luke 11 that his disciples came to Jesus and said, *Lord, teach us to pray*. It is not recorded anywhere that he taught them how to preach. I have often said that I would rather know how to pray like Daniel than to preach like Gabriel. If you get love into your soul, so that the grace of God may come down in answer to prayer, there will be no trouble reaching the people. It is not by eloquent sermons that perishing souls are going to be reached; we need the power of God in order that the blessing may come down.

The prayer our Lord taught his disciples is commonly called the "Lord's Prayer." However, that is the prayer our Lord taught those men to pray, not the prayer he prayed. I think the "Lord's Prayer," more properly, is that found in the seventeenth chapter of John. That is the longest prayer on record that Jesus made.

You can read it slowly and carefully in about four or five minutes. I think we may learn a lesson here. Our Master's prayers were short when offered in public; but when he was alone with God, that was a different thing, and he could spend the whole night in communion with his Father. My experience is that those who pray most in their closets generally make short prayers in public. Long prayers are too often not prayers at all, and they weary the people. How short the publican's prayer was: *God, reconcile me, a sinner* (Luke 18:13). The Syrophenician woman's prayer was short as well when she said, *Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me* (Matthew 15:22). She went right to the mark, and she got what she wanted. The prayer of the thief on the cross was a short one: *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom* (Luke 23:42). When Peter walked on the water toward Jesus, but then saw the wind and waves and became afraid, his prayer was, *Lord, save me* (Matthew 14:30).

If you go through the Scriptures, you will find that the prayers that brought immediate answers were generally brief. Let our prayers be to the point, just telling God what we want.

In the prayer of our Lord in John 17, we find that he makes seven requests – one for himself, four for his disciples around him, and two for the disciples of succeeding ages. Six times in that one prayer he repeats that God had sent him. The world looked upon him as an impostor, and he wanted them to know that he was heaven-sent. He speaks of the world nine times, and makes mention of his disciples and those who believe on him fifty times.

Christ's last prayer on the cross was a short one: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34). I believe that prayer was answered. We find that right there in front of the cross, a Roman

centurion was converted. It was probably in answer to the Savior's prayer. The conversion of the thief, I believe, was also in answer to that prayer of our blessed Lord.

Saul of Tarsus may have heard it, and the words may have followed him as he traveled to Damascus, so that when the Lord spoke to him on the way, he may have recognized the voice. One thing we do know, is that on the day of Pentecost some of the enemies of the Lord were converted. Surely that was in answer to the prayer, *Father, forgive them*. Hence we see how prayer holds a high place among the exercises of a spiritual life.

Prayers of the Faithful

Throughout history, all God's people have been praying people. Look, for instance, at Richard Baxter.[1] He stained his study walls with praying breath, and after he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, he sent a river of living water over the city of Kidderminster in England, and converted hundreds.

Martin Luther[2] and his companions were men of such mighty pleading with God that they broke the spell of ages, and laid nations subdued at the foot of the cross. John Knox grasped all of Scotland in his strong arms of faith; his prayers terrified tyrants. George Whitefield,[3] after much holy, faithful, closet pleading, went to the Devil's fair, and took more than a thousand souls out of the paw of the lion in one day. Wherever there were open spaces around London and crowds gathered for entertainment and events such as the London Fair, he preached in open air, bringing the message of the gospel out of the church building and to the rowdy crowds.

See a praying John Wesley[4] turn more than ten thousand souls to the Lord! Look at the praying Charles Grandison Finney,[5] whose prayers, faith, sermons, and writings have shaken this whole country, and sent a wave of blessing through the churches on both sides of the sea.

Dr. Thomas Guthrie spoke of prayer and its necessity in *The Way to Life*:

> The first true sign of spiritual life, prayer, is also the means of maintaining it. Man can as well live physically without breathing, as spiritually without praying.
>
> There is a class of animals – the cetaceous, neither fish nor seafowl – that inhabit the deep. It is their home; they never leave it for the shore, yet, though swimming beneath its waves, and sounding its darkest depths, they… [often must] rise to the surface that they may breathe the air.
>
> Without that, these monarchs of the deep could not exist in the dense element in which they live, and move, and have their being. And something like what is imposed on them by a physical necessity, the Christian has to do by a spiritual one.
>
> It is by… [often] ascending up to God, by rising through prayer into a loftier, purer region for supplies of divine grace, that he maintains his spiritual life.
>
> Prevent these animals from rising to the surface, and they die for want of breath; prevent the Christian from rising to God, and he dies for want of prayer.
>
> "Give me children," cried Rachel, "or else I die."
>
> "Let me breathe," says a man gasping, "or else I die."
>
> "Let me pray," says the Christian, "or else I die."[6]

When he was a student, Dr. Edward Payson wrote in his journal, which was later published as a memoir,

"Since I began to beg God's blessing on my studies, I have done more in one week than in the whole year before. Surely it is good to draw near to God at all times."[7] Luther, when most pressed with work, said, "I have so much to do that I cannot get on without three hours a day praying."

It isn't only theologians who think and speak highly of prayer; men of all ranks and positions in life have also felt the same.

British General Henry Havelock[8] rose at four o'clock, if the hour for marching was six, rather than lose the precious privilege of communion with God before setting out. Sir Matthew Hale, the English legal scholar, said, "If I omit praying and reading God's Word in the morning, nothing goes well all day."[9]

Elements of Prayer

"A great part of my time," said Scottish minister Robert Murray McCheyne, "is spent in getting my heart in tune for prayer. It is the link that connects earth with heaven."[10]

A comprehensive view of the subject will show that there are nine elements which are essential to true prayer:

1. **Adoration** – We cannot meet God on a level at the start. We must approach him as one far beyond our reach or sight.
2. **Confession** – Sin must be put out of the way. We cannot have any communion with God while there is any disobedience between us. If you have done a man some wrong, you cannot expect that man's favor until you go to him and confess the fault.
3. **Restitution** – We have to make amends for the wrong, wherever possible.
4. **Thanksgiving** – We must be thankful for what God has done for us already.
5. **Forgiveness** – We must forgive others and pull any root of bitterness that might be growing.
6. **Unity** – Loving one another brings power in prayer.
7. **Faith** – There must be faith, which the preceding things produce.
8. **Petition** – Thus influenced by the other things, we will be ready to offer direct petition, or requests, to God. We hear a good deal of praying that is just exhorting others who are present, and if you did not see the person's eyes closed, you would suppose he or she was preaching. Then, much of what is called prayer is simply finding fault. There needs to be more petition in our prayers.
9. **Submission** – After all these, there must come submission. While praying, we must be ready to accept the will of God.

We will consider these nine elements in detail in each of the following chapters. We will round out our examination of each concept with incidents that illustrate the certainty of our receiving answers to prayer under each of these conditions.

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1 Richard Baxter (1615–1691) was an English Puritan church leader, poet, hymn writer, and theologian.

2 Martin Luther (1483–1586) was a German professor of theology, a composer, priest, and monk, and a key leader in the Protestant Reformation.

3 George Whitefield (1714–1770) was an English Anglican cleric who was one of the founders of Methodism and the evangelical

movement.

4 John Wesley (1703–1791) was an English preacher and theologian who, with his brother Charles and fellow preacher George Whitefield, founded Methodism.

5 Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875) was an American Presbyterian minister and leader in the nineteenth-century Protestant revival in the United States.

6 Dr. Thomas Guthrie (1803–1873) was one of the most popular preachers of his day in Scotland. *The Way to Life* was published by Robert Carter and Brothers in 1873.

7 Edward Payson (1783–1827) was an American Congregational preacher. As published in *A Memoir of the Rev. Edward Payson, D.D., Late of Portland, Maine*, by Asa Cummings, 1830.

8 Major General Sir Henry Havelock (1795–1857).

9 Sir Matthew Hale (1609–1676).

10 Robert Murray M'Cheyne, also spelled "McCheyne" (1813–1843).

The Trinity

Thou dear and great mysterious Three,
   Forever be adored,
For all the endless grace we see
   In our Redeemer stored.

The Father's ancient grace we sing,
   That chose us in our head;
Ordaining Christ, our God and King,
   To suffer in our stead.

The sacred Son, in equal strains,
   With reverence we address
For all His grace, and dying pains,
   And splendid righteousness.

With tuneful tongue the Holy Ghost
   For His great work we praise,
Whose power inspires the blood-bought host
   Their grateful voice to raise.

Thus the Eternal Three in One
   We join to praise, for grace
And endless glory through the Son,
   As shining from His face.
      – Thomas Row (1786–1864)

Chapter 2

Adoration

What is Adoration?

Adoration has been defined as the act of rendering divine honor, including in it reverence, esteem, and love. Adoration literally signifies applying the hand to the mouth, "to kiss the hand." In Eastern countries, this is one of the great marks of respect and submission. The importance of coming before God in this spirit is great, and thus it is so often impressed upon us in the Word of God.

In *The Lord's Prayer: A Practical Meditation*, Newman Hall said, "Man's worship, apart from revelation, has been uniformly characterized by selfishness. We come to God either to thank Him for benefits already received, or to implore still further benefits: food, raiment [clothing], health, safety, comfort." He said, like Jacob at Bethel, we tend to correlate the worship we offer to God with having food to eat and clothing to put on. "This style of petition, in which self generally precedes and predominates, if it does not altogether absorb, our supplications, is not only seen in the votaries [devoted followers] of false systems, but in the majority of the prayers of professed Christians," Hall said.

He suggested our prayers are like the Parthian horsemen, who ride one way while they look another way. "We seem to go toward God, but, indeed, reflect upon ourselves, and this may be the reason why many times our prayers are sent forth, like the raven out of Noah's ark, and never return. But when we make the glory of God the chief end of our devotion, they go forth like the dove, and return to us again with an olive branch."[11]

How to Pray

Let me refer you to a passage in the prophecies of Daniel. He was one of the men who knew how to pray; his prayer brought the blessing of heaven upon himself and upon his people. He wrote, *And I turned my face unto the Lord God, seeking him in prayer and supplication, in fasting and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the* LORD *my God and made my confession and said, Now O Lord, thou great God who is worthy to be feared, who keeps the covenant and the mercy with those that love thee and keep thy commandments* (Daniel 9:3-4).

The thought I want to call special attention to is conveyed in the words, *O Lord, thou great God who is worthy to be feared*. Daniel took his right place before God – in the dust – and he also put God in his right place. Likewise, it was when Abraham was on his face, prostrate before God, that God spoke to him. Holiness belongs to God; sinfulness belongs to us.

Thomas Brooks, that grand old Puritan writer, said, "A person of real holiness is much affected and taken up in the admiration of the holiness of God. Unholy persons may be somewhat affected and taken with the other excellences of God; it is only holy souls that are taken and affected with his holiness." He said the more holy any person is, the more deeply he or she is affected by God's holiness. "To the holy

angels, the holiness of God is the sparkling diamond in the ring of glory. But unholy persons are affected and taken with anything rather than with this," Brooks said.

"Nothing puts the sinner into a depression as much as a conversation on the holiness of God," he said. "It is as the handwriting on the wall; nothing makes the head and heart of a sinner to ache like a sermon upon the Holy One; nothing galls and gripes, nothing stings and terrifies unsanctified ones, like a lively setting forth of the holiness of God. But to holy souls there are no discourses that do more suit and satisfy them, that do more delight and content them, that do more please and profit them, than those that do most fully and powerfully discover God to be glorious in holiness."[12]

Our Attitude in Prayer

In coming before God, we must adore and reverence his name. The same thing is brought out in Isaiah. *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims; each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried out unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of the hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory* (Isaiah 6:1-3). When we see the holiness of God, we will adore and magnify him.

Moses had to learn the same lesson at the burning bush. God told him to remove his shoes from his feet, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. When we hear men trying to act as if they are holy and go around speaking about their holiness, they make light of the holiness of God. It is his holiness that we need to think and speak about; when we do that, we will be facedown in the dust.

You remember also how it was with Peter. When Christ made himself known to him at the lakeshore, Peter fell at his feet and said, *Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man* (Luke 5:8). A sight of God is enough to show us how holy he is, and how unholy we are.

We find that Job too had to be taught the same lesson. *Then Job answered the LORD and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand over my mouth* (Job 40:3-4). As we hear Job discussing with his friends, we might think he was one of the holiest men who ever lived. Listen to how Job contrasted his former happiness, honor, and wealth with his loss of dignity and blessing:

> *When I went out to the gate to judgment, when I had my seat prepared in the plaza! The young men would see me and hide themselves, and the aged would arise and stand. The princes would refrain from talking and lay their hand on their mouth; the voice of the principals would not be noticed, and their tongue would cleave to the roof of their mouth.*
>
> *When the ears that heard me, called me blessed; and when the eyes that saw me, gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried and the fatherless who had no one to help him. The blessing of the one that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.*
>
> *I put on righteousness, and it clothed me as a robe; and my diadem was judgment. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; and the cause which I did not know I searched out.* (Job 29:7-16)

He longed for the days when God took care of him. He said, *Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me* (Job 29:2). What a wonderfully good man he was! But it was all *I, I, I.*

At last, God told him to brace himself like a man because he had some questions for Job to answer.

Now gird up thy loins like a man; for I will enquire of thee, and answer thou me (Job 38:3).

The moment God revealed himself, Job changed his language. He saw his own vileness and God's purity, and he answered the Lord in humility. *With my ears I had heard thee; but now my eyes see thee. Therefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes* (Job 42:5-6).

The same thing is seen in the cases of those who came to our Lord when he walked the earth; those who came properly, seeking and obtaining the blessing, showed a lively sense of his infinite superiority to themselves.

Prayer As Worship

The centurion, of whom we read in the eighth chapter of Matthew, wanted Jesus to heal his servant. But when Jesus said he would go and heal him, the centurion said, *Lord, I am not worthy that thou should come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed* (Matthew 8:8). Jesus commended his faith. *Then Jesus said unto the centurion, Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in that same hour* (Matthew 8:13).

Scripture is full of examples of those who worshipped as they came to Jesus with their requests. Jairus, one of the synagogue leaders, fell at his feet and worshipped Jesus as he presented his request for healing for his daughter (Matthew 9, Mark 5, Luke 8). We read of the leper who came to Jesus, *beseeching him and kneeling down to him and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.And Jesus, having mercy on him, put forth his hand and touched him and said unto him, I will; be thou clean* (Mark 1:40-41). In Luke 5, it says the leper *fell on his face* before Jesus – prostrate in worship.

We read the story of a Syrophenician woman, a Gentile who was born in Syrian Phoenicia in the land of Canaan, who *came and fell at his feet* to boldly ask for deliverance for her daughter who was possessed by a demon. Jesus resisted her, but her answer was, *Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs*. Jesus rewarded her persistence and her acknowledgement of him as Lord. He told her, *For this word go; the demon has gone out of thy daughter. And when she came to her house, she found that the demon had gone out, and the daughter lay upon the bed* (Mark 7:29-30).

The beloved disciple, John, spoke of the feeling he and others had concerning Jesus when they were abiding with him as their Lord. He wrote, *we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father* (John 1:14). No matter how intimate their companionship and tender their love, they reverenced as much as they communed, and adored as much as they loved.

Of every act of prayer we may say the same as George Herbert said of public worship:

When once thy foot enters the church, be bare;
God is more than thou; for thou art there
Only by His permission. Then beware,
And make thyself all reverence and fear.
Kneeling ne'er spoiled silk stockings; quit thy state.
All equal are within the churches' gate.[13]

The wise man says, *Watch thy feet when thou goest to the house of God and draw near with more willingness to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know how to do what God wants.Do not be rash with thy mouth and do not let thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God, for God is in*

heaven and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2). If we are struggling to live a higher life, and to know something of God's holiness and purity, what we need is to be brought into contact with him, that he may reveal himself.

Then we will take our place before him as those men of old were compelled to do. We shall hallow – honor as holy – his name as the master taught his disciples when he said, *Hallowed be thy name* (Matthew 6:9). When I think of the irreverence of the present time, it seems to me that we have fallen on evil days. As Christians, when we draw near to God in prayer, let's give him his rightful place. *Therefore, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us hold fast to the grace, by which we serve God, pleasing him with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:28-29).

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11 Written by Newman Hall. Published in Edinburgh in 1883 by T. & T. Clark.

12 Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) was an English non-conformist Puritan preacher and author. As published in *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks, Volume 4*, published by J. Nichol, 1867.

13 George Herbert (1593–1633) was an English poet and orator, and a priest in the Church of England.

Confession

No, not despairingly
   Come I to Thee;
No, not distrustingly
   Bend I the knee;
Sin hath gone over me,
   Yet is this still my plea,
Jesus hath died.

Ah, mine iniquity
   Crimson has been;
Infinite, infinite,
   Sin upon sin;
Sin of not loving Thee,
   Sin of not trusting Thee.
Infinite sin.

Lord, I confess to Thee
   Sadly my sin;
All I am, tell I Thee,
   All I have been.
Purge Thou my sin away,
   Wash Thou my soul this day;
Lord, make me clean!
   – Dr. Horatius Bonar (1808–1889)

Chapter 3

Confession

Another element in true prayer is confession. I do not want Christian friends to think I am talking to the unsaved. I think we as Christians have a large number of sins to confess.

All Have Sinned

If you go back to the Scripture records, you will find that the men who lived nearest to God, and had most power with him, were those who confessed their sins and failures. Daniel, as we have seen, confessed his sins and those of his people. Yet there is nothing recorded against Daniel.

