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PRAYER

#153

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WHAT TRUE PRAYER IS

John Bunyan

Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to his Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God.

In this description there are these seven things. Prayer is (1) a sincere; (2) a sensible; (3) an affectionate, pouring out of the soul to God, through Christ; (4) by the strength or assistance of the Spirit; (5) for such things as God has promised, or, according to his Word; (6) for the good of the church; (7) with submission in faith to the will of God.

1. For the first of these, it is a *sincere* pouring out of the soul to God.

Sincerity is such a grace as runs through all the graces of God in us, and through all the actings of a Christian, and has the sway in them too, or else their actings are not regarded of God. David speaks particularly of sincerity when he mentions prayer: 'I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me (Ps. 66:17, 18). Part of the exercise of prayer is sincerity, without which God does not accept it as prayer. (Ps. 16:1-4). 'Ye shall seek me and find *me*, when ye shall

search for me with all your heart' (Jer. 29:12, 13). The want of this made the Lord reject the prayers of those mentioned in Hos. 7:14, where he says, 'They have not cried unto me with their heart,' that is, in sincerity, 'when they howled upon their beds.' It is rather for a pretence, for a show in hypocrisy, to be seen of men, and applauded for the same that they pray. Sincerity was that which Christ commended in Nathaniel, when he was under the fig tree. 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile' (John 1:47). Probably this good man was pouring out his soul to God in prayer under the fig tree, and that in a sincere and unfeigned spirit before the Lord. The prayer that has this in it as one of the principal ingredients is the prayer that God regards. Thus, 'The prayer of the upright is his delight' (Prov. 15:8).

And why must sincerity be one of the essentials of prayer which is accepted of God? Because sincerity carries the soul in all simplicity to open its heart to God, and to tell him the case plainly, without equivocation; to condemn itself plainly, without dissembling; to cry to God heartily, without complimenting. 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. (Jer. 31:18). Sincerity is the same in a corner alone, as it is before the face of all the world. It knows not how to wear two masks, one for an appearance before men, and another for private use. It must have God, and be with him in the duty of prayer. It is not a lip-labour that it regards, for sincerity, like God, looks at the heart, and that is where prayer comes from, if it be true prayer.

2. It is a sincere and *sensible* pouring out of the heart or soul.

It is not, as many take it to be, a few babbling, prating, complimentary expressions, but a sensible feeling in the heart. Prayer has in it a sensibleness of diverse things; sometimes sense of sin, sometimes of mercy received, sometimes of the readiness of God to give mercy.

(1) A sense of the want of mercy, by reason of the danger of sin. The soul, I say, feels, and from feeling sighs, groans, and breaks at the heart. For right prayer bubbles out of the heart when it is overcome with grief and bitterness, as blood is forced out of the flesh by reason of some heavy burden that lies upon it (1 Sam. 1:10. Ps. 69:3). David roars, cries, weeps, faints at heart, fails at the eyes, loses his moisture (Ps. 38:8-10). Hezekiah mourns like a dove (Is. 38:14). Ephraim bemoans himself (Jer. 31:18). Peter weeps bitterly (Matt. 26:75). Christ has strong cryings and tears (Heb. 5:7.) And all this from a sense of the justice of God, the guilt of sin, the pains of hell and destruction. 'The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord' (Ps. 116:3, 4). And in another place, 'My sore ran in the night' (Ps. 77:2). Again, 'I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long' (Ps. 38:6). In all these instances, you may see that prayer carries in it a sensible feeling, and that first from a sense of sin.

(2) Sometimes there is a sweet sense of mercy received; encouraging, comforting, strengthening, enlivening, enlightening mercy. Thus David pours out his soul, to bless, and praise, and admire the great God for his loving-kindness to such poor vile wretches. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's' (Ps. 103:1-4). And thus is the prayer of saints sometimes turned into praise and thanksgiving, and yet is still prayer. This is a mystery; God's people pray with their praises, as it is written, 'Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer, and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God' (Phil. 4:6). A sensible thanksgiving for mercies received is a mighty prayer in the sight of God; it prevails with him unspeakably.

(3) In prayer there is sometimes in the soul a sense of mercy to be received. This again sets the soul aflame. 'Thou, O Lord of hosts,' says David, 'hast revealed to thy servant, saying I will build thee an house; therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray unto thee' (2 Sam. 7:27). This provoked Jacob, David, Daniel, with others, not by fits and starts, nor yet in a foolish frothy way, but mightily, fervently, and continually, to groan out their conditions before the Lord, as being sensible of their wants, their misery, and the willingness of God to show mercy (Gen. 32:10, 11; Dan. 9:3, 4).

3. Prayer is a sincere, sensible, and *an affectionate pouring out of the soul to God*.

(1) O, what heat, strength, life, vigour, and *affection* there is in true prayer! 'As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God' (Ps. 42:1). 'I have longed after thy precepts' (Ps. 119:40). 'I have longed for thy salvation' (Ps. 119:174). 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God' (Ps. 84:2). 'My soul breaketh for the longing *that it hath* unto thy judgments at all times' (Ps. 119:20). O what affection is here discovered in prayer! You have the same in Daniel. 'O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God' (Dan. 9:19). Every syllable carries a mighty vehemency in it. This is called the fervent, or the working prayer, by James. And so again, 'And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly' (Luke 22:44). He had his affections more and more drawn out after God for his helping hand. O how wide are the most of men with their prayers from this prayer! Alas! the greatest part of men make no conscience at all of the duty; and as for them that do, it is to be feared that many of them are very great strangers to a sincere, sensible, and affectionate pouring out their hearts or souls to God. They content themselves with a little lip-labour and bodily exercise, mumbling over a few imaginary prayers. When the affections are indeed engaged in prayer, then the whole man is engaged, and that in such sort that the soul will spend itself, as it were, rather than go without that good desired, even communion and solace with Christ. And hence it is that the saints have spent their strength, and lost their lives, rather than go without the blessing (Ps. 69:3; 38. 9, 10; Gen. 32:24, 26).

All this is too evident by the ignorance, profaneness, and spirit of envy that reign in the hearts of those men that are so hot for the forms, and not the power of praying. Few among them know what it is to be born again, to have communion with the Father through the Son; to feel the power of grace sanctifying their hearts. For all their prayers, they still live cursed, drunken, whorish, and abominable lives, full of malice, envy, deceit, persecuting the dear children of God. O what a dreadful judgment is coming upon them! a judgment from which all their hypocritical assembling themselves together, with all their prayers, shall never be able to help them against, or shelter them from.

Prayer is a *pouring out* of the heart or soul. There is in prayer an unbosoming of a man's self, an opening of the heart to God, an affectionate pouring out of the soul in requests, sighs, and groans. 'All my desire is before thee,' says David, 'and my groaning is not hid from thee' (Ps. 38:9). And again, 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me' (Ps. 42:2, 4). Mark, 'I pour out my soul.' It is an expression signifying that in prayer there goes the very life and whole strength to God. As in another place, 'Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him' (Ps. 62:8). This is the prayer to which the promise is made, for the delivering of a poor creature out of captivity and thralldom. 'If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul' (Deut. 4:29).

Again, prayer is a pouring out of the heart or soul *to God*. This shows also the excellency of the spirit of prayer. It is the great God to which it goes. 'When shall I come and appear before God?' And it argues that the soul that thus prays indeed, sees an emptiness in all things under heaven; that in God alone there is rest and satisfaction for the soul. 'Now she that is a widow, indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God' (1 Tim. 5:5). So says David, 'In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline thine ear to me, and save me. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: for thou *art* my rock and my fortress; deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For thou *art* my hope, O Lord God, *thou art* my trust from my youth' (Ps. 71:1-5). Many speak of God; but right prayer makes God the hope, stay, and all. True prayer sees nothing substantial, and worth the looking after, but God. And that, as I said before, it does in a sincere, sensible, and affectionate way.

Again, prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, *through Christ*. This 'through Christ' must needs be added, or else it must be questioned, whether it is prayer, though in appearance it be never so eminent and eloquent.

Christ is the way through whom the soul has admittance to God, and without whom it is impossible that so much as one desire should come into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth (John 14:6). ‘If ye shall ask anything in my name;’ whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, I will do it.’ This was Daniel’s way in praying for the people of God; he did it in the name of Christ. ‘Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake’ (Dan. 9:17). And so David, ‘For thy name’s sake—that is, for thy Christ’s sake— ‘pardon mine iniquity, for it is great’ (Ps. 25:11). But now it is not every one that makes mention of Christ’s name in prayer that does indeed, and in truth, effectually pray to God in the name of Christ, or through him. This coming to God through Christ is the hardest part of prayer. A man may be sensible of his condition, and sincerely desire mercy, and yet not be able to come to God by Christ. The man that comes to God by Christ must first have the knowledge of him; ‘for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is’ (Heb. 11:6). And so he that comes to God through Christ, must be enabled to know Christ. Lord, says Moses, ‘show me now thy way, that I may know thee’ (Ex. 32:13).

