

THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

“Men ought always to pray.”—Luke 18:1

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 is as important as private prayer...

1. Prayer is absolutely needful to a man’s salvation. I say absolutely needful, and I say so advisedly.¹ I am not speaking now of infants and idiots.² 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. 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, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Act 16:31). 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 great multitude, which no man could 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

¹ **advisedly** – deliberately and after consideration.

² **idiots** – persons so deficient in mental ability as to be incapable of ordinary acts of reasoning or conduct.

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. 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 day and night unto him” (Luk 18:7). The Holy Spirit, Who makes them new creatures, works in them the feeling of adoption and makes them cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). The Lord Jesus, when He quickens them, gives them a voice and a tongue and says to them, “Be dumb³ 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 upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” I find it recorded as a characteristic of the wicked that they “call not upon the LORD” (1Pe 1:17; 1Co 1:2; Psa 14:4).

I have read the lives of many eminent⁴ 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 Calvinists⁵ and some Arminians.⁶ Some have loved to use a liturgy,⁷ and some to use none. But one thing, I see, they all had in common. They have all been *men of prayer*...

³ **dumb** – without the power of speech.

⁴ **eminent** – famous and admired.

⁵ **Calvinists** – those who believe, along with the French-born Swiss Reformer John Calvin (1509-1664), that the Bible teaches the supreme authority of the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God, predestination, and the doctrines of grace.

⁶ **Arminians** – followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), Dutch theologian, born in Oudewater, the Netherlands.

⁷ **liturgy** – public worship according to set forms and rites.

I do not deny that a man may pray without heart and without sincerity. I do not pretend for a moment 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.⁸

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*.

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, make fine speeches, 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 [Saul's] change of heart than this: "Behold, he prayeth" (Act 9:11)...

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...I cannot call any one justified until he believes. I dare not say that any one believes until he prays...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.

From *Practical Religion*, The Banner of Truth Trust,
www.banneroftruth.org.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Anglican bishop and author; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.



It is a good fall when a man falls on his knees.—*Charles Spurgeon*

⁸ See FGB 193, *Hypocrisy*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

WHAT TRUE PRAYER IS

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

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 extolled¹ with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psa 66:17-18). Part of the exercise of prayer is sincerity, without which God does not accept it as prayer (Psa 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 [lack] of this made the Lord reject the prayers of those mentioned in Hosea 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 pretense, 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 guile²” (Joh 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 unfeigned³ spirit before the Lord. The prayer that has this in it as one of the principal ingre-

¹ **extolled** – exalted by praise.

² **guile** – deceit; treachery.

³ **unfeigned** – sincere.

dients is the prayer that God regards. Thus, “The prayer of the upright is his delight” (Pro 15:8).

And why must sincerity be one of the essentials of prayer that 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;⁴ to condemn itself plainly, without dissembling;⁵ to cry to God heartily, without complimenting. “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning⁶ 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-labor⁷ that it regards; for sincerity, like God, looks at the heart. That is where prayer comes from—*if it is 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,⁸ 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 [lack] 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 (1Sa 1:10; Psa 69:3). David roars, cries, weeps, faints at heart, fails at the eyes, loses his moisture⁹ (Psa 38:8-10). Hezekiah mourns like a dove (Isa 38:14). Ephraim bemoans himself (Jer 31:18). Peter weeps bitterly (Mat 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” (Psa 116:3-4). And in another place, “My sore ran in the night” (Psa 77:2). Again, “I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning

⁴ **equivocation** – a statement that is vague and often deliberately misleading.

⁵ **dissembling** – disguising one’s true character or feelings.

⁶ **bemoaning** – expressing sorrow.

⁷ **lip-labor** – empty talk, especially vain repetition of words in prayer.

⁸ **prating** – to talk in a silly way and at length about nothing important.

⁹ **moisture** – vitality and strength.

all the day long” (Psa 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, praise, and admire the great God for His lovingkindness 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 lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Psa 103:1-4). 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” (Phi 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 this prayer unto thee” (2Sa 7:27). This provoked Jacob, David, Daniel, with others, not by fits and starts¹⁰ nor yet in a foolish, frothy¹¹ way, but mightily, fervently, and continually, to groan out their conditions before the Lord, as being sensible of their [need], 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. O, what heat, strength, life, vigor, and affection there is in true prayer! “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psa 42:1). “I have longed after thy precepts” (Psa 119:40). “I have longed for thy salvation” (Psa 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” (Psa 84:2). “My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times” (Psa 119:20). O, what affection is here

¹⁰ **fits and starts** – stopping and starting.

¹¹ **frothy** – empty; vain.

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 vehemency¹² in it. James calls this the fervent or the working prayer. So again, “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly” (Luk 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. 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-labor and bodily exercise, mumbling over a few imaginary prayers. When the affections are indeed engaged in prayer, then the whole man is engaged, and in such sort that the soul will spend itself, as it were, rather than go without that good desired, even communion and solace¹³ with Christ. Hence it is that the saints have spent their strength and lost their lives rather than go without the blessing (Psa 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 who 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!...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 unbosoming¹⁴ 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” (Psa 38:9). 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” (Psa 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”

¹² **vehemency** – passionate force.

¹³ **solace** – comfort in a time of distress, sadness, or disappointment.

¹⁴ **unbosoming** – bringing out of the heart; to make known one’s thoughts and desires.

(Psa 62:8). This is the prayer to which the promise is made for the delivering of a poor creature out of captivity and thralldom.¹⁵ “But 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” (Deu 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 Whom it goes. “When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psa 42:2). 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” (1Ti 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 unto me, and save me. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, 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” (Psa 71:1-5). Many speak of God; but right prayer makes God the hope, stay,¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (Joh 14:13-14). 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, O LORD”—that is, for thy Christ’s sake—“pardon mine iniquity; for it is great” (Psa 25:11). But now, it is not

¹⁵ **thralldom** – the condition of being under the control of another person; slavery.

¹⁶ **stay** – support; an object of reliance.

¹⁷ **Lord of Sabaoth** – Lord of the Armies; Lord of Hosts.

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). So he that comes to God through Christ must be enabled to know Christ. "I pray thee," says Moses, "shew me now thy way, that I may know thee" (Exo 33:13).

This Christ, none but the Father can reveal (Mat 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 (Mat 16:16). Hence it is that David so often terms Christ his shield, buckler,¹⁸ tower, fortress, rock of defense (Psa 18:2; 27:1; 28:1). Not only because *by* [Christ,] he overcame his enemies, but also because *through* [Christ,] he found favor with God the Father. So God says to Abraham, "Fear not, Abram: 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 (Joh 3:5, 7; 1:12). 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, intercession¹⁹—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 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 concurrence²⁰ of them. Though it be [most] eloquent, yet without these

¹⁸ **buckler** – a small round shield.