He was one of the best men then on the face of the earth, yet his confession of sin was one of the deepest and most humble on record. Daniel turned to the Lord, sprinkled himself with ashes, and pleaded with the Lord in prayer and fasting. His prayer began with giving God honor:

> *Now O Lord, thou great God who is worthy to be feared, who keeps the covenant and the mercy with those that love thee and keep thy commandments; we have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly, and we have been rebels, and we have departed from thy commandments and from thy judgments.*
>
> *We have not hearkened unto thy slaves the prophets, who spoke in thy name to our kings and to our princes, to our fathers, and to all the people of the land.*
>
> *O Lord, the righteousness belongs unto thee, but unto us the confusion of face, as at this day; to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near and that are far off through all the lands where thou hast driven them because of their rebellion with which they have rebelled against thee.*
>
> *O Lord, to us belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.* (Daniel 9:4-8)

Thomas Brooks, referring to Daniel's confession, said, "In these words, you have seven circumstances that Daniel uses in confessing his and the people's sins; and all to heighten and aggravate them." These are the seven circumstances Brooks listed:

1. We have sinned.
2. We have committed iniquity.
3. We have done wickedly.
4. We have rebelled against Thee.
5. We have departed from Thy precepts.
6. We have not hearkened unto Thy servants.

7. Not our princes, nor all the people of the land.

"These seven aggravations which Daniel reckons up in his confession are worthy of our most serious consideration," Brooks said.[14]

Like Daniel, Job was no doubt a holy man and a mighty prince, yet he had to fall in the dust and confess his sins. So you will find it all through the Scriptures. When Isaiah saw the purity and holiness of God, he beheld himself in his true light, and he exclaimed, *Woe is me! for I am dead because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the* LORD *of the hosts.* (Isaiah 6:5).

I firmly believe that the church of God will have to confess her own sins before there can be any great work of grace.

A True and Deep Revival

There must be a deeper work among God's believing people. I sometimes think it is about time to give up preaching to the ungodly, and preach to those who profess to be Christians. If we had a higher standard of life in the church of God, there would be thousands more flocking into the kingdom. It was the same in the past. When God's believing children turned away from their sins and their idols, the fear of God fell upon the people around them.

Study the history of Israel, and you will find that when they put away their strange gods, God visited the nation, and a mighty work of grace came. What we want in these days is a true and deep revival in the church of God. I have little sympathy with the idea that God is going to reach the masses by a cold and formal church. The judgment of God must begin with us. You notice that when Daniel got that wonderful answer to prayer recorded in the ninth chapter, he was confessing his sin. That is one of the best chapters on prayer in the whole Bible. We read:

> *And whiles I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and presenting my supplication before the* LORD *my God for the holy mountain of my God; I was even yet speaking in prayer, and that man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, flying swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening sacrifice. And he caused me to understand and spoke with me and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to cause thee to understand the interpretation.* (Daniel 9:20-22)

In the same way, when Job confessed his sin and prayed for his friends, the Lord heard him and restored his fortunes. God will hear our prayer and restore us when we take our true place before him, and confess and forsake our transgressions.

It was when Isaiah cried out before the Lord, *I am dead*, that the blessing came. The live coal was taken from the altar and put upon his lips, and he went out to write one of the most wonderful books the world has ever seen. What a blessing it has been to the church!

It was when David said, *I have sinned*, that God dealt in mercy with him. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and I have not hid my iniquity. I said, I will confess (against myself) my rebellions unto the* LORD, *and thou shalt forgive the iniquity of my sin* (Psalm 32:5). Notice how David made a similar confession in another psalm: *Against thee, against thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight that thou be declared just in thy word and pure in thy judgment* (Psalm 51:4).

The same heart like David's is reflected in the words of the prodigal: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no longer worthy to be called thy son* (Luke 15:21). There is no difference between the king and the beggar when the Spirit of God comes into the heart and convicts of sin.

Richard Sibbes[15] quaintly said of confession, "This is the way to give glory to God…when we have laid open our souls to God, and laid as much against ourselves as the Devil could do that way – for let us think what the Devil would lay to our charge at the hour of death and the day of judgment." He said the Devil would accuse us of all sorts of things, and so we should accuse ourselves as the Devil would, and as he will before long. "The more we accuse and judge ourselves, and set up a tribunal in our hearts, certainly there will follow an incredible ease. Jonah was cast into the sea, and there was an ease in the ship; Achan was stoned, and the plague was stayed."

Out with our "Jonah," out with our "Achan," Sibbes said, and we will soon have calm and quiet in the soul; our conscience will receive wonderful serenity. "It must needs be so; for when God is honored, conscience is purified. God is honored by confession of sin every way. It honors his omniscience; that he is all-seeing, that he sees our sins and searches the hearts. Our secrets are not hid from him. It honors his power."

Sibbes proposed, isn't it our fear of his power and that he will use it that makes us confess our sins? And what makes us confess our sins, except that we know *there is forgiveness close to thee, that thou may be feared* (Psalm 130:4), and there is pardon for sin? "We would not confess our sins else," said Sibbes. "With men it is, confess, and have execution, but with God, confess, and have mercy. It is his own protestation. We should never lay open our sins but for mercy. So it honors God, and when he is honored, he honors the soul with inward peace and tranquility."[16]

Praying with Penitence

Old Thomas Fuller[17] said, "Man's owning his weakness is the only stock for God thereon to graft the grace of his assistance." Confession implies humility, and this, in God's sight, is of great price.

A farmer went with his son into a wheat field to see if it was ready for the harvest. "See, father," exclaimed the boy, "how straight these stems hold up their heads! They must be the best ones. Those that hang their heads down, I am sure cannot be good for much."

The farmer plucked a stalk of each kind and said, "See here, foolish child! This stalk that stood so straight is light-headed, and almost good for nothing; while this that hung its head so modestly is full of the most beautiful grain."

Outspokenness is needful and powerful, both with God and man. We need to be honest and frank with ourselves. A soldier said in a revival meeting, "My fellow soldiers, I am not excited; I am convinced – that is all. I feel that I ought to be a Christian, that I ought to say so, to tell you so, and to ask you to come with me. And now if there is a call for sinners seeking Christ to come forward, I for one shall go – not to make a show, for I have nothing but sin to show. I do not go because I want to – I would rather keep my seat. But going will be telling the truth. I ought to be a Christian, I want to be a Christian, and going forward for prayers is just telling the truth about it." More than twenty went with him.

Speaking of Pharaoh's words, *Intreat the LORD that he may take away the frogs from me* (Exodus 8:8), Charles Spurgeon said:

> A fatal flaw is manifest in that prayer. It contains no confession of sin. He says not, "I have rebelled against the Lord; entreat that I may find forgiveness!"
>
> Nothing of the kind; he loves sin as much as ever. A prayer without penitence is a prayer without acceptance. If no tear has fallen upon it, it is withered. Thou must come to God as a sinner through a Savior, but by no other way.
>
> He who comes to God like the Pharisee, with, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are," never draws near to God at all; but he who cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner," has come to God by the way which God has himself appointed. There must be confession of sin before God, or our prayer is faulty.[18]

Leading by Example

If this confession of sin is deep among believers, it will be so among the ungodly also. I never knew it to fail. I am now anxious that God should revive his work in the hearts of his children, so we may see the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

There are a great many fathers and mothers who are anxious for the conversion of their children. I have had as many as fifty messages from parents come to me within a single week, wondering why their children are not saved, and asking prayer for them. I venture to say that, as a rule, the fault lies at our own door.

There may be something in our life that stands in the way. It may be there is some secret sin that keeps back the blessing. David lived for many months in the awful sin into which he fell before the prophet Nathan made his appearance. Let's pray and ask God to come into our hearts and make his power felt. If it is a right eye, let's pluck it out; if it is a right hand, let's cut it off, that we may have power with God and with man.

> *And if thy right hand should bring thee occasion to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.* (Matthew 5:30)

Why is it that so many of our children are wandering into the drinking saloons, drifting away into infidelity and going down to a dishonored grave? There seems to be very little power in the Christianity of the present time. Many godly parents find their children are going astray. Does it arise from some secret sin clinging around the heart?

There is a passage of God's Word that is often quoted, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred those who quote it stop at the wrong place. In Isaiah 59:1 we read, *Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear*. There they stop.

Of course, God's hand is not shortened, and his ear is not heavy, but we ought to read the next two verses: *But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips pronounce lies; your tongue speaks evil* (verses 2-3).

As Matthew Henry said, "It was owing to themselves – they stood in their own light, they shut their own door. God was coming toward them in the way of mercy, and they hindered him. 'Your iniquities have kept good things from you.'"[19]

Sincere Confession

Bear in mind that if we are contemplating wickedness in our hearts, or living on a mere empty profession, we have no claim to expect our prayers will be answered. There is not one solitary promise for us. I sometimes tremble when I hear people quote promises and say God is bound to fulfill those promises to them, when all the time there is something in their own lives which they are not willing to give up. It is well for us to search our hearts and find out why it is that our prayers are not answered. The first chapter of Isaiah is a solemn passage:

> *Hear the word of the LORD, ye princes of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? shall the LORD say. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; and I do not delight in the blood of bullocks or of lambs or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*
>
> *Bring no more vain oblations; the incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot stand them; iniquity and the solemn meeting.* (Isaiah 1:10-13)

The King James Version says, *it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting*. Even our pious gatherings! Think of that. If God does not get our heart service, he will have none of it; it is an abomination to him.

> *Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; likewise, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek judgment; restore unto the oppressed; hear the fatherless in right judgment; protect the widow. Then come, shall the LORD say, and we shall be even; if your sins were as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; if they were red like crimson, they shall become as wool.* (Isaiah 1:14-18)

Think of this! *He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination* (Proverbs 28:9). It may shock some of us to think our prayers are an abomination to God, yet if any are living in known sin, this is what God's Word says about them. If we are not willing to turn from sin and obey God's law, we have no right to expect that he will answer our prayers. Unconfessed sin is unforgiven sin, and unforgiven sin is the darkest, foulest thing on this sin-cursed earth.

You cannot find a case in the Bible where a man has been honest in dealing with sin, where God has not also been honest with him and blessed him. The prayer of the humble and the contrite heart is a delight to God. There is no sound that goes up from this sin-cursed earth so sweet to his ear as the prayer of the man who does what is right.

Searching Our Own Hearts

Let me call attention to that prayer of David, in which he said, *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way eternal* (Psalm 139:23-24). I wish all my readers would commit these verses to memory. If we would all honestly

make this prayer once every day, there would be a good deal of change in our lives. Search *me*. Not my neighbor. It is so easy to pray for other people, but so hard to get "home to ourselves."

I am afraid those of us who are busy in the Lord's work are very often in danger of neglecting our vineyard. In this psalm, David got home to himself. There is a difference between God searching me and me searching myself. I may search my heart, and pronounce it all right, but when God searches me as with a lighted candle, many things will come to light that I might have known nothing about.

Try me. David was tried when he fell by taking his eyes off the God of his father Abraham. *Know my thoughts*. God looks at the thoughts.

Are our thoughts pure? Are there thoughts in our hearts against God or against his people – against anyone in the world? If there are, then we are not right in the sight of God. Oh, may God search us, every one of us! I do not know any better prayer that we can make than this prayer of David. One of the most solemn things in Scripture history is that when holy people – better people than we are – were tested and tried, they were found to be as weak as water when they were away from God. Let's be sure that we are right in how we live.

Isaac Ambrose, in his essay on self-trial, said we should ask our heart two questions now and then. The first is, "Heart, how dost thou? A few words, but a very serious question." Ambrose reminded us this is the first question and the first greeting we use with one another. We ask, how do you do? How are you?

"I would to God we sometimes thus spoke to our hearts: heart, how dost thou? How is it with you for your spiritual state?" Ambrose said. What excellent questions to ask. How is my heart? What is its spiritual condition?

The second question Ambrose said we should ask is, "Heart, what wilt thou do? Or, heart, what do you think will become of you and me? As that dying Roman once said, 'Poor, wretched, miserable soul, whither art thou and I going, and what will become of thee, when thou and I shall part?'"

Moses proposed this very thing to Israel, only worded differently. *O that they . . . would understand their latter end!* (Deuteronomy 32:29). Listen to the rest of what Ambrose had to say:

> And oh that we would put this question constantly to our hearts, to consider and debate upon! *Commune with your own heart*, said David (Psalm 4:4, KJV); that is, debate the matter between you and your hearts to the very utmost.
>
> Let your hearts be so put to it in communing with them, as that they may speak their very bottom. Commune, or hold a serious communication, and clear intelligence and acquaintance with your own hearts.
>
> It was the confession of a divine, sensible of his neglect, and especially of the difficulty of this duty. "I have lived," said he, "forty years and somewhat more, and carried my heart in my bosom all this while, and yet my heart and I are as great strangers, and as utterly unacquainted, as if we had never come near one another. Nay, I know not my heart; I have forgotten my heart. Alas! alas! that I could be grieved at the very heart, that my poor heart and I have been so unacquainted!"
>
> We are fallen into an Athenian age, spending our time in nothing more than in *telling or hearing news* (Acts 17:21). How go things here? How there? How in one place? How in another? But who is there that is inquisitive? How are things with my poor heart?
>
> Weigh but in the balance of a serious consideration, what time we have spent in this duty, and what time otherwise? And for many scores and hundreds of hours or days that we owe to our hearts in

> this duty, can we write fifty? Or where there should have been fifty vessels full of this duty, can we find twenty, or ten?
>
> Oh, the days, months, years, we bestow upon sin, vanity, the affairs of this world, while we afford not a minute in converse with our own hearts concerning their case![20]

If there is anything in our lives that is wrong, let's ask God to show it to us. Have we been selfish? Have we been more protective of our own reputation than of the honor of God? Elijah thought he was zealous for the honor of God, but it turned out that it was his own honor after all; self was really at the bottom of it. One of the saddest things, I think, that Christ had to deal with in his disciples was this very thing; there was a constant struggle between them as to who should be the greatest, instead of each one taking the humblest place and being least in his own estimation. We find proof of this in the following discussions that Jesus mediated:

> *And he came to Capernaum; and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves on the way?*
>
> *But they were silent; for on the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.*
>
> *Then, sitting down, he called the twelve and said unto them, If anyone desires to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all. And taking a child, he set him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receives me; and whosoever shall receive me, receives not me, but him that sent me.*
>
> *And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out demons in thy name and he does not follow us; and we forbade him because he does not follow us.*
>
> *But Jesus said, Forbid him not, for there is no one who does a miracle in my name that can then speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us.* (Mark 9:33-40)

Soon after, a similar topic came up again:

> *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou should do for us whatever we shall ask. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one at thy right hand and the other at thy left hand in thy glory.*
>
> *Then Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask; can ye drink the cup that I drink? Or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*
>
> *And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink the cup that I drink, and of the baptism that I am baptized with ye shall be baptized; but to sit at my right hand and at my left hand is not mine to give, but it shall be given to those for whom it is prepared.*
>
> *And when the ten heard it, they began to be angry against James and John.*
>
> *But Jesus, calling unto them, said unto them, Ye know that those who are seen to be princes among the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those that are great among them wield power over them. But it shall not be like this among you, for whosoever desires to make himself great among you shall be your servant; and whosoever of you that desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to serve and to give his life in ransom for many.* (Mark 10:35-45)

The latter words were spoken in the third year of Jesus' ministry. For three years the disciples had been with him; they had listened to the words that fell from his lips, yet they had failed to learn this lesson of humility. The most humiliating thing that happened among the chosen twelve occurred on the night of our Lord's betrayal, when Judas sold him and Peter denied him.

If there was any place where there should have been an absence of these thoughts, it was at the supper table. Yet we find that when Christ instituted that blessed memorial, there was a debate going on among his disciples as to who should be the greatest. Think of that – right under the cross, when the Master was *exceeding sorrowful, even unto death* (Matthew 26:38), he was already tasting the bitterness of Calvary, and the horrors of that dark hour were gathering upon his soul.

Testing Our Motives

I think if God searches us, we will find many things in our lives for us to confess. If we are tried and tested by God's law, there will be many things that will have to be changed. I ask again, are we selfish or jealous? Are we willing to hear of others being used of God more than we are? Are our Methodist friends willing to hear of a great revival of God's work among the Baptists? Would they rejoice in their souls to hear of such efforts being blessed? Are Baptists willing to hear of a reviving of God's work in the Methodist, Congregational, or other churches?

If we are full of narrow, party, and sectarian feelings, there will be many things to be laid aside. Let's pray to God to search us, and try us, and see if there is any evil way in us. If these holy and good men felt they were faulty, shouldn't we tremble, and endeavor to find out if there is anything in our lives that God would have us get rid of? Once again, let me call your attention to the prayer of David contained in Psalm 51. A friend of mine told me some years ago that he repeated this prayer as his own every week. I think it would be a good thing if we offered up these petitions frequently – let them go right up from our hearts.

Psalm 51

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy mercy; according unto the multitude of thy compassion eradicate my rebellion. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my rebellion; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, against thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight that thou be declared just in thy word and pure in thy judgment. Behold, the pain of my iniquity has caused me to writhe; my mother conceived me so that sin might be removed from me. Behold, thou dost desire truth in the inward parts, and in the secret things thou hast made me to know wisdom.