This Christ, none but the Father can reveal (Matt. 11:27). And to come through Christ is for the sinner to be enabled of God to hide himself under the shadow of the Lord Jesus, as a man hides himself under a thing for safeguard (Matt. 16:16). Hence it is that David so often terms Christ his shield, buckler, tower, fortress, rock of defence (Ps. 18:2; 27:1; 28:1). Not only because by him he overcame his enemies, but because through him he found favour with God the Father. And so God says to Abraham, ‘Fear not, I am thy shield’ (Gen. 15:1). The man then that comes to God through Christ must have faith, by which he puts on Christ, and in him appears before God. Now he that has faith is born of God, and so becomes one of the sons of God; by virtue of which he is joined to Christ, and made a member of Christ (John 3:5, 7; 1:12). And, therefore, he, as a member of Christ, comes to God; I say, as a member of Christ, so that God looks on that man as part of Christ, part of his body, flesh, and bones, united to him by election, conversion, enlightenment, the Spirit being conveyed into the heart of that man by God (Eph. 5:30). So that now he comes to God in Christ’s merits, in his blood, righteousness, victory, intercession, and so stands before him, being ‘accepted in the Beloved’ (Eph. 1:6). And because this poor creature is thus a member of the Lord Jesus, and under this consideration has admittance to God; therefore, by virtue of this union also is the Holy Spirit conveyed into him, whereby he is able to pour out his soul before God.

4. Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate, pouring out of the heart or soul to God through Christ, *by the strength or assistance of the Spirit.*

These things so depend one upon another that it is impossible that it should be prayer without a joint concurrence of them; for though it be never so eloquent, yet without these things, it is only such prayer as is rejected of God. For without a sincere, sensible, affectionate, pouring out of the heart to God, it is but lip-labour; and if it be not through Christ, it falls far short of ever sounding well in the ears of God. So also, if it be not in the strength and by the assistance of the Spirit, it is but like the sons of Aaron, offering strange fire (Lev. 10:1, 2).

I say that which is not petitioned through the teaching and assistance of the Spirit cannot be ‘according to the will of God’ (Rom. 8:26, 27). There is no man nor church in the world that can come to God in prayer, but by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. ‘For through Christ we all have access by one Spirit unto the Father’ (Eph. 2:18). Wherefore Paul says, ‘For we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*’ (Rom. 8:26, 27). And because there is in this Scripture so full a discovery of the spirit of prayer, and of man’s inability to pray without it; therefore I shall in a few words comment upon it.

‘For we.’ Consider first the person speaking, even Paul, and, in his person, all the apostles. We apostles, we extraordinary officers, the wise master-builders, some of whom have been caught up into paradise (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 3:10; 2 Cor. 12:4). ‘We know not what we should pray for.’ Surely there is no man but will confess that Paul and his companions were as able to have done any work for God, as any pope or proud prelate in the

church of Rome, and could as well have made a Common Prayer Book as those who at first composed this; as being not a whit behind them either in grace or gifts.

‘For we know not what we should pray for.’ We know not the matter of the things for which we should pray, neither the object to whom we pray, nor the medium by or through whom we pray; none of these things know we, but by the help and assistance of the Spirit. Should we pray for communion with God through Christ? Should we pray for faith, for justification by grace, and a truly sanctified heart? None of these things know we. ‘For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God’ (1 Cor. 2:11). But here, alas! the apostles speak of inward and spiritual things, which the world knows not (Is. 29:11).

Again, as they know not the matter of prayer, without the help of the Spirit; so neither know they the manner thereof without the same; and therefore he adds, ‘We know not what we should pray for as we ought;’ but the Spirit helps our infirmities, with sighs and groans which cannot be uttered. Mark here, they could not so well and so fully succeed in the manner of performing this duty, as these in our days think they can.

The apostles, when they were at the best, yea when the Holy Ghost assisted them, yet then they were fain to come off with sighs and groans, falling short of expressing their mind, but with sighs and groans which cannot be uttered.

‘For we know not what we should pray for as we ought.’ Mark this, ‘as we ought.’ For the not thinking of this word, or at least the not understanding it in the spirit and truth of it, has occasioned some men to devise, as Jeroboam did, another way of worship, both for matter and manner, than is revealed in the Word of God (1 Kgs. 12:26-33). But, says Paul, we must pray as we ought; and this we cannot do by all the art, skill, cunning, and device of men or angels. ‘For we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit;’ nay, further, it must be ‘the Spirit itself’ that helps our infirmities; not the Spirit and man’s lusts. What man of his own brain may imagine and devise, is one thing, and what they are commanded, and ought to do, is another.

Many ask and have not, because they ask amiss; and so are never the nearer the enjoying of those things they petition for (Jas. 4:3). It is not to pray at random that will cause God to answer. While prayer is making, God is searching the heart to see from what root and spirit it arises (1 John 5:14). ‘And he that searcheth the heart knoweth,’ that is, approves only, the meaning ‘of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.’ For in that which is according to his will only, he hears us, and in nothing else. And it is the Spirit only that can teach us so to ask; it only being able to search out all things, even the deep things of God. Without which Spirit, though we had a thousand Common Prayer Books, yet we know not what we should pray for as we ought, being accompanied with those infirmities that make us absolutely incapable of such a work.

5. Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart, or soul, to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Spirit, *for such things as God has promised* (Matt. 6:6-8).

Prayer is only true when it is within the compass of God’s Word; it is blasphemy, or at best vain babbling, when the petition is unrelated to the Book. David therefore in his prayer kept his eye on the Word of God. ‘My soul,’ says he, ‘cleaveth to the dust; quicken me according to thy word.’ And again, ‘My soul melteth for heaviness, strengthen thou me according unto thy word’ (Ps. 119:25-28. See also verses 41, 42, 58, 65, 74, 81, 82, 107, 147, 154, 169, 170). And, ‘remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope’ (ver. 49). And indeed the Holy Ghost does not immediately quicken and stir up the heart of the Christian without, but by, with, and through the Word, by bringing that to the heart, and by opening that, whereby the man is provoked to go to the Lord, and to tell him how it is with him; and also to argue, and supplicate, according to the Word. Thus it was with Daniel that mighty prophet of the Lord. He, understanding by books that the captivity of the children of Israel was nearing its end, then, according unto that word, he makes his prayer to God. ‘I Daniel,’ says he, ‘understood by books,’ viz., the writings of Jeremiah, ‘the number of the years whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face to the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes’ (Ch. 9:2, 3).

As the Spirit is the helper and the governor of the soul, when it prays according to the will of God; so it guides by and according to the Word of God and his promise. Hence it is that our Lord Jesus Christ himself did make a stop, although his life lay at stake for it. 'I could now pray to my Father, and he should give me more than twelve legions of angels; but how then must the Scripture be fulfilled that thus it must be?' (Matt. 26:53, 54). Were there but a word for it in the Scripture, I should soon be out of the hands of mine enemies, I should be helped by angels; but the Scripture will not warrant this kind of praying, for that says otherwise.

It is a praying then according to the Word and promise. The Spirit by the Word must direct, in the manner, as well as in the matter of prayer. 'I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also' (1 Cor. 14:15). But there is no understanding without the Word. For if they reject the word of the Lord, 'what wisdom is in them?' (Jer. 8:9.)

6. *For the good of the Church.*

This clause covers whatsoever tends either to the honour of God, Christ's advancement, or his people's benefit. For God, and Christ, and his people are so linked together that if the good of the one be prayed for, the others must needs be included. As Christ is in the Father, so the saints are in Christ; and he that touches the saints, touches the apple of God's eye. Therefore pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and you pray for all that is required of you. For Jerusalem will never be in perfect peace until she be in heaven; and there is nothing that Christ more desires than to have her there. That also is the place that God through Christ has given her. He then that prays for the peace and good of Zion, or the church, asks that in prayer which Christ has purchased with his blood; and also that which the Father has given to him as the price thereof. Now he that prays for this, must pray for abundance of grace for the church, for help against all its temptations; that God would let nothing be too hard for it; that all things might work together for its good; that God would keep his children blameless and harmless, the sons of God, to his glory, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. And this is the substance of Christ's own prayer in John 17. And all Paul's prayers run that way, as one of his prayers eminently shows: 'And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere, and without offence, till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God' (Phil. 1:11). But a short prayer, you see, and yet full of good desires for the church, from the beginning to the end; that it may stand and go on, and that in the most excellent frame of spirit, even without blame, sincere, and without offence, until the day of Christ, let its temptations or persecutions be what they will (Eph. 1:16-21; 3:14-19; Col. 1:13).