¹⁹ **intercession** – pleading on behalf of another.

²⁰ **concurrence** – happening together at the same time.

things, such prayer is rejected of God. For without a sincere, sensible, affectionate, pouring out of the heart to God, it is but lip-labor; and if it be not through Christ, it falls far short of ever sounding well in the ears of God. So also, if it is 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 or church in the world that can come to God in prayer but by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. “For through him [*Christ*] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18). Wherefore, Paul says, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: 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; 1Co 3:10; 2Co 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 prelate²¹ in [the Roman Catholic tradition], and could as well have made a Common Prayer Book²² as those who at first composed this. [Paul and his companions were] not a whit²³ 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, 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

²¹ **prelate** – a minister or priest of the higher order, as an archbishop, bishop, or patriarch.

²² **Book of Common Prayer** – the official service book of the Anglican tradition, compiled by Thomas Cranmer and others, first issued in 1549.

²³ **a whit** – the least bit.

faith, for justification²⁴ by grace, and a truly sanctified²⁵ heart? We know none of these things. “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” (1Co 2:11). But here, alas! the apostles speak of inward and spiritual things, which the world knows not (Isa 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. Therefore, he adds, “We know not what we should pray for as we ought”; but the Spirit helps our infirmities with sighs and groans that 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—were fain to come off²⁶ with sighs and groans, falling short of expressing their mind but with sighs and groans that 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 (1Ki 12:26-33). “But,” says Paul, “we must pray as we ought.” 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 may imagine and devise of his own brain is one thing; what [he is] commanded and ought to do is another.

Many ask and have not because they ask amiss;²⁷ and [they] so are never nearer the enjoying of those things they petition for (Jam 4:3). It is not to pray at random that will cause God to answer. While pray-

²⁴ **justification** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32) See FGB 187, *Justification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

²⁵ **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God’s Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 34) See FGB 215, *Sanctification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

²⁶ **fain to come off** – glad under the circumstances to succeed.

²⁷ **amiss** – wrongly; with wrong motives.

er is making, God is searching the heart to see from what root and spirit it arises (1Jo 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” (Rom 8:27). For in that which is according to His will only, He hears us, and in nothing else. Only the Spirit 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 (Mat 6:6-8). Prayer is only true when it is within the compass²⁸ 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 unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.” And again, “My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word” (Psa 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” (119:49). Indeed, the Holy Ghost does not immediately quicken and stir up the heart of the Christian without the Word, but by, with, and through [it], by bringing that to the heart and by opening that whereby the man is provoked to go to the Lord to tell Him how it is with him, to argue, and to supplicate,²⁹ 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.,³⁰ the writings of Jeremiah, “the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan 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

²⁸ **within the compass** – within the boundaries or limits.

²⁹ **supplicate** – ask for humbly or earnestly.

³⁰ **viz.** – abbreviation for Latin *videlicet*: that is; namely.

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. “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Mat 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” (1Co 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 to the honor of God, Christ’s advancement, or His people’s benefit. For God, Christ, and His people are so linked together that if the good of the one be prayed for, [then] 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 in prayer [for] that which Christ has purchased with His blood; and also [for] 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 her temptations, that God would let nothing be too hard for her; that all things might work together for her 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 (Phi 2:15). 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 eminently³¹ 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 righteous-

³¹ **eminently** – plainly; obviously.

ness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Phi 1:9-11). But a short prayer, you see, and yet full of good desires for the church from the beginning to the end that she 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 her 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 (Mat 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, [and] sometimes Satan may get advantage of them, [tempting] them to pray for that which, if they had it, would prove neither to God’s glory nor [to] His people’s good. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing 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” (1Jo 5:14-15), that is, [if we ask] in the Spirit of grace and supplication. 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” (1Co 2:11).

From *Prayer*, The Banner of Truth Trust,
www.banneroftruth.org.

John Bunyan (1628-1688): English Baptist preacher and influential author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and numerous other titles; born at Elstow near Bedford, England. (Bunyan’s complete works are available at www.chapellibrary.org.)



Here is prayer under three aspects. It is the appeal of creaturely dependence; it is the wail of a sinner’s guilt; it is the articulate worship of an intelligent soul.—*B. M. Palmer*.

GOD'S POWER FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Eugene Bradford (1915-2010)

IT is precisely because of the redemptive work of Christ that Paul can pray for the church. This is very clear in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Colossians: "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (Col 1:3-5).

It is because they have come to faith in Christ and have manifested that faith in love to all the saints that Paul gives thanks to God and prays for the Colossian Christians. The report of their faith in Christ prompts him to prayer on their behalf, and he is thankful for the hope laid up for them in heaven, which hope is theirs because they have heard it in the word of the truth of the gospel. There is no other basis upon which he may pray or give thanks for them. The actual prayer of Paul for them demonstrates that the confidence with which he prays is based upon the redemption accomplished through the work of Christ. After praying that they might have wisdom, moral uprightness, increase in the knowledge of God, and strengthened patience, longsuffering, and joyfulness, Paul concludes by "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:12-14). From this passage, then, there can be no doubt that all of Paul's thanksgiving for them could be summed up in the fact that they have come to the experience of faith in Christ Jesus, which brought them the forgiveness of sins and a heavenly inheritance. For this reason also he was warranted in supplicating God that all the Christian graces would adorn their lives; and furthermore he has been constrained to pray for them ever since the day he heard of their faith.

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, the warrant for and the duty of intercession for the church by the apostle Paul are implied even more fully. Here again, noting that he has heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love to all the saints, he assures them that he unceasingly gives thanks for them and makes mention of them in his pray-

ers. The specific petitions he makes for them are expressed in language similar to that used in the Colossian prayer, but he adds his desire that they may know “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe” (Eph 1:19). But what is so impressive is his description of that power in terms of its historical manifestation in the resurrection of Christ from the dead and His exaltation to the right hand of God. He prays that “ye may know... what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:19-23). To paraphrase, “May you experience the same power that was demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ and in His exaltation to heaven, for indeed, Christ was exalted just so that He might be head over all things for the eternal welfare of His Church.” What confidence is implicit in this prayer! Christ raised from the dead by the power of God! Christ set at God’s own right hand in the heavenly places! Christ exalted far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named! Christ having all things put under His feet! And Christ given to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the mystical complement of His person. Since Christ has thus been triumphant over all other power in order to bring about the good of His Church, which is His body, surely Paul is warranted in praying that all the members of the body may experience the power of God that was the instrument in the exaltation of the head. The head and the body are inseparable. There is a mystical, vital union that has been effected by the power of God and experienced in the members of the body by faith. As surely as God’s power exalted the head, so surely will the body and all the members thereof experience God’s power.