Remove the sin in me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins and eradicate all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy saving health, and thy spirit of liberty shall uphold me. Then I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud

of thy righteousness. O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou dost not desire sacrifice or else would I give it; thou dost not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then thou shalt be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, the burnt offering, the offering that has been totally consumed by the fire; then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

If we have been proud, or irritable, or lacking in patience, shouldn't we confess it at once? Isn't it time that we began at home and got our lives straightened out? See how quickly the ungodly will then begin to inquire about the way of life! Let those of us who are parents set our own houses in order and be filled with Christ's Spirit; then it won't be long before our children will be inquiring what they must do to get the same Spirit.

Encountering God

I believe today, by its lukewarm quality and formality, the Christian church is making more nonbelievers than all the books that nonbelievers ever wrote. I do not fear pagan lectures half so much as the cold and dead formalism in the professing church at the present time. One prayer meeting like the one the disciples had on the day of Pentecost would shake the whole nonbelieving fraternity.

What we want is to encounter God in prayer. You are not going to reach the masses by great sermons. We want to "move the arm that moves the world." To do that, we must be clear and right before God. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart doesn't condemn, then have confidence toward God, *and whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight* (1 John 3:22).

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14 From *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks, Volume 4*, published in Edinburgh by James Nichol, 1867.
15 Richard Sibbes (or Sibbs) (1577–1635) was an Anglican theologian.
16 From *The Works of the Reverend Richard Sibbs*, published by J. Chalmers & Company, 1809.
17 Thomas Fuller (1608–1661) was an English churchman and historian.
18 Spurgeon (1834–1892) was an English Baptist preacher and prolific author. From Charles Haddon Spurgeon's sermon, "Take Away the Frogs."
19 From *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, published in the early 1700s.
20 Isaac Ambrose (1604–1664) was an English Puritan divine. Published in *The Compleat Works of Mr. Isaac Ambrose*, chapter 4, section 6, 1759.

Perfect Cleansing

Who would be cleansed from every sin,
   Must to God's holy altar bring
The whole of life – its joys, its tears,
   Its hopes, its loves, its powers, its years,
The will, and every cherished thing!

Must make this sweeping sacrifice –
   Choose God, and dare reproach and shame,
And boldly stand in storm or flame
   For him who paid redemption's price;
Then trust (not struggle to believe),
   And trusting wait, nor doubt, but pray
That in his own good time he'll say,
   "Thy faith hath saved thee; now receive."

His time is when the soul brings all,
   Is all upon his altar lain;
When pride and self-conceit are slain,
   And crucified with Christ, we fall
Helpless upon his word, and he;
   When, faithful to his word, we feel
The cleansing touch, the Spirit's seal,
   And know that he does sanctify.
      – A. T. Allis, 1865

Chapter 4

Restitution

A third element of successful prayer is restitution. If I have at any time taken what does not belong to me, and am not willing to make restitution, my prayers will not go very far toward heaven. It is a singular thing, but I have never touched on this subject in my addresses without hearing of immediate results.

A man once told me that I would not need to dwell on this point at a meeting I was about to address, as probably there would be no one present that would need to make restitution. But I think if the Spirit of God searches our hearts, most of us will find many things that we never thought of before.

Making Things Right

After Zacchaeus met with Christ, things looked altogether different. I venture to say the idea of making restitution never entered into his mind before. That morning, he probably thought he was a perfectly honest man. But when the Lord came and spoke to him, he saw himself in an altogether different light.

Notice how short his speech was. The only thing put on record that he said was, *Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold* (Luke 19:8). A short speech, but how the words have come ringing down through the ages! By making that remark, he confessed his sin – that he had been dishonest. Besides that, he showed that he knew the requirements of the law of Moses. If a man had taken what did not belong to him, he was not only to return it, but also to multiply it by four.

I think those who are exempt from the law ought to be as fully honest as men under the law. I am getting so sick and tired of your mere sentimentalism; that does not straighten out a man's life.

We may sing our hymns and psalms, and offer prayers, but they will be an abomination to God unless we are willing to be thoroughly straightforward in our daily life. Nothing will give Christianity such a hold upon the world as to have God's believing people begin to act in this way. Zacchaeus probably had more influence in Jericho after he made restitution than any other man in it.

Charles Finney, in his lectures to professing Christians, said, "One reason for the requirement, 'Be not conformed to this world,' is the immense, salutary, and instantaneous influence it would have, if everybody would do business on the principles of the gospel." Finney suggested we turn the tables over and let Christians do business on gospel principles for one year.

"It would shake the world!" he said. "It would ring louder than thunder. Let the ungodly see professing Christians in every bargain consulting the good of the person they are trading with – seeking not their own wealth, but every man another's wealth – living above the world – setting no value on the world any further than it would be the means of glorifying God – what do you think would be the effect? ... It would cover the world with confusion of face, and overwhelm them with conviction of sin."[21]

Finney makes restitution to be one grand mark of genuine repentance. "The thief has not repented who

keeps the money he stole. He may have conviction, but no repentance. If he had repentance, he would go and give back the money. If you have cheated anyone, and do not restore what you have taken unjustly, or if you have injured anyone, and do not set about to undo the wrong you have done, as far as in you lies, you have not truly repented."

In Exodus we read, *If a man shall steal an ox or a sheep and kill it or sell it he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep* (Exodus 22:1). And also, *If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten and shall put in his beast and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field and of the best of his own vineyard shall he make restitution* (verse 5). Or turn to Leviticus, where the law of the trespass offering is laid down – the same point is asserted with equal clearness and force:

> *If a person commits a sin, a trespass against the LORD, and denies unto his neighbour that which was delivered unto him to keep or left in his hand, or in a thing stolen, or has slandered his neighbour; or has found that which was lost and then denies it and swears falsely, in any of all these in which a man can sin, then it shall be that because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he stole, or for the damage of the slander, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he has sworn falsely, he shall even restore it in the principal and shall add the fifth part more to it, for the one to whom it belongs, and he shall pay in the day of his guiltiness.* (Leviticus 6:2-5)

If we didn't already understand it from Exodus and Leviticus, the same thing is repeated in Numbers, where we read:

> *And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the sons of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then they shall confess their sin which they have done, and he shall recompense his guilt with the principal thereof and add unto it the fifth part thereof and give it unto him against whom he is guilty. But if that man has no redeemer to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the LORD, even to the priest, beside the ram of the reconciliations, whereby reconciliation shall be made for him.* (Numbers 5:5-8)

These were the laws God laid down for his people, and I believe their principle is as binding today as it was then. If we have taken anything from any person, if we have in any way defrauded someone, let's not only confess it, but also do all we can to make restitution. If we have misrepresented anyone – if we have started some slander, or some false report about him or her – let's do all in our power to undo the wrong.

Pure Motives

In reference to a practical righteousness that is related to making restitution, God says in Isaiah:

> *Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast and an acceptable day to the LORD?* (Isaiah 58:4-5)

What good is fasting if we keep on fighting and quarrelling? Performing rituals that look like expressions of sorrow and mourning doesn't please the Lord. This passage shows a picture of what it looks like to believe God will bless empty rituals.

> *Is not rather the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the ties of oppression, to release into freedom those who are broken, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to share thy bread with the hungry and that thou bring the poor that are cast out into thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou not hide thyself from thy brother?* (Isaiah 58:6-7)

True fasting brings awareness to the cause of the broken, those imprisoned wrongly, and those who are oppressed. A heartfelt prayer is accompanied by action that reaches out to help those in need.

> *Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall gather thee. Then shalt thou call, and thou shalt hear the LORD; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.* (Isaiah 58:8-9a)

We will be a light to shine God's truth on others when we turn fully to the Lord, and he will hear us when we cry. The passage goes on to explain how true change can lead to restitution. Let's look at how this kind of restoration might look in a practical situation. John Trapp, in his commentary on Zacchaeus, told the following stories:

> Sultan Selymus could tell his counselor, Pyrrhus, who persuaded him to bestow the great wealth he had taken from the Persian merchants upon some notable hospital for relief of the poor, that God hates robbery for burnt offering. The dying Turk commanded it rather to be restored to the right owners, which was done accordingly, to the great shame of many Christians who mind nothing less than restitution.
>
> When Henry III of England had sent the friar Minors a load of frieze[22] to clothe them, they returned the same with this message, that he ought not to give alms of what he had rent from the poor; neither would they accept of that abominable gift.
>
> Master Latimer said, "If you make no restitution of goods detained, you shall cough in hell, and the devils shall laugh at you."
>
> Henry VII, in his last will and testament, after the disposition of his soul and body, devised and willed restitution should be made of all such moneys as had unjustly been levied by his officers. Queen Mary restored again all ecclesiastical livings assumed to the crown, saying that she set more by the salvation of her own soul, than she did by ten kingdoms. A bull came also from the Pope, at the same time, that others should do the like, but none did. Latimer tells us that the first day he preached about restitution, one came and gave him £20 to restore; the next day another brought him £30; another time another gave him £200.[23]
>
> Mr. Bradford, hearing Latimer on that subject, was struck in the heart for one dash of the pen which he had made without the knowledge of his master, and could never be quiet till, by the advice of Mr. Latimer restitution was made, for which he did willingly forego all the private and certain patrimony which he had on earth.
>
> "I, myself," said Mr. Barroughs, "knew one man who had wronged another but of five shillings, and fifty years after could not be quiet till he had restored it.[24]

Signs of True Repentance

If there is true repentance, it will bring forth fruit. If we have done wrong to someone, we should never

ask God to forgive us until we are willing to make restitution. If I have done any man a great injustice and can make it good, I do not need to ask God to forgive me until I am willing to forgive first.

Suppose I have taken something that does not belong to me. I cannot expect forgiveness until I make restitution. I remember preaching in an Eastern city, and a fine-looking man came up to me at the close. He was in great distress of mind.

"The fact is," he said, "I am a defaulter. I have taken money that belonged to my employers. How can I become a Christian without restoring it?"

"Have you got the money?" I asked.

He told me he did not have it all. He had taken about $1,500, and he still had about $900. He said, "Could I not take that money and go into business, and make enough to pay them back?"

I told him that was a delusion of Satan, that he could not expect to prosper on stolen money, and that he should restore all he had, and go and ask his employers to have mercy upon him and forgive him.

"But they will put me in prison," he said. "Can you not give me any help?"

"No, you must restore the money before you can expect to get any help from God."

"It is pretty hard," he said.

"Yes, it is hard, but the great mistake was in doing the wrong at first."

His burden became so heavy that it was, in fact, unbearable. He handed me the money – $950 and some cents – and asked me to take it back to his employers.

I told them the story and said he wanted mercy from them, not justice. The tears trickled down the cheeks of these two men, and they said, "Forgive him! Yes, we will be glad to forgive him."

I went downstairs and brought him up. After he had confessed his guilt and been forgiven, we all fell down on our knees and had a blessed prayer meeting. God met us and blessed us there.

There was another friend of mine who had come to Christ and was trying to consecrate himself and his wealth to God. He had formerly had transactions with the government and had taken advantage of them. This thing came to memory, and his conscience troubled him. He had a terrible struggle; his conscience kept rising up and smacking him. At last, he drew a check for $1,500 and sent it to the treasury of the government. He told me he received such a blessing after he had done it.

That is bringing forth fruits that are fitting for repentance. I believe a great many people are crying to God for light, and they are not getting it because they are not honest.

A man came to one of our meetings when we touched upon this subject. The memory of a dishonest transaction flashed into his mind. He saw at once how it was that his prayers were not answered, *but . . . my prayer rose up in my bosom*, as the Scripture phrase puts it (Psalm 35:13). He left the meeting, took the train, and went to a distant city, where he had defrauded his employer years before. He went straight to this man, confessed the wrong, and offered to make restitution.

Then he remembered another transaction in which he had failed to meet the just demands upon him, and at once, he made arrangements to have a large amount repaid. He came back to the place where we were holding the meetings, and God blessed him wonderfully in his own soul. I have not met a man for a long time who seemed to have received such a blessing.

Never Too Late

Some years ago, in the north of England, a woman came to one of the meetings and appeared to be very

anxious about her soul. For some time, she did not seem to be able to get peace. The truth was, she was covering up one thing that she was not willing to confess. At last, the burden was too great, and she said to a worker, “I never go down on my knees to pray, but a few bottles of wine keep coming up before my mind.”

It appeared that years before when she was housekeeper, she had taken some bottles of wine belonging to her employer.

The worker said, “Why don’t you make restitution?”

The woman replied that the man was dead, and besides, she did not know how much it was worth.

“Are there any heirs living to whom you can make restitution?”

She said there was a son living at some distance, but she thought it would be a very humiliating thing, so she kept back for some time.

At last she felt as if she must have a clear conscience at any cost, so she took the train, and went to the place where the son of her employer resided. She took five pounds with her; she did not exactly know what the wine was worth, but that would cover it at any rate.

The man said he did not want the money, but she replied, “I do not want it; it has burned my pocket long enough.”

So he agreed to take half of it and give it to some charitable object. Then she came back, and I think she was one of the happiest people I have ever met with. She said she could not tell whether she was in the body or out of it – such a blessing had come to her soul.

It may be that there is something in our lives that needs straightening out, something that happened perhaps twenty years ago and that has been forgotten until the Spirit of God brought it to our remembrance. If we are not willing to make restitution, we cannot expect God to give us great blessing. Perhaps that is the reason so many of our prayers are not answered.

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21 Take from *Lectures to Professing Christians*, delivered by Finney in New York in 1836 and 1837.
22 A kind of coarse, woolen cloth.
23 British pounds.
24 John Trapp (1601–1669) was an English Anglican Bible commentator. Among other commentaries, he wrote the five-volume work, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, published in 1662.

The Praise of God

Speak, lips of mine!
   And tell abroad
The praises of my God,
   Speak, stammering tongue!
In gladdest tone,
   Make His high praises known.

Speak, sea and earth!
   Heaven's utmost star,
Speak from your realms afar!
   Take up the note,
And send it round
   Creation's farthest bound.

Speak, heaven of heavens!
   Wherein our God
Has made His bright abode.
   Speak, angels, speak!
In songs proclaim
   His everlasting name.

Speak, son of dust!
   Thy flesh He took
And heaven for thee forsook.
   Speak child of death!
Thy death He died,
   Bless thou the crucified.
      – Dr. Horatius Bonar (1808–1889)

Chapter 5

Thanksgiving

The next thing I would mention as an element of prayer is thanksgiving. We ought to be more thankful for what we get from God. Perhaps some of you mothers have a child in your family who is constantly complaining – never thankful. You know there is not much pleasure in doing anything for a child like that. If you meet with a beggar who is always grumbling, and never seems to be thankful for what you give him, you very soon shut the door in his face altogether. Ingratitude is about the hardest thing we have to meet with. The great English poet said:

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
  Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
  Thy tooth is not so keen
Because thou art not seen,
  Although thy breath be rude.[25]

Blessing and Thanks

We cannot speak too plainly of this evil, which so demeans those who are guilty of it. Even in Christians there is too much of it to be seen. Here we are, getting blessings from God day after day, yet how little praise and thanksgiving there is in the church of God!

William Gurnall, in *TheChristian in Complete Armor*, referred to the concept of "In everything give thanks," when he quoted Psalm 33:1: *for to the upright praise is beautiful*. Gurnall said, "An unthankful saint carries a contradiction with it. 'Evil' and 'unthankful' are twins that live and die together; as any one ceases to be evil, he begins to be thankful. Consider it is that which God both expects and promises himself at your hands; he made you for this end. When the vote passed in heaven for your being, yea, happy being, in Christ, it was upon this account, that you should be 'a name and a praise' to him on earth in time, and in heaven to eternity."

Gurnall said if God missed this, he would fail on one main part of his design. He asked, what prompts God to give every mercy to us, except to give us the material to compose a song for his praise? *For he said, Surely they are my people, sons that do not lie: and he was their Saviour* (Isaiah 63:8). "He looks for fair dealing, you see, at your hands," Gurnall said. "Whom may a father trust with his reputation, if not a child? Where can a prince expect honor, if not among his favorites? Your state is such that the least mercy you have is more than all the world besides. Thou, Christian, and thy few brethren, divide heaven and earth among you! What hath God that he withholds from you? Sun, moon and stars are set up to give you light; sea and land have their treasures for your use."

He went on to teach that others are encroachers upon these things, but we are the rightful heirs to them. "They groan that any others should be served by them. The angels, bad and good, minister unto you; the

evil, against their will, are forced like scullions when they tempt you, to scour and brighten your graces, and make way for your greater comforts…the good angels are servants to your heavenly Father, and disdain not to carry you [in their arms]."

God doesn't withhold himself from us. He is our portion, father, husband, and friend. "God is his own happiness, and admits you to enjoy him," Gurnall said. "Oh, what honor is this, for the subject to drink in his prince's cup! *Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures* (Psalm 36:8 KJV). And all this, not the purchase of your sweat, much less blood; the feast is paid for by another hand and you are welcome: only he expects your thanks to the founder… No sin-offering is imposed under the gospel; thank offerings are all he looks for."[26]

Stephen Charnock, in speaking on spiritual worship, said:

> The praise of God is the choicest sacrifice and worship, under a dispensation of redeeming grace. This is the prime and eternal part of worship under the gospel. The Psalmist, [in] Psalm 149 and 150, speaking of the gospel times, animates to this kind of worship: *Sing unto the Lord a new song…let the children of Zion be joyful in their King…let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth* (Psalm 149:1-2, 5-6 KJV). He begins and ends both Psalms with Praise ye the Lord!
>
> That cannot be a spiritual and evangelical worship that hath nothing of the praise of God in the heart. The consideration of God's adorable perfections discovered in the gospel will make us come to him with more seriousness, beg blessings of him with more confidence, fly to him with a winged faith and love, and more spiritually glorify him in our attendances upon him.[27]

Mixing Praise with Prayer

There is a great deal more said in the Bible about praise than prayer, yet how few praise meetings there are! David, in his psalms, always mixes praise with prayer. Solomon had great power with God in prayer at the dedication of the temple, but it was the voice of praise which brought down the glory that filled the house; for we read:

> *And when the priests came out of the sanctuary (for all the priests that were present were sanctified and did not then wait by course, and the Levite singers, all of those of Asaph, those of Heman, and those of Jeduthun, together with their sons and their brethren, being clothed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets). And they sounded the trumpets and sang with one voice, all together as one man praising and thanking the LORD, when they lifted up their voice with trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, when they praised the LORD, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endures for ever; and the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.* (2 Chronicles 5:11-14)

We read of Jehoshaphat, who gained the victory over the hosts of Ammon and Moab through praise, which was incited by faith and thankfulness to God.