7. And because, as I said, prayer *submits to the will of God*, and says, Thy will be done, as Christ has taught (Matt. 6:10); therefore the people of the Lord in all humility are to lay themselves and their prayers, and all that they have, at the foot of their God, to be disposed of by him as he in his heavenly wisdom sees best. Yet not doubting but God will answer the desire of his people that way that shall be most for their advantage and his glory. When the saints therefore pray with submission to the will of God, it does not argue that they are to doubt or question God's love and kindness to them. But because they at all times are not so wise, but that sometimes Satan may get advantage of them, as to tempt them to pray for that which, if they had it, would neither prove to God's glory nor his people's good. 'Yet this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him,' that is, we asking in the Spirit of grace and supplication (1 John 5:14, 15). For, as I said before, that petition that is not put up in and through the Spirit, is not to be answered, because it is beside the will of God. For the Spirit only knows that, and so consequently knows how to pray according to that will of God. 'For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God' (1 Cor. 2:11). But more of this hereafter.

Taken From: *Prayer*, by The Banner of Truth Trust

THE SIN AND CAUSE OF PRAYERLESSNES

Andrew Murray

If conscience is to do its work, and the contrite heart is to feel its misery, it is necessary that each individual should mention his sin by name. The confession must be severely personal. In a meeting of ministers there is probably no single sin which each one of us ought to acknowledge with deeper shame—“Guilty, verily guilty”—than the sin of prayerlessness.

What is it, then, that makes prayerlessness such a great sin? At first it is looked upon merely as a weakness. There is so much talk about lack of time and all sorts of distractions that the deep guilt of the situation is not recognized. Let it be our honest desire that, for the future, the sin of prayerlessness may be to us truly sinful. Consider—

1. What a reproach it is to God.—There is the holy and most glorious God who invites us to come to Him, to hold converse with Him, to ask from Him such things as we need, and to experience what a blessing there is in fellowship with Him. He has created us in His own image, and has redeemed us by His own Son, so that in converse with Him we might find our highest glory and salvation.

What use do we make of this heavenly privilege? How many there are who take only five minutes for prayer! They say that they have no time and that the heart desire for prayer is lacking; they do not *know how* to spend half an hour with God! It is not that they absolutely do not pray; they pray every day—but they have no joy in prayer, as a token of communion with God which shows that God is every thing to them.

If a friend comes to visit them, they have time, they *make time, even* at the cost of sacrifice, for the sake of enjoying converse with him. Yes, they have time for everything that really interests them, but no time to practice fellowship with God and delight themselves in Him! They find time for a creature who can be of service to them; but day after day, month after month passes, and there is no time to spend *one hour* with God.

Do not our hearts begin to acknowledge what a dishonor, what a despite of God this is, that I dare to say I cannot find time for fellowship with Him? If this sin begins to appear plain to us, shall we not with deep shame cry out: “Woe is me, for I am undone, O God; be merciful to me, and forgive this awful sin of prayerlessness.” Consider further—

2. It is the cause of a deficient spiritual life.—It is a proof that, for the most part, our life is still under the power of “the flesh.” Prayer is the pulse of life; by it the doctor can tell what is the condition of the heart. The sin of prayerlessness is a proof for the ordinary Christian or minister that the life of God in the soul is in deadly sickness and weakness.

Much is said and many complaints are made about the feebleness of the Church to fulfill her calling, to exercise an influence over her members, to deliver them from the power of the world, and to bring them to a life of holy consecration to God. Much is also spoken about her indifference to the millions of heathen whom Christ entrusted to her that she might make known to them His love and salvation. What is the reason that many thousands of Christian workers in the world have not a greater influence? Nothing save this—the prayerlessness of their service. In the midst of all their zeal in the study and in the work of the Church, of all their faithfulness in preaching and conversation with the people, they lack that ceaseless prayer which has attached to it the sure promise of the Spirit and the power from on high. It is nothing but the sin of prayerlessness which is the cause of the lack of a powerful spiritual life! Consider further—

3. The dreadful loss which the church suffers as a result of prayerlessness of the minister.—It is the business of

a minister to train believers up to a life of prayer; but how can a leader do this if he himself understands little the art of conversing with God and of receiving from the Holy Spirit, every day, out of heaven, abundant grace for himself and for his work? A minister cannot lead a congregation higher than he is himself. He cannot with enthusiasm point out a way, or explain a work, in which he is not himself walking or living.

How many thousands of Christians there are who know next to nothing of the blessedness of prayer fellowship with God! How many there are who know something of it and long for a further increase of this knowledge, but in the preaching of the Word they are not persistently urged to keep on till they obtain the blessing! The reason is simply and only that the minister understands so little about the secret of powerful prayer and does not give prayer the place in his service which, in the nature of the case and in the will of God, is indispensably necessary. Oh, what a difference we should notice in our congregations if ministers could be brought to see in its right light the sin of prayerlessness and were delivered from it! Once more consider—

4. The impossibility of preaching the gospel to all men—as we are commanded by Christ to do—so long as this sin is not overcome and cast out.

Many feel that the great need of missions is the obtaining of men and women who will give themselves to the Lord to strive in prayer for the salvation of souls. It has also been said that God is eager and able to deliver and bless the world, if His people were but willing, if they were but ready, to cry to Him day and night. But how can congregations be brought to that unless there comes first an entire change in ministers and that they begin to see that the indispensable thing is not preaching, not pastoral visitation, not church work, but *fellowship with God in prayer till they are clothed with power from on high?*

Oh, that all thought and work and expectation concerning the kingdom might drive us to the acknowledgment of the sin of prayerlessness! God help us to root it out! God deliver us from it through the blood and power of Christ Jesus! God teach every minister of the Word to see what a glorious place he may occupy if he first of all is delivered from this root of evils; so that with courage and joy, in faith and perseverance, he can go on with his God!

The sin of prayerlessness! The Lord lay the burden of it so heavy on our hearts that we may not rest till it is taken far from us through the name and power of Jesus. He will make this possible for us.

The above article was taken From:

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LONGINGS AFTER GOD

My Dear Lord,

I can but tell thee that thou knowest I long for nothing but thyself, nothing but holiness, nothing but union with thy will.

Thou hast given me these desires, and thou alone canst give me the thing desired.

My soul longs for communion with thee, for mortification of indwelling corruption, especially spiritual pride.

How precious it is to have a tender sense and clear apprehension of the mystery of godliness, of true holiness!

What a blessedness to be like thee as much as it is possible for a creature to be like its creator!

Lord, give me more of thy likeness; enlarge my soul to contain fullness of holiness; engage me to live more for thee.

Help me to be less pleased with my spiritual experiences, and when I feel at ease after sweet communings, teach me it is far too little I know and do.

Blessed Lord, let me climb up near to thee, and love, and long, and plead, and wrestle with thee, and pant for deliverance from the body of sin, for my heart is wandering and lifeless, and my soul mourns to think it should ever lose sight of its beloved.

Wrap my life in divine love, and keep me ever desiring thee, always humble and resigned to thy will, more fixed on thyself, that I may be more fitted for doing and suffering.

Taken From: The Valley of Vision a collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions

MORE AND BETTER PRAYING THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

E. M. Bounds

More praying and better is the secret of the whole matter. More time for prayer, more relish and preparation to meet God, to commune with God through Christ—this has in it the whole of the matter. Our manner and matter of praying ill become us. The attitude and relationship of God and the Son are the eternal relationship of Father and Son, of asking and giving—the Son always asking, the Father always giving:

Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance,

And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron;

Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Jesus is to be always praying through His people. "And men shall pray to him continually." "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." We must prepare ourselves to pray; to be like Christ, to pray like Christ.

Man's access in prayer to God opens everything, and makes his impoverishment his wealth. All things are his through prayer. The wealth and the glory—all things are Christ's. As the light grows brighter and prophets take in the nature of the restoration, the divine record seems to be enlarged. "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel and his Maker, Ask me of the things that are to come, concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens and all their host have I commanded."

To man is given to command God with all this authority and power in the demands of God's earthly Kingdom. Heaven, with all it has, is under tribute to carry out the ultimate, final and glorious purposes of God. Why then is the time so long in carrying out these wise benedictions for man? Why then does sin so long reign? Why are the oath-bound covenant promises so long in coming to their gracious end? Sin reigns, Satan reigns, sighing marks the lives of many; all tears are fresh and full.