From *Intercessory Prayer: A Ministerial Task*, Simpson Publishing Company,
www.simpsonpublishing.com.

Eugene Bradford (1915-2010): American Christian Reformed minister; born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“That your prayers be not hindered.”—1 Peter 3:7

TO many persons this discourse will have but little reference because they do not pray. I fear also [that] there are some others whose prayers are so worthless that if they were hindered, it would be of no very material consequence. It is even possible that their being forced to omit them [would] arouse them out of a self-righteous lethargy. Merely to bow the knee in formality, to go through a form of devotion in a careless or half-hearted manner is rather to mock God than to worship Him. It would be a terrible theme for contemplation to consider how much of vain repetition and heartless “prayer-saying” the Lord is wearied with from day to day. I would, however, most solemnly remind those who do not truly pray that the wrath of God abideth on them. He who never seeks for mercy has certainly never found it.

Conscience acknowledges it a righteous thing with God that He should not give to those who will not ask. It is the smallest thing that can be expected of us that we should humbly ask for the favors we need. If we refuse to do so, it is but right that the door of grace should be closed so long as men refuse to knock. Prayer is no hard requirement: it is the natural duty of a creature to its Creator, the simplest homage that human want can pay to divine liberality. Those who refuse to render it may well expect that one of these days when in dire extremity they begin to bemoan their folly, they will hear a voice from their insulted God, saying, “I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded...[Therefore,] I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Pro 1:24, 26)...If a sinner will not plead the name of Jesus to which the promise of forgiveness is appended, if he will not bend his knee in penitential prayer and ask for pardon at the hand of God, none will wonder that he perishes for his folly. None will be able to accuse the Lord of too great severity when He casts away forever all prayerless souls. O, you who never pray, I *tremble* for you! Would to God you would tremble for yourselves, for there is cause enough for it.

To those who *do* pray, prayer is a most precious thing. It is the channel by which priceless blessings come to them, the window

through which a gracious God supplies their needs. To believers, prayer is the great means of soul enrichment—it is the vessel that trades with heaven and comes home from the celestial country, laden with treasures of far greater worth than ever Spanish galleon brought from the land of gold. Indeed, to true believers, prayer is so invaluable that [Peter used the danger of hindering it] as a motive why, in their marriage relationships and household concerns, they should behave themselves with great wisdom. He bids the husband “dwell” with his wife “according to knowledge,” and render loving honor to her, lest [it should hinder] their united prayers. Anything that hinders prayer must be wrong. If any management of the family, or want of management, is injuring our power in prayer, there is an urgent demand for an alteration! Husband and wife should pray together, as joint heirs of grace, and any temper or habit that hinders this is *evil*...

THERE IS SUCH A THING AS BEING HINDERED FROM PRAYER. That may be done by falling into a generally lax, lukewarm condition in reference to the things of God. When a man becomes cold, indifferent, and careless, one of the first things that will suffer will be his devotion. When a sick man is in a decline, his lungs and his voice suffer; so when a Christian is in a spiritual decline, the breath of prayer is affected, and the cry of supplication becomes weak. Prayer is the true gauge of spiritual power. To restrain prayer is dangerous and of deadly tendency. You may depend upon it that, take it for all in all, what you are upon your knees you really are before your God...If you are a man of earnest prayer, and especially if the spirit of prayer be in you, so that in addition to certain seasons of supplication your heart habitually talks with God, things are right with you. But if this is not the case and your prayers be “hindered,” there is something in your spiritual system that needs to be ejected or somewhat lacking that ought at once to be supplied...

Prayers may be hindered, next, by having too much to do. In this age, this is a very common occurrence. We man have too much business for ourselves. The quiet days of our contented forefathers are gone, and men allot to themselves an increasing drudgery. Not content to earn as much as is necessary for themselves and families, they must have much more than they can possibly enjoy for themselves or profitably use for others...Many a man who might have been of great service to the church of God becomes useless because he must branch out in some new direction in business, which takes up all his spare time. Instead of feeling that his first care should be, “How can I best glorify God?” his all-absorbing object is to “stretch his arms like seas

and grasp in all the shore"...The rich man in the parable had no time for prayer, for he was busy in planning new barns wherein to bestow his goods. Yet, he had to find time for dying when the Lord said, "This night shall thy soul be required of thee" (Luk 12:20). Beware, I pray you, of "the lusts of other things" (Mar 4:19), the [cancer] of riches, the greed insatiable that drives men into the snare of the devil. If it works you no other ill, it will do you mischief enough if thereby your prayers are hindered.

We may even have too much to do in God's house, and so hinder our prayers by being like Martha, cumbered¹ with much serving. I never heard of anyone who was cumbered with much praying. The more we do, the more we should pray, and prayer should balance our service, or rather, it should be the life-blood of every action, and saturate our entire life...I fear that some of us would do far more if we attempted less and prayed more about it. I even fear that some allow public religious engagements to override private communion with God: they attend too many sermons, too many conferences, too many Bible readings, too many committees, aye, and too many prayer meetings—all good in their way, but all acting injuriously when they cramp our *secret* prayer...Praying is the end of preaching, and woe to the man who, prizing the means more than the end, allows any other form of service to push his prayers into a corner.

There can be no doubt, also, that prayer is hindered by *having too little to do*...I said we might do too much, and I could not balance that truth unless I added that a very large proportion of Christians do too little. God has given them enough wealth to be able to retire from business. They have time upon their hands, and they have even to invent ways of spending that time; yet the ignorant require instructing, the sick [desire] visiting, the poor need helping. Should they not lay out their abundant leisure in the service of God? Would they not then be quickened in prayer? I wish that all could say with one of the Lord's saints, "Prayer is my business, and praise is my pleasure"; but I am sure they never will until the zeal of the Lord's house shall more fully consume them.

Some people hinder their prayers, again, by a [lack] of order. They get up a little too late, and they have to chase their cork all the day and never overtake it, but are always in a flurry, one duty tripping up the heels of another. They have no appointed time for retirement, too little space hedged about for communion with God; and, consequent-

¹ **cumbered** – distracted; overburdened.

ly, something or other happens, and prayer is forgotten.— nay, I hope not quite forgotten, but so slurred and hurried over that it amounts to little and brings them no blessing. I wish you would each keep a diary of how you pray next week, and see how much or rather *how little* time you spend with God out of the twenty-four hours. Much time goes at the table; how much at the mercy seat? Many hours are spent with men; how many with your Maker? You are [to some extent] with your friends on earth; how many minutes are you with your friend in heaven? You allow yourself space for recreation; what do you set apart for those exercises that in very truth re-create the soul?...