> *And when they arose early in the morning and while they were going forth into the wilderness of Tekoa, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe*

in the LORD your God, and ye shall be secure; believe his prophets, and ye shall be prospered. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed some to sing unto the LORD and to praise in the beauty of holiness, while the army went out and to say, Praise the LORD, for his mercy endures for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set the sons of Moab and those of Mount Seir to ambush the sons of Ammon, who were coming against Judah; and they smote one another. (2 Chronicles 20:20-22)

It is said that in a time of great despondency among the first settlers in New England, someone proposed in one of their public assemblies to proclaim a fast. An old farmer arose, spoke of their provoking heaven with their complaints, reviewed their measures, showed that they had much to be thankful for, and moved that instead of appointing a day of fasting, they should appoint a day of thanksgiving. This was done, and the custom has been continued ever since.

Always Room for Gratitude

However great our difficulties, or deep even our sorrows, there is room for thankfulness. Thomas Adams said, "Lay up in the ark of thy memory not only the pot of manna, the bread of life; but even Aaron's rod, the very scourge of correction, wherewith thou hast been bettered. Blessed be the Lord, not only giving, but taking away, said Job. God who sees there is no walking upon roses to heaven, puts his children into the way of discipline; and by the fire of correction eats out the rust of corruption. God sends trouble, then bids us call upon him; promises our deliverance; and lastly, the all he requires of us is to glorify him."[28]

Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me (Psalm 50:15). Like the nightingale we can sing in the night, and say with John Newton:

Since all that I meet shall work for my good,
The bitter is sweet, the medicine food;
Though painful at present, 'twill cease before long,
And then - oh, how pleasant! - the conqueror's song.[29]

Among all the apostles, none suffered so much as Paul, but we don't find any of them giving thanks as often as he did. Take his letter to the Philippians. Remember what he suffered at Philippi, how they beat him and cast him into prison. Yet every chapter in that epistle speaks of rejoicing and giving thanks. There is that well-known passage, *Be anxious for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God* (Philippians 4:6). As someone has said, there are three precious ideas here: be careful for nothing, prayerful for everything, and thankful for anything.

We always get more by being thankful for what God has done for us. Paul says again, *We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you* (Colossians 1:3). So he was constantly giving thanks. Take up any one of his epistles, and you will find them full of praise to God.

Even if nothing else called for thankfulness, the truth that Jesus Christ loves us and gave himself for us would always be an ample cause for it.

A farmer was once found kneeling at a soldier's grave near Nashville. Someone came to him and said, "Why do you pay so much attention to this grave? Was your son buried here?"

"No," he said. "During the war my family were all sick; I knew not how to leave them. I was drafted.

One of my neighbors came over and said, ‘I will go for you; I have no family.’ He went off. He was wounded at Chickamauga. He was carried to the hospital, and there died. And, sir, I have come a great many miles, that I might write over his grave these words, ‘He died for me.’”

The believer can always say this of his blessed Savior, and may well rejoice in the truth of it: *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips confessing his name* (Hebrews 13:15).

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25 William Shakespeare (1564–1616).

26 William Gurnall (1616–1679) was an English author and Anglican clergyman. Excerpted from *The Christian in Complete Armour* (Glasgow, Scotland: Blackie & Son, 1864).

27 Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) was a Puritan divine and an English Puritan Presbyterian clergyman. Excerpt as recorded in *The Works of the Late Rev. Stephen Charnock B.D.* (Baynes, 1815).

28 Thomas Adams (1583–1653) was an English clergyman and reputed preacher. Excerpted from *An Exposition Upon the Second Epistle General of St. Peter*, Henry G. Bohn, 1848.

29 John Newton (1725–1807) was an Anglican clergyman, sailor in the English Royal Navy, and hymn writer.

Pardon

Now, oh joy! my sins are pardoned!
   Now I can and do believe!
All I have; and am, and shall be,
   To my precious Lord I give;
He roused my deathly slumbers,
   He dispersed my soul's dark night;
Whispered peace, and drew me to Him
   Made Himself my chief delight.

Let the babe forget its mother,
   Let the bridegroom slight his bride;
True to him, I'll love none other,
   Cleaving alley to His side.
Jesus, hear my soul's confession;
   Weak am I, but strength is Thine;
On Thine arms for strength and succor,
   Calmly may my soul recline!
      – Albert Midlane (1825–1909)

Chapter 6

Forgiveness

The next thing is perhaps the most difficult of all to deal with – forgiveness. I believe this keeps more people from having power with God than any other thing; they are not willing to cultivate the spirit of forgiveness. If we allow the root of bitterness to spring up in our hearts against someone, our prayers will not be answered. It may not be an easy thing to live in sweet fellowship with all those with whom we come in contact, but that is why the grace of God is given to us.

The Lord's Prayer

The disciples' prayer – the Lord's Prayer – is a test of sonship. If we can pray it all from the heart, we have good reason to think that we have been born of God. No man can call God Father but by the Spirit. Though this prayer has been such a blessing to the world, I believe it has been a great snare; many stumble over it into damnation. They do not weigh its meaning, nor take its facts right into their hearts. I have no sympathy with the idea of universal sonship – that all men are the sons and daughters of God. The Bible teaches very plainly that we are adopted into the family of God. If all were sons, God would not need to adopt any.

We are all God's by creation, but when people teach that any person can say, "Our Father which art in heaven," whether he is born of God or not, I think that is contrary to Scripture. *For all that are led by the Spirit of God, the same are sons of God* (Romans 8:14). Sonship in the family is the privilege of the believer. *In this the sons of God are manifest, and the sons of the devil*, says the apostle John (1 John 3:10). If we are doing the will of God, that is a very good sign that we are born of God. If we have no desire to do that will, how can we call God "Our Father?"

Another thing: we cannot really pray for God's kingdom to come until we are in it. If we would pray for the coming of God's kingdom while we are rebelling against him, we are only seeking our own condemnation. No unrighteous person really wants God's will to be done on the earth. You might write over the door of every unsaved man's house, and over his place of business, "God's will is not done here."

If the nations were really to put up this prayer, all their armies could be discharged. They tell us there are some twelve million men in the standing armies of Europe alone. But men do not want God's will done on earth as it is in heaven; that is the trouble.

Forgive Us Our Debts

Now let's come to the part I want to dwell upon: *And set us free from our debts, as we set free our debtors* (Matthew 6:12). This is the only part of the prayer that Christ explained. *For if ye set men free from their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also set you free; but if ye do not set men free from their*

trespasses, neither will your Father set you free from your trespasses (Matthew 6:14-15). Notice that when you go into the door of God's kingdom, you go in through the door of forgiveness.

I never knew of a man getting a blessing in his own soul if he was not willing to forgive others. If we are unwilling to forgive others, God cannot forgive us. I do not know how language could be more plain than it is in these words of our Lord. I firmly believe a great many prayers are not answered because we are not willing to forgive someone.

Let your mind go back over the past, and through the circle of your acquaintances. Are there any against whom you hold hard feelings? Is there any root of bitterness springing up against someone who has perhaps injured you? It may be that for months or years you have been nursing this unforgiving spirit. How can you ask God to forgive you? If I am not willing to forgive those who may have committed some single offense against me, what a mean, contemptible thing it would be for me to ask God to forgive the ten thousand sins of which I have been guilty!

But Christ went even further. He said, *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother has something against thee; leave thy gift there before the altar, and go; first restore friendship with thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift* (Matthew 5:23-24). It may be that you are saying, "I do not know that I have anything against anyone."

Does anyone have anything against you? Is there someone who thinks you have done them wrong? Perhaps you haven't, but maybe they think you have. I will tell you what I would do before I go to sleep tonight; I would go and see them, and have the question settled. You will find that you will be greatly blessed in the very act.

Supposing you are in the right and they are in the wrong, you may win your brother or sister. May God root out of all our hearts this unforgiving spirit.

Finding Forgiveness

A gentleman came to me some time ago and wanted me to talk to his wife about her soul. That woman seemed as anxious as any person I ever met, and I thought it would not take long to lead her into the light, but it seemed that the longer I talked with her, the more her darkness increased.

I went to see her again the next day and found her in still greater darkness of soul. I thought there must be something in the way that I had not discovered, and I asked her to repeat with me this prayer of the disciples – the Lord's Prayer. I thought if she could say this prayer from the heart, the Lord would meet her in peace.

I began to repeat it sentence after sentence, and she repeated it after me until I came to this petition: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." There she stopped.

I repeated it the second time and waited for her to say it after me. She said she could not do it.

"What is the trouble?" I asked.

She replied, "There is one woman I never will forgive."

"Oh," I said, "I have got at your difficulty; it is no use my going on to pray, for your prayers will not go higher than my head. God says he will not forgive you unless you forgive others. If you do not forgive this woman, God will never forgive you. That is the decree of heaven."

She said, "Do you mean to say that I cannot be forgiven until I have forgiven her?"

"No, I do not say it; the Lord says it, and that is far better authority."

“Then I will never be forgiven,” she said.

I left the house without having made any impression on her. A few years after, I heard that this woman was in an asylum for the insane. I believe this spirit of unforgiveness drove her mad.

If there is someone who has anything at all against you, go at once and be reconciled. If you have anything against anyone, write them a letter telling them you forgive them, and so have this thing removed from your conscience. I remember being in the inquiry room[30] some years ago; I was in one corner of the room, talking to a young lady. There seemed to be something in the way, but I could not find out what it was.

At last I said, “Is there not someone you do not forgive?”

She looked up at me and said, “What made you ask that? Has anyone told you about me?”

“No,” I said, “but I thought perhaps that might be the case, as you have not received forgiveness yourself.”

“Well,” she said, pointing to another corner of the room, where there was a young lady sitting. “I have had trouble with that young lady; we have not spoken to each other for a long time.”

“Oh,” I said, “it is all plain to me now; you cannot be forgiven until you are willing to forgive her.”

It was a great struggle. But then you know, the greater the cross, the greater the blessing. It is human to err, but it is Christlike to forgive and be forgiven.

At last this young lady said, “I will go and forgive her.”

Strange to say, the same conflict was going on in the mind of the lady in the other part of the room. They both came to their right mind about the same time. They met each other in the middle of the floor. The one tried to say that she forgave the other, but they could not finish, so they rushed into each other’s arms. Then the four of us – the two seekers and the two workers – got down on our knees together and we had a grand meeting. These two went away rejoicing.

A Wall of Unforgiveness

Dear friend, is this the reason why your prayers are not answered? Is there some friend, some member of your family, someone in the church, you have not forgiven? We sometimes hear of members of the same church who have not spoken to each other for years. How can we expect God to forgive when this is the case? I remember one town that Mr. Sankey[31] and I visited. For a week it seemed as if we were beating the air; there was no power in the meetings.

At last I said one day that perhaps there was someone cultivating this unforgiving spirit. The chairman of our committee, who was sitting next to me, got up and left the meeting right in view of the audience. The arrow had hit the mark and gone home to the heart of the chairman of the committee. He had had trouble with someone for about six months. At once he hunted up this man and asked him to forgive him.

He came to me with tears in his eyes and said, “I thank God you ever came here.”

That night the inquiry room was thronged. The chairman became one of the best workers I have ever known, and he has been active in Christian service ever since.

Several years ago, the Church of England sent a devoted missionary to New Zealand. After a few years of toil and success, one Sabbath he was holding a communion service in a district where the converts had been savages not long before. As the missionary was conducting the service, he observed one of the men, just as he was about to kneel at the rail, suddenly leap to his feet and hastily go to the opposite end of the

church. After a while, he returned, and calmly took his place. After the service, the clergyman took him to one side and asked the reason for his strange behavior.

He replied, "As I was about to kneel I recognized in the man next to me the chief of a neighboring tribe, who had murdered my father, and drunk his blood, and I had sworn by all the gods that I would slay that man at the first opportunity. The impulse to have my revenge at the first almost overpowered me, and I rushed away, as you saw me, to escape the power of it. As I stood at the other end of the room and considered the object of our meeting, I thought of him [Jesus] who prayed for his own murderers, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And I felt that I could forgive the murderer of my father, and came and knelt down at his side."

As one has said, "There is an ugly kind of forgiveness in the world – a kind of hedgehog forgiveness, shot out like quills. Men take one who has offended, and set him down before the blowpipe of their indignation, and scorch him, and burn his fault into him. And when they have kneaded him sufficiently with their fists, then they forgive him."

Forgive Your Enemies

The father of Frederick the Great, on his deathbed, was warned by M. Roloff, his spiritual adviser, that he was bound to forgive his enemies. He was quite troubled, and after a moment's pause, said to the queen, "You may write to your brother [the King of England] after I am dead, and tell him that I forgave him, and died at peace with him."

"It would be better," Roloff mildly suggested, "that your majesty should write at once."

"No," was the stern reply. "Write after I am dead. That will be safer."

Another story tells of a man who, supposing he was about to die, expressed his forgiveness to one who had injured him, but added, "Now you mind, if I get well, the old grudge holds good."

My friends, that is not forgiveness at all. I believe true forgiveness includes forgetting the offense – putting it entirely away out of our hearts and memories.

As Matthew Henry said, "We do not forgive our offending brother aright nor acceptably, if we do not forgive him from the heart, for it is that [which] God looks at. No malice must be harbored there, nor ill-will to any; no projects of revenge must be hatched there, nor desires of it, as there are in many who outwardly appear peaceful and reconciled. We must from the heart desire and seek the welfare of those who have offended us."[32]

If God's forgiveness was like that often shown by us, it would not be worth much. Suppose God said, "I will forgive you, but I will never forget it; all through eternity I will keep reminding you of it." We would not feel that would be forgiveness at all. Notice what God says: "I will remember their sin no more."[33] In a passage in Ezekiel it says not one of our sins will be mentioned; isn't that like God? *All his rebellions that he has committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him; by his righteousness that he has done he shall live* (Ezekiel 18:22).

Forgiven and Forgotten

I do like to preach this forgiveness – the sweet truth that sin is blotted out for time and eternity and will never once be mentioned against us. In another Scripture we read, *their sins and iniquities will I*

remember no more (Hebrews 10:17). Then when you turn to the eleventh chapter of Hebrews and read God's roll of honor, you find that not one of the sins of any of those men of faith is mentioned.

Abraham is spoken of as a man of faith, but it is not told how he denied his wife down in Egypt; all that had been forgiven. Moses was kept out of the Promised Land because he lost patience, but this is not mentioned in the New Testament, though his name appears in the apostle's roll of honor.

Samson too is named, but his sins are not brought up again. Why, we even read of "righteous Lot." He did not look much like a righteous man in the Old Testament story, but he was forgiven, and God made him righteous. If we are once forgiven by God, our sins will be remembered against us no more. This is God's eternal decree.

Thomas Brooks said of God's pardon granted to his people:

> When God pardons sin, he takes it sheer away; that if it should be sought for, yet it could not be found, as the prophet Jeremiah speaks [in] Jeremiah 50:20: "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found; for I will pardon them whom I reserve."
>
> As David, when he saw in Mephibosheth the features of his friend Jonathan, took no notice of his lameness, or any other defect or deformity; so God, beholding in his people the glorious image of his Son, winks at all their faults and deformities, which made Luther say, "Do with me what thou wilt, since Thou hast pardoned my sin." And what is it to pardon sin, but not to mention sin?[34]

We read in the Gospel of Matthew, *Therefore if thy brother shall sin against thee, go and reprove him between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother* (Matthew 18:15). Then a little further on we read that Peter came to Christ and said, *Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? until seven times? Jesus said unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times, but, Until seventy times seven* (Matthew 18:21-22).

Peter did not seem to think he was in danger of falling into sin; his question was, how often should I forgive my brother? But very soon we hear that Peter has fallen. I can imagine that when he did fall, the sweet thought came to him of what the Master had said about forgiving as many as seventy times seven. The voice of sin may be loud, but the voice of forgiveness is louder.

Let's enter into David's experience, when he said:

> *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the* LORD *does not impute iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my green growth is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and I have not hid my iniquity. I said, I will confess (against myself) my rebellions unto the* LORD*, and thou shalt forgive the iniquity of my sin.* (Psalm 32:1-5)

David could look below, above, behind, and before – to the past, present, and future, and know that all was well. Let's make up our mind that we will not rest until this question of sin is forever settled, so we can look up and claim God as our forgiving Father. Let's be willing to forgive others, that we may be able to claim forgiveness from God, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, *For if ye set men free from their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also set you free; but if ye do not set men free from their trespasses, neither will your Father set you free from your trespasses* (Matthew 6:14-15).