Why is all this so? We have not prayed to bring the evil to an end; we have not prayed as we must pray. We have not met the conditions of prayer.

Ask of me. Ask of God. We have not rested on prayer. We have not made prayer the sole condition. There has been violation of the primary condition of prayer. We have not prayed aright. We have not prayed at all. God is willing to give, but we are slow to ask. The Son, through His saints, is ever praying and God the Father is ever answering.

Ask of me. In the invitation is conveyed the assurance of answer; the shout of victory is there and may be heard by the listening ear. The Father holds the authority and power in His hands. How easy is the condition, and yet how long are we in fulfilling the conditions! Nations are in bondage; the uttermost parts of the earth are still unpossessed. The earth groans; the world is still in bondage; Satan and evil hold sway.

The Father holds Himself in the attitude of Giver, *Ask of me*, and that petition to God the Father empowers all agencies, inspires all movements. The Gospel is divinely inspired. Back of all its inspirations is prayer. *Ask of me* lies back of all movements. Standing as the endowment of the enthroned Christ is the oath-bound covenant of the Father, "*Ask of me*, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. "And men shall pray to him continually."

Ever are the prayers of holy men streaming up to God as fragrant as the richest incense. And God in many ways is speaking to us, declaring His wealth and our impoverishment. "I am the Maker of all things; the wealth and glory are mine. *Command ye me.*"

We can do all things by God's aid, and can have the whole of His aid by asking. We can have all that God has. *Command ye me.* This is no figment of the imagination, no idle dream, no vain fancy. The life of the Church is the highest life. Its office is to pray. Its prayer life is the highest life, the most odorous, the most conspicuous.

The Book of Revelation says nothing about prayer as a great duty, a hallowed service, but much about prayer in its aggregated force and energies. It is the prayer force ever living and ever praying; it is all saints' prayers going out as a mighty, living energy while the lips that uttered the words are stilled and sealed in death, while the living church has an energy of faith to inherit the forces of all the past praying and make it deathless.

The statement by the Baptist philosopher, John Foster, contains the purest philosophy and the simple truth of God, for God has no force and demands no conditions but prayer. "More and better praying will bring the surest and readiest triumph to God's cause; feeble, formal, listless praying brings decay and death. The Church has its sheet-anchor in the closet; its magazine stores are there."

"I am convinced," Foster continues, "that every man who amidst his serious projects is apprized of his dependence upon God as completely as that dependence is a fact, will be impelled to pray and anxious to induce his serious friends to pray almost every hour. He will not without it promise himself any noble success any more than a mariner would expect to reach a distant coast by having his sails spread in a stagnation of air.

"I have intimated my fear that it is visionary to expect an unusual success in the human administration of religion unless there are unusual omens: now a most emphatical spirit of prayer would be such an omen; and the individual who should determine to try its last possible efficacy might probably find himself becoming a much more prevailing agent in his little sphere. And if the whole, or the greater number of the disciples of Christianity were with an earnest and unalterable resolution of each to combine that heaven should not withhold one single influence which the very utmost effort of conspiring and persevering supplication would obtain, it would be a sign that a revolution of the world was at hand."

Edward Payson, one of God's own, says of this statement of Foster, "Very few missionaries since the apostles, probably, have tried the experiment. He who shall make the first trial will, I believe, effect wonders. Nothing that I could write, nothing that an angel could write, would be necessary to him who should make this trial.

"One of the principal results of the little experience which I have had as a Christian minister is a conviction that religion consists very much in giving God that place in our views and feelings which He actually fills in the universe. We know that in the universe He is all in all. So far as He is constantly all in all to us, so far as we

comply with the Psalmist's charge to his soul, 'My soul, wait thou *only* upon God'; so far, I apprehend, have we advanced towards perfection. It is comparatively easy to wait upon God; but to wait upon Him *only* to feel, so far as our strength, happiness, and usefulness are concerned, as if all creatures and second causes were annihilated, and we were alone in the universe with God, is, I suspect, a difficult and rare attainment. At least, I am sure it is one which I am very far from having made. In proportion as we make this attainment we shall find everything easy; for we shall become, emphatically, men of prayer; and we may say of prayer as Solomon says of money, that it answereth all things."

This same John Foster said, when approaching death: "I never prayed more earnestly nor probably with such faithful frequency. 'Pray without ceasing' has been the sentence repeating itself in the silent thought, and I am sure it must be my practice till the last conscious hour of life. Oh, why not throughout that long, indolent, inanimate half-century past?"

And yet this is the way in which we all act about prayer. Conscious as we are of its importance, of its vital importance, we yet let the hours pass away as a blank and can only lament in death the irremediable loss.

When we calmly reflect upon the fact that the progress of our Lord's Kingdom is dependent upon prayer, it is sad to think that we give so little time to the holy exercise. Everything depends upon prayer, and yet we neglect it not only to our own spiritual hurt but also to the delay and injury of our Lord's cause upon earth. The forces of good and evil are contending for the world. If we would, we could add to the conquering power of the army of righteousness, and yet our lips are sealed, our hands hang listlessly by our side, and we jeopardize the very cause in which we profess to be deeply interested by holding back from the prayer chamber.

Prayer is the one prime, eternal condition by which the Father is pledged to put the Son in possession of the world. Christ prays through His people. Had there been importunate, universal and continuous prayer by God's people, long ere this the earth had been possessed for Christ. The delay is not to be accounted for by the inveterate obstacles, but by the lack of the right asking. We do more of everything else than of praying. As poor as our giving is, our contributions of money exceed our offerings of prayer. Perhaps in the average congregation fifty aid in paying, where one saintly, ardent soul shuts itself up with God and wrestles for the deliverance of the heathen world. Official praying on set or state occasions counts for nothing in this estimate. We emphasize other things more than we do the necessity of prayer.

We are saying prayers after an orderly way, but we have not the world in the grasp of our faith. We are not praying after the order that moves God and brings all divine influences to help us. The world needs more true praying to save it from the reign and ruin of Satan.

We do not pray as Elijah prayed. John Foster puts the whole matter to a practical point. "When the Church of God," he says, "is aroused to its obligation and duties and right faith to claim what Christ has promised— 'all things whatsoever' —a revolution will take place."

But not all praying is praying. The driving power, the conquering force in God's cause is God Himself. "Call upon me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not," is God's challenge to prayer. Prayer puts God in full force into God's work. "Ask of me things to come, concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me"—God's *carte blanche* to prayer. Faith is only omnipotent when on its knees, and its outstretched hands take hold of God, then it draws to the utmost of God's capacity; for only a praying faith can get God's "all things whatsoever." Wonderful lessons are the Syrophenician woman, the importunate widow, and the friend at midnight, of what dauntless prayer can do in mastering or defying conditions, in changing defeat into victory and triumphing in the regions of despair. Oneness with Christ, the acme of spiritual attainment, is glorious in all things; most glorious in that we can then "ask what we will and it shall be done unto us." Prayer in Jesus' name puts the crowning crown on God, because it glorifies Him through the Son and pledges the Son to give to men "whatsoever and anything" they shall ask.

In the New Testament the marvelous prayer of the Old Testament is put to the front that it may provoke and stimulate our praying, and it is preceded with a declaration, the dynamic energy of which we can scarcely

translate. “The supplication of a righteous man availeth much. Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.”

Our paucity in results, the cause of all leanness, is solved by the apostle James— “Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it on your pleasures.”

That is the whole truth in a nutshell.

I never prayed sincerely and earnestly for anything but it came at some time—no matter at how distant a day, somehow, in some shape, probably the last I would have devised, it came. —Adoniram Judson.

Taken From: *Purpose in Prayer* by E.M. Bounds, a Moody Press Publication

PRAYER

J. C. RYLE

“Men ought always to pray.”—Luke 18:1

“I will that men pray everywhere.”—1 Timothy 2:8

Prayer is the most important subject in practical religion. All other subjects are second to it. Reading the Bible, keeping the Sabbath, hearing sermons, attending public worship, going to the Lord’s Table,—all these are very weighty matters. But none of them are so important as private prayer.

I propose in this paper to offer plain reasons why I use such strong language about prayer. I invite to these reasons the attention of every thinking man into whose hands this paper may fall. I venture to assert with confidence that they deserve serious consideration.

1. In the first place, *Prayer is absolutely needful to a man’s salvation.*

I say absolutely needful, and I say so advisedly. I am not speaking now of infants and idiots. I am not settling the state of the heathen. I remember that where little is given, there little will be required. I speak especially of those who call themselves Christians, in a land like our own. And of such I say no man or woman can expect to be saved who does not pray.

