

Believing Prayer

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

“And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” 1 John 5:15

Believing prayer is prevailing, successful prayer. It assails the kingdom of heaven with holy violence and carries it as by storm. It believes that God has both the heart and the arm, both the love that moves Him and the power that enables Him, to do all and to grant all that His pleading child requests of Him. We may mention a few of the attributes of believing prayer.

It is *real prayer*, because it is the expression of need. It springs from feeling the need for the mercy which it craves.

It is *sincere* prayer, welling up from a soul schooled in the knowledge of its deep poverty and need.

Oh, how much passes for real prayer which is not prayer! It is not the breathing of the soul, nor the language of the heart, nor the expression of need. There is no true approach to God, no thirsting for Christ, no desire for holiness. Were God to bestow the things which had been so thoughtlessly and heartlessly asked, the individual would be taken by surprise.

The prayer of faith is *importunate and persevering*. It will not take a refusal. It will not be put off with a denial. Thus Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the covenant until he prevailed: “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen 32:26). The woman of Canaan would not release the Savior from her hold until He had granted her request: “If I am a dog, satisfy me with the crumbs.” And thus, too, the man who besieged the house of his friend at midnight for bread, and went not away until he obtained it, and the oppressed widow who sought justice at the hands of the unrighteous and reluctant judge until he righted her, illustrate the nature of earnest, persevering prayer that prevails with God, and obtains the blessing.

Believing prayer is *humble*. How low in the dust the truly importunate suppliant lies before God! There is nothing of bold flippancy or unholy freedom in the cases of earnest prayer that we have cited. There is no irreverence of manner, familiarity of speech, or rushing into God’s holy presence as if He were an equal; but rather, a consciousness and awe of the divine presence, a profound spirit of self-abasement which seems to say, “How dreadful is this place! Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand

upon my mouth. Oh, how lowly is the heart from which arises the incense of believing prayer! How it feels utterly unworthy of the least of all the Lord's mercies, and unfit to be a channel of grace to others. With what trembling it lies prostrate upon the spot where God, the Triune God, is passing by! "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Ecc 5:2).

Submission is another attribute of the prayer of faith. Its utmost range of request is bounded and its deepest fervor of spirit is chastened by submission to the divine will. It presumes neither to dictate to God, nor to counsel Him. It leaves the mode of answering its petitions—the time, the place, the way—with God. Trained, perhaps, in the school of bitter disappointment, it has learned to see as much love in God's heart in withholding as in granting its requests, as much wisdom in delaying as in promptly bestowing the blessing. And, seeing that delays in prayer are not denials of prayer, he that believeth maketh not haste to anticipate the divine mind, or to precede the divine blessing. "Thy will, not mine, be done," the praying lip of faith always breathes.

Yet another and the crowning attribute of believing prayer is that it is *presented in the name of Jesus*. As it is life from God through Christ, so through Christ it is life breathed back again to God. It approaches the divine Majesty by the "new and living way," its mighty argument, and its one prevailing plea being the atoning blood of Jesus. This is the ground of its boldness, this the reason of its nearness, and this the secret of its power and success. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name," observes Christ, "that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (Joh 14:13).

Adapted from the text of Octavius Winslow's *Morning Thoughts*,
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