30 It was custom in Moody's ministry to have a room set aside for seekers to go to at the end of his preaching to receive counsel and prayer and to confess their sin and repent. This was Moody's alternative to an altar call.
31 Most likely Ira David Sankey (1840–1908).
32 From *An Exposition of All the Books of the Old and New Testaments*, published by W. Baynes, 1806.
33 Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17; Ezekiel 33:16
34 From *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks, Volume 5* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1867).

Union

Let party names no more be known
Among the ransomed throng;
For Jesus claims them for his own;
To him they all belong.

One in their covenant Head and King,
They should be one in heart;
Of one salvation all should sing,
Each claiming his own part.

One bread, one family, one rock,
One building, formed by love,
One fold, one Shepherd, yea, one flock,
They shall be one above.
– Joseph Irons (1785–1852)

Chapter 7

Unity

Love Binds Together

The next thing we need to have, if we would get our prayers answered, is unity. If we do not love one another, we certainly will not have much power with God in prayer. One of the saddest things in the present day is the division in God's church. You notice that when the power of God came upon the early church, it was when they were all of one accord. I believe the blessing of Pentecost never would have been given if it hadn't been for that spirit of unity. If they had been divided and quarreling among themselves, do you think the Holy Spirit would have come, and those thousands would have been converted?

I have noticed in our work that if we have gone to a town where three churches were united in it, we have had greater blessing than if only one church was in harmony. And if there have been twelve churches united, the blessing has multiplied fourfold; it has always been in proportion to the spirit of unity that has been manifested. Where there is bickering and divisions, and where the spirit of unity is absent, there is very little blessing and praise.

Dr. Thomas Guthrie thus illustrated this when he said, "Separate the atoms which make the hammer, and each would fall on the stone as a snowflake; but welded into one, and wielded by the firm arm of the quarryman, it will break the massive rocks asunder. Divide the waters of Niagara into distinct and individual drops, and they would be no more than the falling rain, but in their united body they would quench the fires of Vesuvius, and have some to spare for the volcanoes of other mountains."

History tells us that both the armies of the Romans and the Albans agreed to put the trial of all to the issue of a battle between six brothers – three on the one side, the sons of Curatius, and three on the other, the sons of Horatius. While the Curatii were united, though all three sorely wounded, they killed two of the Horatii. The third began to take to his heels, though not hurt at all, and when he saw them follow slowly, one after another, because of wounds and heavy armor, he fell upon them singly, and slew all three. It is the cunning trick of the Devil to divide us that he may destroy us.

Sacrifice for Unity

We ought to endure much and sacrifice much, rather than permit discord and division to prevail in our hearts. Martin Luther said, "When two goats meet upon a narrow bridge over deep water, how do they behave? Neither of them can turn back again, neither can pass the other, because the bridge is too narrow; if they should thrust one another they might both fall into the water and be drowned. Nature, then, has taught them that if the one lays himself down and permits the other to go over him, both remain unhurt. Even so people should rather endure to be trod upon than to fall into debate and discord one with another."

We must find harmony with each other. Daniel Cawdry[35] said, "As in music, if the harmony of tones be

not complete they are offensive to the cultivated ear; so if Christians disagree among themselves they are unacceptable to God." There are diversities of gifts – that is clearly taught, but there is one Spirit. If we have all been redeemed with the same blood, we ought to see eye to eye in spiritual things.

Paul wrote, *Now there is dispersal of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there is dispersal of ministries, but the same Lord. And there is dispersal of operations, but it is the same God who works all in each one* (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Where there is union, I do not believe any power, earthly or infernal, can stand before the work. When the church, the pulpit, and the pew get united, and God's people are all of one mind, Christianity is like a red-hot ball rolling over the earth, and all the hosts of death and hell cannot stand before it.

I believe people will then come flocking into the kingdom by hundreds and thousands. *By this*, says Christ, *shall everyone know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another* (John 13:35). If only we love one another and pray for one another, there will be success. God will not disappoint us.

Love One Another

There can be no real separation or division in the true church of Christ; his people are redeemed by one price and indwelled by one Spirit. If I belong to the family of God, I have been bought with the same blood, though I may not belong to the same sect or party as another. What we want to do is get these miserable sectarian walls taken away. Our weakness has been in our division, and what we need is for there to be no rift or division among those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first epistle to the Corinthians we read of the first symptoms of sectarianism coming into the early church:

> *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfect, joined together in the same understanding and in the same perception. For it has been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by those of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. In other words, that each one of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is the Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?* (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)

Notice how one said, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," and another, "I am of Cephas." Apollos was a young orator, and the people had been carried away by his eloquence. Some said Cephas, or Peter, was of the regular apostolic line, because he had been with the Lord, and Paul had not. So they were divided, and Paul wrote the letter in order to settle the question.

William Jenkyn,[36] in his commentary on the epistle of Jude, said:

> The partakers of a "common salvation," who here agree in one way to heaven, and who expect to be hereafter in one heaven, should be of one heart. It is the apostle's inference in Ephesians. What an amazing misery is it, that they who agree in common faith should disagree like common foes! That Christians should live as if faith had banished love! This common faith should allay and temper our spirits in all our differences. This should moderate our minds, though there is inequality in earthly relations. What a powerful motive was that of Joseph's brethren to him to forgive their sin, they being both his brethren, and the servants of the God of his fathers! Though our own breath cannot blow out the taper of contention, oh, yet let the blood of Christ extinguish it![37]

Divisions among Christians

What a strange state of things Paul, Cephas, and Apollos would find if they would come to the world today! The little tree that sprang up at Corinth has grown up into a tree like Nebuchadnezzar's, with many of the birds of heaven gathered into it. If Paul and Cephas were to come down to us now, they would hear at once about our churchmen and dissenters. A conversation might go something like this:

"A dissenter!" says Paul. "What is that?"

"We have a Church of England, and there are those who dissent from the church."

"Oh, indeed! Are there two classes of Christians here, then?"

"I am sorry to say there are a good many more divisions. The dissenters themselves are split up. There are Wesleyans, Baptists, Presbyterians, Independents, and so on; even these are all divided up."

"Is it possible," says Paul, "that there are so many divisions?"

"Yes, the Church of England is pretty well divided itself. There is the Broad Church, the High Church, the Low Church, and the High-Lows. Then there is the Lutheran Church, and away in Russia they have the Greek Church, and so on."

I declare I do not know what Paul and Cephas would think if they came back to the world; they would find a strange state of things. It is one of the most humiliating things in the present day to see how God's family is divided up. If we love the Lord Jesus Christ, the burden of our hearts will be that God may bring us closer together, so that we may love one another and rise above all partisan feeling.

In repairing a church in one of the Boston wards, the inscription upon the wall behind the pulpit was covered up. On the first Sabbath after the repairs, a little five-year-old whispered to her mother, "I know why God told the paint men to cover that pretty verse up. It was because the people did not love one another."

The inscription was, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another."

A Boston minister said he once preached a sermon titled "The Recognition of Friends in the Future," and was told after the service by a hearer that it would be more to the point to preach about the recognition of friends here, as he had been in the church twenty years, and did not know any of its members.

The Power in Unity

I was in a little town some time ago, when one night as I came out of the meeting, I saw another building where the people were coming out. I said to a friend, "Have you got two churches here?"

"Oh yes."

"How do you get on?"

"Oh, we get on very well."

"I am glad to hear that. Was your brother minister at the meeting?"

"Oh no, we don't have anything to do with each other. We find that is the best way."

And they called that "getting on very well." Oh, may God make us of one heart and of one mind! Let our hearts be like drops of water flowing together. Unity among the people of God is a sort of foretaste of heaven. There we will not find any Baptists, or Methodists, or Congregationalists, or Episcopalians; we

will all be one in Christ. We leave all our party names behind us when we leave this earth. Oh, that the Spirit of God may speedily sweep away all these miserable walls that we have been building up!

Did you ever notice that the last prayer Jesus Christ made on earth, before they led him away to Calvary, was that his disciples might all be one? He said, *Neither do I pray for these alone, but also for those who shall believe in me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the clarity which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them as thou hast loved me* (John 17:20-23).

He could look down the stream of time and see that divisions would come – how Satan would try to divide the flock of God. Nothing will silence unbelievers and those opposed to Christianity as quickly as Christians everywhere being united. Then our testimony will have weight with the ungodly and the careless. But when they see how Christians are divided, they will not believe their testimony. The Holy Spirit is grieved, and there is little power where there is no unity.

If I thought I had one drop of sectarian blood in my veins, I would let it out before I went to bed; if I had one sectarian hair in my head, I would pull it out. Let's get right to the heart of Jesus Christ, and then our prayers will be acceptable to God, and showers of blessings will descend.

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35 Daniel Cawdry (also Cawdrey) (1588–1664) was an English clergyman.

36 William Jenkyn (1612–1685) was an English Puritan.

37 From *Exposition of the Epistle of Jude*, first published in 1656.

Have Faith in God

Have faith in God, for He who reigns on high
   Hath borne thy grief, and hears the suppliant's sigh;
Still to his arms, thine only refuge, fly,
   Have faith in God!

Fear not to call on him, O soul distressed!
   Thy sorrow's whisper woos thee to his breast;
He who is oftenest there is oftenest blest.
   Have faith in God!

Lean not on Egypt's reeds; slake not thy thirst
   At earthly cisterns. Seek the kingdom first.
Though man and Satan fright thee with their worst,
   Have faith in God!

Go, tell him all! The sigh thy bosom heaves
   Is heard in heaven. Strength and peace he gives,
Who gave himself for thee. Our Jesus lives;
   Have faith in God!
      – Anna Shipton (1815–1901)

Chapter 8

Faith

Another element of prayer is faith. It is as important for us to know how to pray as it is to know how to work. We are not told that Jesus ever taught his disciples how to preach, but he taught them how to pray. He wanted them to have power with God; then he knew they would have power with man.

In James we read, *if any of you lacks wisdom, let them ask of God (who gives abundantly to all, and without reproach), and it shall be given them* (James 1:5). So, faith is the golden key that unlocks the treasures of heaven. It was the shield that David took when he met Goliath on the field; he believed God was going to deliver the Philistine into his hands. Someone has said that faith could lead Christ about anywhere; wherever he found it he honored it.

Faith Brings Life

Unbelief sees something in God's hand and says, "I cannot get it." Faith sees it and says, "I will have it." The new life begins with faith; then we have only to go on building on that foundation. *Therefore I say unto you that everything that ye ask for, praying, believe that ye receive it, and it shall come upon you* (Mark 11:24). But bear in mind, we must be in earnest when we go to God.

I do not know of a more vivid illustration of the cry of distress for help going up to God, in all the earnestness of deeply realized need, than the following story supplies. Carl Steinman, who visited Mount Hekla, Iceland, in 1845, just before the great eruption – after it had been dormant for eighty years – narrowly escaped death when venturing into the smoking crater against the earnest plea of his guide.

On the brink of the yawning gulf he was knocked down by a convulsion of the summit, and held there by blocks of lava upon his feet. He graphically wrote:

> Oh, the horrors of that awful realization! There, over the mouth of a black and heated abyss, I was held suspended, a helpless and conscious prisoner, to be hurled downward by the next great throe of trembling nature!
>
> "Help! help! help! For the love of God, help!" I shrieked, in the very agony of my despair. I had nothing to rely upon but the mercy of heaven; and I prayed to God as I had never prayed before, for the forgiveness of my sins, that they might not follow me to judgment.
>
> All at once I heard a shout, and, looking around, I beheld, with feelings that cannot be described, my faithful guide hastening down the sides of the crater to my relief.
>
> "I warned you!" said he.
>
> "You did!" cried I, "but forgive me, and save me, for I am perishing!"
>
> "I will save you, or perish with you!"
>
> The earth trembled, and the rocks parted – one of them rolling down the chasm with a dull, booming sound. I sprang forward; I seized a hand of the guide, and the next moment we had both

> fallen, locked in each other's arms, upon the solid earth above. I was free, but still upon the verge of the pit.[38]

Bishop Joseph Hall, in a well-known excerpt, puts the point of earnestness in its relation to the prayer of faith this way:

> An arrow, if it be drawn up but a little way, goes not far; but, if it be pulled up to the head, dies swiftly and pierces deep. Thus prayer, if it be only dribbled forth from careless lips, falls at our feet. It is the strength of ejaculation and strong desire which sends it to heaven, and makes it pierce the clouds.
>
> It is not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are; nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how eloquent they be; nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they be; nor the music of our prayers, how sweet our voice may be; nor the logic of our prayers, how argumentative they may be; nor the method of our prayers, how orderly they may be; nor even the divinity of our prayers, how good the doctrine may be – which God cares for.
>
> He looks not for the horny knees which James is said to have had through the assiduity of prayer. We might be like Bartholomew, who is said to have had a hundred prayers for the morning, and as many for the evening, and all might be of no avail. Fervency of spirit is that which avails much.[39]

Warm Prayer

Archbishop Robert Leighton said, "It is not the gilded paper and good writing of a petition that prevails with a king, but the moving sense of it. And to that King who discerns the heart, heart-sense is the sense of all, and that which he only regards. He listens to hear what that speaks and takes all as nothing where that is silent. All other excellence in prayer is but the outside and fashion of it. This is the life of it."[40]

Thomas Brooks said:

> As a painted fire is no fire, a dead man no man, so a cold prayer is no prayer. In a painted fire there is no heat, in a dead man there is no life; so in a cold prayer there is no omnipotency, no devotion, no blessing. Cold prayers are as arrows without heads, as swords without edges, as birds without wings; they pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Cold prayers do always freeze before they get to heaven. Oh that Christians would chide themselves out of their cold prayers, and chide themselves into a better and warmer frame of spirit, when they make their supplications to the Lord!

Consider the case of the Syrophenician woman in Matthew 15, whom we discussed in chapter 1. When she called to the Master, it seemed for a time as if he was deaf to her request. The disciples wanted her to be sent away. Although they were with Christ for three years and sat at his feet, they still did not know how full of grace his heart was.

Think of Christ sending away a poor sinner who had come to him for mercy! Can you comprehend such a thing? Never once did it occur. This poor woman put herself in the place of her child. "Lord, help me!" she said. I think when we get so far as that in the earnest desire to have our friends blessed – when we put ourselves in their place – God will soon hear our prayer.

Lord, Help Me

I remember a number of years ago at a meeting, I asked all those who wished to be prayed for to come forward and kneel or take seats in front. Among those who came was a woman. I thought by her look that she must be a Christian, but she knelt down with the others.

I said, "You are a Christian, are you not?"

She said she had been one for so many years.

"Did you understand the invitation? I asked those only who wanted to become Christians."

I shall never forget the look on her face as she replied, "I have a son who has gone far away; I thought I would take his place today, and see if God would not bless him."

Thank God for such a mother as that! The Syrophenician woman did the same thing in Matthew 15:25-28. She prayed, *Lord help me.*

It was a short prayer, but it went right to the heart of the Son of God. He tested her faith, however. He said, *It is not good to take the children's bread and to cast it to the little dogs.*

She replied, *Yes, Lord, yet the little dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*

He said, *O woman, great is thy faith.*

What a eulogy Jesus paid to her! Her story will never be forgotten as long as the church is on the earth. He honored her faith and gave her all she asked for.

Everyone can say, "Lord, help me!" We all need help. As Christians, don't we need more grace, more love, more purity of life, more righteousness? Then let's make this prayer today.

I want God to help me to preach better and to live better, to be more like the Son of God. The golden chains of faith link us right to the throne of God, and the grace of heaven flows down into our souls.

The one thing I know is, that woman was a great sinner; still, the Lord heard her cry. It may be that up to this hour you have been living in sin, but if you will cry, "Lord help me!" he will answer your prayer if it is an honest one.

Pray Earnestly

Very often when we cry to God, we do not really mean anything. You mothers understand that. Your children have two voices. When they ask you for something, you can soon tell if the cry is a make-believe one or not. If it is, you do not pay any attention to it, but if it is a real cry for help, how quickly you respond! The cry of distress always brings relief.

Your child is playing around, and he or she says, "Mamma, I want some bread," but then goes on playing. You know that he or she is not very hungry, so you let it alone. But, by and by, the child drops the toys, and comes tugging at your dress.

"Mamma, I am so hungry!" Then you know that the cry is a real one; you soon go to the pantry and get some bread.

When we sincerely long for the bread of heaven, we will get it. This woman was terribly sincere; therefore, her petition was answered.

I remember hearing of a boy brought up in an English poorhouse. He had never learned to read or write, except that he could read the letters of the alphabet. One day a man of God came there and told the children that if they prayed to God in their trouble, he would send them help.

After a time, this boy was apprenticed to a farmer. One day he was sent out into the fields to look after

some sheep. He was having rather a hard time, so he remembered what the preacher had said, and he thought he would pray to God about it. Someone going by the field heard a voice behind the hedge.

They looked to see whose it was, and saw the little fellow on his knees, saying, “A, B, C, D,” and so on.

The man said, “My boy, what are you doing?”

He looked up and said he was praying.

“Why, that is not praying; it is only saying the alphabet.”

He said he did not know just how to pray, but that a man once came to the poorhouse, who told them that if they called upon God, he would help them. So he thought that if he named over the letters of the alphabet, God would take them and put them together into a prayer, and give him what he needed. The little fellow was really praying.