I hold salvation by grace as strongly as any one. I would gladly offer a free and full pardon to the greatest sinner that ever lived. I would not hesitate to stand by his dying bed, and say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ even now, and you shall be saved.” But that a man can have salvation without *asking* for it, I cannot see in the Bible. That a man will receive pardon of his sins, who will not so much as lift up his heart inwardly, and say, “Lord Jesus, give it to me,” this I cannot find. I can find that nobody will be saved by his prayers, but I cannot find that without prayer anybody will be saved.

There will be many at Christ’s right hand in the last day. The saints gathered from North and South, and East and West, will be “a multitude that no man can number.” (Rev. 7:9) The song of victory that will burst from their mouths, when their redemption is at length complete, will be a glorious song indeed. It will be far above

the noise of many waters, and of mighty thunders. But there will be no discord in that song. They that sing will sing with one heart as well as one voice. Their experience will be one and the same. All will have believed. All will have been washed in the blood of Christ. All will have been born again. All will have prayed. Yes, we must pray on earth, or we shall never praise in heaven. We must go through the school of prayer, or we shall never be fit for the holiday of praise. In short, to be prayerless is to be without God,—without Christ,—without grace,—without hope,—and without heaven. It is to be in the road to hell.

2. In the second place, A habit of prayer is one of the surest marks of a true Christian.

All the children of God on earth are alike in this respect. From the moment there is any life and reality about their religion, they pray. Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world, is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again, is *praying*.

This is one of the common marks of all the elect of God; “They cry unto Him day and night.” (Luke 18:1) The Holy Spirit, who makes them new creatures, works in them the feeling of adoption, and makes them cry, “Abba, Father.” (Rom. 7:15) The Lord Jesus, when He quickens them, gives them a voice and a tongue, and says to them, “Be dumb no more.” God has no dumb children. It is as much a part of their new nature to pray, as it is of a child to cry. They see their need of mercy and grace. They feel their emptiness and weakness. They cannot do otherwise than they do. They *must* pray.

I have looked carefully over the lives of God’s saints in the Bible. I cannot find one of whose history much is told us, from Genesis to Revelation, who was not a man of prayer. I find it mentioned as a characteristic of the godly, that “they call on the Father,” that “they call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” I find it recorded as a characteristic of the wicked, that “they call not upon the Lord.” (1 Peter 1:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Psalm 14:4)

I have read the lives of many eminent Christians who have been on earth since the Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, and some poor. Some were learned, and some unlearned. Some of them were Episcopalians, some Presbyterians, some Baptists, some Independents. Some were Calvinists, and some Arminians. Some have loved to use a liturgy, and some to use none. But one thing, I see, they all had in common. They have all been *men of prayer*.

I study the reports of Missionary Societies in our own times. I see with joy that heathen men and women are receiving the Gospel in various parts of the globe. There are conversions in Africa, in New Zealand, in Hindostan, in America. The people converted are naturally unlike one another in every respect. But one striking thing I observe at all the Missionary stations. The converted people *always* pray.

I do not deny that a man may pray without heart, and without sincerity. I do not for a moment pretend to say that the mere fact of a person praying proves everything about his soul. As in every other part of religion, so also in this, there is plenty of deception and hypocrisy.

But this I do say,—that not praying is a clear proof that a man is not yet a true Christian. He cannot really feel his sins. He cannot love God. He cannot feel himself a debtor to Christ. He cannot long after holiness. He cannot desire heaven. He has yet to be born again. He has yet to be made a new creature. He may boast confidently of election, grace, faith, hope, and knowledge, and deceive ignorant people. But you may rest assured it is all vain talk *if he does not pray*.

And I say furthermore, that of all the evidences of real work of the Spirit, a habit of hearty private prayer is one of the most satisfactory that can be named. A man may preach from false motives. A man may write books, and make fine speeches, and seem diligent in good works, and yet be a Judas Iscariot. But a man seldom goes into his closet, and pours out his soul before God in secret, unless he is in earnest. The Lord Himself has set His stamp on prayer as the best proof of a true conversion. When He sent Ananias to Saul in Damascus, He gave him no other evidence of his change of heart than this,— “*Behold, he prayeth.*” (Acts 9:11)

I know that much may go on in a man’s mind before he is brought to pray. He may have many convictions, desires, wishes, feelings, intentions, resolutions, hopes, and fears. But all these things are very uncertain evidences. They are to be found in ungodly people, and often come to nothing. In many a case they are not more

lasting than “the morning cloud, and the dew that goeth away.” (Hos. 6:4) A real hearty prayer, flowing from a broken and contrite spirit, is worth all these things put together.

I know that the elect of God are chosen to salvation from all eternity. I do not forget that the Holy Spirit, who calls them in due time, in many instances leads them by very slow degrees to acquaintance with Christ. But the eye of man can only judge by what it sees. I cannot call any one justified until he believes. I dare not say that any one believes until he prays. I cannot understand a dumb faith. The first act of faith will be to speak to God. Faith is to the soul what life is to the body. Prayer is to faith what breath is to life. How a man can live and not breathe is past my comprehension, and how a man can believe and not pray is past my comprehension too.

Let no one be surprised if he hears ministers of the Gospel dwelling much on the importance of prayer. This is the point we want to bring you to,—we want to know that you pray. Your views of doctrine may be correct. Your love of Protestantism may be warm and unmistakable. But still this may be nothing more than head knowledge and party spirit. The great point is this,— whether you can speak *to* God as well as speak *about* God.

(1) Let me speak a word *to those who do not pray*. I dare not suppose that all who read these pages will be praying people. If you are a prayerless person, suffer me to speak to you this day on God’s behalf.

Prayerless friend, I can only warn you; but I do warn you most solemnly. I warn you that you are in a position of fearful danger. If you die in your present state you are a lost soul. You will only rise again to be eternally miserable. I warn you that of all professing Christians you are most utterly without excuse. There is not a single good reason that you can show for living without prayer.

It is useless to say you *know not how* to pray. Prayer is the simplest act in all religion. It is simply speaking to God. It needs neither learning, nor wisdom, nor book-knowledge to begin it. It needs nothing but heart and will. The weakest infant can cry when he is hungry. The poorest beggar can hold out his hand for an alms, and does not wait to find fine words. The most ignorant man will find something to say to God, if he has only a mind.

It is useless to say you have *no convenient place* to pray in. Any man can find a place private enough, if he is disposed. Our Lord prayed on a mountain; Peter on the house-top; Isaac in the field; Nathanael under the fig-tree; Jonah in the whale’s belly. Any place may become a closet, an oratory, and a Bethel, and be to us the presence of God.

It is useless to say *you have no time*. There is plenty of time, if men will only employ it. Time may be short, but time is always long enough for prayer. Daniel had all the affairs of a kingdom on his hands, and yet he prayed three times a day. David was ruler over a mighty nation, and yet he says, “Evening and morning and at noon will I pray.” (Psalm 55:17) When time is really wanted, time can always be found.

It is useless to say you *cannot pray till you have faith and a new heart*, and that you must sit still and wait for them. This is to add sin to sin. It is bad enough to be unconverted and going to hell. It is even worse to say, “I know it, but I will not cry for mercy.” This is a kind of argument for which there is no warrant in Scripture. “Call ye upon the Lord,” saith Isaiah, “while He is near.” (Isaiah 55:6) “Take with you words, and come unto the Lord,” says Hosea. (Hosea 14:1) “Repent and pray,” says Peter to Simon Magus. (Acts 8:22) if you want faith and a new heart, go and cry to the Lord for them. The very attempt to pray has often been the quickening of a dead soul. Alas, there is no devil so dangerous as a dumb devil.

Oh, prayerless man, who and what are you that you will not ask anything of God? Have you made a covenant with death and hell? Are you at peace with the worm and the fire? Have you no sins to be pardoned? Have you no fear of eternal torment? Have you no desire after heaven? Oh, that you would awake from your present folly! Oh, that you would consider your latter end! Oh, that you would arise and call upon God! Alas, there is a day coming when men shall pray loudly, “Lord, Lord, open to us,” but all too late;—when many shall cry to the rocks to fall on them, and the hills to cover them, who would never cry to God. In all affection I warn you. Beware lest this be the end of your soul. Salvation is very near you. Do not lose heaven for want of asking.

Let me speak, lastly, *to those who do pray*. I trust that some who read this paper know well what prayer is, and have the Spirit of adoption. To all such I offer a few words of brotherly counsel and exhortation. The incense

offered in the tabernacle was ordered to be made in a particular way. Not every kind of incense would do. Let us remember this, and be careful about the matter and manner of our prayers.