SECONDLY, WE MUST WATCH THAT WE BE NOT HINDERED IN PRAYER, WHEN WE ARE REALLY ENGAGED IN THAT HOLY WORK... Prayer can be hindered—very terribly hindered—in three ways: if we dishonor the Father *to* whom we pray, or the Son *through* whom we pray, or the Holy Ghost *by* whom we pray.

I say we can dishonor *the Father*. This can be done by inconsistency of life: if children of God are not obedient to the Father's will they must not wonder if they find it hard to pray. Something will rise in the throat that will choke their pleading. You cannot pour out your heart acceptably unless you believe in your heavenly Father. If you have hard thoughts of God; if you have a cold heart towards Him and a [lack] of reverence for His name; if you do not believe in that great willing heart that is waiting to bless you, your [lack] of love, faith, and reverence will strangle your prayers. Oh! When a man is fully at one with the great Father; when "Abba, Father," is the very spirit of his soul; when he speaks to God as one in Whom he places implicit trust and to Whose will he yields himself up perfectly and Whose glory is his soul's delight—then is he on a vantage ground in prayer. He will win what he wills of God. If he is not so with God, his prayers will limp most painfully.

So, brethren, if we be wrong with *Jesus* through Whom we pray, if we are in any measure self-righteous, if we delight in self and forget our Beloved, if we fancy that we can do without the Savior, if, therefore, we pray like complacent Pharisees, our prayers will be hindered. If we are not like the Savior; if we do not make Him our example; if we have none of His loving spirit; above all, if we crucify Him afresh and put Him to an open shame, and if we are ungrateful for the [gifts] we have already received, our prayers will be hindered...

So, again, with the *Holy Ghost*. There is never a prayer that God accepts but the Spirit first writes it in our hearts. True prayer is not so much our intercession as the Spirit of God making intercession in us.

Now, if we grieve the Spirit, He will not help us to pray; and if we attempt to pray for something that is contrary to the Spirit's holy, gracious, loving nature, we cannot expect Him to enable us to pray in contradiction to the mind of God. Take care that you vex not the Spirit of God in any way, especially by shutting your ears to His gentle warnings, His loving calls, His earnest entreaties, His tender [cautionary advice]. If you are deaf to the divine Comforter, He will be speechless to you. He will not help you to pray if you will not yield to Him in other matters.

Here let me interpose a remark. The Lord will hear any man's prayer who asks for mercy through the mediation of the Lord Jesus. He never despises the cry of the contrite. He is a God ready to hear all those who seek reconciliation...If they will repent and cry for mercy through Jesus Christ he will hear their cry and will save them; but if they are not first reconciled to Him, their prayers are empty wind. A man will grant his child's request, but he does not listen to strangers. He will listen to his friends, but not to enemies...Yet more, God does not hear all his children alike or alike at all times. Not every believer is mighty in prayer...When children of God find that their prayers do not succeed they should search, and they would soon discover a reason why their prayers are hindered.

First, there must be *holy living* in a believer if his prayers are greatly to succeed with God. Listen: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam 5:16). Note that point of *a righteous man*. Listen to our Savior (John 15:7): "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." There is an *if* there. If you do not do Christ's will, He will not do your will. This is not legal: it has nothing to do with the Law, but it is the gospel rule of Christ's house that obedience should have for its reward power in prayer...It is impossible for God to patronize² a guilty professor of religion by giving him success in prayer. The blind man whom Jesus healed most truly said, "If any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth" (Joh 9:31).

In addition to obedience, there must be *faith*. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb 11:6). "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (Jam 1:6)...Without faith, it is impossible to please

² **patronize** – to act as a father or supporter towards.

God in prayer or in anything else. It is the very backbone, sinew, and muscle of intercession.

Thirdly, there must be *holy desires*, or else prayer will be a failure. And those desires must be founded on a promise...So the successful prayer is the desire of a holy heart, sanctioned by the promise. True prayers are like those carrier pigeons that find their way so well: they cannot fail to go to heaven, for it is from heaven that they came. They are only going home.

Furthermore, if prayer is to speed, there must be *fervor and importunity*. It is written, “The effectual *fervent* prayer of the righteous man availeth much,” not the dead-and-alive prayer of the mere professor—not the prayer of one who does not care whether he is answered or not. There must be eagerness, intensity, the pouring out of the heart before God...You *must resolve to have it* with this boundary only—“the will of the Lord be done”— and you will succeed.

There must be, next, a *desire for God’s glory*. That is the white of the target; and if we do not shoot towards that, the arrow will avail nothing! We must earnestly desire what we ask because we believe it will glorify God to give it to us. If we are wholly living unto God, our prayers will run side by side with His purposes, and none of them will fall to the ground. “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Psa 37:4).

We must also have *holy expectancy, or we shall hinder prayer*. The man who shoots must look to see where his arrow goes. We must direct our prayer unto God, and look up. Eyeing the Lord Jesus in all, we must look to succeed through the merits of the Redeemer “If we believe that he heareth us, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him.”

God grant us grace as Christians to walk with God in the power of His Spirit, resting alone on Jesus; and may He make each one of us mighty in prayer. A man, whom God has taught to pray mightily, is one with God’s mind and is God’s hand moving among the sons of men. When he acts, God acts in him.

From a sermon delivered on Lord’s Day morning, September 13, 1871,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist; history’s most widely read preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.



INTERCESSION: THE PASTOR'S TASK

Eugene Bradford (1915-2010)

Intercession is no more peculiar to the apostolic office than to the permanent office of minister. It is clearly a part of the minister's task to give himself to prayer for his flock. In this age of activism, of programs and meetings and drives, it is easy to bypass this activity that is to be performed largely in secret. But the ministers who neglect this function, together with their congregations, will pay a very high price.

Ministers of the gospel, and those who aspire to the sacred office, would do well to capture the spirit of a voice out of the past, that of John Smith, one of the ministers of Campbelton, who wrote in 1808:

Prayer is the life and soul of the sacred function. Without it, we can expect no success in our ministry. Without it, our best instructions are barren and our most painful labors idle. Before we can strike terror into those who break the Law, we must first, like Moses, spend much time with God in retirement. Prayer often gains a success to little talents, while the greatest, without it, are useless or pernicious. A minister who is not a man of piety and prayer, whatever his other talents may be, cannot be called a servant of God, but rather a "servant of Satan, chosen by him for the same reason that he chose the serpent of old: because he was 'more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God has made' (Gen 3:1)"...What a monster, O God, must that minister of religion be, that dispenser of the ordinances of the gospel, that intercessor between God and His people, that reconciler of man to his Maker, if he himself is not a man of prayer!...

As we, my brethren, are ministers of reconciliation between God and man, prayer is one of our principle duties. God often grants the grace intended for the people to the prayers of the minister; of that minister, who, like one of the angels who ascended and descended on Jacob's ladder, not only pleads the cause of God with the people, but the cause of the people with God. It is our business to lay before Him constantly all the needs of those of whom we have charge. It is our part to lament before Him their sins; those sins that our care and zeal cannot prevent nor remove. It is our part to solicit for them the riches of His mercy, and to deprecate His deserved indignation. It is ours to

pray that the sinner may be converted, that the saint may be confirmed, that the weak may be strengthened, the diffident encouraged, and the presumptuous alarmed. The more numerous the wants and sins of our people are, the more frequent and fervent should our prayers be on their behalf! Not only their general state, but also their particular cases, ought to be spread by us before the throne and to be recommended, pleaded, and earnestly urged, before the Father of mercies. (John Smith, *Lectures on the Nature and End of the Sacred Office*, 33-34)

The supreme consideration that impels a minister to prayer on behalf of those to whom he addresses his work is consecrated obedience to God Who has called him. The Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, refers to himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). He has been apprehended of Christ and is now His bondservant. He is not his own. He has been called apart and separated unto the gospel of God. To that, and only to that, he must devote himself exclusively and intensively. He is not engaged in a profession. He has no career. He is not employed in an ecclesiastical task. He has been laid hold of: he is a slave, an ambassador in bonds, if not yet literally, surely in figure. After having thus introduced himself to the Romans as a bondslave of Jesus Christ, he assures them of his sincere interest in them: “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers” (Rom 1:8-9). It is as though he cannot conceive of serving God without also praying for the Roman Christians. The most basic thing about this assertion of his faithfulness in prayer for them is that he solemnly calls God to witness. Paul would certainly not lightly employ the oath. The form of the oath indicates that he is willing to put at stake his whole apostolic service to God along with his prayers for this church. “I call God to witness,” he says in effect, “that as surely as I serve Him with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, I faithfully and constantly pray for you.” If it were not enough to employ the oath, he uses the expression “whom I serve with my spirit,” referring to his sincerity. He asserts that there is no sham to his ministry. He is not simply performing duties. As he says in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he has “renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the

sight of God.” How gross would be the sin of the Apostle Paul if he had made the assertion about his prayers for them falsely! The life and writings of Paul combine in grand testimony that he was not vain or pretentious, but utterly sincere. We may legitimately conclude, therefore, that Paul, being a bondservant of Jesus Christ and separated unto the gospel of God, was moved by an irresistible inner compulsion, to pray unceasingly for the church. Appealing for witness to God Whom he serves sincerely in the gospel of His Son, he assures the church that he bears them regularly to the throne of grace. He can no more neglect prayer for them than he can lay down the apostleship to which he had been called. We cannot doubt that he considered faithfulness in prayer an act of obedience to his Lord to Whom he had been consecrated and Whom he loved.

What of us? Do we similarly conduct ourselves in our office, or do we aspire to such conduct when we shall enter into the sacred office at some future time? God forbid that the office of the minister should be thought of professionally, that is, in the sense that it is simply a job to be done, adeptness and success therein being judged by some outward standard. It is our duty, as Paul says, to “preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2Co 4:5). In our service to men, we are responsible to God Who has called us in Christ to the sacred office of the ministry. In the last analysis, the minister is judged not by the elders or the congregation he serves, nor by the presbytery within the bounds of which he labors. They can criticize his preaching, they can judge his pastoral ministrations, fairly or unfairly. But as Paul says, “As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts” (1Th 2:4). But if the minister’s basic responsibility in his preaching is not to men, how much less in his prayers, concerning which they can know so little. However orthodox and forceful the minister and others may judge his preaching to be, however assiduous and skillful he may be considered to be in the performance of pastoral labors, he is not obedient to the Lord if he neglects to accompany all his labors with faithful prayer.

From *Intercessory Prayer: A Ministerial Task*, Simpson Publishing Company,
www.simpsonpublishing.com.



Prayer digs up those treasures that the gospel of our Lord
discovers to the eye of faith.—*John Calvin*

THE VITAL ROLE 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 demeanor 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. Are a world vision and a fervent desire for revival and the glory of our Redeemer among the nations of the world there? 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 (5:00 AM in summer and 6:00 AM 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 labored from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM daily, yet attended without fail a prayer meeting at 6:00 AM on his way to work!

In 1866, Spurgeon instituted daily prayer meetings at the Tabernacle, 7:00 AM every morning and again 7:30 PM 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 obvi-

¹ Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Edinburgh, UK/Carlisle, PA; The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992). The original six volumes are bound in two in this new set. The reference appears in the original Vol. 3, page 183.

ous 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 that words cannot express (Rom 8:26).

Spiritual repentance is the creation of the Spirit...There was no repentance in King David concerning his adultery and murder until the Holy Spirit convicted him. 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

² C. H. Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1973).

³ Definition composed from the Larger and Shorter catechisms; cited in B. M. Palmer, *Theology of Prayer* (Harrisonburg, VA.: Sprinkle Publications, 1980), 13.

prayer. That is our way of life; 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 (Luk 3:21). He rose very early while it was still dark to go to a solitary place to pray (Mar 1:35). He spent a whole night in prayer before choosing His apostles (Luk 6:12). He was in prayer when He was transfigured (Luk 9:29). Prayer was the means of His agonizing His way to victory in Gethsemane (Luk 22:44)...

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 laboring 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 (1Ti 2:1-4).

Is one prayer meeting a week sufficient? If we are to pray in a way that 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 shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench" (Isa 42:3).

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...

The importance of versatile leadership at the church prayer meeting...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, information,

and exhortation. He should encourage participation. In addition, he may need to remind participants not to be too long, but not so short as to be trite.⁴ It may also 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 that have been memorized, when He obviously knows them already. Information before prayer, compressed, crisp, clear, is vital. Those who come tired and who feel spiritually apathetic⁵ or perhaps downright rebellious need pithy⁶ 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, Ohio. It is most effective as a “prayer quickener”...

Leaders should encourage freedom so that there is no embarrassment for those who can only stay for a while...

The role 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 recourse⁷—*the church prayer meeting*. As on former occasions, [they met] 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.

⁴ **trite** – overused and consequently of little import.

⁵ **apathetic** – feeling no interest, enthusiasm, or concern.

⁶ **pithy** – concise and full of meaning.

⁷ **recourse** – a source of help in a difficult situation.

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 (Act 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*.⁸ Spiritual impetus⁹ 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 Trust, *Power of Prayer*.¹⁰ Written by an eyewitness, 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).

Available as a booklet from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Erroll Hulse: English Baptist minister; editor of *Reformation Today*, a bi-monthly international digest of doctrinal, historical, practical, and expository articles; author of numerous books and regular conference speaker; worked with D.M. Lloyd-Jones in the early days of The Banner of Truth Trust; currently Associate Pastor at Leeds Reformed Baptist Church, Leeds, England.



Prayer should be the natural outflow of the soul: you should pray because you *must* pray, not because the set time for praying has arrived, but because your heart *must* cry unto your Lord.—*Charles Spurgeon*

⁸ Erroll Hulse, *Give Him No Rest* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 1991).

⁹ **impetus** – a force that moves something along.

¹⁰ Samuel Prime, *The Power of Prayer: The New York Revival of 1858* (Edinburgh, UK/ Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998).

PRAYERLESS PASTORS

Andrew Murray (1828-1917)

IN a meeting of ministers, there is probably no single sin that 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 that shows that God is everything 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 despite¹ 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

¹ **despite** – action that shows utter lack of respect.

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 the condition of the heart is. 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 no 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 that has attached to it the sure promise of the Spirit and the power from on high. It is nothing but the sin of prayerlessness that is the cause of the lack of a powerful spiritual life! Consider further—

3. The dreadful loss that 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 until 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 that, 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 until 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 until it is taken far from us through the name and power of Jesus. He will make this possible.

From *The Prayer Life*, Morgan & Scott Limited.

Andrew Murray (1828-1917): South African Dutch Reformed pastor, educator, and author; born in Graaff Reinet, South Africa.



Every true Christian ought to be a man of prayer. All his views, all his affections, all his desires, hopes, and joys, ought to be constantly mounting on the wings of devotions and flying before him into heaven. Every rub that he meets with in this thorny wilderness, every outward combat, every inward struggle ought to make his groans and prayers rise incessantly, as memorials before that throne from which he expects aid and deliverance. Without this, he is only a nominal, not a real Christian...If [he is] not addicted to prayer, [he] is a man without any interest in Christ, without hope, and without God in the world.

—*John Smith*

I believe that no man can have any evidence in his own soul that he doth conscientiously perform any ministerial duty toward his flock, who doth not continually pray for them.

Let him preach as much as he will, visit as much as he will, speak as much as he will, unless God doth keep up in him a spirit of prayer in his closet and family for them, he can have no evidence that he doth perform any other ministerial duty in a due manner, or that what he doth is accepted with God.—*John Owen*

PRAYERLESS OR PRAYERFUL?

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

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

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,¹ and [he] 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 housetop; Isaac in the field; Nathanael under the fig tree; Jonah in the whale’s belly. Any place may become a closet, an oratory,² 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” (Psa 55:17). When time is really wanted, time can always be found.

¹ **alms** – anything given freely to relieve the poor, such as money, food, or clothing.

² **oratory** – place of prayer.

It is useless to say you *cannot pray until 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 him,” saith Isaiah, “while he is near” (Isa 55:6). “Take with you words, and turn to the LORD,” says Hosea (Hos 14:2). “Repent and pray,” says Peter to Simon Magus (Act 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 as 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” (Mat 25:11), 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 [lack] 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...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), as thoroughly as you sometimes do upon your knees. You can understand David’s words, “I hate vain thoughts” (Psa 119:113). You can sympathize with that poor, converted Hottentot,³ 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 that cost us no trouble should be regarded with great suspicion. I believe we are very poor judges of the goodness of

³ **Hottentot** – a name first recorded in the late 17th century and applied to the Khoikhoi peoples of South Africa and Namibia.

our prayers, and that the prayer that 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.⁴ 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 trifling⁵ 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 any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth” (Ecc 5:2). When Abraham spoke to God, he said, “[I am] but 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 labor 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 especially 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 are 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...

(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

⁴ **levity** – lack of seriousness.

⁵ **trifling** – treating with lack of seriousness or respect.

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 allot⁶ 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, leavings, and parings⁷ 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, sleepy, or weary; you need not pray." Your mind will sometimes say, "You have important business to attend to today: 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" (Col 4:2; 1Th 5:17). He did not mean that men should be always on their knees, as an old sect, called the Euchite,⁸ 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 ejaculatory⁹ prayers throughout the day. Even in company, 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 that is given to God. A nation does not become poorer because it loses one year of working days in

⁶ **allot** – to give in portions.

⁷ **parings** – shavings; slivers.

⁸ **Euchite** – a member of a 4th century sect that believed salvation could be gained only through perpetual prayer.

⁹ **ejaculatory** – quickly and suddenly uttered.

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, scream, or be very loud, in order to prove that he is in earnest. But it is desirable that we should be hearty, 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, listless¹⁰ one. This is the lesson that is taught us by the expressions used in Scripture about prayer. It is called, “crying, knocking, wrestling, laboring, 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, when he had offered up prayers and supplications 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 door of grace, like Mercy in *Pilgrim’s Progress*,¹¹ as if we must perish unless heard. Let us settle it down in our minds that cold prayers are a sacrifice without fire...

(f) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of praying with faith. We should endeavor 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: “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mar 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, “Now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said” (2Sa 7:25). This was the habit of Jacob, 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.

¹⁰ **listless** – characterized by being unwilling to make an effort.

¹¹ ***Pilgrim’s Progress*** – the classic Puritan allegory written by John Bunyan in 1678; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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 (Act 12:15). It is a solemn saying of old Traill's,¹² "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 wrath" (Exo 32:12). I mean such boldness as that of Joshua, when the children of Israel were defeated before Ai: "What," says he, "what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Jos 7:9). This is the boldness for which Luther¹³ 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"... 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 honor that thy gospel should increase?"

(h) I commend to you, in the next place, the importance of fullness in prayer. I do not forget that our Lord warns us against the example of the Pharisees, who for pretense 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...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,

¹² **Robert Traill** (1642-1716) – Presbyterian minister and author.

¹³ **Martin Luther** (1483–1546) – German Protestant theologian, the leading figure of the German Reformation.

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” (Psa 81:10). 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 (2Ki 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 (2Co 12:8). This is true faith and confidence. We should believe that nothing is too small to be named before God...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,¹⁴ 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... 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 pray.

(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 requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6). "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col 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 lovingkindness that endureth forever. 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 Whitefield¹⁵ in the last century, and Bickersteth,¹⁶ Marsh,¹⁷ and Haldane Stewart¹⁸ in our own time, were ever running over with thankfulness. Oh, if we would be bright and shining lights in our day,

¹⁴ **sojourn** – stay temporarily.

¹⁵ **George Whitefield** (1714-1770) – Anglican preacher who helped spread the Great Awakening in Britain and the British North American colonies.

¹⁶ **Edward Bickersteth** (1825-1906) – Anglican minister, theologian, and author.

¹⁷ **William Marsh** (1775-1864) – Anglican minister and author.

¹⁸ **James Haldane Stewart** (1778-1854) – Anglican evangelical minister.

we must cherish a spirit of praise! And above all, let our prayers be thankful prayers.

(1) 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...Oh, let us keep an eye continually upon our private devotions! Here is the pith,¹⁹ marrow, and backbone of our practical Christianity. Sermons, books, tracts, 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, 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 [article] 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.

From *Practical Religion*, The Banner of Truth Trust,
www.banneroftruth.org.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Anglican bishop and author; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.



Prayer is the longing of the soul to hold communion with the Most High, the desire of the heart to obtain blessings at His hands.—*Charles Spurgeon*

¹⁹ **pith** – the most essential part of an idea or experience.

CONTINUE IN PRAYER

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

IT is interesting to remark how large a portion of Sacred Writ is occupied with the subject of prayer, either in furnishing examples, enforcing precepts, or pronouncing promises.

We scarcely open the Bible before we read, “Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen 4:26); and just as we are about to close the volume, the “amen” of an earnest supplication meets our ear (Rev 22:21). Instances are plentiful. Here we find a wrestling Jacob—there a Daniel who prayed three times a day—and a David who with all his heart called upon his God. On the mountain, we see Elias, in the dungeon, Paul and Silas. We have multitudes of commands and myriads¹ of promises. What does this teach us but the sacred importance and necessity of prayer?

We may be certain that whatever God has made prominent in His Word, He intended to be conspicuous² in our lives. If he has said much about prayer, it is because he knows we have much need of it. So deep are our necessities, that until we are in heaven we must not cease to pray. Dost thou [lack] nothing? Then, I fear thou dost not know thy poverty. Hast thou no mercy to ask of God? Then, may the Lord’s mercy show thee thy misery! A prayerless soul is a Christless soul. Prayer is the lisping of the believing infant, the shout of the fighting believer, the requiem³ of the dying saint falling asleep in Jesus. It is the breath, the watchword, the comfort, the strength, the honor of a Christian.

If thou be a child of God, thou wilt seek thy Father’s face and live in thy Father’s love. Pray that this year thou mayest be holy, humble, zealous, and patient. Have closer communion with Christ, and enter oftener into the banqueting-house of His love. Pray that thou mayest be an example and a blessing unto others and that thou mayest live more to the glory of thy Master. The motto for this year must be, “Continue in prayer” (Col 4:2).

From *Morning and Evening*.



¹ **myriads** – countless numbers.

² **conspicuous** – clearly visible; plainly evident.

³ **requiem** – a hymn performed as a memorial to a dead person.

THE PRAYERS OF CHRIST'S SAINTS

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

“Golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.”
—Revelation 5:8

THERE exists not a more undoubted evidence of a renewed nature than prayer. The absence of it is the unmistakable evidence of *death*, its existence a palpable¹ and positive evidence of *life*. Prayer is the most vital, spiritual, and pure emanation² of the indwelling of the Spirit in the soul.

If, in a case of suspended animation,³ we marked the slightest symptom of life—the gentlest heaving of the heart, the faintest moisture breathed upon the surface of a mirror—we should certainly hail it as proof of the existence of the vital principle. We would not ask for strong spasmodic⁴ action and postpone all efforts to rouse the dormant pulse before we pronounced the individual alive. We would be satisfied that the spark still glowed, and this would reassure our hope and animate our labor. Prayer is the spiritual life of the renewed soul.

There may be the absence of profound religious knowledge, great depth of Christian experience, fiery zeal, and gigantic energy. Nevertheless, if it is said of one thus apparently dormant, “Behold he prays!”; if in the secret walk, all deeply veiled from human eye, there is fellowship with God, communion with the Invisible, there is life—life divine, life spiritual, life eternal. To change the figure, here is a plant of righteousness growing in a corrupt soil; here is a flower of holiness blooming and exhaling amid sin, corruption, and death! Surely, this cannot be indigenous to our fallen humanity, but must be a seedling, a germ, a graft from the paradise of God. Among the most precious things of God is this: the principle and spirit, the power and sweetness of prayer.

¹ **palpable** – easily observed.

² **emanation** – something that issues from a source.

³ **suspended animation** – a temporary cessation of vital functions with loss of consciousness resembling death.

⁴ **spasmodic** – sudden muscle contraction or twitches.

We select the idea from a scene in the apocalyptic drama⁵ that passed before the eye of John. In this vision, among other sublime revelations, he beheld “four beasts and four and twenty elders fall down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints” (Rev 5:8). That these elders belonged not to any order of angelic intelligence is conclusive from the subsequent verse, in which they are represented as acknowledging themselves to be “redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb.” It is clear, then, that they formed a part of the Church redeemed from among men. The whole vision is designed to present the fact that the Church of God is a *praying* Church and that the prayers of the Lord’s people ascend before Jehovah as precious incense, holy, fragrant, and acceptable through the infinite and atoning merits of Jesus Christ...But observe in the outset whose prayers are these:

“The prayers of saints.” “Odours (*incense*), which are the prayers of saints.” What saints? Not the glorified saints. The saints in heaven have done with prayer. The service and the employment, which before was to them the most precious and hallowed, has now ceased forever. That which is perfect is come, and that which was but in part is done away. Prayer and supplication, which on earth was the source of their sweetest solace and their richest comfort—the vital atmosphere in which they lived—is exchanged for praise. Adoration, thanksgiving, and worship fill every soul, attune every heart, and employ every tongue in this world of blessedness. Beloved, there is no prayer in heaven, save that of the Great Interceding High Priest...There is but *one* recognized Intercessor in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who “by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place” (Heb 9:12) and “ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). With such a Mediator⁶ before the throne, Whom the Father hears always, why invoke the aid, the sympathy, the prayers of creatures—angel or saint? The Great High Priest is in heaven—will not that suffice? With Him, the Father is well pleased—is not this enough? His intercession *never* fails—what more can you desire?

⁵ **apocalyptic drama** – the remarkable scene described in Revelation 5:8.

⁶ **Mediator** – a go-between; “It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: unto Whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.” (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1) See FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Begirt with His ephod⁷ and wearing His breastplate, He bears the burdens and participates in the sorrows of His Church below. By no avenue but His bleeding heart can they enter—up no ladder but His cross can they ascend; and with no name may they entwine their supplications but the one name that transcends every name, the name of Jesus. Who can fully unfold the blessedness of this truth to the saints of God? Do we not, beloved, rob our souls of the peculiar blessing—the support, the comfort, the grace—bound up in the intercessory work of our Immanuel within the veil? What can be more encouraging and animating than to *know* that Christ remembers us, prays for us, and upholds us in heaven?²—that He thinks of us with a friend’s affection, compassionates⁸ us with a brother’s sympathy, prays for and supports us with a Savior’s meritorious intercession? By faith, [do] you not see Him, standing before the golden altar in glory, presenting the sacred incense of His merits, the temple all filled with its perfume? Do not think that the Church below has no tokens, unmistakable and precious, of her Great High Priest’s intercession within the veil of glory. Has the type of this truth no significance? A part of Aaron’s vestment was “a golden bell...upon the hem of the robe round about” (Exo 28:34). The Divine instruction was, “It shall be upon Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the LORD” (Exo 28:35.) How expressive and how sweet must that sound have been to the waiting congregation without! It was to them an evidence and a token that the priest was within the veil, ministering before the altar, bearing them upon his breastplate, presenting their sacrifices, and securing by his intercession their acceptance and God’s response. Beloved, our Great High Priest has passed within the veil and appears in the presence of God for us. Hear you not the music of His bells? How entrancing their melody! How precious their significance! Every covenant blessing sent down from God, every gracious answer to prayer returned, every pure beam of love darting into your soul, every spring of joy, peace, and hope welling up in your heart, every burden sustained, every grief soothed, every temptation broken is the chiming of these bells upon the robe of Jesus as He ministers before the throne of God in glory. How sweet, how precious, how soothing their melody!

“The prayers of saints.” If prayer be the breathing of the indwelling Spirit in the soul, if the expression of deeply-felt [need], if the

⁷ **begirt with His ephod** – clothed with a priestly garment, encircled with a sash or belt.

⁸ **compassionates** – treats with compassion; feels pity for.

language of a child, and if the incense of the heart wafted⁹ to heaven through faith in Christ, then the saints of God are the only individuals who offer true prayer. Prayer is too holy and spiritual an exercise for any but the holy ones. None prostrate themselves at the mercyseat but the poor in spirit—the self-abhorring—Christ-desiring! To them, this spot is the *dearest in the universe*. Here is attraction that, find them where it may, irresistibly draws and indissolubly¹⁰ binds them. All may be gloom beyond—all is sunshine here. The saint in audience with Jehovah is the most morally sublime spectacle in the universe. Angelic spirits must look down upon it with an emotion of blended awe and delight. Such is the privilege of a saint. Let the world deride the name and trample in the dust him who wears it, yet is it the most honored and sacred appellation¹¹ God ever conferred upon mortals: “*called to be saints*”—what a high calling, beloved, is this! Made lower than angels by sin, we are made higher than angels by grace. Redemption has exalted our humanity above every other nature but the Divine. To be clothed upon with the “righteousness of God” (Rom 3:21-22) is to occupy a position of dignity and glory to which no other creature can aspire...Lord! Let the infidel deny the character and the worldling¹² scorn the name, number me among Your saints everlasting, upon whom is conferred the privilege of fellowship and nearness with You here, and glory, honor, and immortality with You hereafter!

But what is the incense?—“the prayers of saints.” The emblem is exquisitely beautiful and expressive. It is one of the highest conceptions of poetry in one of its most sacred forms. Prayer is holy incense...David so employs the expression in connection with prayer: “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psa 141:2).

We have but glanced at the truth that the saints of God are a praying people, that communion with the Triune Jehovah is an essential characteristic...No man is a saint of God who is not a praying man; and a praying man, find him where you may, is a saint of God. He may prefer the place and the mode of prayer that his conscience best approves; whether that place be a cathedral or a barn, and the mode

⁹ **wafted** – floated through the air.

¹⁰ **indissolubly** – unable to be dissolved or destroyed; permanently.

¹¹ **appellation** – name or title.

¹² **worldling** – a person more interested in concerns, interests, and pleasures of the present world rather than spiritual matters.

be liturgical¹³ or free, is of no essential moment. If, penetrating within the inner and hidden shrine, he waves before its altar the censer of a truly contrite, believing, adoring heart, drawing near to God in the name of Jesus and holding fellowship with the Invisible, that man is a man of prayer...But not only is prayer *essential* to the character of a saint of God, his whole history implies that he is a man of prayer. Your Christian life, beloved reader, necessitates this walking with God in all its minute detail. If it be a divine precept, as it is a precious privilege, to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, then this habit of recognizing the being and government of God, His love and care for us, His providential guidance of our every step, must keep us in constant and close contact with our Father and Friend. When to this we add the more spiritual part of our history—the Christian conflict we wage, the discoveries of sin we make, the seductions by which we are assailed, the daily trials, sorrows, and disappointments to which we are subjected—surely prayer must be the living, enshrouding atmosphere of a saint of God! Not one moment could we live without it. Prayer, breathed from the believer's heart on earth or from the lips of the Great Intercessor in heaven, sustains each moment the life of God in the soul of man. Ah, beloved! Where could you go with those burdens, those wants, those chafings,¹⁴ those backslidings, those shortcomings, those sorrows that compose so large a part of daily life, but to the throne of grace? Where could you resort for mercy, for strength, for fortitude,¹⁵ for patience, for comfort and soothing, but where the God of love and power meets you and talks with you through Jesus, as man communes with his friend? It is in this light we come to regard prayer, not merely as a divine command or as a Christian duty, but as the holiest, sweetest, and most precious privilege God has given to us on earth.

From "The Preciousness of Prayer" in *The Precious Things of God*,
Soli Deo Gloria, a division of Reformation Heritage Books,
www.heritagebooks.org.

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878): Nonconformist pastor; born in London, England, raised in New York, buried in Abbey Cemetery, Bath, England.



¹³ **liturgical** – relating to the forms or regular rituals of public worship.

¹⁴ **chafings** – irritations; things that inflame our feelings or make us impatient.

¹⁵ **fortitude** – unyielding courage in the endurance of pain or adversity.