Sometimes, when your child talks, your friends cannot understand what he says, but the mother understands very well. So, if our prayer comes right from the heart, God understands our language. It is a delusion of the Devil to think we cannot pray; we can, if we really want anything. It is not the most beautiful or the most eloquent language that brings down the answer; it is the cry that goes up from a burdened heart.

When this poor Gentile woman cried out, “Lord, help me!” the cry flashed over the divine wires and the blessing came. So you can pray if you will; it is the desire, the wish of the heart, that God delights to hear and to answer.

Pray Expectantly

When we pray sincerely, then we must expect to receive a blessing. *And a certain centurion’s slave, who was dear unto him, was sick and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and free his slave* (Luke 7:2-3). He wanted Christ to heal his servant, but he thought he was not worthy to go and ask the Lord himself, so he sent his friends to make the petition.

> *Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself, for I am not worthy that thou should enter under my roof; therefore neither did I think myself worthy to come unto thee but say the word, and my slave shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say unto one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my slave, Do this, and he does it.* (Luke 7: 6-8)

Jesus said to the Jews, the man’s friends, *I say unto you that not even in Israel have I found such great faith* (verse 9). He marveled at the faith of this centurion; it pleased him, so he healed the servant then and there. Faith brought the answer.

In John we read of a nobleman whose child was sick. The father fell on his knees before the Master and said, *Sir, come down before my child dies* (John 4:49). Here you have both earnestness and faith, and the Lord answered the prayer at once.

The nobleman’s son began to get better that very hour. Christ honored the man’s faith.

In his case, there was nothing to rest upon but the bare word of Christ, but this was enough. It is well to

bear always in mind that the object of faith is not the creature, but the Creator; not the instrument, but the hand that wields it.

Richard Sibbes put it this way for us: "The object in believing is God, and Christ as Mediator. We must have both to found our faith upon. We cannot believe in God, except we believe in Christ. For God must be satisfied by God and by him that is God must that satisfaction be applied, the Spirit of God, by working faith in the heart, and for raising it up when it is dejected." Sibbes said everything about faith is supernatural. The things we believe are above nature, and promises are above nature, "the worker of it, the Holy Ghost, is above nature; and everything in faith is above nature."

God is the one in whom we believe and through whom we believe, said Sibbes. We will know that Christ is God, not only by the things he has done, the miracles, which none of us but God could do, but we also know he is God by what is done to him. Sibbes said, "And two things are done to him, which show that he is God; that is, faith and prayer. We must believe only in God, and pray only to God. But Christ is the object of both these." Christ is shown to be the object of faith and of prayer, as in the prayer of Saint Stephen: *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit* (Acts 7:59). Here, said Sibbes, we also see "therefore, his God; for that is done unto him, which is proper and peculiar only to God…What a strong foundation, what bottom and basis, our faith hath! There is God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and Christ the Mediator. That our faith may be supported, we have him to believe on who supports heaven and earth."[41]

Sibbes based that final paragraph above on two passages from Scripture. One is from Hebrews. *God, having spoken many times and in many ways in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last times spoken unto us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the ages; who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his substance and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high* (Hebrews 1:1-3). The other is from Colossians. *For by him were all things created, that are in the heavens and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they are thrones or dominions or principalities or powers: all things were created by him and in him; And he is before all things, and by him all things consist* (Colossians 1:16-17).

In his exposition on the book of Hebrews, John Owen said, "There is nothing that can lie in the way of the accomplishment of any of God's promises, but it is conquerable by faith."[42]

Samuel Rutherford commented on the case of the Syrophenician woman whom we have been discussing in this chapter. "See the sweet use of faith under a sad temptation; faith traffics with Christ and heaven in the dark, upon plain trust and credit, without seeing any surety of dawn: *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed* (John 20:29)."

Why are they blessed? Rutherford said it "is because faith is sinewed and boned with spiritual courage; so as to keep a barred city against hell, yea, and to stand under impossibilities; and here is a weak woman, though not as a woman, yet as a believer, standing out against him who is 'the Mighty God, the Father of Ages, the Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6). Faith only stands out, and overcomes the sword, the world, and all afflictions. This is our victory, whereby one man overcomes the great and vast world (1 John 5:4)."[43]

Whatever You Ask

Bishop John Charles Ryle has described Christ's intercession as the ground and sureness of our faith with

this illustration. “The bank note without a signature at the bottom is nothing but a worthless piece of paper. The stroke of a pen confers on it all its value. The prayer of a poor child of Adam is a feeble thing in itself, but once endorsed by the hand of the Lord Jesus, it avails much.”[44]

There was an officer in the city of Rome who was appointed to have his doors always open, in order to receive any Roman citizen who applied to him for help. In this same way, the ear of the Lord Jesus is always open to the cry of all who want mercy and grace. It is his role to help them. Their prayer is his delight. Reader, think of this. Isn’t this encouragement?

Let’s close this chapter by referring to some of our Lord’s own words concerning faith in its relation to prayer:

> *And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it and found nothing upon it, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee from now on for ever. And then the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done.* (Matthew 21:19-21).

> *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes in me, the works that I do he shall do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* (John 14:12-14)

> *If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.* (John 15:7)

> *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give you. Until now ye have asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled.* (John 16:23-24)

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38 The full story was published in the June 1862 issue of *The Guardian*, a monthly magazine published in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, by Pearsol and Geist. Henry Harbough was the editor. Original publication source unknown.

39 Joseph Hall (1574–1656) was an English bishop, satirist, and moralist. Original publication of this excerpt unknown.

40 Robert Leighton (1611–1684) was a Scottish bishop and scholar. Published in *The Whole Works of Robert Leighton* (London: Ogle, Duncan, and Co., 1820).

41 From *The Complete Works of the Reverend Richard Sibbs, Volume 7*, published by J. Nichol, 1864.

42 Found in *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* by John Owen (1616–1683), published by T. Tegg, 1840.

43 As found in *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* by Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), published by Banner of Truth Trust, 1645.

44 John Charles Ryle (1816–1900) was an English Evangelical Anglican bishop. Published by J. C. Ryle in *A Call to Prayer*, by the American Tract Society, 1853.

To See His Face

Sweet is the precious gift of prayer,
   To bow before a throne of grace;
To leave our every burden there,
   And gain new strength to run our race;
To gird our heavenly armor on,
   Depending on the Lord alone.

And sweet the whisper of his love,
   When conscience sinks beneath its load,
That bids our guilty fears remove,
   And points to Christ's atoning blood;
Oh, then 'tis sweet indeed to know
   God can be just and gracious too.

But oh, to see our Savior's face!
   From sin and sorrow to be freed!
To dwell in his divine embrace -
   This will be sweeter far indeed!
The fairest form of earthly bliss
   Is less than nought compared with this.

Chapter 9

Petition

The next element in prayer that comes to mind is petition. How often we go to prayer meetings without really asking for anything! Our prayers go all around the world, without anything definite being asked for. We do not expect anything. Many people would be greatly surprised if God did answer their prayers.

I remember hearing of a very eloquent man who was leading a meeting in prayer. There wasn't a single definite petition in the whole prayer.

A poor, earnest woman shouted out, "Ask him summat [something], man!"

Ask, Seek, Knock

How often we hear something that is called prayer that doesn't contain any asking! *Ask, and it shall be given you* (Matthew 7:7). I believe if we put all the stumbling blocks out of the way, God will answer our petitions. If we put away sin and come into his presence with pure hands, as he has commanded us to come, our prayers will have power with him.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus gave a grand supplement to the disciples' prayer (also called the Lord's Prayer). *And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you* (Luke 11:9). Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. The only way to trouble God is not to come at all. He encourages us to come to him repeatedly and press our claims.

I believe you will find three kinds of Christians in the church today. The first are those who ask; the second are those who seek; the third are those who knock.

"Teacher," said a bright, earnest-faced boy, "why is it that so many prayers are unanswered? I do not understand. The Bible says, 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you;' but it seems to me a great many knock and are not admitted."

"Did you never sit by your cheerful parlor fire," said the teacher, "on some dark evening, and hear a loud knocking at the door? Going to answer the summons, have you not sometimes looked out into the darkness, seeing nothing, but hearing the pattering feet of some mischievous boy, who knocked but did not wish to enter, and therefore ran away? Thus is it often with us. We ask for blessings, but do not really expect them; we knock, but do not mean to enter; we fear that Jesus will not hear us, will not fulfill his promises, will not admit us, and so we go away."

"Ah, I see," said the earnest-faced boy, his eyes shining with the new light dawning in his soul. "Jesus cannot be expected to answer runaway knocks. He has never promised it. I mean to keep knocking, knocking, until he cannot help opening the door."

Waiting for an Answer

Too often we knock at mercy's door, and then run away, instead of waiting for an entrance and an answer. Thus we act as if we were afraid of having our prayers answered.

So many people pray in that way; they do not wait for the answer. Our Lord teaches us here that we are not only to ask, but we are also to wait for the answer; if it does not come, we must seek to find out the reason. I believe that we get many blessings just by asking; others we do not get because there may be something in our life that needs to be brought to light.

When Daniel began to pray in Babylon for the deliverance of his people, he sought to find out what the trouble was, and why God had turned away his face from them. In the same way, there may be something in our life that is keeping back the blessing; if there is, we want to find it out. Someone speaking on this subject has said, "We are to ask with a beggar's humility, to seek with a servant's carefulness, and to knock with the confidence of a friend."

How often people become discouraged and say they do not know whether or not God does answer prayer! In the parable of the persistent widow, Christ teaches us how we are not only to pray and seek, but also to find.

> *And he spoke a parable unto them to this end, that it behooves us always to pray and not faint, saying, There was in a city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man; and there was a widow in that city, and she came unto him, saying, Defend me from my adversary.*
>
> *And he would not for a while, but afterward he said within himself, Though I do not fear God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me, I will do her justice, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*
>
> *And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge says.*
>
> *And shall not God avenge his own elect who cry day and night unto him though he bears long regarding them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?* (Luke 18:1-8)

If the unjust judge heard the petition of the poor woman who pushed her claims, how much more will our heavenly Father hear our cry!

Asking Boldly

A good many years ago, an Irishman in the state of New Jersey was condemned to be hung. Every possible influence was brought to bear upon the governor to have the man reprieved, but he stood firm, and refused to alter the sentence.

One morning, the wife of the condemned man went to see the governor, and brought along her ten children. When he came to his office, they all fell on their faces before him, and besought him to have mercy on the husband – the father.

The governor's heart was moved, and at once he wrote out a reprieve. The persistence of the wife and children saved the life of the man, just as the woman in the parable, who, pressing her claims, persuaded the unjust judge to grant her request.

It was this that brought the answer to the prayer of blind Bartimaeus. The people, and even the

disciples, tried to hush him into silence, but he only cried out louder, *Thou Son of David, have mercy on me*.

> *Then Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Have confidence, rise; he calls thee. He, therefore, casting away his garment, rose and came to Jesus.*
>
> *And Jesus, answering, said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? And the blind man said unto him, Master, that I might receive my sight.*
>
> *And Jesus said unto him, Go; thy faith has saved thee. And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way.* (Mark 10:49-52)

Prayer is hardly ever mentioned alone in the Bible; it is prayer and earnestness, prayer and watchfulness, prayer and thanksgiving. It is useful to note that throughout Scripture, prayer is always linked with something else. Bartimaeus was in earnest, and the Lord heard his cry.

Then the highest type of Christian is the one who goes beyond asking and seeking and keeps knocking until the answer comes. If we knock, God has promised to open the door and grant our request. It may be years before the answer comes; he may keep us knocking, but he has promised that the answer will come.

Prayer Is Power

I will tell you what I think it means to knock. A number of years ago, when we were having meetings in a certain city, it came to a point where there seemed to be very little power. We called together all the mothers, and asked them to meet and pray for their children. About fifteen hundred mothers came together to pour out their hearts to God in prayer.

One mother said, “I wish you would pray for my two boys. They have gone off on a drunken spree, and it seems as if my heart would break.”

She was a widowed mother. A few mothers gathered together and said, “Let’s have a prayer meeting for these boys.”

They cried to God for these two wandering boys, and now see how God answered their prayer.

That day, these two brothers had planned to meet at the corner of the street where our meetings were being held. They were going to spend the night in sensual pleasures and sin. About seven o’clock, the first one came to the appointed place; he saw the people going into the meeting. As it was a stormy night, he thought he would go in for a little while. The Word of God reached him, and he went into the inquiry room, where he gave his heart to the Savior.

The other brother waited at the corner until the meeting broke up, expecting his brother to come. He did not know that he had been in the meeting. There was a young men’s meeting in the church nearby, and this brother thought he would like to see what was going on, so he followed the crowd into the meeting. He also was impressed with what he heard and was the first one to go into the inquiry room, where he found peace.

While this was happening, the first one had gone home to cheer his mother’s heart with the good news. He found her on her knees. She had been knocking at the mercy seat. While she was doing so, her boy came in and told her that her prayers had been answered; his soul was saved. It was not long before the other brother came in and told his story – how he too had been blessed.

On the following Monday night, the first to get up at the young converts’ meeting was one of these

brothers, who told the story of their conversion.

As soon as he had taken his seat, another man jumped up and said, “All that my brother has told you is true, for I am his brother. The Lord has indeed met us and blessed us.”

I heard of a wife in England who had an unconverted husband. She resolved that she would pray every day for twelve months for his conversion. Every day at twelve o’clock she went to her room alone and cried to God. Her husband would not allow her to speak to him on the subject, but she could speak to God on his behalf.

It may be that you have a friend who does not wish to be spoken with about his salvation; you can do as this woman did – go and pray to God about it.

The twelve months passed by, and there was no sign of his yielding. She resolved to pray for six months longer, so every day she went alone and prayed for the conversion of her husband. The six months passed, and still there was no sign, no answer. The question arose in her mind, could she give him up?

“No,” she said, “I will pray for him as long as God gives me breath.”

That very day, when he came home to dinner, instead of going into the dining room he went upstairs. She waited, and waited, and waited, but he did not come down to dinner. Finally, she went to his room, and found him on his knees crying to God to have mercy upon him. God convicted him of sin; he not only became a Christian, but also the Word of God had a free flow in him and was glorified in him. God used him mightily. That was God answering the prayers of this Christian wife. She knocked, and knocked, until the answer came.

I heard something the other day that cheered me greatly. People had prayed for a man for about forty years, but there was no sign of any answer. It seemed as though he was going down to his grave as one of the most self-righteous men on the face of the earth.

Conviction came in one night.

In the morning, he sent for the members of his family, and said to his daughter, “I want you to pray for me. Pray that God would forgive my sins. My whole life has been nothing but sin – sin.”

Again, all this conviction came in one night! We want to press our case right up to the throne of God. I have often known cases of men who came to our meetings, and although they could not hear a word that was said, it seemed as though some unseen power laid hold of them, so that they were convicted and converted then and there.

Prayer Always Hopes

I remember at one place where we were holding meetings, a wife came to the first meeting and asked me to talk with her husband. “He is not interested,” she said, “but I am in hopes he will become so.”

I talked with him, and I think I hardly ever spoke to a man who seemed to be so self-righteous. It looked as though I might as well have talked to an iron post, he seemed to be so encased in self-righteousness.

I told his wife that he was not at all interested.

She said, “I told you that, but I am interested for him.”

All the thirty days we were there, that wife never gave him up. I must confess she had ten times more faith for him than I had. I had spoken to him several times, but I could see no ray of hope.

Two nights before the final meeting night, the man came to me and said, “Would you see me in another room?”

I went aside with him and asked him what was the trouble.

He said, “I am the greatest sinner in the state of Vermont.”

“How is that?” I asked. “Is there any particular sin you have been guilty of?” I must confess I thought he had committed some awful crime that he was covering up, and now he wanted to make confession.

“My whole life,” he said, “has been nothing but sin. God has shown it to me today.” He asked the Lord to have mercy on him, and he went home rejoicing in the assurance of sins forgiven. This was a man convicted and converted in answer to prayer.

So if you are anxious about the conversion of some relative, or some friend, make up your mind that you will give God no rest, day or night, until he grants your petition. He can reach them, wherever they are – at their places of business, in their homes, or anywhere – and bring them to his feet.

Dr. Austin Phelps, in his book *The Still Hour*, said:

> The prospect of gaining an object will always affect thus the expression of intense desire.
>
> The feeling which will become spontaneous with a Christian under the influence of such a trust is this: I come to my devotions this morning on an errand of real life. This is no romance, and no farce. I do not come here to go through a form of words; I have no hopeless desires to express. I have an object to gain; I have an end to accomplish. This is a business in which I am about to engage.
>
> An astronomer does not turn his telescope to the skies with a more reasonable hope of penetrating those distant heavens, than I have of reaching the mind of God by lifting up my heart at the throne of grace.
>
> This is the privilege of my calling of God in Christ Jesus. Even my faltering voice is now to be heard in heaven; and it is to put forth a new power there, the results of which only God can know, and only eternity can develop. Therefore, O Lord, thy servant finds it in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee![45]

Jeremy Taylor said, “Easiness of desire is a great enemy to the success of a good man’s prayer. It must be an intent, zealous, busy, operative prayer; for consider what a huge indecency it is that a man should speak to God for a thing that he values not! Our prayers upbraid our spirits when we beg tamely for those things for which we ought to die, which are more precious than imperial scepters, richer than the spoils of the sea, or the treasures of Indian hills.”[46]

Dr. Patton, in his book *Remarkable Answers to Prayer*, said:

> Jesus bids us seek. Imagine a mother seeking a lost child. She looks through the house, and along the streets, then searches the fields and woods, and examines the riverbanks.
>
> A wise neighbor meets her and says: “Seek on, look everywhere; search every accessible place. You will not find, indeed; but then seeking is a good thing. It put the mind on the stretch; it fixes the attention; it aids observation; it makes the idea of the child very real. And then, after a while, you will cease to want your child.”
>
> The words of Christ are, “Knock.”
>
> Imagine a man knocking at the door of a house, long and loud. After he has done this for an hour,

a window opens, and the occupant of the house puts out his head and says: "That is right my friend; I shall not open the door, but keep on knocking. It is excellent exercise, and you will be the healthier for it. Knock away till sundown, and then come again, and knock all tomorrow. After some days thus spent, you will attain to a state of mind in which you will no longer care to come in."