If I know anything of a Christian's heart, you to whom I now speak are often sick of your own prayers. You never enter into the Apostle's words, "When I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:21), so thoroughly as you sometimes do upon your knees. You can understand David's words, "I hate vain thoughts." You can sympathize with that poor converted Hottentot, who was overheard praying, "Lord, deliver me from all my enemies; and, above all, from that bad man myself!"—There are few children of God who do not often find the season of prayer a season of conflict. The devil has special wrath against us when he sees us on our knees. Yet I believe that prayers which cost us no trouble should be regarded with great suspicion. I believe we are very poor judges of the goodness of our prayers, and that the prayer which pleases us *least* often pleases God *most*. Suffer me then, as a companion in the Christian warfare, to offer you a few words of exhortation. One thing, at least, we all feel,—we must pray. We cannot give it up: we must go on.

(a) I commend, then, to your attention the importance of *reverence and humility* in prayer. Let us never forget what we are, and what a solemn thing it is to speak with God. Let us beware of rushing into His presence with carelessness and levity. Let us say to ourselves, "I am on holy ground. This is no other than the gate of heaven. If I do not mean what I say, I am trifling with God. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Let us keep in mind the words of Solomon: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou on earth." (Eccles. 5:2) When Abraham spoke to God, he said, "I am dust and ashes." When Job spoke, he said, "I am vile." (Gen. 18:27; Job 40:4). Let us do likewise.

(b) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of praying *spiritually*. I mean by this that we should labour always to have the direct help of the Spirit in our prayers, and beware above all things of formality. There is nothing so spiritual but that it may become a form, and this is specially true of private prayer. We may insensibly get into the habit of using the fittest possible words, and offering the most Scriptural petitions; and yet we may do it all by rote, without feeling it, and walk daily round an old beaten path, like a horse in a mill. I desire to touch this point with caution and delicacy. I know that there are certain great things we daily want, and that there is nothing necessarily formal in asking for these things in the same words. The world, the devil, and our hearts, are daily the same. Of necessity we must daily go over old ground. But this I say,—we must be very careful on this point. If the skeleton and outline of our prayers be by habit almost a form, let us strive that the clothing and filling up of our prayers be as far as possible of the Spirit. As to praying out of a book, it is a habit I cannot praise. If we can tell our doctors the state of our bodies without a book, we ought to be able to tell the state of our souls to God. I have no objection to a man using crutches, when he is first recovering from a broken limb. It is better to use crutches than not to walk at all. But if I saw him all his life on crutches, I should not think it matter for congratulation. I should like to see him strong enough to throw his crutches away.

(c) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of making prayer *a regular business of life*. I might say something of the value of regular times in the day for prayer. God is a God of order. The hours for morning and evening sacrifice in the Jewish temple were not fixed as they were without a meaning. Disorder is eminently one of the fruits of sin. But I would not bring any under bondage. This only I say, that it is essential to your soul's health to make praying a part of the business of every twenty-four hours in your life. Just as you allot time to eating, sleeping, and business, so also allot time to prayer. Choose your own hours and seasons. At the very least, speak with God in the morning, before you speak with the world; and speak with God at night, after you have done with the world. But settle it down in your minds that prayer is one of the great things of every day. Do not drive it into a corner. Do not give it the scraps, and leavings, and parings of your day. Whatever else you make a business of, make a business of prayer.

(d) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of *perseverance in prayer*. Once having begun the habit, never give it up. Your heart will sometimes say, "We have had family prayers; what mighty harm if we leave private prayer undone?"—Your body will sometimes say, "You are unwell, or sleepy, or weary; you need not pray."—Your mind will sometimes say, "You have important business to attend to to-day: cut short your prayers." Look on all such suggestions as coming direct from the devil. They are all as good as saying, "Neglect

your soul.” I do not maintain that prayers should always be of the same length;—but I do say, let no excuse make you give up prayer. It is not for nothing that Paul said, “Continue in prayer,” and “Pray without ceasing.” (Colos. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17) He did not mean that men should be always on their knees, as an old sect, called the Euchite, supposed. But he did mean that our prayers should be like the continual burnt offering,—a thing steadily persevered in every day;—that it should be like seed-time and harvest, and summer and winter,—a thing that should unceasingly come round at regular seasons;—that it should be like the fire on the altar, not always consuming sacrifices, but never completely going out. Never forget that you may tie together morning and evening devotions by an endless chain of short ejaculatory prayers throughout the day. Even in company, or business, or in the very streets, you may be silently sending up little winged messengers to God, as Nehemiah did in the very presence of Artaxerxes. (Neh. 2:4) And never think that time is wasted which is given to God. A nation does not become poorer because it loses one year of working days in seven by keeping the Sabbath. A Christian never finds he is a loser in the long run by persevering in prayer.

(e) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of *earnestness* in prayer. It is not necessary that a man should shout, or scream, or be very loud, in order to prove that he is in earnest. But it is desirable that we should be hearty, and fervent, and warm, and ask as if we were really interested in what we were doing. It is the “effectual fervent” prayer that “availeth much,” and not the cold, sleepy, lazy, listless one. This is the lesson that is taught us by the expressions used in Scripture about prayer. It is called, “crying, knocking, wrestling, labouring, striving.” This is the lesson taught us by Scripture examples. Jacob is one. He said to the angel at Penueel, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” (Gen. 32:26) Daniel is another. Hear how he pleaded with God: “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God.” (Dan. 9:19) Our Lord Jesus Christ is another. It is written of Him, “In the days of His flesh He offered up prayer and supplication, with strong crying and tears.” (Heb. 5:7) Alas, how unlike is this to many of our supplications! How tame and lukewarm they seem by comparison! How truly might God say to many of us, “You do not really want what you pray for!” Let us try to amend this fault. Let us knock loudly at the donor of grace, like Mercy in “Pilgrim’s Progress,” as if we must perish unless heard. Let us settle it down in our minds, that cold prayers are a sacrifice without fire. Let us remember the story of Demosthenes, the great orator, when one came to him, and wanted him to plead his cause. He heard him without attention, while he told his story without earnestness. The man saw this, and cried out with anxiety that it was all true. “Ah!” said Demosthenes, “I believe you *now*.”

(f) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of *praying with faith*. We should endeavour to believe that our prayers are always heard, and that if we ask things according to God’s will, we shall always be answered. This is the plain command of our Lord Jesus Christ: “Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” (Mark 11:24). Faith is to prayer what the feather is to the arrow; without it prayer will not hit the mark. We should cultivate the habit of pleading promises in our prayers. We should take with us some promise, and say, “Lord, here is Thine own word pledged. Do for us as Thou hast said.” (2 Sam. 7:25) This was the habit of Jacob, and Moses, and David. The 119th Psalm is full of things asked, “according to Thy word.” Above all, we should cultivate the habit of expecting answers to our prayers. We should do like the merchant who sends his ships to sea. We should not be satisfied unless we see some return. Alas, there are few points on which Christians come short so much as this. The Church at Jerusalem made prayer without ceasing for Peter in prison; but when the prayer was answered, they would hardly believe it. (Acts 12:15) It is a solemn saying of old Traill’s, “There is no surer mark of trifling in prayer, than when men are careless what they get by prayer.”

(g) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of *boldness* in prayer. There is an unseemly familiarity in some men’s prayers, which I cannot praise. But there is such a thing as a holy boldness, which is exceedingly to be desired. I mean such boldness as that of Moses, when he pleads with God not to destroy Israel: Wherefore,” says he, “should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did He bring them out, to slay them in the mountains? Turn from Thy fierce anger.” (Exod. 32:12) I mean such boldness as that of Joshua, when the children of Israel were defeated before Ai: “What,” says he, “wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?” (Josh. 7:9) This is the boldness for which Luther was remarkable. One who heard him praying said, “What a spirit,—what

a confidence was in his very expressions! With such a reverence he sued, as one begging of God, and yet with such hope and assurance as if he spake with a loving father or friend.” This is the boldness which distinguished Bruce, a great Scotch divine of the 17th century. His prayers were said to be “like bolts shot up into heaven.” Here also I fear we sadly come short. We do not sufficiently realize the believer’s privileges. We do not plead as often as we might, “Lord, are we not Thine own people? Is it not for Thy glory that we should be sanctified? Is it not for Thine honour that thy Gospel should increase?”

(h) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of *fulness in prayer*. I do not forget that our Lord warns us against the example of the Pharisees, who for pretence made long prayers, and commands us, when we pray, not to use vain repetitions. But I cannot forget, on the other hand, that He has given His own sanction to large and long devotions, by continuing all night in prayer to God. At all events we are not likely in this day to err on the side of praying *too much*. Might it not rather be feared that many believers in this generation pray *too little*? Is not the actual amount of time that many Christians give to prayer in the aggregate very small? I am afraid these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily. I am afraid the private devotions of many are most painfully scanty and limited,—just enough to prove they are alive, and no more. They really seem to want little from God. They seem to have little to confess, little to ask for, and little to thank Him for. Alas, this is altogether wrong! Nothing is more common than to hear believers complaining that they do not get on. They tell us that they do not grow in grace, as they could desire. Is it not rather to be suspected that many have quite as much grace as they ask for? Is it not the true account of many, that they have little, because they ask little? The cause of their weakness is to be found in their own stunted, dwarfish, clipped, contracted, hurried, little, narrow, diminutive prayers. *They have not because they ask not*. Oh, reader, we are not straitened in Christ, but in ourselves. The Lord says, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” But we are like the king of Israel who smote on the ground thrice and stayed, when he ought to have smitten five or six times. (Psalm 81:10; 2 Kings 13:18, 19)

(i) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of *particularity in prayer*. We ought not to be content with great general petitions. We ought to specify our wants before the throne of grace. It should not be enough to confess we are sinners. We should name the sins of which our conscience tells us we are most guilty. It should not be enough to ask for holiness. We should name the graces in which we feel most deficient. It should not be enough to tell the Lord we are in trouble. We should describe our trouble and all its peculiarities. This is what Jacob did, when he feared his brother Esau. He tells God exactly what it is that he fears. (Gen. 32:11) This is what Eliezer did, when he sought a wife for his master’s son. He spreads before God precisely what he wants. (Gen. 24:12) This is what Paul did, when he had a thorn in the flesh. He besought the Lord. (2 Cor. 12:8) This is true faith and confidence. We should believe that nothing is too small to be named before God. What should we think of the patient who told his doctor he was ill, but never went into particulars? What should we think of the wife who told her husband she was unhappy, but did not specify the cause? What should we think of the child who told his father he was in trouble, but nothing more? Let us never forget that Christ is the true bridegroom of the soul,—the true physician of the heart,—the real father of all His people. Let us show that we feel this, by being unreserved in our communications with Him. Let us hide no secrets from Him. Let us tell Him all our hearts.

(j) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of *intercession* in our prayers. We are all selfish by nature, and our selfishness is very apt to stick to us, even when we are converted. There is a tendency in us to think only of our own souls,—our own spiritual conflict,—our own progress in religion, and to forget others. Against this tendency we have all need to watch and strive, and not least in our prayers. We should study to be of a public spirit. We should stir ourselves up to name other names beside our own before the throne of grace. We should try to bear in our hearts the whole world,—the heathen,—the Jews,—the Roman Catholics,—the body of true believers,—the professing Protestant Churches,—the country in which we live,—the congregation to which we belong,—the household in which we sojourn,—the friends and relations we are connected with. For each and all of these we should plead. This is the highest charity. He loves me best who loves me in his prayers. This is for our soul’s health. It enlarges our sympathies and expands our hearts. This is for the benefit of the Church. The wheels of all machinery for extending the Gospel are oiled by prayer. They do as much for

the Lord's cause who intercede like Moses on the mount, as they do who fight like Joshua in the thick of the battle. This is to be like Christ. He bears the names of His people on His breast and shoulders as their High Priest before the Father. Oh, the privilege of being like Jesus! This is to be a true helper to ministers. If I must needs choose a congregation, give me a people that prays.

(k) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of *thankfulness* in prayer. I know well that asking God is one thing, and praising God is another. But I see so close a connection between prayer and praise in the Bible, that I dare not call that true prayer in which thankfulness has no part. It is not for nothing that Paul says, "By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God." (Phil. 4:6) "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving. (Coloss. 4:2) It is of mercy that we are not in hell. It is of mercy that we have the hope of heaven. It is of mercy that we live in a land of spiritual light. It is of mercy that we have been called by the Spirit, and not left to reap the fruit of our own ways. It is of mercy that we still live, and have opportunities of glorifying God actively or passively. Surely, these thoughts should crowd on our minds whenever we speak with God. Surely, we should never open our lips in prayer without blessing God for that free grace by which we live, and for that loving-kindness which endureth for ever. Never was there an eminent saint who was not full of thankfulness. St. Paul hardly ever writes an Epistle without beginning with thankfulness. Men like Whitfield in the last century, and Bickersteth, and Marsh, and Haldane Stewart, in our own time, were ever running over with thankfulness. Oh, if we would be bright and shining lights in our day, we must cherish a spirit of praise! And above all, let our prayers be thankful prayers.

(l) I commend to you, in the last place, the importance of *watchfulness over your prayers*. Prayer is that point of all others in religion at which you must be on your guard. Here it is that true religion begins: here it flourishes, and here it decays. Tell me what a man's prayers are, and I will soon tell you the state of his soul. Prayer is the spiritual pulse: by this the spiritual health may always be tested. Prayer is the spiritual weather-glass: by this we may always know whether it is fair or foul with our hearts. Oh, let us keep an eye continually upon our private devotions! Here is the pith, and marrow, and backbone of our practical Christianity. Sermons, and books, and tracts, and committee meetings, and the company of good men, are all good in their way; but they will never make up for the neglect of private prayer. Mark well the places, and society, and companions, that unhinge your hearts for communion with God, and make your prayers drive heavily. *There be on your guard*. Observe narrowly what friends and what employments leave your soul in the most spiritual frame, and most ready to speak with God. *To these cleave and stick fast*. If you will only take care of your prayers, I will engage that nothing shall go very wrong with your soul.

I offer these points for private consideration. I do it in all humility. I know no one who needs to be reminded of them more than I do myself. But I believe them to be God's own truth, and I should like myself and all I love to feel them more.

I want the times we live in to be praying times. I want the Christians of our day to be praying Christians. I want the Church of our age to be a praying Church. My heart's desire and prayer in sending forth this paper is to promote a spirit of prayerfulness. I want those who never prayed yet, to arise and call upon God; and I want those who do pray, to improve their prayers every year, and to see that they are not getting slack, and praying amiss.

Taken From: *Practical Religion* by J.C. Ryle, a Baker Book House Publication

THE VITAL PLACE OF THE PRAYER MEETING

Erroll Hulse

It is said that the weekly prayer meeting is the spiritual barometer for any local church. You can tell with a fair degree of accuracy what the church is like by the demeanour or substance of the weekly prayer meeting. Is there genuine evangelistic concern? If so it will be expressed in the prayers. Is there a heartfelt longing for the conversion of unconverted family members? If so that is sure to surface. Is there a world vision and a fervent desire for revival and the glory of our Redeemer among the nations of the world? Such a burden cannot be suppressed. Is there a heart agony about famine and war and the need for the gospel of peace among the suffering multitudes of mankind? The church prayer meeting will answer that question. Intercession in the prayer meeting will soon reveal a loving church that cares for those who are oppressed and weighed down with trials and burdens. Those bearing trials too painful or personal to be described in public will nevertheless find comfort in the prayer meeting, for there the Holy Spirit is especially at work.

A Daily Church Prayer Meeting

One of the results of the revival in Korea is the multiplication of daily early morning prayer meetings. I questioned a Korean pastor recently and he assured me that daily early morning prayer meetings (5am in summer and 6am in winter) are part of the lifestyle of evangelical Christians of all denominations. Are these Koreans more angels than men?! Yet Bob Sheehan told me that as a boy he was impressed by the devotion of his father, a working man who laboured from 7am to 7pm daily, yet attended without fail a prayer meeting at 6am on his way to work!

In 1866 Spurgeon instituted daily prayer meetings at the Tabernacle, 7 every morning and again 7:30 each evening.¹ The main Tabernacle prayer meeting took place on Monday evenings attended by over 3,000. To provide for participation there was an obvious need of supplementary times of prayer for smaller groups within the church.

The book *Only a Prayer Meeting*² by C. H. Spurgeon consists mostly of brief addresses given at the Monday evening prayer meeting, but does not describe the mechanics of how the church prayer meeting functioned with so many present. Visitors to Romania have observed that in their large church prayer meetings it is the custom to designate a section of the assembled company as solely responsible for the prayers. In this way those in one part of a gallery or one section of the seating on the lower deck are responsible to pray out with enough volume to reach the corners of the auditorium. Prayers are fervent and in rapid succession.