Is this what Jesus intended us to understand, when he said: "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"?

No doubt one would thus soon cease to ask, to seek, and to knock; but would it not be from disgust?[47]

Persevering Prayer

Nothing is more pleasing to our Father in heaven than direct, unrelenting, and persevering prayer. Two Christian ladies, whose husbands were unconverted, feeling their great danger, agreed to spend one hour each day in united prayer for their salvation. They continued this for seven years, when they debated whether they should pray longer, because their prayers appeared so useless. They decided to persevere until death, and, if their husbands went to destruction, it would be loaded with prayers.

In renewed strength, they prayed three more years, when one of them was awakened in the night by her husband, who was in great distress for sin. As soon as the day dawned, she hastened with joy to tell her praying companion that God was about to answer their prayers. She was surprised to meet her friend coming to her on the same errand! Thus, ten years of united and persevering prayer was crowned with the conversion of both husbands on the same day.

We cannot be too frequent in our requests; God will not weary of his children's prayers. Sir Walter Raleigh asked a favor of Queen Elizabeth, to which she replied, "Raleigh, when will you leave off begging?"

"When your Majesty leaves off giving," he replied.

We must continue praying this long.

Mr. George Muller, in an address given in Calcutta, said that in 1844, five individuals were laid on his heart, and he began to pray for them. Eighteen months passed by before one of them was converted. He prayed on for five years more, and another was converted. At the end of twelve and a half years, a third was converted.

And now for forty years he had been praying for the other two without missing one single day for any reason whatsoever, but they were not yet converted. He felt encouraged, however, to continue in prayer, and he was sure of receiving an answer in relation to the two who were still resisting the Spirit.

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45 Austin Phelps (1820─1890) was an American Congregational minister and educator. *The Still Hour; or Communion with God* was published by Gould and Lincoln, 1861.

46 Quoted from the writing of Austin Phelps in *The Still Hour; or Communion with God*.

47 William Weston Patton (1821─1889), was an abolitionist, academic administrator, and scholar. Found in *Prayer and Its Remarkable Answers: Being a Statement of Facts in the Light of Reason and Revelation*, published by J. S. Goodman, 1877.

Submission

Hear me, my God, and if my lip hath dared
   To murmur ‘neath Thy Hand, oh, teach me now
To feel each inmost thought before Thee bared,
   And this rebellious will in faith to bow.
Though I wept wildly o’er the ruined shrine,
   Where earthly idols held Thy place alone,
Now purify and make this temple Thine,
   And teach me, Lord, to say, ‘Thy will be done!

What can I bring to offer that is mine?
   A youth of sorrow, and a life of sin.
What can I lay upon Thy hallowed shrine,
   One hope of pardon for the past to win?
While thus a suppliant at Thy feet I bow,
   Still dare I lift to Thee my tearful eyes,
I plead the promise of Thy word, that Thou
   A broken, contrite heart will not despise.

What shall I bring? A bruised spirit, Lord,
   Worn with the contest, pining now for rest,
And yearning for Thy peace, as some poor bird,
   Mid the wild tempest, seeks its mother’s breast,
My sacrifice, the Lamb who died for me;
   I plead the merits of Thy sinless Son;
I bring Thy promises; I trust in Thee;
   In love Thou smitest; Lord, Thy will be done!

Chapter 10

Submission

Another essential element in prayer is submission. All true prayer must be offered in full submission to God. After we have made our requests known to him, our language should be, "Thy will be done." A thousand times over, I would rather have God's will be done than my own. I cannot see into the future as God can; therefore, it is a good deal better to let him choose for me than for me to choose for myself. I know his mind about spiritual things.

His will is that I should be sanctified, so I can pray with confidence to God for that, and I can expect an answer to my prayers. But when it comes to temporal matters, it is different; what I ask for may not be God's purpose concerning me. As one has well put it, "Depend upon it; prayer does not mean that I am to bring God down to my thoughts and my purposes, and bend his government according to my foolish, silly, and sometimes sinful notions. Prayer means that I am to be raised up into feeling in union and design with him; that I am to enter into his counsel and carry out his purpose fully."[48]

Thy Will Be Done

I am afraid sometimes we think of prayer in an altogether opposite way, as if by praying we persuaded or influenced our Father in heaven to do whatever comes into our own minds, and whatever would accomplish our foolish, weak-sighted purposes. I am quite convinced that God knows more about what is best for me and for the world than I can possibly know, and even though it were in my power to say, "My will be done," I would rather say to him, "Thy will be done."

It is reported of a woman who was sick that she was asked whether she was willing to live or die. She answered, "Whichever God pleases."

"But," said someone, "if God should refer the choice to you, which would you choose?"

"Truly," she replied, "I would refer it to him again."

Thus, that person whose will is subjected to God is the one who obtains his will from God.

Mr. Charles Spurgeon remarked on this subject. "The believing man resorts to God at all times, that he may keep up his fellowship with the divine mind. Prayer is not a soliloquy, but a dialogue; not an introspection, but a looking toward the hills, whence cometh our help."

Spurgeon acknowledged that we do find relief in unburdening our mind to a sympathetic friend, and it can even be of benefit to our faith. But "there is more than this in prayer," he said. "When an obedient activity has gone to the full length of its line, and yet the needful thing is not reached, then the hand of God is trusted in to go beyond us, just as before it was relied upon to go with us." Prayer is more than unburdening our minds. Faith means we trust God with the outcome.

"Faith has no desire to have its own will, when that will is not in accordance with the mind of God," Spurgeon said. "For such a desire would at bottom be the impulse of an unbelief which did not rely upon

God's judgment as our best guide. Faith knows that God's will is the highest good, and that anything which is beneficial to us will be granted to our petitions.[49]

According to history, the Tusculani – a people of Tusculum, Italy – had offended the Romans, whose power was infinitely superior to theirs. Camillus,[50] at the head of a considerable army, was on his march to subdue them. Conscious of their inability to cope with such an enemy, they took the following method to appease him: They declined all thoughts of resistance, opened their gates, and every man went about his proper business, resolving to submit where they knew it was useless to resist.

Camillus, entering their city, was struck with the wisdom and candor of their conduct, and addressed them with these words: "You only, of all people, have found out the true method of abating the Roman fury, and your submission has proved your best defense. Upon these terms, we can no more find in our heart to injure you than upon other terms you could have found power to oppose us."

The chief magistrate replied, "We have so sincerely repented of our former folly, that in confidence of that satisfaction to a generous enemy, we are not afraid to acknowledge our fault."

When God Says No

In view of the difficulty of bringing our hearts to this complete submission to the divine will, we may well adopt Fenelon's prayer, "O God, take my heart for I cannot give it; and when Thou hast it, keep it for I cannot keep it for Thee; and save me in spite of myself."[51]

Some of the best men the world has ever seen have made great mistakes on this point. Moses could pray for Israel and could prevail with God, but God did not answer his petition for himself. He asked God to take him over the Jordan, that he might see Lebanon. And after the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, he desired to go into the Promised Land, but the Lord did not grant his desire.

Was that a sign that God did not love him? By no means. He was a man greatly beloved of God, like Daniel, and yet God did not answer this prayer of his. Your child says, "I want this or that," but you do not grant the request, because you know that it will be the ruin of the child to give him everything he wants.

Moses wished to enter the Promised Land, but because of his earlier transgression, the Lord had something else in store for him. As someone has said, "God kissed away his soul, and took him home to himself." God buried him – perhaps the greatest honor ever paid to mortal man. And then fifteen hundred years later, God answered the prayer of Moses; he allowed him to go into the Promised Land, and to get a glimpse of the coming glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration, with Elijah, the great prophet, and with Peter, James, and John, Moses heard the voice come from the throne of God, *and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son; hear him* (Luke 9:35). That was better than to have gone across the Jordan, as Joshua did, and to sojourn for thirty years in the land of Canaan. So, when our prayers for earthly things are not answered, let's submit to the will of God, and know that it is all right.

When someone asked a deaf and mute boy why he thought he was born deaf and unable to speak, taking the chalk he wrote upon the board, "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

John Brown, of Haddington, once said, "No doubt I have met with trials like others: but yet so kind has God been to me, that I think if he were to give me as many years as I have lived in the world, I would not desire one single circumstance in my lot changed – except that I wish there had been less sin." Later he

said, “It might be written on my coffin, ‘Here lies one of the cares of Providence, who early lost both father and mother, and yet never wanted for the care of either.’”[52]

God Answers in Love

Elijah was mighty in prayer; he brought fire down from heaven on his sacrifice, and his petitions brought rain on the thirsty land. He stood fearlessly before King Ahab in the power of prayer. Yet we find him sitting under a juniper tree like a coward, asking God to let him die.

But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and desiring to die, he said, It is enough; now, O LORD*, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers* (1 Kings 19:4). The Lord loved him too well for that. He was soon going to take him up to heaven in a chariot of fire.

In the same way, we must not allow the Devil to take advantage of us, and make us believe God does not love us because he does not grant all our petitions in the time and way we would have him do.

As Moses takes up more room in the Old Testament than any other character, so it is with Paul in the New Testament, except, perhaps, the Lord himself. Yet Paul did not know how to pray for himself. He besought the Lord to take away the “thorn in the flesh” he was given. His request was not granted, but the Lord bestowed upon him a greater blessing. He gave him more grace. It may be that we have some trial – some thorn in the flesh. If it is not God’s will to take it away, let’s ask him to give us more grace in order to bear it.

We find that Paul gloried in his setbacks and his infirmities, because all the more, the power of God rested upon him. It may be there are some of us who feel as if everything is against us. May God give us grace to take Paul’s platform and say of our trials, *unto those who love God, all things help them unto good, to those who according to the purpose are called to be saints* (Romans 8:28).

So when we pray to God we must be submissive, and say, “Thy will be done.” In the Gospel of John we read, *If ye . . . .* That *if* is a mountain to begin with. *If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you* (John 15:7). The latter part is often quoted, but not the first. It seems there is very little abiding in Christ nowadays! You go and visit him once in awhile, but that is all.

If Christ is in my heart, of course I will not ask anything that is against his will. And how many of us have God’s Word abiding in us? We must have a warrant for our prayers. If we have some great desire, we must search the Scriptures to find if it is right to ask it. There are many things we want that are not good for us, and many other things we desire to avoid are really our best blessings.

A friend of mine was shaving one morning, and his little boy, not four years old, asked him for his razor, and said he wanted to whittle with it. When he found he could not get it, he began to cry as if his heart would break. I am afraid that there are a great many of us who are praying for razors. John Bunyan was arrested for being a nonconformist preacher. He blessed God for the twelve years in the Bedford jail more than for anything else that happened to him in this life.[53] We never pray for affliction, and yet it is often the best thing we could ask for.

When It Is Good to Wait

Dyer said, “Afflictions are blessings to us when we can bless God for afflictions. Suffering has kept

many from sinning. God had one Son without sin, but he never had any without sorrow. Fiery trials make golden Christians; sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions."

In reference to the value of sanctified trials and the wisdom of submitting in them to God's will, Samuel Rutherford beautifully wrote, "Oh, what owe I to the file, to the hammer, to the furnace of my Lord Jesus, who has now let me see how good the wheat of Christ is that goes through his mill and his oven, to be made bread for his own table! Grace tried is better than grace, and it is more than grace; it is glory in its infancy. I now see that godliness is more than the outside, and this world's passments and their buskings." [54] Those embellishments and outward performances look appealing, but is it real faith until it is tested?

Rutherford said, "Who knows the truth of grace without a trial? Oh, how little gets Christ of us, but that which he wins (to speak so) with much toil and pains! And how soon would faith freeze without a cross! How many dumb crosses have been laid upon my back, that had never a tongue to speak the sweetness of Christ, as this has!" He said when Christ blesses his own crosses, they "breathe out Christ's love, wisdom, kindness, and care for us."

"Why should I fear the plow of my Lord?" Rutherford asked. Yes, he acknowledged that it makes deep furrows on our souls, but we "know that he is no idle husbandman; he purposes a crop. Oh that this white withered lea-ground were made fertile to bear a crop for him, by whom it is so painfully dressed, and that this fallow ground were broken up!" He called himself a fool for being grieved that God put "his garland and his rose upon my head – the glory and honor of his faithful witnesses." We wear both Christ's cross and his crown of thorns if we follow him.

"I desire now to make no more pleas with Christ," Rutherford said. "Verily he has not put me to a loss by what I suffer; he owes me nothing; for in my bonds how sweet and comfortable have the thoughts of him been to me, wherein I find a sufficient recompense of reward! How blind are my adversaries who sent me to a banqueting house, to a house of wine, to the lovely feasts of my lovely Lord Jesus, and not to a prison, or place of exile!"[55]

As we conclude this subject, let's look at the words of the prophet Jeremiah, in Lamentations:

The LORD is good unto those that wait in him, to the soul that seeks him.

It is good to wait quietly in the salvation of the LORD.

It is good for the man if he bears the yoke from his youth.

He shall sit alone and keep silence because he has borne it upon him.

He shall put his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.

He shall turn his cheek unto him that smites him; he shall be filled with reproach.

For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

But though he causes grief, yet he will also have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

For he does not afflict nor grieve the sons of men from his heart.

To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth,

To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High,

To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord does not approve.

Who shall he be that saith that something comes which the Lord has not sent?

Out of the mouth of the most High proceeds not evil and good?

Why does the living man have pain, the man in his sins?

Let us search out our ways, and seek, and turn again to the LORD.

Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens. (Lamentations 3:25-41)

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48 It is unclear whom Moody was quoting here. This quote has been attributed to Moody in the years following the publication of *Prevailing Prayer*.

49 From *The Clue of the Maze: A Voice Lifted Up on Behalf of Honest Faith*, by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, published by Passmore & Alabaster, 1895.

50 Most likely Marcus Furius Camillus (446–365 BC).

51 François Fénelon (1651─1715) was a French Roman Catholic archbishop, theologian, poet, and writer.

52 John Brown of Haddington (1722─1787) was a Scottish divine and author. These quotes were recorded in *The Life of the Rev. John Brown, of Haddington*, published by R.T.S., 1832.

53 John Bunyan (1628─1688) was an English writer and Puritan preacher best remembered as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

54 The meaning of these words is uncertain. Most likely, the first is related to *passement*, which means a decorative trim or border on a garment. *Busking* could refer to performances, but there are other meanings of the word.

55 Published in *Letters of Samuel Rutherford* by W. P. Kennedy, 1863, and also published in other works.

Look Up

O soul most desolate, look up! For thee
One faithful voice doth promise sure relief.
Whate'er thy sin, whate'er thy sorrow be,
Tell all to Jesus. He looketh where
The weary-hearted weep, and draweth near
To listen fondly to the half-formed prayer,
Or read the silent pleading of a tear.
Lose not thy privilege, O silent soul;
Pour out they sorrow at thy Saviour's feet.
What outcast spurns the hand that gives the dole?
Oh, let Him hear thy voice; to Him thy voice is sweet.
– Anna Shipton (1815–1901)

Chapter 11

Answered Prayers

In John, we learn who will have their prayers answered. *If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you* (John 15:7). Now in James, we also find something spoken of those whose prayers were not answered. *Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your pleasures* (James 4:3) There are a great many prayers not answered because the motive is not right; we have not complied with the Word of God and we ask with our motives out of line. It is a good thing our prayers are not answered when we ask with wrong motives.

Examining Our Motives

If our prayers are not answered, it may be that we have prayed without the right motive, or that we have not prayed according to the Scriptures. So let's not be discouraged, or give up praying, even though our prayers are not answered in the way we want.

A man once went to George Muller and said he wanted him to pray for a certain thing. The man stated that he had asked God a great many times to grant him his request, but God had not seen fit to do it. Mr. Muller took out his notebook and showed the man the name of a person for whom he said he had prayed for twenty-four years. The prayer, Mr. Muller added, was not answered yet, but the Lord had given him assurance that that person was going to be converted, and his faith rested there.

We sometimes find our prayers are answered right away while we are praying; at other times the answer is delayed. But especially when people pray for mercy, how quickly the answer comes! Look at Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus when God got ahold of him:

> *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, came unto the prince of the priests and asked him for letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*
>
> *And as he proceeded, he came near Damascus; and suddenly there shone round about him a light from heaven; and falling to the earth, he heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?*
>
> *And he said, Who art thou, Lord?*
>
> *And the Lord said, I AM Jesus whom thou dost persecute; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*
>
> *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*
>
> *And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what it behooves thee to do.* (Acts 9:1-6)

Saul's answer came at once when he asked the Lord what he would have him do.

Note also the publican who went up to the temple to pray and humbly ask for God's pardon for sin; he

got an immediate answer (Luke 18:10-14). The thief on the cross prayed, *and he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom* (Luke 23:42). The answer came immediately – then and there. *And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise* (verse 43).