The Theology of Prayer

'Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God *for the things agreeable to his will*, in the name of Christ, *by the help of his Spirit*, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.'³ How can we be in accord with the will of the Holy Spirit unless he creates those desires in us? When the Holy Spirit works powerfully then there is not enough time for everyone who wishes to participate. When he is absent then spiritual deadness prevails. How can we express the burdens and concerns of the Holy Spirit except by prayer? The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we should pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans which words cannot express (Rom 8:26).

Spiritual repentance is the creation of the Spirit. 'They shall look upon the One whom they have pierced and mourn and grieve bitterly for him' (Zech 12:10). There was no repentance in King David concerning his adultery and murder until he was convicted by the Holy Spirit. Psalm 51 was the outcome. Desire for the glory of Christ and a burden to pray for his Kingdom to prosper is also the creation of the Holy Spirit. At the same time such concern is our responsibility. It is sinful to be fatalistic and say to ourselves, 'Well, we will be more

attentive and lively in prayer when the Spirit comes to us!’ No! That will not do! We are exhorted to stir ourselves up to prayer, but at the same time we must rely on the Spirit.

But, we reason, will our prayers achieve anything of moment? Hasn’t the Lord made up his mind what he is going to do? This brings us back to the tension of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We must uphold both to the full. We are answerable to the Lord by way of dependence upon him through his Word and by prayer. That is our way of life, and the extent to which we follow that will reflect in our entire way of life and be the measure of our peace, joy, and happiness.

Prayer as dependence upon the Father and the means of guidance is seen in the prayer life of our Lord. He is divine, yet his divinity did not lessen his need to pray. He was in prayer at the time of his baptism (Luke 3:21). He rose very early while it was still dark to go to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35). He spent a whole night in prayer before choosing his apostles (Luke 6:12). He was in prayer when he was transfigured (Luke 9:29). Prayer was the means of his agonising his way to victory in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44).

The phrase ‘prepared to do any good work’ (2 Tim 2:21) literally ‘having been prepared to every good work,’⁴ suggests that all that we do requires preparation in prayer. All that we do requires spiritual motivation and wisdom. Our works therefore need to be prepared in prayer. Obviously we must be governed by common sense. We can’t close our eyes for prayer every time we come to traffic lights. Prayerfulness is an attitude and there are all kinds of prayer (Eph 6:18; Phil 4:6).

Is There Adequate Church Prayer Meeting Time?

Consider the subjects that cry out for intercession: family concerns and anxieties, church issues, the ongoing evangelistic scenario, sister churches and ministers in particular, regional and national concerns, the world of missions, missionaries including members of our own church labouring abroad, the global situation with several nations experiencing the agony of civil war, drought, famine, or extreme poverty, the desperate need for stable government and rulers of integrity (1 Tim 2:1-4).

If we are not to succumb to a feeling of being overwhelmed we will need a structure of subjects. Specific prayer should be encouraged and individuals should be mentioned by name. Note the individuals named by Paul in Romans 16; and to the Colossians whom he had never met he wrote, ‘For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have never stopped praying for you’ (Col 1:6).

Is one prayer meeting a week sufficient? If we are to pray in a way which is worthy of so great a Majesty should a local church not offer more opportunity for praying together? Those with family responsibility find it difficult enough to attend every second week. Some churches have a short prayer meeting before the Sunday evening service, an excellent preparation for worship, but hardly adequate if that is the only time for some church members.

What About the Weak?

In most churches there are members who never attend the communion service and who rarely if ever attend the weekly prayer meeting. What can be done? Spiritual life and growth is akin to horticulture. Plants can be nurtured and cultured but there is no way that they can be forced to grow. The Lord is gentle with the weak, *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out (Isa 42:3,4).*

There are some in the body who possess the gift of exhortation (Rom 12:8). That gift wisely employed can be most effective for stirring believers to faithful attendance at the prayer meeting.

Is the Weekly Prayer Meeting Marked in Your Diary?

It is customary to mark engagements in our diary. If meeting the King with our fellow believers is important it will surely be reserved in our diary. Invitations to dinner or to recreational events will have to be fitted in

elsewhere. Jesus says that we have not because we fail to ask (James 4:2). Is the audience with our Monarch esteemed by you as a priority? Does your diary reflect that fact?

The Importance of Versatile Leadership at the Church Prayer Meeting

In a previous article with the title *A Lively and Edifying Prayer Meeting*⁵ I urged that a leadership of common sense is needed up front for an edifying prayer meeting. The leader must come thoroughly prepared himself, ready to encourage with appropriate scriptures and information and exhortation. He should encourage participation. Also he may need to remind participants not to be too long, but not so short as to be trite. Also it may be needful to go privately to individual participants who fall into a bad habit of which there are several. For instance the eccentricity of preaching instead of praying or the oddity of telling the Lord all the biblical texts which have been memorised when he obviously knows them already. Information before prayer, compressed, crisp, clear, is vital. Those who come tired and who feel spiritually apathetic or perhaps downright rebellious need pithy biblical reminders of what praying is all about. The leader up front must be in touch with the feelings of those present.

Helpful examples can be cited of means employed to stimulate prayer. A well prepared brief information focus is hard to beat. For instance a five minute feature using an atlas and extracts from OPERATION WORLD is the practice at the midweek prayer meeting at Kings Chapel, West Chester, USA. It is most effective as a 'prayer quickener.' The Baptist Church in Hillcrest, Natal, South Africa, do the same thing in the Lord's Day morning service and include the outline as part of the printed bulletin—excellent for getting out of parochiality and promoting a vision for world missions.

Leaders should encourage freedom so that there is no embarrassment for those who can only stay for a while. The notice used for the prayer meeting which proved the genesis of the 1858 revival in New York read as follows:

Daily Prayer Meeting

from 12 to 1 o'clock

STOP

5, 10, 20 mins

or the whole hour as your time permits

The Place of the Church Prayer Meeting Illustrated from the Book of Acts

The place and importance of the church prayer meeting can be seen from the opening chapters of the book of Acts. Pentecost was born out of the church prayer meeting. We are not told how often the disciples adjourned for refreshments but we know they continued earnestly in prayer until the Holy Spirit came in power. How many today really believe in praying for revival? Soon after Pentecost when there were serious setbacks, fierce persecution threatened the cause, and the apostles were forbidden to preach any more. What could be done? There was only one answer. The church prayer meeting. They got together and told the Lord all about it. He responded by giving the building a gentle shake, a token of his support! Later persecution raged again. James was beheaded. Peter was arrested and imprisoned. What did the disciples do? They had only one recourse. The church prayer meeting. As on former occasions it was daily and continued for eight days right up to the eve of the hour when Peter was to be executed. In answer to their intercession the Lord sent an angel who took Peter out of his chains and through the locked doors as effortlessly as a great liner sails out to sea.

Where did Peter go when he found himself free? Why, he went to the church prayer meeting! How did he know where to find the prayer meeting? Do you think that the leading apostle would not know where to find the prayer meeting? And when he arrived it took time to get in because they could hardly believe it was Peter, alive

and well! Why did they find it hard to believe? Because like us they only half believed in the effectual nature of prayer.

Further on in the book of Acts we learn that the first church in Europe had its genesis in a prayer meeting for women (Acts 16:13).

Revival and Improvements at the Church Prayer Meeting

We stand in urgent need of revival personally, in our churches, nationally, and internationally. When revival comes he who is the Spirit will almost certainly begin to stir us in our private prayers and in our church prayer meetings. There is room for occasional united church prayer meetings. The biblical base for a concert of prayer involving several churches is described in the book *Give Him no Rest*.⁶ Spiritual impetus can come from other evangelical churches.

Revivals always seem to have their genesis in prayer meetings. I conclude by recommending a book just published by the Banner of Truth, *The Power of Prayer*.⁷ Written by an eye witness, Samuel Prime, it describes how a great national revival began with a small prayer meeting. The local church weekly prayer meeting is the best place to call upon the Lord to revive his work. He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Eph 3:20).

NOTES

1 *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, Holden Pike, Banner of Truth, 1992 (The original six volumes are bound in two in this new set. The reference is found in the original vol 3 page 183).

2 *Only a Prayer Meeting*, C H Spurgeon, 367 pages, Pilgrim Publishers, Box 66, Pasadena, TX 77501, USA.

3 This definition is composed from the Larger and Shorter Catechisms and cited in B. M. Palmer's book *Theology of Prayer*.

4 *hetoimasmēnon* is a perfect passive.

5 *Reformation Today* 95, now available only in the bound volume 91-110.

6 *Give Him no Rest*, Erroll Hulse, pages 90ff and 124ff. EP. 144pp.

7 *The Power of Prayer, The New York Revival of 1858*, Samuel Prime, 263pp bound.