There are many cases of a similar kind in the Bible, but there are also cases of others who prayed long and often. The Lord delights in hearing his children make our requests known to him – telling our troubles all out to him, and then we should wait for his time. We do not know when that is.

Deferred Answers

There was a mother in Connecticut who had a son in the army and it almost broke her heart when he left, because he was not a Christian. Day after day she lifted up her voice in prayer for her boy. She learned afterward that he had been taken to the hospital, and there died, but she could not find out anything about how he had died. Years passed, and one day a friend came to see a member of the family on business. There was a picture of the soldier boy on the wall.

He looked at it and said, "Did you know that young man?"

The mother said, "That young man was my son. He died in the late war."

The man replied, "I knew him very well; he was in my company."

The mother then asked, "Do you know anything about his end?"

The man said, "I was in the hospital, and he died a most peaceful death, triumphant in the faith."

The mother had given up hope of ever hearing of her boy, but before she went to heaven she had the satisfaction of knowing her prayers had prevailed with God.

I think when we get to heaven, we will find a great many of our prayers that we thought were unanswered were actually answered. If it is the true prayer of faith, God will not disappoint us. Let's not doubt God.

On one occasion at a meeting I attended, a gentleman pointed out an individual and said, "Do you see that man over there? That is one of the leaders of an infidel club."

I sat down beside him, when the infidel said, "I am not a Christian. You have been humbugging these people long enough and making some of these old women believe that you get answers to prayer. Try it on me."

I prayed, and when I got up, the infidel said with a good deal of sarcasm, "I am not converted; God has not answered your prayer!"

I said, "But you may be converted yet."

Sometime afterward I received a letter from a friend, stating that the man had been converted and was at work in the meetings.

Praying for Christ's Sake

Jeremiah prayed, and said, *Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing hidden from thee* (Jeremiah 32:17). Nothing is too hard for God; that is a good thing to claim for a motto. I believe this is a time of great blessing in the world, and we may expect great things. While the blessing is falling all around, let's rise up and share in it.

God has said, *Call unto me, and I will answer thee and show thee great and difficult things, which thou dost not know* (Jeremiah 33:3). Now let's call on the Lord, and let's pray that it may be done for Christ's sake – not our own.

At a Christian convention a number of years ago, a leading man got up and spoke – his subject being "For Christ's Sake" – and he cast new light upon that passage. I had never seen it in that way before. When the war broke out, the gentleman's only son had enlisted, and every time he saw a company of soldiers, his heart went right out after them. They started a soldiers' home in the city where that gentleman lived, and he gladly joined the committee and acted as president.

Sometime afterward he said to his wife, "I have given so much time to these soldiers that I have neglected my business," and he went down to his office with the fixed determination that he would not be disturbed by any soldiers that day.

The door opened soon after, and he saw a soldier entering. He never minded him, but kept on writing, and the poor fellow stood for some time. At last the soldier put down an old, soiled piece of paper on which there was writing. The gentleman observed that it was the handwriting of his son, and he seized the letter at once and read it. It was something to this effect: "Dear father, this young man belongs to my company. He has lost his health in defense of his country, and he is on his way home to his mother to die. Treat him kindly for Charlie's sake."

The gentleman at once dropped his work and took the soldier to his house, where he was kindly cared for until he was able to be sent home to his mother. Then he took him to the station, and sent him home with a "God bless you, for Charlie's sake!"

Let our prayers, then, be for Christ's sake. If we want our sons and daughters converted, let's pray that it be done for Christ's sake. If that is the motive, our prayers will be answered. If God gave up Christ for the world, is there anything he won't give us? If he gave Christ to the murderers and blasphemers, and the rebels of a world lying in wickedness and sin, what wouldn't he give to those who go to him for Christ's sake? Let our prayer be that God may advance his work, not for our glory – not for our sake – but for the sake of his beloved Son whom he has sent.

Expecting an Answer

Let's remember that when we pray we ought to expect an answer. Let's be looking for it. I remember at the close of a meeting in one of our southern cities near the close of the war, a man came up to me weeping and trembling. I thought something I had said had disturbed him, and I began to question him as to what it was.

I found, however, that he could not repeat a word of what I had said. "My friend," I said, "What is the trouble?"

He put his hand into his pocket, and brought out a letter, all soiled, as if his tears had fallen on it. "I got that letter," he said, "from my sister last night. She tells me that every night she goes on her knees and prays to God for me. I think I am the worst man in all the army of the Cumberland. I have been perfectly wretched today."

That sister was six hundred miles away, but she had brought her brother to his knees in answer to her earnest, believing prayer. It was a hard case, but God heard and answered the prayer of this godly sister,

so that the man was as clay in the hands of the potter. He was soon brought into the kingdom of God – all through his sister's prayers.

I went off some thirty miles to another place where I told this story. A young man, a lieutenant in the army, sprang to his feet and said, "That reminds me of the last letter I got from my mother. She told me that every night as the sun went down she prayed for me. She begged of me, when I got her letter, to go away alone, and yield myself to God. I put the letter in my pocket, thinking there would be plenty of time." He went on to say that the next news that came from home was that his mother was gone. He went out into the woods alone and cried to his mother's God to have mercy upon him.

As he stood in the meeting with his face shining, that lieutenant said, "My mother's prayers are answered, and my only regret is that she did not live to know it, but I will meet her by and by."

So, though we may not live to see the answer to our prayers, if we cry mightily to God, the answer will come.

Living in Full Surrender

In Scotland a good many years ago, there lived a man with his wife and three children – two girls and a boy. He was in the habit of getting drunk, and thus lost his job. At last, he said he would take Johnnie and go off to America, where he would be away from his old associates, and where he could begin life over again. He took the little fellow, who was seven years old, and went away.

Soon after he arrived in America, he went into a saloon and got drunk. He got separated from his boy in the streets, and the man has never been seen by his friends since. The little fellow was placed in an orphanage, and afterward apprenticed in Massachusetts. After he had been there some time he became discontented and went off to sea. Finally, he came to Chicago to work on the lakes. He had been a roving spirit, had gone over sea and land, and now he was in Chicago. When the vessel came into port one time, he was invited to a gospel meeting. The joyful sound of the gospel reached him, and he became a Christian.

After he had been a Christian a little while, he became very anxious to find his mother. He wrote to different places in Scotland, but could not find out where she was. One day he read in the Psalms, *For the LORD God is a sun and shield unto us; the LORD will give grace and glory;he will not withhold good from those that walk uprightly* (Psalm 84:11).

He closed his Bible, got down on his knees, and said, "O God, I have been trying to walk uprightly for months past; help me to find my mother." It came into his mind to write back to the place in Massachusetts from which he had run away years before.

It turned out that a letter from Scotland had been waiting for him there for seven years. He wrote at once to the place in Scotland and found that his mother was still living; the answer came back immediately. I would like you to have seen him when he got that letter. He brought it to me, and the tears flowed so that he could scarcely read it. His sister had written on behalf of the mother; she had been so overcome by the tidings of her long-lost boy that she could not write.

The sister said that all the nineteen years he had been away, his mother had prayed to God day and night that he might be saved, and that she might live to know what had become of him, and to see him once more. Now, said the sister, she was so overjoyed, not only that he was alive, but also that he had become a Christian. It was not long before the mother and sisters came out to Chicago to meet him.

I mention this incident to show how God answers prayer. This mother cried to God for nineteen long years. It must have seemed to her sometimes as though God did not mean to give her the desire of her heart, but she kept praying, and at last the answer came.

As I close, I would like to leave you with a testimony. The personal account in chapter 12 was publicly given by an attendee at one of our meetings held in London, and I hope it will help and encourage readers of these pages.

Chapter 12

A Prayer-Meeting Testimony

I want you to understand, my friends, that what I state is not what I did, but what God did. Only God could have done it! I had given it up as a bad job long before. But it is of God's great mercy that I am standing here tonight to tell you that Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him.

The reading of those "requests" (for the salvation of inebriates) touched me very deeply indeed. They seemed to be an echo of many a request for prayer which has been made for me. And, from my knowledge of society generally, and of human nature, I know that in a very great number of families there is need of some such request.

Therefore, if what I may tell you will cheer any Christian heart, encourage any godly father and mother to go on praying for their sons, or assist any man or woman who has felt himself or herself beyond the reach of hope, I shall thank God for it.

I had very good opportunities. My parents loved the Lord Jesus, and did their best to train me up in the right path, and for some time I thought myself to be a Christian. But I got away from Christ, and turned further and further away from God and all good influences.

It was at a public school where I first learned to drink. Many a time at seventeen I drank to excess, but I had an amount of self-respect that kept me from going thoroughly to the bad until I was about twenty-three. But from then until I was twenty-six, I went steadily downhill. At Cambridge I went on further and further in drinking, until I lost all self-respect, and voluntarily chose the worst of companions.

I strayed further and further from God, until my friends, those who were Christians and those who were not, considered, and told me there was very little hope for me. I had been pleaded with by all sorts of people, but I "hated reproof." I hated everything that tasted of religion, and I sneered at every bit of good advice, or any kind word offered me in that way. My father and mother both died without seeing me brought to the Lord. They prayed for me all the time they lived, and at the very last my mother asked me if I would not follow her to be with her in heaven.

To quiet and soothe her, I said I would. But I did not mean it, and I thought, when she had passed away, that she knew now my real feelings. After her death, I went from bad to worse, and plunged deeper and deeper into vice. Drink got a stronger hold of me, and I went lower and lower down. I was never "in the gutter," in the sense in which that term is generally understood, but I was as low in my soul as any man who lives in one of the common lodging houses.

I went from Cambridge first to a town in the north, where I was apprenticed to an attorney, and then to London. While I was in the north, misters Moody and Sankey came to the town I lived in, and an aunt of mine who was still praying for me after my mother's death came and said to me, "I have a favor to ask of you." She had been very kind to me, and I knew what she wanted. She said, "It is to go and hear misters Moody and Sankey."

"Very good," I said. "It is a bargain. I will go and hear the men, but you are never to ask me again. You

will promise that?”

“Yes,” she said, “I do.”

I went, and kept, as I thought, most religiously my share of the bargain.

I waited until the sermon was over, and I saw Mr. Moody coming down from the pulpit. Earnest prayer had been offered for me, and there had been an understanding between my aunt and him that the sermon should apply to me, and that he would come and speak to me immediately afterward. We met Mr. Moody in the aisle, and I thought that I had done a very clever thing when I walked round my aunt, before Mr. Moody could address me, and out of the building.

I wandered further from God after that, and I do not think that I bent my knees in prayer for between two and three years. I went to London, and things grew worse and worse. At times I tried to pull up. I made any number of resolutions. I promised myself and my friends not to touch the drink. I kept my resolutions for some days, and, on one occasion, for six months, but the temptation came with stronger force than ever, and swept me further and further from the pathway of virtue. When in London, I neglected my business and everything I ought to have done, and sank deeper into sin.

One of my close friends said to me, “If you don’t pull up, you will kill yourself.”

“How is that?” I asked.

“You are killing yourself, for you can’t drink so much as you used to.”

“Well,” I replied, “I can’t help it then.”

I got to such a state that I did not think there was any possible help for me. The recital of these things pains me, and as I relate them, God forbid that I should feel anything but shame. I am telling you these things because we have a Savior, and if the Lord Jesus Christ saved even me, he is able also to save you.

Affairs went on in this manner until, at last, I lost all control over myself. I had been drinking and playing billiards one day, and in the evening I returned to my lodgings. I thought that I would sit there awhile, and then go out again as usual. Before going out, I began to think, and the thought struck me, “How will all this end?”

“Oh,” I thought to myself, “what is the use of that? I know how it will end – in my eternal destruction, body and soul!”

I felt I was killing myself – my body, and I knew too well what would be the result to my soul. I thought it impossible for me to be saved. But the thought came to me very strongly, “Is there any way of escape?”

“No,” I said, “I have made any number of resolutions. I have done all I could to keep clear of drink, but I can’t. It is impossible.”

Just at that moment the words came into my mind from God’s own Word – words that I had not remembered since I was a boy. *With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26). And then I saw, in a flash, that what I had just admitted, as I had done hundreds of times before, to be an impossibility, was the one thing that God had pledged himself to do, if I would go to him. All the difficulties came up in my way – my companions, my surroundings of all sorts, and my temptations, but I just looked up and thought, “It is possible with God.”

I went down on my knees there and then, in my room, and began to ask God to do the impossible. As soon as I prayed to him, with very stammering utterance – I had not prayed for nearly three years – I thought, “Now then, God will help me.” I took hold of his truth; I don’t know how.

It was nine days before I knew how, and before I had any assurance, or peace and rest, to my soul. I got

up, there and then, with the hope that God would save me. I took it to be the truth, and I ultimately proved it, for which I praise God.

I thought the best thing I could do would be to go and get somebody to talk to me about my soul, and tell me how to be saved, for I was a perfect heathen, though I had been brought up so well. I went out and hunted about London, and it shows how little I knew of religious people and places of worship, that I could not find a Wesleyan chapel. My mother and father were Wesleyans, and I thought I would find a place belonging to their denomination, but I could not. I searched an hour and a half, and that night I was in the most utter, abject misery of body and soul any man can think of or conceive.

I came home to my lodgings and went upstairs, and thought to myself, "I will not go to bed till I am saved." But I was so ill from drinking – I had not had my usual amount of food in the evening, and the reaction was so tremendous that I felt I must go to bed (although I dared not), or I should be in a very serious condition in the morning.

I knew how I expected to be in the morning. I would think, "What a fool I was last night!" I expected I would wake up moderately fresh, and go off to drink again, as I had often done. But again I thought, "God can do the impossible. He will do that which I cannot do myself." And I prayed to the Lord to let me wake up in much the same condition as that in which I went to bed, feeling the weight of my sins and my misery. Then I went to sleep.

The first thing in the morning, as soon as I remembered where I was, I thought, "Has the conviction left me?" No. I was more miserable than before, and – it seemed strange, though it was natural – I got up, and thanked the Lord because he had kept me anxious about my soul.

Have you ever felt like that? Perhaps after some meeting or conversation with some Christian, or reading the Word of God, you have gone to your room miserable and "almost persuaded." I went on for eight or nine days seeking the Lord. On Saturday morning, I had to go and tell the clerks. That was hard. I did it with the tears running down my cheeks. A man does not like to cry before other men.

Anyway, I told them I wanted to become, and meant to become, a Christian. The Lord helped me with that promise: "With God all things are possible."

A skeptic dropped his head and said nothing. Another fellow, with whom I played billiards, said, "I wish I had the pluck to say so myself!"

My words were received in a different way from what I thought they would be. But the very man who had told me I was killing myself with drink, spent an hour and a half trying to get me to drink, saying that I "had the blues, and was out of sorts; and that a glass of brandy or whisky would do me good."

He tried to get me to drink, and I turned upon him at last, and said, "You remember what you said to me; I am trying to get away from drink, and not to touch it again."

When I think of that, I am reminded of the words of God Himself: *the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel* (Proverbs 12:10 KJV).

And now the Lord drew me on until the little thread became a cable by which my soul could swing. He drew me nearer until I found that he was my Savior. Truly *he is able also to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him* (Hebrews 7:25).

I must not forget to tell you that I went down before God in my misery, my helplessness, and my sin, and owned to him that it was impossible that I should be saved – that it was impossible for me to keep clear of drink. But from that night to this moment, I have never had the slightest desire for drink.

It was a hard struggle indeed to give up smoking. But God in his great wisdom knew that I must have

come to grief if I had to fight single-handedly against the overwhelming desire I had for drink, and he took that desire, too, clean away. From that day to this, the Lord has kept me away from drink and made me hate it most bitterly. I simply said that I had not any strength, nor have I now, but it is the Lord Jesus who is *able also to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him*.

If there is anyone hearing me who has given up all hope, come to the Savior! That is his name, *for he shall save his people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21). Wherever I have gone, since then, I have found him to be my Savior. God forbid that I should glory! It would be glorying in my shame. It is to my shame that I speak thus of myself, but oh, the Savior is able to save, and he will save!

Christian friends, continue to pray. You may go to heaven before your sons are brought home. My parents did, and my sisters prayed for me for years and years. But now I can help others on their way to Zion. Praise the Lord for all his mercy to me!

Remember, *with God all things are possible*. And then you may say like St. Paul, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13).

Dwight L. Moody – A Brief Biography

Dwight Lyman Moody was born on February 5, 1837, in Northfield, Massachusetts. His father died when Dwight was only four years old, leaving his mother with nine children to care for. When Dwight was seventeen years old, he left for Boston to work as a salesman. A year later, he was led to Jesus Christ by Edward Kimball, Moody's Sunday school teacher. Moody soon left for Chicago and began teaching a Sunday school class of his own. By the time he was twenty-three, he had become a successful shoe salesman, earning $5,000 in only eight months, which was a lot of money for the middle of the nineteenth century. Having decided to follow Jesus, though, he left his career to engage in Christian work for only $300 a year.

D. L. Moody was not an ordained minister, but was an effective evangelist. He was once told by Henry Varley, a British evangelist, "Moody, the world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to Him."

Moody later said, "By God's help, I aim to be that man."

It is estimated that during his lifetime, without the help of television or radio, Moody traveled more than one million miles, preached to more than one million people, and personally dealt with over seven hundred and fifty thousand individuals.

D. L. Moody died on December 22, 1899.

Moody once said, "Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all – out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever."