

The Hidden Life of Prayer

DAVID MACINTYRE (1859-1938)

Some of the archaic words have been changed into modern English, for the purpose of making this publication easier to read.

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THE HIDDEN LIFE OF PRAYER

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1. The Life of Prayer

“My God. Thy creature answers, Thee.”—Alfred de Musset

“The love of Christ is my prayer-book.”—Gerhard Tersteegen

“Prayer is the key of heaven; the Spirit helps faith to turn this key.”

—Thomas Watson

Introduction

In one of the cathedrals of Northern Europe an exquisite group in high relief represents the prayer life. It is disposed in three panels. The first of these reminds us of the apostolic precept, “Pray without ceasing.” We see the front of a spacious temple which opens on the market-place. The great square is strewn with crowds of eager men, gesticulating, bargaining—all evidently intent on gain. But One, who wears a circlet of thorn, and is clothed in a garment woven without seam from the top throughout, moves silently through the clamorous crowds, and subdues to holy fear the most covetous heart.

The second panel displays the precincts of the temple, and serves to illustrate the common worship of the Church. White-robed ministers hasten here and there. They carry oil for the lamp, and water for the laver, and blood from the altar; with pure intention, their eyes turned towards the unseen glory, they fulfill the duties of their sacred calling.

The third panel introduces us to the inner sanctuary. A solitary worshipper has entered within the veil, and hushed and lowly in the presence of God, bends before the glancing Shekinah. This represents the hidden life of prayer of which the Master spoke in the familiar words, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” (Mat 6:6).

Our Lord takes it for granted that His people will pray. And indeed in Scripture generally the outward obligation of prayer is implied rather than asserted. Moved by a divinely-implanted instinct, our natures cry out for God, for the living God. And however this instinct may be crushed by sin, it awakes to power in the consciousness of redemption. Theologians of all schools, and Christians of every type, agree in their recognition of this principle of the new life. Chrysostom has said, “The just man does not desist from praying until he ceases to be just;” and Augustine, “He that loveth little prayeth little, and he that loveth much prayeth much;” and Richard Hooker, “Prayer is the first thing

wherewith a righteous life beginneth, and the last wherewith it doth end;” and Père la Combe, “He who has a pure heart will never cease to pray, and he who will be constant in prayer shall know what it is to have a pure heart;” and Bunyan, “If thou art not a praying person, thou art not a Christian;” and Richard Baxter, “Prayer is the breath of the new creature;” and George Herbert, “Prayer...the soul’s blood.”

Prayer Is Hard Work

And yet, instinctive as is our dependence upon God, no duty is more earnestly impressed upon us in Scripture than the duty of continual communion with Him. The main reason for this unceasing insistence is *the arduousness of prayer*. In its nature it is a laborious undertaking, and in our endeavor to maintain the spirit of prayer we are called to wrestle against principalities and powers of darkness.

“Dear Christian reader,” says Jacob Boehme, “to pray aright is right earnest work.” Prayer is the most sublime energy of which the spirit of man is capable.¹ It is in one aspect glory and blessedness; in another, it is toil and travail, battle and agony. Uplifted hands grow tremulous long before the field is won; straining sinews and panting breath proclaim the exhaustion of the “heavenly footman.” The weight that falls upon an aching heart fills the brow with anguish, even when the midnight air is chill. Prayer is the uplift of the earth-bound soul into the heaven, the entrance of the purified spirit into the holiest; the rending of the luminous veil that shuts in, as behind curtains, the glory of God. It is the vision of things unseen; the recognition of the mind of the Spirit; the effort to frame words which man may not utter. A man that truly prays one prayer,” says Bunyan, “shall after that never be able to express with his mouth or pen the unutterable desires, sense, affection, and longing that went to God in that prayer.” The saints of the Jewish Church had a princely energy in intercession: “Battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer,” they took the kingdom of heaven by violence. The first Christians proved in the wilderness, in the dungeon, in the arena, and at the stake the truth of their Master’s words, “He shall have whatsoever he saith.” Their souls ascended to God in supplication as the flame of the altar mounts heavenward. The Talmudists affirm that in the divine life four things call for fortitude; of these prayer is one. One who met Tersteegen at Kronenberg remarked, “It seemed to me as if he had gone straight into heaven, and had lost himself in God; but often when he had done praying he was as white as the wall.” David Brainerd notes that on one occasion, when he found his soul “exceedingly enlarged” in supplication, he was “in such anguish, and pleaded with so

much earnestness and importunity,” that when he rose from his knees he felt “extremely weak and overcome.” “I could scarcely walk straight,” he goes on to say, “my joints were loosed, the sweat ran down my face and body, and nature seemed as if it would dissolve.” A living writer has reminded us of John Foster, who used to spend long nights in his chapel, absorbed in spiritual exercises, pacing to and fro in the disquietude of his spirit, until his restless feet had worn a little track in the aisle.²

One might easily multiply examples, but there is no need to go beyond Scripture to find either precept or example to impress us with the arduousness of that prayer which prevails. Should not the supplication of the Psalmist, “Quicken Thou me, according to Thy word...quicken me in Thy righteousness...quicken me after Thy lovingkindness...quicken me according to Thy judgments...quicken me, O Lord, for Thy name’s sake;” and the complaint of the Evangelical Prophet, “There is none that calleth upon Thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee,” find an echo in our experience? Do we know what it is to “labor,” to “wrestle,” to “agonize” in prayer?³

Another explanation of the arduousness of prayer lies in the fact that we are spiritually hindered: there is “the noise of archers in the places of drawing water.” St. Paul assures us that we shall have to maintain our prayer energy “against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Dr. Andrew Bonar used to say that, as the King of Syria commanded his captains to fight neither with small nor great, but only with the King of Israel, so the prince of the power of the air seems to bend all the force of his attack against the spirit of prayer. If he should prove victorious there, he has won the day.

Sometimes we are conscious of a satanic impulse directed immediately against the life of prayer in our souls. Sometimes we are led into “dry” and wilderness-experiences, and the face of God grows dark above us. Sometimes, when we strive most earnestly to bring every thought and imagination under obedience to Christ, we seem to be given over to disorder and unrest. Sometimes the inbred slothfulness of our nature lends itself to the evil one as an instrument by which he may turn our minds back from the exercise of prayer. Because of all these things, therefore, we must be diligent and resolved, watching as a sentry who remembers that the lives of men are lying at the hazard of his wakefulness, resourcefulness, and courage.⁴ “And what I say unto you,” said the Lord to His disciples, “I say unto all, Watch!”

We Must Be on Guard

There are times when even the soldiers of Christ become heedless of their trust, and no longer guard with vigilance the gift of prayer. Should any one who reads these pages be conscious of loss of power in intercession, lack of joy in communion, hardness and impenitence in confession, “Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.”⁵

*“Oh, stars of heaven that fade and flame, Oh, whispering waves below!
Was earth, or heaven. or I the same, A year, a year ago!*

*The stars have kept their home on high, The waves their wonted flow;
The love is lost that once was I, A year, a year ago.”*⁶

The only remedy for this sluggish mood is that we should “rekindle our love,” as Polycarp wrote to the Church in Ephesus, “in the blood of God.” Let us ask for a fresh gift of the Holy Spirit to quicken our sluggish hearts, a new disclosure of the *charity of God*. The Spirit will help our infirmities, and the very compassion of the Son of God will fall upon us, clothing us with zeal as with a garment, stirring our affections into a most vehement flame, and filling our souls with heaven.

“Men ought always to pray, and”—although faintness of spirit attends on prayer like a shadow—“not faint.” The soil in which the prayer of faith takes root is a life of unbroken communion with God, a life in which the windows of the soul are always open towards the City of Rest. We do not know the true potency of prayer until our hearts are so steadfastly inclined to God that our thoughts turn to Him, as by a divine instinct, whenever they are set free from the consideration of earthly things. It has been said of Origen (in his own words) that his life was “one unceasing supplication.” By this means above all others the perfect idea of the Christian life is realized. Communion between the believer and his Lord ought never to be interrupted.⁷

Prayer Is Continuous

“The vision of God,” says Bishop Westcott, “makes life a continuous prayer.” And in that vision all fleeting things resolve themselves, and appear in relation to things unseen. In a broad use of the term, prayer is the sum of all the service that we render to God,⁸ so that all fulfillment of duty is, in one sense, the performance of divine service, and the familiar saying, “Work is worship,” is justified. “I am prayer,” said a Psalmist (Psa 109:4). “In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving,” said an Apostle.

In the Old Testament that life which is steeped in prayer is often described as a walk with God. Enoch walked in assurance, Abraham in perfectness, Elijah in fidelity, the sons of Levi in peace and equity. Or it is spoken of as a dwelling with God, even as Joshua departed not from the Tabernacle; or as certain craftsmen of the olden time abode with a king for his work. Again, it is defined as the ascent of the soul into the Sacred Presence; as the planets, “with open face beholding,” climb into the light of the sun’s countenance, or as a flower, lit with beauty and dipped in fragrance, reaches upwards towards the light. At other times, prayer is said to be the gathering up of all the faculties in an ardor of reverence, and love, and praise. As one clear strain may succeed in reducing to harmony a number of mutually-discordant voices, so the reigning impulses of the spiritual nature unite the heart to fear the name of the Lord.

But the most familiar, and perhaps the most impressive, description of prayer in the Old Testament, is found in those numerous passages where the life of communion with God is spoken of as a waiting upon Him. A great scholar has given a beautiful definition of waiting upon God: “To wait is not merely to remain impassive. It is to expect—to look for with patience, and also with submission. It is to long for, but not impatiently; to look for, but not to fret at the delay; to watch for, but not restlessly; to feel that if He does not come we will acquiesce, and yet to refuse to let the mind acquiesce in the feeling that He will not come.”⁹

Now, do not let any one say that such a life is visionary and unprofitable. The real world is not this covering veil of sense; reality belongs to those heavenly things of which the earthly are mere “patterns” and correspondences. Who is so practical as God? Who among men so wisely directed His efforts to the circumstances and the occasions which He was called to face, as “the Son of Man who is in heaven? “Those who pray well, work well. Those who pray most, achieve the grandest results.”¹⁰ To use the striking phrase of Tauler, “In God nothing is hindered.”

Pray on All Occasions

The cultivation of the habit of prayer will secure its expression on all suitable occasions.

In times of need, in the first instance; almost everyone will pray then. Moses stood on the shores of the Red Sea, surveying the panic into which the children of Israel were cast when they realized that the chariots of Pharaoh were thundering down upon them. “Wherefore

criest thou unto Me?” said the Lord. Nehemiah stood before King Artaxerxes. The monarch noted his inward grief, and said, “Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart.” That question opened the door to admit the answer to three months’ praying; and the hot desire that had risen to God in those slow months gathered itself into one fervent outcry, “So I prayed to the God of heaven.”

Again, one whose life is spent in fellowship with God will constantly seek and find opportunities for swift and frequently-recurring approaches to the throne of grace. The apostles bring every duty under the cross; at the name of Jesus their loyal souls soar heavenward in adoration and in praise. The early Christians never met without invoking a benediction; they never parted without prayer. The saints of the Middle Ages allowed each passing incident to summon them to intercession—the shadow on the dial, the church-bell, the flight of the swallow, the rising of the sun, the falling of a leaf. The covenant which Sir Thomas Browne made with himself is well-known, but one may venture to refer to it once more: “To pray in all places where quietness inviteth; in any house, highway, or street; and to know no street in this city that may not witness that I have not forgotten God and my Savior in it; and that no parish or town where I have been may not say the like. To take occasion of praying upon the sight of any church which I see, or pass by, as I ride about. To pray daily, and particularly for my sick patients, and for all sick people under whose care soever. And at the entrance into the house of the sick to say, “The peace and the mercy of God be upon this house.” After a sermon to make a prayer and desire a blessing, and to pray for the minister.” And much more of a like nature.

Once more, one who lives in the spirit of prayer will spend much time in *retired and intimate communion* with God. It is by such a deliberate engagement of prayer that the fresh springs of devotion which flow through the day are fed. For, although communion with God is the life-energy of the renewed nature, our souls “cleave to the dust,” and devotion tends to grow formal—it becomes emptied of its spiritual content, and exhausts itself in outward acts. The Master reminds us of this grave peril, and informs us that the true defense against insincerity in our approach to God lies in the diligent exercise of private prayer.¹¹

In the days of the Commonwealth, one of the early Friends, “a servant of the Lord, but a stranger outwardly,” came into an assembly of serious people, who had met for worship. “And after some time he had waited on the Lord in spirit he had an opportunity to speak, all

being silent; he said by way of exhortation, ‘Keep to the Lord’s watch.’ These words, being spake in the power of God, had its operation upon all or most of the meeting, so that they felt some great dread and fear upon their spirits. After a little time he spake again, saying, ‘What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.’ Then he was silent again a little time, but the whole meeting, being sensible that this man was in some extraordinary spirit and power, were all musing what manner of teaching this should be, being such a voice that most of the hearers never heard before, that carried such great authority with it that they were all necessitated to be subject to the power.”¹²

Soldier of Christ, you are in an enemy’s country; “Keep to the Lord’s watch.”

2. The Equipment

“Remember that in the Levitical Law there is a frequent commemoration and charge given of the two daily sacrifices, the one to be offered up in the morning and the other in the evening. These offerings by incense our holy, harmless, and undefiled High Priest hath taken away, and instead of them every devout Christian is at the appointed times to offer up a spiritual sacrifice, namely, that of prayer: for ‘God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.’ At these prescribed times, if thou wilt have thy prayers to ascend up before God, thou must withdraw from all outward occupations, to prepare for the inward and divine.”

—Henry Vaughan, *Silurist*

“God comes to me in silent hours, As morning dew to summer flowers.”

—Mechthild von Magdeburg

“It will never be altogether well with us till we convert the universe into a prayer room, and continue in the Spirit as we go from place to place...The prayer-hour is left standing before God till the other hours come and stand beside it; then, If they are found to be a harmonious sisterhood, the prayer is granted.”

—George Bowen

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray.”

“Of this manner of prayer,” says Walter Hilton of Thurgarton, “speaketh our Lord in a figure, thus: ‘Fire shall always burn upon the altar, which the priest shall nourish, putting wood underneath in the morning every day, that so the fire may not go out.’ That is, the fire of

love shall ever be lighted in the soul of a devout and clean man or woman, the which is God's altar. And the priest shall every morning lay to it sticks, and nourish the fire; that is, this man shall by holy psalms, clean thoughts, and fervent desire, nourish the fire of love in his heart, that it may not go out at any time."¹³

The equipment for the inner life of prayer is simple, if not always easily secured. It consists particularly of a *quiet place*, a *quiet hour*, and a *quiet heart*.

1. A Quiet Place

With regard to many of us the first of these, a *quiet place*, is well within our reach. But there are tens of thousands of our fellow-believers who find it generally impossible to withdraw into the desired seclusion of the secret place. A house-mother in a crowded tenement, an apprentice in city lodgings, a ploughman in his living quarters, a soldier in barracks, a boy living at school, these and many more may not be able always to command quiet and solitude. But, "your Father knoweth." And it is comforting to reflect that the very Prince of the pilgrims shared the experience of such as these. In the carpenter's cottage in Nazareth there were, it appears, no fewer than nine persons who lived under the one roof. There were the Holy Child, Mary His mother, and Joseph. There were also the Lord's "brothers"—four of them—and at least two "sisters." The cottage consisted, let us suppose, principally of a living room, the workshop, and an inner chamber—a store-closet in which the provision for the day, the kitchen utensils, the firewood, etc., were laid. That gloomy recess had a latch on the inner side, placed there, it may be, by the carpenter's Son, for that dark chamber was His oratory, not less sacred than the cloud-wrapt shrine of the Presence in the Temple.¹⁴

Afterwards, when our Lord had entered on His public ministry, there were occasions when He found it difficult to secure the privilege of solitude. He frequently received entertainment from those who showed Him the scantiest courtesy, and afforded Him no facility for retirement. When His spirit hungered for communion with His Father, He was to bend His steps toward the rough uplands—"*Cold mountains and the midnight air, Witnessed the fervor of His prayer.*"

And when, a homeless man, He came up to Jerusalem to the Feasts, it was His custom to "resort" to the olive-garden of Gethsemane. Under the laden branches of some gnarled tree, which was old when Isaiah was young, our Lord must often through the soft summer night have outwatched the stars.

Any place may become an oratory, provided that one is able to find in it seclusion. Isaac went into the fields to meditate. Jacob lingered on the eastern bank of the Brook Jabbok, after all his company had passed over; there he wrestled with the Angel, and prevailed. Moses, hidden in the clefts of Horeb, beheld the vanishing glory which marked the way by which Jehovah had gone. Elijah sent Ahab down to eat and drink, while he himself withdrew to the lonely crest of Carmel. Daniel spent weeks in an ecstasy of intercession on the banks of Hiddekel, which once had watered Paradise.

And Paul, no doubt in order that he might have an opportunity for undisturbed meditation and prayer, “was minded to go afoot” from Troas to Assos.

And if no better place presents itself, the soul which turns to God may clothe itself in quietness even in the crowded concourse or in the hurrying streets. A poor woman in a great city, never able to free herself from the insistent clamor of her little ones, made for herself a sanctuary in the simplest way. “I threw my apron over my head,” she said, “and *there* is my closet.”¹⁵

2. A Quiet Hour

For most of us it may be harder to find a *quiet hour*. I do not mean an “hour” of exactly sixty minutes, but a portion of time withdrawn from the engagements of the day, fenced round from the encroachments of business or pleasure, and dedicated to God. Older and wiser men might linger in the fields in meditation on the covenant-name until darkness wrapt them round. But we who live with the clang of machinery and the roar of traffic always in our ears, whose crowding obligations jostle against each other as the hours fly on, are often tempted to withdraw to other uses those moments which we ought to hold sacred to communion with heaven. Dr. Dale says somewhere that if each day had forty-eight hours, and every week had fourteen days, we might conceivably get through our work, but that, as things are, it is impossible. There is at least an edge of truth in this whimsical utterance. Certainly, if we are to have a quiet hour set down in the midst of a hurry of duties, and kept sacred, we must exercise both forethought and self-denial. We must be prepared to forgo many things that are pleasant, and some things that are profitable.¹⁶ We shall have to redeem time, it may be from recreation, or from social interaction, or from study, or from works of benevolence, if we are to find leisure daily to enter into our closet, and having shut the door, to pray to our Father who is in secret.¹⁷

One is tempted to linger here, and, with all humility and earnestness, to press the consideration of this point. One sometimes

hears it said, “I confess that I do not spend much time in the *secret chamber* (in quiet, secluded prayer), but I try to cultivate the habit of *continual prayer* (short prayer in the midst of other activities). And it is implied that this is more and better than that. The two things ought not to be set in opposition. Each is necessary to a well-ordered Christian life; and each was perfectly maintained in the practice of the Lord Jesus. He was always enfolded in the divine love; His communion with the Father was unbroken; He was the Son of Man who is in heaven. But St. Luke tells us that it was His habit to withdraw Himself into the wilderness and pray (Luk 5:16). Our Authorized Version does not give us the force of the original in this verse. Dean Vaughan comments on it thus: “It was not one withdrawal, nor one wilderness, nor one prayer, all is plural in the original—the withdrawals were repeated; the wildernesses were more than one, the prayers were habitual.” Crowds were thronging and pressing Him; great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed of their infirmities; and He had no leisure so much as to eat. But He found time to pray. And this one who sought retirement with so much solitude was the Son of God, having no sin to confess, no shortcoming to deplore, no unbelief to subdue, no languor of love to overcome. Nor are we to imagine that His prayers were merely peaceful meditations, or rapturous acts of communion. They were strenuous and warlike, from that hour in the wilderness when angels came to minister to the prostrate Man of Sorrows, on to that awful “agony” in which His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood. His prayers were sacrifices, offered up with strong crying and tears.

Now, if it was part of the sacred discipline of the Incarnate Son that He should observe frequent seasons of retirement, how much more is it incumbent on us, broken as we are and disabled by manifold sin, to be diligent in the exercise of private prayer!

Practical Suggestions

To hurry over this duty would be to rob ourselves of the benefits which proceed from it. We know, of course, that prayer cannot be measured by divisions of time. But the advantages to be derived from secret prayer are not to be obtained unless we enter on it with deliberation. We must “shut the door,” enclosing and securing a sufficient portion of time for the fitting discharge of the engagement before us.

In the morning we should look forward to the duties of the day, anticipating those situations in which temptation may lurk, and preparing ourselves to embrace such opportunities of usefulness as may

be presented to us. In the evening we ought to remark upon the providences which have befallen us, consider our attainment in holiness, and endeavor to profit by the lessons which God would have us learn. And, always, we must acknowledge and forsake sin. Then there are the numberless themes of prayer which our desires for the good estate of the Church of God, for the conversion and sanctification of our friends and acquaintances, for the furtherance of missionary effort, and for the coming of the kingdom of Christ may suggest. All this cannot be pressed into a few crowded moments. We must be at leisure when we enter the secret place. At one time at least in his life, the late Mr. Hudson Taylor was so fully occupied during the hours of the day with the direction of the China Inland Mission that he found it difficult to gain the requisite freedom for private prayer. Accordingly, he made it his rule to rise each night at two o'clock, watch with God till four, then lie down to sleep until the morning.

In the Jewish Church it was customary to set apart a space of time for meditation and prayer three times daily—in the morning, at noon, and in the evening (Psa 55:17; Dan 6:10). But in Bible lands there is a natural pause at mid-day which we, in our cooler climate, do not generally observe. Where it is possible to hallow a few moments in the mid-stream of the day's duties it ought surely to be done.¹⁸ And nature itself teaches us that morning and evening are suitable occasions of approach to God.

A question which has been frequently discussed, and is not without interest is: Whether we should employ the morning or the evening hour for our more deliberate and prolonged period of waiting upon God? It is probable that each person can answer this question most profitably for himself or herself. But it should always be understood that we give our best to God.

3. A Quiet Heart

For most of us, perhaps, it is still harder to secure the *quiet heart*. The contemplationists of the Middle Ages desired to present themselves before God in silence, that He might teach them what their lips should utter, and their hearts expect. Stephen Gurnall acknowledges that it is far more difficult to hang up the big bell than it is to ring it when it has been hung. Mc'Cheyne used to say that very much of his prayer time was spent in preparing to pray.¹⁹ A new England Puritan writes: "While I was at the Word, I saw I had a wild heart, which was as hard to stand and abide before the presence of God in an ordinance, as a bird before any man. And Bunyan remarks from his own deep experience: "O! the

starting-holes that the heart hath in the time of prayer; none knows how many bye-ways the heart hath and back-lanes, to slip away from the presence of God.”²⁰

In particular there are three great (but simple) acts of faith, which will serve to stay the mind on God.

(a) Let us, in the first place, recognize our acceptance before God through the dying of the Lord Jesus. When a pilgrim, either of the Greek or of the Latin Church, arrives in Jerusalem, his first act, before ever he seeks refreshment or rest, is to visit the traditional scene of the Redeemer’s passion. Our first act in prayer ought to be the yielding of our souls to the power of the blood of Christ. It was in the power of the ritual sacrifice that the high priest in Israel passed through the veil on the day of atonement. It is in the power of the accepted offering of the Lamb of divine appointment that we are privileged to come into the presence of God. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an High Priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised” (Heb 10:19-23).

*“Were I with the trespass laden, Of a thousand worlds beside,
Yet by that path I enter—The blood of the Lamb who died.”*

(b) It is important also that we confess and receive the enabling grace of the divine Spirit, without whom nothing is holy, nothing good. For it is He who teaches us to cry, “Abba, Father,” who searches for us the deep things of God, who discloses to us the mind and will of Christ, who helps our infirmities, and intercedes on our behalf “according to God.”²¹ And we all, “with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Co 3:18). When we enter the inner chamber we should present ourselves before God in meekness and trust, and open our hearts to the incoming and infilling of the Holy Ghost. So we shall receive from the praying Spirit, and commit to the praying Christ, those petitions which are of divine birth, and express themselves, through our finite hearts and sin-stained lips, in “groanings which cannot be uttered.” Without the support of the Holy Spirit, prayer becomes a matter of incredible difficulty. “As for my heart,” said one who was deeply exercised in this engagement, “when I go to pray, I

find it so loath to go to God, and when it is with Him, so loath to stay with Him, that many times I am forced in my prayers, first to beg of God that He would take mine heart, and set it on Himself in Christ, and when it is there, that He would keep it there. Nay, many times I know not what to pray for, I am so blind, nor how to pray, I am so ignorant; only, blessed be grace, the Spirit helps our infirmities.”

(c) Once more, as “the Spirit rides most triumphantly in His own chariot,” His chosen means of enlightenment, comfort, quickening, and rebuke being the Word of God, it is well for us in the beginning of our supplications to **direct our hearts towards the Holy Scriptures**. It will greatly help to calm the “contrary” mind if we open the sacred volume and read it as in the presence of God, until there shall come to us out from the printed page a word from the Eternal. George Müller confessed that often he could not pray until he had steadied his mind upon a text.²² Is it not the prerogative of God to break the silence? “When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, thy face, Lord, will I seek” (Psa 27:8). Is it not fitting that His will should order all the acts of our prayer with Himself? Let us be silent to God, that He may fashion us.

“So shall I keep For ever in my heart one silent space; A little sacred spot of loneliness, Where to set up the memory of Thy Cross, A little quiet garden, where no man May pass or rest for ever, sacred still To visions of Thy sorrow and Thy love.”

3. The Direction of the Mind

“Thou oughtest to go to prayer, that thou mayest deliver thyself wholly up into the hands of God, with perfect resignation, exerting an act of faith, believing that thou art in the divine Presence, afterwards settling in that holy repose, with quietness, silence, and tranquillity; and endeavoring for a whole day, a whole year, and thy whole life, to continue that first act of contemplation, by faith and love.”

—Molinos

“Satan strikes either at the root of faith or at the root of diligence.”

—John Livingstone

“The sum is: remember always the presence of God; rejoice always in the will of God; and direct all to the glory of God.”

—Archbishop Leighton

In Essex, in the year 1550, a number of religious persons who had received the Word of God as their only rule of faith and conduct, and who therefore differed in certain particulars from the dominant party in the Church, met to confer on the ordering of worship. The chief point in debate related to the attitude which one ought to observe in prayer—whether it were better to stand or kneel, to have the head covered or uncovered. The decision arrived at was that the material question had reference not to the bodily posture, but to the direction of the mind. It was agreed that that attitude is most seemly which most fitly expresses the desires and emotions of the soul.

Those words of our Lord which we have prefixed to this chapter indicate not obscurely that attitude of spirit which befits our approach to God.

1. Realize the Presence of God

In the first place, it is necessary that we should *realize the presence of God*.²³ He who fills earth and heaven “is,” in a singular and impressive sense, in the secret place. As the electric energy which is diffused in the atmosphere is concentrated in the lightning flash, so the presence of God becomes vivid and powerful in the prayer-chamber. Bishop Jeremy Taylor enforces this rule with stately and affluent speech: “In the beginning of actions of religion, make an act of adoration; that is, solemnly worship God, and place thyself in God’s presence, and behold Him with the eye of faith; and let thy desires actually fix on Him as the object of thy worship, and the reason of thy hope, and the fountain of thy blessing. For when thou hast placed thyself before Him, and kneelest in His presence, it is most likely all the following parts of thy devotion will be answerable to the wisdom of such an apprehension, and the glory of such a presence.”

Our Father “is” in the secret place. Then we shall find Him in the inwardness of a “recollected” spirit, in the stillness of a heart united to fear His name. The dew falls most copiously when the night-winds are hushed. The great tides lift themselves “too full for sound or foam.” The suppliant who prays with a true direction of spirit, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” is oftentimes taken up into heaven before ever he is aware. “But, oh how rare it is!” cries Fénelon, “How rare it is to find a soul quiet enough to hear God speak!” So many of us have mistrained ears. We are like the Indian hunters of whom Whittier speaks, who can hear the crackle of a twig far off in the dim forest, but are deaf to the thunder of Niagara only a few rods away. Brother Lawrence, who lived

to practice the presence of God, speaks thus: "As for my set hours of prayer, they are only a continuation of the same exercise. Sometimes I consider myself there as a stone before a carver, whereof he is to make a statue; presenting myself before God I desire Him to form His perfect image in my soul, and make me entirely like Himself. At other times, when I apply myself to prayer, I feel all my spirit and all my soul lift itself up without any care or effort of mine, and it continues as it were suspended and, firmly fixed in God, as in its center and place of rest."

The realization of the divine presence is the inflexible condition of a right engagement of spirit in the exercise of private prayer.

John Spilsbury of Bromgrove, who was confined in Worcester jail for the testimony of Christ, bore this witness: "I shall not henceforward fear a prison as formerly, because I had so much of my Heavenly Father's company as made it a palace to me." Another, in similar case, testified: "I thought of Jesus until every stone in my cell shone like a ruby." And for us, too, in our measure, the dull room in which we talk with God, as a man may speak with his friend, will burn at times like a sapphire and a sardius stone, and be to us as the cleft rock in Sinai, through which the un-created glory poured, until the prophet's steadfast gaze was dimmed, and his countenance kindled as a flame.

Our realization of the presence of God may, however, be accompanied with little or no emotion. Our spirits may lie as if dead under the hand of God. Vision and rapture may alike be withdrawn. But we ought not therefore to grow sluggish in prayer. So far from interrupting the exercise at such times, we ought to redouble our energy. And it may be that the prayer which goes up through darkness to God will bring to us a blessing such as we have not received in our most favored hours. The prayer which rises from "the land of forgetfulness," "the place of darkness," "the belly of hell," may have an abundant and glorious return.

At the same time, there are seasons of special privilege when the winds of God are unbound about the throne of grace, and the breath of spring begins to stir in the King's gardens. The Scottish preachers used to talk much of gaining *access*. And it is related of Robert Bruce that when two visitors presented themselves before him on a certain morning, he said to them, "You must go and leave me for some time. I thought last night when I lay down I had a good measure of the Lord's presence, and now I have wrestled this hour or two, and have not yet got access." It may be that in his solitude there was a disproportionate subjectivity, yet the eagerness of his desire was surely commendable.

To what profit is it that we dwell in Jerusalem, if we do not see the King's face? And when He comes forth from His royal chambers, accompanied with blessing, are we to hold ourselves at leisure that we may yield Him worship and offer Him service? Jonathan Edwards resolved that whenever he should find himself "in a good frame for divine contemplation," he would not allow even the recurrence of the mid-day meal to interrupt his engagement with His Lord. "I will forgo my dinner," he said, "rather than be broke off." When the fire of God gleamed upon Mount Carmel, it was Ahab who went down to eat and drink: it was Elijah who went up to pray (1Ki 18).

2. Honesty in Prayer

Again, He who "is" in the secret place "seeth" in secret, and *honest dealing becomes us* when we kneel in His pure presence.

In our address to God we like to speak of Him as we think we ought to speak, and there are times when our words far outrun our feelings. But it is best that we should be perfectly frank before Him. He will allow us to say anything we will, so long as we say it to Himself. "I will say unto God, my rock," exclaims the psalmist, "Why hast thou forgotten me?" (Psa 42:9). If he had said, "Lord, thou canst not forget: thou hast graven my name on the palms of thy hands," he would have spoken more worthily, but less truly. On one occasion Jeremiah failed to interpret God aright. He cried, as if in anger, "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed" (Jer 20:7). These are terrible words to utter before Him who is changeless truth. But the prophet spoke as he felt, and the Lord not only pardoned him, He met and blessed him there.

It is possible that some who read these words may have a complaint against God. A controversy of long standing has come between your soul and His grace. If you were to utter the word that is trembling on your lips, you would say to him, "Why hast Thou dealt thus with me?" Then dare to say, with reverence and with boldness, all that is in your heart. "Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob" (Isa 41:21). Carry your grievance into the light of His countenance; charge your complaint home. Then listen to His answer. For surely, in gentleness and truth, He will clear Himself of the charge of unkindness that you bring against Him. And in His light you shall see light. But, remember, that this is a private matter between you and your Lord, and you must not defame Him to any one. "If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the

generation of thy children” (Psa 73:15). John Livingstone of Ancrum, in a day of darkness, made a most excellent resolution: “Finding myself, as I thought, surely deserted, and somewhat hardly dealt with in my particular state, I made a promise to God not to tell it to any but Himself, lest I should seem to complain or foster misbelief in myself or others.”

But there is another region in which honesty in prayer must operate. There have been times, no doubt, in the life of each one of us, when the Spirit of God granted us enlargement of affection and desire. Our prayers soared through heavenly distances, and were about to fold their wings before the throne. When, suddenly, there was brought to our remembrance some duty unfulfilled, some harmful indulgence tolerated, some sin unrepented of. It was in order that we might forsake that which is evil, and follow that which is good, that the Holy Spirit granted us so abundantly His assistance in prayer.²⁴ He designed that, in that good hour of His visitation, we should be enabled to purify ourselves from every stain, that henceforth we might live as His “purchased possession.” And, perhaps, in such a case, we shunned the light, and turned back from the solicitation of God. Then darkness fell upon our face; the divine Comforter, “who helpeth our infirmities,” being grieved, withdrew. And to that hour, it may be, we can trace our present feebleness in the holy exercise of prayer. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psa 66:18). “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Pro 28:9). “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa 59:2). “And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear” (Isa 1:15). In wireless telegraphy if the receiver is not attuned to the transmitter, communication is impossible. In true prayer God and the suppliant must be “of one accord.” Cavalier, a Huguenot leader, who had lived for years in the enjoyment of unbroken communion with God, deceived by vanity, forsook the cause to which he had devoted his life. Finally, he came to England, and entered the British army. When he was presented to Queen Anne, she said, “Does God visit you now, Monsieur Cavalier?” The young Camisard bowed his head and was silent. Christmas Evans tells of an eclipse of faith which he experienced. A time of powerlessness and decay followed. But the Lord visited him in mercy. “Lazarus had been four days dead when Jesus came that way.” Immediately he began to plead that the fervor and gladness of earlier years might be restored. “On the Caerphilly mountain,” he related, “the

spirit of prayer fell upon me as it had once in Anglesea. I wept and supplicated, and gave myself to Christ. I wept long and besought Jesus Christ, and my heart poured forth its requests before Him on the mountain.” Then followed a period of marvelous blessing.

On the other hand, “If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1Jo 3:21-22).

The devotional writers of the Middle Ages were accustomed to distinguish between “a pure intention” and “a right intention.” The former, they said, was the fruit of sanctification; the latter was the condition of sanctification. The former implied a trained and disciplined will, the latter a will laid down in meek surrender at the Master’s feet. Now, what God requires of those who seek His face is “a right intention”—a deliberate, a resigned, a joyful acceptance of His good and perfect will. All true prayer must fall back upon the great atonement, in which the Man of Sorrows translated into “active passion” the supplication of His agony, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat 26:39). He has transmitted to us His own prayer: we offer it in the power of his sacrifice. “When ye pray, say, Our Father... Thy will be done” (Luk 11:2).

*Lord, here I hold within my trembling hand,
This wmine—a ill of thing which seemeth small;
And only Thou, O Christ, canst understand
How, when I yield Thee this, I yield mine all.*

*It hath been wet with tears, and stained with sighs,
Clenched in my grasp till beauty hath it none;
Now, from Thy footstool where it prostrate lies
The prayer ascendeth, Let Thy will be done.*

3. Faith

Once more, it is necessary that when we draw near to God we should come in *faith*. “Pray to thy Father.” “When we pray say, Our Father.” “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luk 12:32). “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of” (Mat 6:8). “The Father himself loveth you” (Joh 16:27). The whole philosophy of prayer is contained in words like these. “This word ‘Father,’” writes Luther, “hath overcome God.”

(a) Let it be once admitted that with God, *no miracle is impossible*. Let it be acknowledged that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, **no true prayer will remain unblest**. But faith in God is by no means a light or trivial thing. Robert Bruce of Edinburgh used sometimes to pause in his preaching, and, bending over the pulpit, say with much solemnity, "I think it's a great matter to believe there is a God." Once he confessed that during three years he had never said, "My God," without being "challenged and disquieted for the same." "These words, 'My God,'" said Ebenezer Erskine, "are the marrow of the Gospel." To be able to hold the living God within our feeble grasp, and say with assurance, "God, even *our own God*, shall bless us" (Psa 67:6), demands a faith which is not of nature's birth.

But it is comforting to remember that even a feeble faith prevails to overcome. "Is it not a wonder," says Robert Blair, "that our words in prayer, which almost die in the coming out of our lips, should climb so well as to go into heaven?" It is indeed a wonder, but all the doings of God in grace are wondrous. Like the miner, whose trained eye detects the glitter of the precious metal sown in sparse flakes through the coarse grain of the rocks, He observes the rare but costly faith which lies imbedded in our unbelief. Standing somewhere on the slopes of that goodly mountain Hermon, our Lord said to His disciples, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove: and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Mat 17:20). The mountain which the word of faith was to pluck up and cast into the sea was the immeasurable mass which fills the horizon to the north of Palestine, whose roots run under the whole land of Immanuel, whose dews refresh the city of God.

*"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done."*

When the pilgrims (in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*) came to the Delectable Mountains, the shepherds showed them a man standing on Mount Marvel who "tumbled the hills about with words." That man was the son of one Mr. Great Grace, the King's champion, and he was set there "to teach pilgrims to believe down, or to tumble out of their ways what difficulties they should meet with, by faith."

(b) But this God who is ours is our Father. **Our Lord confers on us His own rights and privileges**. He puts into our hand the master-key, which unlocks all the doors of the treasury of God. "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of

God by us” (2Co 1:20). In Him we draw nigh to God. In Him we plead with boldness our requests. Ralph Erskine tells us that, on a certain Sabbath evening, he had unusual liberty in prayer through the name of the Lord Jesus; “I was helped to pray in secret with an outpouring of the soul before the Lord, owning my claim to the promise, my claim to pardon, my claim to grace, my claim to daily bread, my claim to a comfortable life, my claim to a stingless death, my claim to a glorious resurrection, and my claim to everlasting life and happiness: to be, only, only in Christ, and in God through Him as a promising God.”

When we pray to our Father we offer our prayers *in the name of Jesus* with His authority. We must not think, however, that the name of Jesus may be used by us as we like. God can in no wise deal with His children as Ahasuerus dealt with Mordecai when he handed him the great seal with the words, “Write as you like, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s ring: for the writing which is written in the king’s name, and sealed with the king’s ring, may no man reverse” (Est 8:8). John Bunyan shows his accustomed spiritual discernment when, in his *Holy War*, he discourses of the petitions which the men of Mansoul sent to Emmanuel, to none of which did He return any answer. After a time “they agreed together to draw up yet another petition, and to send it away to Emmanuel for relief. But Mr. Godly-Fear stood up, and answered that he knew his Lord, the Prince, never did, nor ever would, receive a petition for these matters from the hand of any unless the Lord Secretary’s hand was to it. ‘And this,’ quoted he, ‘is the reason you prevailed not all this while.’ Then they said they would draw up one, and get the Lord Secretary’s hand to it. But Mr. Godly-Fear answered again that he knew also that the Lord Secretary would not set His hand to any petition that He Himself had not a hand in composing and drawing up.”²⁵

The prayer of faith is a middle term between the intercession of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Christ.²⁶ It is the divinely appointed means by which the unutterable groanings of the Spirit, who dwells within His people as in a temple, are conveyed and committed to the exalted Mediator, who “ever liveth to make intercession” for us. And thus in a peculiar and especial manner, those who make mention of the Lord are graced to become fellow-laborers together with God.

4. The Engagement: Worship

*“We praise Thee... We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory,
O Lord God.” —Book of Common Prayer*

*“Were there nothing else For which to praise the heavens but only love,
That only love were cause enough for praise.”—Tennyson*
“Praise Him, ever praise Him, For remembering dust of earth.”
—Morgan Rhys

“When thou has shut thy door, PRAY.” The word used here, that word which is most frequently employed in the New Testament to denote prayer, implies, *a desire towards*; and while it suggests petition, it is sufficiently general to include the whole of our engagement in the secret place—*Worship, Confession, Request*. In this chapter we shall speak of the first of these—*Worship*.

When Scipio Africanus entered Rome, after he had humbled the proud city of Carthage, he rode in procession along the Way of Triumph, swept over the slope of the Velia, passed reverently down the ancient Way of Sacrifice, then climbed the long ascent of the Capitol, scattering with both hands “the largess of the victor,” while the air was torn with the applause of the crowd. Amid the rejoicing multitudes there were probably some whose most obvious sentiment of gratitude was stirred by the liberality of the conqueror in that hour of triumph. Others exulted in the rolling away of the terror of years, and thought with emotion of the fair fields of Italy, now freed from the yoke of the stranger. While others, forgetting for the moment personal benefits or national enlargement, acclaimed the personal qualities of the victor—his resourcefulness, his benevolence, his courage, his courtesy.

Similarly, the tribute of praise which the saints are instructed to render to the Lord may arise either (a) in the acknowledgment of daily mercies, or (b) in thanksgiving for the great redemption, or (c) in contemplation of the divine perfection.

(a) Acknowledge Daily Mercies

“Memory,” says Aristotle, “is the scribe of the soul.” Let her bring forth her tablets, and write. Fraser of Brea, at one time a prisoner for Christ’s sake on the Bass Rock, resolved that he would search out and record the loving-kindnesses of God. He did so with a very happy effect upon his own spirit. He says, “The calling to mind and seriously

meditating on the Lord's dealings with me as to soul and body, His manifold mercies, has done me very much good, cleared my case, confirmed my soul of God's love and my interest in Him, and made me love Him. Oh...what wells of water have mine eyes been opened to see, which before were hid. Scarce anything hath done me more good than this." Let us take trouble to observe and consider the Lord's dealings with us, and we shall surely receive soul-enriching views of His kindness and truth. His mercies are new every morning. He makes the outgoings of the evening to rejoice. His thoughts concerning us are for number as the sands on the shore, and they are all thoughts of peace. Those benefits which recur with so much regularity that they seem to us "common" and "ordinary," which penetrate with golden threads the homespun vesture of our daily life, ought to be most lovingly commemorated. For, often, they are unspeakably great. "I have experienced today the most exquisite pleasure that I have ever had in my life," said a young invalid; "I was able to breathe freely for about five minutes." In Dr. Judson's house in Burma some friends were speculating on the highest form of happiness which could arise from outward circumstances, and each fortified his own opinion by the judgment of some authority. "Pooh," said Dr. Judson, who had been recalling his terrible imprisonment in Ava, "these men were not qualified to judge. What do you think of floating down the Irrawadi, on a cool, moonlight evening, with your wife by your side, and your baby in your arms, free, all free? But you cannot understand it either; it needs a twenty-one months' qualification; and I can scarcely regret my twenty-one months of misery when I recall that one delicious thrill. I think I have had a better appreciation of what heaven may be ever since." But how often do we thank God for the mere joy of living in the free and healthful use of all our faculties?

"The river past, and God forgotten," is an English proverb which ought in no case to apply to those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. "Praise is comely for the upright" (Psa 33:1) is the judgment of the Old Testament; "In everything give thanks" (1Th 5:18) is the decision of the New. Even a heathen was moved to say, "What can I, a lame old man, do but sing His praise, and exhort others to do the same?"²⁷ For the beauty of nature, the fellowship of the good, the tender love of home; for safe conduct in temptation, strength to overcome, deliverance from evil; for the generosity, the patience, the sympathy of God; and for ten thousand thousand unobserved or unremembered mercies, let us unweariedly bless His Holy Name. "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; for he

is good; for his mercy endureth for ever” (Psa 136:1).²⁸

But if things go hard with us, and trials darken all our sky, are we still to give thanks, and bless our God? Most surely.

“Trials make the promise sweet; Trials give new life to prayer; Trials bring me to His feet, Lay me low, and keep me there.”

Let us thank God for our trials. We dwell, perhaps, in a land of narrowness. But, like Immanuel Kant’s garden, it is “endlessly high.” The air is fresh, and the sun is clear. The winter is frosty, but kindly. With the springtime comes the singing of birds, and the bloom and fragrance of flowers. And if, even in the summer, there breathes “a nipping and an eager air,” there is always the health-giving smile of God. On the other hand, how true is the sentence of Augustine, “Earthly riches are full of poverty.” Rich stores of corn and wine will never satisfy a hungry soul. Purple and fine linen may only mask a threadbare life. The shrill blare of fame’s trumpet cannot subdue the discords of the spirit. The best night that Jacob ever spent was that in which a stone was his pillow, and the skies the curtains of his tent. When Job was held in derision by youths whose fathers he would have disdained to set with the dogs of his flock, he was made a spectacle to angels, and became the theme of their wonder and joy. The defeat which Adam sustained in Paradise, the Redeemer retrieved in the desolation of the desert and the anguish of His passion. The cross we are called to bear may be heavy, but we have not to carry it far. And when God bids us lay it down, heaven begins.

Chrysostom, on his way to exile, exclaimed, “Thank God for everything.” If we imitate him we shall never have a bad day. Alexander Simson, a famous Scottish minister of two hundred years ago, once, when out walking, fell, and broke his leg. He was found “sitting with his broken leg in his arm, and always crying out, ‘Blessed be the Lord; blessed be His name.’” And truly he was wise, seeing that all things work together for good to those who love God. Richard Baxter found reason to bless God for a discipline of pain which endured for five and thirty years. And Samuel Rutherford exclaims, “Oh, what owe I to the furnace, the file, and the hammer of my Lord Jesus!”

(b) Thanksgiving for Redemption

But all our mercies, rightly viewed, lead us back to the thought of our acceptance in Christ. The river of the water of life, which makes the desert glad, flows from under the throne of God and the Lamb. The

benefits of that gracious covenant that is ordered and sure are all confirmed for our use and pleasure by the blood-seal. "There's not a gift His hand bestows, But cost His heart a groan."

The water may be spent in the bottle, but the Well of the Oath is springing freshly just at hand, so near that we may hear the music of its flow. Thieves may rob us of our spending money, "but our gold is in our trunk at home." God may take away from us much that is dear, but has He not given us Christ? And however the prayer of thanksgiving may circle in and out among the gracious providences of God, it will infallibly come to rest at the feet of the Lord.

But to praise Christ is a high exercise. What Thomas Boston says of preaching is as true of praising: "I saw the preaching of Christ to be the most difficult thing; for that, though the whole world is full of wonders, yet here are depths beyond all." And seeing it to be so he kept this "suit" pending before God for a long time, "That he might see Christ by a spiritual illumination." So eager was he for the acceptance of his plea, and so grievous to his soul was his ignorance of Christ, that his bodily health began to be affected. Yet, as he tells us, there were times when his soul went out in love to Christ, followed hard after Him, and "saw much content, delight, and sweet in Him."

The *Passover* in Israel was celebrated on the eve of the great deliverance, which was thenceforth a "night to be much observed unto the Lord." Let us frequently commemorate our redemption from a bondage more bitter than that of Egypt. John Bunyan conveys this wholesome counsel to his "dear children." "Call to mind the former days and years of ancient times; remember also your songs in the night, and commune with your own hearts. Yea, look diligently, and leave no corner therein unsearched, for that treasure hid, even the treasure of your first and second experience of the grace of God towards you; remember, I say, the word that first laid hold upon you; remember your terrors of conscience and fear of death and hell; remember also your tears and prayers to God—yea, how you sighed under every hedge for mercy! Have you never a hill *Mizar* to remember? Have you forgot the closet, the milk-house, the stable, the barn, and the like, where God did visit your souls? Remember also the word—the word, I say, upon which the Lord caused you to hope."

It is right also that we should search into the riches and glory of the inheritance of which we have been made partakers. The blood of Christ, the grace of the Spirit, the light of the divine countenance, are "three jewels worth more than heaven. The name of Christ hath in it ten thousand treasures of joy."²⁹ Perhaps the most acceptable form of worship

and the swiftest incitement to praise, when we recall the mercies which are made sure to us” in the blood of an eternal covenant,” is the act of appropriation by which we serve ourselves heirs to the purchased possession already ours in Christ. Dr. Chalmers was one of those who discovered this open secret. In his diary we frequently meet with expressions such as these: “Began my first waking minutes with a confident hold of Christ as my Savior. A day of great quietness.” “Let the laying hold of Christ as my propitiation be the unvarying initial act of every morning.” “Began the day with a distinct act of confidence; but should renew it through the day.” “Began again with an act of confidence; but why not a perennial confidence in the Savior?” “I have recurred more frequently to the actings of faith in Christ, and I can have no doubt of this being the habit that is to bring me right.” “Recurring to the topic of a large confidence and belief in the promises of the Gospel, let me act on the injunction, ‘Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.’”

It is our pleasant duty also to review with thanksgiving all the way by which the Lord has led us. Otto Funcke has beautifully entitled his brief autobiography, “The Footprints of God in the Pathway of My Life.” The way of the divine direction may lead from the bitter waters of Marah to the tempered shade of Elim’s palms. It may pass through the fiery desert, but it reaches onwards to the Mount of God. It may descend to the valley of the shadow of death, but it will bring us out and through to the pleasant land of the promises of God—“A land of corn and wine and oil, Favored with God’s peculiar smile, With every blessing blest.”

And in that “right way” of the divine conduct there is always the comforting and adorable presence of our Great God and Savior. We cannot recall the mercies of the way and not remember Him. He took, with a hand that was pierced, the bitter cup, and drank, until His lips were wet with our sorrow and doom. And now the cup of bitterness has become sweet. Where His footsteps fell the wilderness rejoiced, and the waste places of our life became fruitful as Carmel. A rugged track beneath our feet ran darkly into the night, but the tender love of His presence was as a lamp to our feet and a light upon our path. His name is fragrance, His voice is music, His countenance is health. Dr. Judson, in his last illness, had a wonderful entrance into the land of praise. He would suddenly exclaim, as the tears ran down his face, “Oh, the love of Christ! the love of Christ! We cannot understand it now, but what a beautiful study for eternity.” Again and again, though his pain was constant and severe, he would cry in a holy rapture, “Oh, the love of

Christ! the love of Christ!”

Such praises uplift their strain until it mingles with the glory of the new song which fills the sanctuary on high, “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9-10).

(c) Contemplation of the divine Perfection

And so, praise addressed to God in name and memory of Jesus Christ rises inevitably into *adoration*. And here, most often, “praise is silent.” Isaiah, transported by faith into the inner sanctuary, was rapt into the worship of the seraphim, and joined in spirit in the unending adoration of the Triune God—“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3). The herald angels poured forth upon the plains of Bethlehem the song of heaven, “Glory to God in the highest;” and our sad earth heard, and was comforted. “Angels, help us to adore Him; Ye behold Him face to face!”

But even these bright intelligences are unable to show forth all His praise.³⁰

It is reported of John Janeway that often in the hour of secret prayer he scarcely knew whether he were “in the body, or out of the body.” Tersteegen said to some friends who had gathered round him, “I sit here and talk with you, but within is the eternal adoration, unceasing and undisturbed.” Woodrow relates that on one occasion Mr. Carstairs was invited to take part in communion services at Calder, near Glasgow. He was wonderfully assisted, and had “a strange gale through all the sermon.” His hearers were affected in an unusual degree; glory seemed to fill the house. “A Christian man that had been at the table, and was obliged to come out of the church, pressing to get in again, could not succeed for some time, but stood without the door, wrapt up in the thoughts of that glory that was in the house, for nearly half-an-hour, and could think of nothing else.”

Dr. A. J. Gordon describes the impression made upon his mind by dialogue with Joseph Rabinowitz, whom Dr. Delitzsch considered the most remarkable Jewish convert since Saul of Tarsus: “We shall not soon forget the radiance that would come into his face as he expounded the Messianic psalms at our morning or evening worship, and how, as here and there he caught a glimpse of the suffering or glorified Christ, he would suddenly lift his hands and his eyes to heaven in a burst of

admiration, exclaiming with Thomas, after he had seen the nail-prints, ‘My Lord, and my God!’”

With many of us emotion may be feeble, and rapture of the spirit may be rare. Love to Christ may express itself more naturally in right conduct than in a tumult of praise. But it is probable that to each sincere believer there are granted seasons of communion when, as one turns to the unseen glory, the veil of sense becomes translucent, and one seems to behold within the Holiest the very Face and Form of Him who died for our sins, who rose for our justification, who now awaits us at the right hand of God. But, even so, we must never forget that adoration does not exhaust itself in pleasing emotions. By the law of its nature it turns again to request: “Our Father, which art in heaven, *hallowed be thy name*” (Mat 6:9).

5. The Engagement: Confession

“The garden of spices is sprinkled with red flowers.”—Heinrich Seuse

“It is a great and rare thing to have forgiveness in God discovered unto a sinful soul. It is a pure Gospel truth, that hath neither shadow, footsteps, nor intimation elsewhere. The whole creation hath not the least obscure impression of it left thereon.”—John Owen

“Before His breath the bands That held me fall and shrivel up in flame. He bears my name upon His wounded hands, Upon His heart my name. I wait, my soul doth wait For Him who on His shoulder bears the key; I sit fast bound, and yet not desolate; My mighty Lord is free. Be thou up-lifted, Door Of everlasting strength! the Lord on high Hath gone, and captive led for evermore My long captivity.”

—Dora Greenwell

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). Confession of sin is the first act of an awakened sinner, the first mark of a gracious spirit. When God desires an habitation in which to dwell, He prepares “a broken and a contrite heart.” The altar of reconciliation stands at the entrance of the New Testament temple; from the altar the worshipper passes on, by way of the laver, to the appointed place of meeting: the blood-stained mercy-seat.

But we speak now rather of the confession of sin which is due by those who are justified, having found acceptance in Christ Jesus.

Though they are children, they are sinners still. And if they walk in the light, they are conscious—as in their unregenerate state they never were—of the baseness of their guilt, the hatefulness of their iniquity. For now they bring their transgressions and apostasies into the light of God’s countenance, and holding them up before Him, cry, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest” (Psa 51:4).

Be Explicit

Confession of sin should *be explicit*. “The care of Christianity is for particulars,” says Bishop Warburton. The ritual law in Israel which provided for the transference of sin on the Day of Atonement presupposed definiteness of confession: “Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him *all* the iniquities of the children of Israel, and *all* their transgressions in all their sins” (Lev 16:21). In private sacrifices, also, while the hands of the offerer (Lev 1:4) were laid on the victim, the following prayer was recited: “I entreat, O Jehovah: I have sinned, I have done perversely, I have rebelled, I have committed _____;” then the special sin, or sins, were named, and the worshipper continued, “but I return in penitence: let this be for my atonement.” Standing beside the ruins of Jericho, Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto Him.” And Achan answered, “Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel; *and thus and thus have I done*” (Jos 7:19-20). The great promise of the New Testament is not less definite: “If we confess our *sins*, he is faithful and just to forgive us our *sins*, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9). A wise old writer says, “A child of God will confess sin in particular; an unsound Christian will confess sin by wholesale; he will acknowledge he is a sinner in general; whereas David doth, as it were, point with his finger to the sore: ‘I have done *this* evil’ (Psa 51:4); he doth not say, ‘I have done evil,’ but ‘*this* evil.’ He points to his blood-guiltiness.”

When, in the course of the day’s engagements, our conscience witnesses against us that we have sinned, we should at once confess our guilt, claim by faith the cleansing of the blood of Christ, and so wash our hands in innocence. And afterwards, as soon as we have a convenient opportunity, we ought to review with deliberation the wrong that we have done. As we consider it *with God* we shall be impressed by its sinfulness, as we were not at the time of its committal. And if the

sin is one which we have committed before, one to which perhaps our nature lies open, we must cast ourselves in utter faith upon the strong mercy of God, pleading with Him in the name of Christ that we may never again so grieve Him.³¹

As our hearts grow more tender in the presence of God, the remembrance of former sins which have already been acknowledged and forgiven will from time to time imprint a fresh stain upon our conscience. In such a case nature itself seems to teach us that we ought anew to implore the pardoning grace of God. For we bend, not before the judgment seat of the divine Lawgiver, but before our Father, to whom we have been reconciled through Christ. A more adequate conception of the offense which we have committed ought surely to be followed by a deeper penitence for the wrong done. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we shall often be led to pray with the Psalmist, "Remember not the sins of my youth" (Psa 25:7), even though these have long since been dealt with and done away. Conviction of sin will naturally prompt to confession. When such promptings are disregarded, the Spirit who has wrought in us that conviction is grieved.

*"My sins, my sins, my Savior, How sad on Thee they fall;
While through Thy gentle patience, I ten-fold feel them all.
I know they are forgiven; But still their pain to me
Is all the grief and anguish They laid, my Lord, on Thee."*

Yield to the Comforter

It is of the first importance that in all the exercises of the secret chamber we should yield ourselves to the blessed influences of the Comforter, by whom alone we are enabled to pray with acceptance. An important caution in regard to this has been noted by Ralph Erskine. In his diary he writes, under the date January 23, 1733: "This morning I was quickened in prayer, and strengthened to hope in the Lord. At the beginning of my prayer I discerned a lively frame in asserting a God in Christ to be the fountain of my life, the strength of my life, the joy of my life; and that I had no life that deserved that name, unless He Himself were my life. But here, checking myself with reflections upon my own sinfulness, vileness, and corruption, I began to acknowledge my wickedness; but for the time the sweetness of frame failed me, and wore off. Whence, I think, I may gather this lesson, that no sweet influence of the Spirit ought to be checked upon pretense of getting a frame better founded upon humiliation; otherwise, the Lord may be provoked to withdraw." When Thomas Boston found himself in danger

of giving way to vain-glory, he *took a look at his black [sinful] feet.*³² We may well do the same, but never so as to lose our assurance of sonship, or our sense of the preciousness of Christ. As Rutherford reminds us, “There is no ‘law-music’ [i.e., themes of judgment] in heaven: there all their song is, ‘Worthy is the Lamb.’” And the blood of ransom has atoned for ALL SIN.

Believers of a former age used to observe with thankfulness the occasions on which they were enabled to show “a kindly, penitential mourning for sin.” At other times they would lament their deadness. Yet it never occurred to them that the coldness of their affections should induce them to restrain prayer before God. On the contrary, they were of one mind with “a laborious and successful wrestler at the throne of grace,” who determined that “he would never give over enumerating and confessing his sins, till his heart were melted in contrition and penitential sorrow.”

Why Deadness of Heart?

For such deadness of heart there may be many explanations.

He who was once as a flame of fire in his Master’s service may have allowed the fervor of his first love to decline for want of fuel, or want of watchful care, until only a little heap of gray ashes smolders on the altar of his affections. His greatest sorrow is that he has no sorrow for sin, his heaviest burden that he is unburdened. “Oh, that I were once again under the terrors of Christ,” was the cry of one who had hung in agony over the brink of the pit, but who had learned that a cold heart towards Christ is still more insupportable. Those who are in such a case are often nearer the Savior than they know. Shepard of New England, speaking from a wide experience, says: More are drawn to Christ under the sense of a dead, blind heart, than by all sorrows, humiliations, and terrors.”

That which impresses us as deadness of heart may be the operation of the Holy Spirit, convincing us of sins hitherto unnoticed. As one looks at some star-galaxy, and sees it only as a wreath of dimming mist, so one becomes conscious of innumerable unregarded sins, merely by the shadow which they fling upon the face of the heavens. But when one observes through a telescope the nebulous drift, it resolves itself into a cluster of stars, almost infinite in number. And when one examines in the secret place of communion the cloud which darkens the face of God, it is seen to scatter and break into a multitude of sins. If, then, in the hour of prayer we have no living communion with God, let us plead with the psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa 139:23-24). He who has engaged to “search Jerusalem with candles” (Zep 1:12) will examine us through and through, will test us as silver is proved, will sift us as wheat. He will bring up from the unexplored depths of our nature all that is contrary to the mind of Christ, and reduce every thought and imagination to the obedience of His will.

Deadness of heart may arise also from the consciousness of our many sins of omission—duties unattempted, opportunities unimproved, grace disregarded. Often, when we kneel in prayer, “the lost years cry out” behind us. What was related of Archbishop Ussher might be said of very many of the Lord’s servants—“He prayed often, and with great humility, that God would forgive him his sins of omission, and his failings in his duty.” Each day is a vessel to be freighted with holy deeds and earnest endeavors before it weighs anchor and sets sail for the eternal shores. How many hours we misspend! How many occasions we lose! How many precious gifts of God we squander! And the world passes away, and the fashion of it fadeth.

But there is that which lies still deeper in the soul than even secret sin—there is native sinfulness, the body of death. When we acknowledge the depravity of our nature we should endeavor to speak according to the measure of our experience. We can scarcely exaggerate the facts, but we may easily overstate to hold our lightest thought or feeling within the piercing illumination of them. As we advance in grace, as we become accustomed to the divine purity, as we open the most hidden recesses of our being to the gracious influences of the good Spirit of God, we are led into a profounder understanding of the sinfulness of inbred sin, until we lament with Ezra, “Oh, my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God” (Ezr 9:6).

It is reported of Luther that for one long day his inborn sinfulness revealed itself in dreadful manifestations, so vehement and terrifying that “the very venom of them drank up his spirits, and his body seemed dead, that neither speech, sense, blood, or heat appeared in him.” On a day of special fasting and prayer Thomas Shepard, of Cambridge, Connecticut, wrote as follows: “November 3rd. I saw sin as my greatest evil; and that I was vile; but God was good only, whom my sins did cross. And I saw what cause I had to loathe myself...The Lord also gave me some glimpse of myself; a good day and time it was to me...I went to God, and rested on Him...I began to consider whether all the country did not fare the worse for my sins. And I saw it was so. And this was an humbling thought to me.”

President Edwards had at one time an amazing discovery of the beauty and glory of Christ. After recording it in his diary, he continues: “My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, and swallowing up all thought and imagination, like an infinite deluge, or mountains over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite. Very often for these many years these expressions are in my mind and in my mouth, “Infinite upon infinite! Infinite upon infinite!” When Dr. John Duncan was drawing near to death he remarked with great earnestness, “I am thinking with horror of the carnal mind, enmity against God. *I never get a sight of it but it produces horror, even bodily sickness.*”

These are solemn experiences. Perhaps God leads few of His children through waters so wild and deep. Nor must we try to follow, unless He points the way. Above all, we dare not, in confessions which are addressed to a holy God, simulate an experience which we have never known. But let us, as far as God has revealed it to us, confess the deep sin of our nature. It has been said³³ with much truth that the only “sign of one’s being in Christ which Satan cannot counterfeit” is the grief and sorrow which true believers undergo when God discloses to them the sinfulness of inbred sin.

But, on the other hand, the love of Christ at times so fills the heart that, though the remembrance of sin continues, the sense of sin is lost—swallowed up in a measureless ocean of peace and grace. Such high moments of visitation from the living God are surely a prelude to the joy of heaven. For the song of the redeemed in glory is unlike the praises of earth in this, that while it also celebrates the death of the Lamb of God there is in it no mention of sin. All the poisonous fruits of our iniquity have been killed; all the bitter consequences of our evil deeds have been blotted out. And the only relics of sin which are found in heaven are the scarred feet and hands and side of the Redeemer. So, when the saved from earth recall their former transgressions, they look to Christ; and the remembrance of sin dies in the love of Him who wore the thorny-crown, and endured the cross.

*“The fouler was the error, The sadder was the fall,
The ampler are the praises Of Him who pardoned all.”*

6. The Engagement: Request

“Make me sensible of real answers to actual requests, as evidence of an interchange between myself on earth and my Savior in heaven.”

—Thomas Chalmers

“O brother, pray; in spite of Satan, pray; spend hours in prayer; rather neglect friends than not pray; rather fast, and lose breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper—and sleep too—than not pray. And we must not talk about prayer, we must pray in right earnest. The Lord is near. He comes softly while the virgins slumber.”

—A. A. Bonar

“The main lesson about prayer is just this: Do it! Do it! Do it! You want to be taught to pray. My answer is: pray and never faint, and then you shall never fail. There is no possibility. You cannot fail...A sense of real want is the very root of prayer.”

—John Laidlaw

Once, when the late Dr. Moody Stuart happened to be in Huntly, Duncan Matheson took him to see some earnest Christian people. He visited, among others, an aged woman who was in her own way a “character.” Before leaving, he prayed with her; and she, as was her habit, emphasized each petition with some ejaculatory comment, or note of assent. Towards the close of his prayer, he asked that God, according to His promise, would give her “all things.” The old lady interjected, “All things, na, that *wad* be a lift.”

The mingling of comfort and doubt which was revealed by the quaint insertion is characteristic of the faith of very many of the children of God, when they are brought face to face with some great promise addressed to believing prayer. “And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Mat 21:22). “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mar 11:24). “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (Joh 15:7).

It is so reasonable to think that He who spared not His own Son should with Him also freely give us all things; and it is so hard to believe that He will. As Dr. Moody Stuart says elsewhere, the controversy is between the mustard-seed and the mountain: “The trial is whether the mountain shall bury the mustard-seed, or the mustard-seed cast the mountain into the sea.” The mustard-seed is so small, and the

mountain so great, that faith is not easily come by. Indeed, it is literally “the gift of God.” It is a divinely-implanted persuasion, the fruit of much spiritual instruction and discipline. It is vision in a clearer light than that of earth.

A Disposition Conformed to Christ

The prayer of faith, like some plant rooted in a fruitful soil, draws its virtue from a disposition which has been brought into conformity with the mind of Christ.

1. It is subject to the divine will—“This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1Jo 5:14).
2. It is restrained within the interest of Christ—“Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (Joh 14:13).
3. It is instructed in the truth—“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (Joh 15:7).
4. It is energized by the Spirit—“Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20).
5. It is interwoven with love and mercy—“And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mar 11:25).
6. It is accompanied with obedience—“Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1Jo 3:22).
7. It is so earnest that it will not accept denial—“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Luk 11:9).
8. It goes out to look for, and to hasten its answer —“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jam 5:16).³⁴

The Warrant for Faith

But, although the prayer of faith springs from a divinely-implanted disposition, there is nothing mysterious in the act of faith. It is simply an assurance which relies upon a sufficient warrant.

(a) In the first instance, the warrant of faith is **the Word of God**. The promises of God are letters of credit, drawn on the bank of heaven, to be honored at sight. Some time ago a bundle of Bank of England notes was stolen, but they were unsigned, and therefore valueless. But

the promises of God are all witnessed to by the eternal veracity, and are countersigned in the blood of the cross. They are subject to no discount; those who present them will receive their full face-value. "I am the Lord; I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall be performed."

(b) The word of God rests on **the divine character**. Therefore we are taught to pray, "O Lord, . . . do Thou it, for Thy name's sake." God is our Father, and He knoweth what things we have need of. He is our God in covenant—our own God—and He will bless us. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and He will secure to His well-beloved Son the inheritance which He has purchased in blood. He is the source of blessing, from whom the Comforter proceeds, and the prayer which He inspires He will fulfill.

In the intercession of Daniel the prophet we have a signal illustration of petitions founded on this two-fold warrant. He "understood by books 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." But the prophet does not rest His trust only on the promise; he urges that which is due to the divine character: "Now, therefore, O our God, hearken unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, *for the Lord's sake*. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city *which is called by thy name*: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but *for thy great mercies*. O Lord, hear; O Lord forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not; *for thine own sake*, O my God, because thy city and thy people are *called by thy name*" (Dan 9:17-19).

Reasons Why We Must Pray

But it may be objected, If our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him, and if it is His good pleasure to give us the kingdom, is it necessary that we should present our petitions deliberately before Him? The simplest answer to that question is that *we are instructed to do so*. In the Old Testament we read, "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." And in the New Testament, "In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." We have a striking illumination of the working of this divine law in the case of Elijah. He had preserved unhesitating fidelity towards God, and so had fulfilled the conditions by which alone fellowship with

the Holy One is secured and maintained—“Jehovah liveth, before whom I stand.” He had won Israel back to covenant allegiance—“And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God.” He had received, and acted upon a definite promise—“Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.” He had the inward assurance that God’s answer to his long-continued importunity in prayer was already on its way, “There is a sound of abundance of rain” (1Ki 18:15,39,1,41). Nevertheless, he did not cease from praying—he could not until the skies grew dark with the gathering storm.

It is possible, however, to suggest certain reasons why we should with particularity and importunity implore those blessings which are already ours in Christ.

(1) By prayer our continued and *humble dependence* on the grace of God is secured. If the bestowments of the covenant came to us without solicitation, as the gifts of nature do, we might be tempted to hold ourselves in independence of God, to say, “My power, and the might of mine hand, hath gotten me this wealth”³⁵ (Deu 8:17).

(2) The Lord desires to have us much in *communion with Himself*.³⁶ The reluctance of the carnal heart to dwell in God’s presence is terrible. We will rather speak of Him than to Him. How often He finds occasion to reprove us, saying, “The companions hearken to thy voice; cause Me to hear it.” A father will prize an ill-spelled, blotted-scrawl from his little child, because it is a pledge and seal of love.³⁷ And precious in the sight of the Lord are the prayers of His saints.

(3) Much, very much, has often to be accomplished in us before we are fitted to employ worthily the gifts we covet. And God effects this preparation of heart largely by delaying to grant our request at once, and so holding us in the truth of His presence until we are brought into a *spiritual understanding* of the will of Christ for us in this respect. If a friend, out of his way (Luk 11:6), comes to us, hungry, and seeking from us the bread of life, and we have nothing to set before him, we must go to Him who has all store of blessing. And if He should seem to deny our prayer, and say, “Trouble me not,” it is only that we may understand the nature of the blessing we seek, and be fitted to dispense aright the bounty of God.

(4) Once more, we are called to *be fellow-laborers together with God*, in prayer, as in all other ministries. The exalted Savior ever lives to make intercession; and to His redeemed people He says, “Tarry ye here, and watch with me” (Mat 26:38). There is a great work to be done in the hearts of men, there is a fierce battle to be waged with spiritual

wickedness in heavenly places. Demons are to be cast out, the power of hell to be restrained, the works of the devil to be destroyed. And in these things, it is by prayer above all other means that we shall be able to cooperate with the Captain of the Lord's host.³⁸

*“God spake, and gave us the word to keep;
Bade never fold the hands, nor sleep
‘Mid a faithless world—at watch and ward,
Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.
By His servant Moses the watch was set;
Though near upon cock-crow we keep it yet.”*

Self Is Forgotten

When prayer rises to its true level, self, with its concerns and needs, is for the time forgotten, and the interests of Christ fill, and sometimes overwhelm, the soul. It is then that prayer becomes most urgent and intense. It was said of Luther that he prayed “with as much reverence as if he were praying to God, and with as much boldness as if he had been speaking to a friend.” One remarked of the prayers of Guthrie of Fenwick that “every word would fill a corn measure.” Livingstone reports of Robert Bruce that in prayer “every sentence was like a strong bolt shot up to heaven.” The biographer of Richard Baxter tells us that when he gathered his spirit together to pray, it “took wing for heaven.” And it is related in similar terms of Archbishop Leighton that “his manner of praying was so earnest and importunate as proved that his soul mounted up to God in the flame of his own aspirations.” Henry Martyn notes in his diary that, having set apart a day for fasting and humiliation, he began to pray for the establishment of the divine kingdom upon earth, with particular mention of India. He received so great an enlargement, and had such energy and delight in prayer, as he had never before experienced. He adds, “My whole soul wrestled with God. I knew not how to leave off crying to Him to fulfill His promises, chiefly pleading His own glorious power.”

How much of the regeneration of Central Africa do we not owe to the prayers of David Livingstone? He did not live to see the healing of “the open sore;” it was not given to him to know the advancing Christian culture of “the dark continent.” But the record of his prayers is on high. His journals give some slight indication of his lonely vigils, his daily and nightly intercessions. He lived praying for Africa, and when he felt the coldness of death seizing upon his frame, he crept out of bed, and as he knelt upon the floor of the rude grass hut in

Chitambo's village in Ilala his soul took flight to God in prayer. He died, his sympathetic biographer informs us, "in the act of praying prayer offered in that reverential attitude about which he was always so particular; commending his own spirit, with all his dear ones, as was his wont, into the hands of his Savior, and commending Africa—his own dear Africa—with all her woes, and sins, and wrongs, to the Avenger of the oppressed, and the Redeemer of the lost."

7. The Hidden Riches of the Secret Place

"Prayer is the means by which we obtain all the graces which rain down upon us from the divine Fountain of Goodness and Love."

—*Laurence Scupoli*

"The consolation of Scriptures consisteth in this, that reading in them the promises of God, we do anew confirm, and fortify ourselves in Hope; there promising unto us that which betides to one to whom a Lord promiseth by his Letters a thousand Duckets of income, who maintains himself in the Hope to have that revenue through patience, fortifying his heart more and more through hope, when it seems to him that the accomplishment of the promise is delayed, no way departing from his hope, and comforting himself with the Letter of the Lord."

—*Juan de Valdés (Nicholas Ferrar's Translation)*

In many modern translations of the New Testament the ear misses the familiar ending of the text which in these pages we have kept before us. Instead of the words "shall reward thee openly" (in the KJV), we read in the RSV for example, "shall recompense thee." The return of prayer is, in the first instance, personal and private; it is "the hidden riches" of the secret place (Isa 45:3). Then, as it passes out into life and action, it is made manifest. The Father who is in secret, and who seeth in secret, rewards His servants "openly."

We read that when the Pilgrims (of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*) had come almost to the end of the enchanted ground, "they perceived that a little before them was a solemn noise, as of one that was much concerned. So they went on, and looked before them; and, behold, they saw, as they thought, a man upon his knees, with his hands and eyes

lifted up, and speaking, as they thought, earnestly to one that was above. They drew nigh, but could not tell what he said; so they went softly till he had done. When he had done, he got up, and *began to run towards the Celestial City.*”

Holiness

This is the first reward of the secret place; through prayer our graces are quickened, and holiness is wrought in us. “Holiness,” says Hewitson, “is a habit of mind—a setting of the Lord continually before one’s eyes, a constant walking with God as one with whom we are agreed.” And in the attainment and maintenance of unbroken communion, “Prayer is amongst duties, as faith is amongst graces.” Richard Sibbes reminds us that “Prayer exercises all the graces of the Spirit,” and Flavel confirms the sentence: “You must strive,” he writes, “to excel in this, forasmuch as no grace within or service without can thrive without it.” Berridge affirms that “all decays begin in the closet; no heart thrives without much secret converse with God, and nothing will make amends for the want of it.” On the other hand, he acknowledges, “I never rose from secret prayer without some quickening. Even when I set about it with heaviness or reluctance the Lord is pleased in mercy to meet me in it.” Similarly, Fraser of Brea declares, “I find myself better and worse as I decay and increase in prayer.”

If prayer is hindered, even though it be hindered by devotion to other duties of religion, the health of the soul is impaired. Henry Martyn laments in his diary that “want of private devotional reading and shortness of prayer, through incessant sermon-making, had produced much strangeness” between God and his soul. *Communion with God is the condition of spiritual growth.* It is the soil in which all the graces of the divine life root themselves. If the virtues were the work of man, we might perfect them one by one, but they are “the fruit of the Spirit,” and grow together in one common life. When Philip Saphir embraced Christianity, he said, “I have found a religion for my whole nature.” Holiness is the harmonious perfection, the “wholeness” of the soul.

While we abide in Christ we ought not to allow ourselves to be discouraged by the apparent slowness of our advancement in grace. In nature, growth proceeds with varying speed. Sibbes compares the progressive sanctification of believers to “the increase in herbs and trees,” which “grow at the root in winter, in the leaf in summer, and in the seed in autumn.” The first of these forms of increase seems very slow; the second is more rapid; the third rushes on to full maturity. In a few days of early autumn a field of grain will seem to ripen more than in weeks of midsummer.

Intimacy with Christ

Communion with God discovers the excellence of His character, and by beholding Him the soul is transformed. *Holiness is conformity to Christ*, and this is secured by a growing intimacy with Him.

It is evident that this consideration opens up a vast field for reflection. We shall merely indicate two of the many directions in which it applies.

(a) First, the habit of prayerfulness produces a singular *serenity of spirit*. To use Bengel's phrase, we are "built up into a recollected consciousness of God."

When one looks into the quiet eyes of Him that sitteth upon the throne, the tremors of the spirit are stilled. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is but a noise; and the valley of the shadow of death is tuneful with songs of praise. Storms may rave beneath our feet, but the sky above is blue. We take our station with Christ in heavenly places; we dwell in the Sabbath of God. "Here I lie," said Thomas Halyburton when his death-hour was drawing near, "pained without pain, without strength yet strong." Seguiet, a French Protestant, who was sentenced to death, was mockingly asked by one of his guards how he felt. He replied, "My soul is as a garden, full of shelter and fountains." There are towns in Europe which would be almost insupportably hot in midsummer were it not that rivers, issuing from the ice-fields of Switzerland, diffuse a cool and refreshing air even in the sultry noon. And so the river of the water of life, which flows from under the throne of God and the Lamb, makes glad the city of God. Jeremy Taylor says, "Prayer is the peace of our spirits, the stillness of our thoughts, the evenness of our recollection, the seat of our meditation, the rest of our cares, and the calm of our tempest."³⁹

(b) Again, those who continually exercise themselves in prayer are taught to *rule their lives according to the will of God*. This effect follows naturally upon the former, for "all noble, moral energy roots itself in moral calm."

Prayer is the avowal of our creature-dependence. For the believer also it is the acknowledgment that he is not his own, but is, by reason of the great atonement, the "purchased possession" of the Son of God. Pius IV, hearing of Calvin's death, exclaimed: "Ah, the strength of that proud heretic lay in this, that riches and honour were nothing to him." David Livingstone, in the heart of darkest Africa, writes in his Journal, "My Jesus, my King, my Life, my All, I again dedicate my whole self to Thee." Bengel spoke in the name of all the children of faith when he said, "All I am, and have, both in principle and practice, is to be

summed up in this one expression—‘The Lord’s property.’ My belonging totally to Christ as my Savior is all my salvation and all my desire. I have no other glory than this, and I want no other.” Afterwards, when death drew near, the following words were pronounced over him, “Lord Jesus, to Thee I live, to Thee I suffer, to Thee I die. Thine I am in death and in life; save and bless me, O Savior, for ever and ever. Amen.” At the words “Thine I am,” he laid his right hand upon his heart, in token of his full and hearty assent. And so he fell asleep in Jesus.

Such is the normal attitude of the redeemed soul, an attitude which prayer acknowledges and confirms.

Further, in prayer we present ourselves to God, holding our motives in His clear light, and estimating them after the counsel of His will. Thus our thoughts and feelings *arrange* themselves into classes (as in a process of polishing or smoothing); those that rise towards the honour of God taking precedence of those that drift downward towards the gratification of self. And so the great decisions of life are prepared. In prayer, Jacob became Israel; in prayer, Daniel saw Christ’s day, and was glad; in prayer, Saul of Tarsus received his commission to go “far hence” among the Gentiles; in prayer, the Son of Man accomplished His obedience, and embraced His cross. It does not always happen, however, that the cardinal points of life are recognized in the very place and hour of prayer. Helmholtz, the celebrated physicist, used to say that his greatest discoveries came to him, not in the laboratory, but when he was walking, perhaps along a country road, in perfect freedom of mind. But his discoveries merely registered themselves then; they were really brought to the birth in the laboratory. And whether it be in the place of prayer, or elsewhere, that life’s great decisions frame themselves, undoubtedly it is in the silent hour that characters are molded and careers determined.

In his *Autobiography* George Müller gives a striking testimony: “I never remember, in all my Christian course, a period now (in March, 1895) of sixty-nine years and four months, that I ever SINCERELY and PATIENTLY sought to know the will of God by *the teaching of the Holy Ghost*, through the instrumentality of the Word of God, but I have been ALWAYS directed rightly. But if *honesty of heart* and *uprightness before God* were lacking, or if I did not *patiently* wait before God for instruction, or if I preferred *the counsel of my fellow-men* to the declarations of the *Word of the Living God*, I made great mistakes.”

As we present ourselves before the Lord in prayer, we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit when we yield to the inward impulse, and the divine energy commands our being. Our plans, if we have formed them

at the dictation of nature, are laid aside, and the purpose of God in relation to our lives is accepted. As we are Spirit-born, let us be Spirit-controlled: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

(c) Through the acceptance of the will of God for us, we are led out into a richer influence and a *wider usefulness*. Montalembert once complained to Lacordaire, "How little it is that man can do for his fellows! Of all his miseries this is the greatest." It is true that we can effect little for one another by ordinary human means, but much may be done by prayer. "*More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.*" Prayer brings the divine omnipotence into the occasions of life. We ask, and receive; and our joy is full.

An English scholar has told us that those who have helped him most were not learned divines nor eloquent preachers, but holy men and women who walked with God, and who revealed unconsciously the unadorned goodness which the blessed Spirit had wrought in them. Those saintly persons had looked on Christ until they were changed into His likeness; they had tarried on the Mount of God until the uncreated glory shone upon their brow. Tradition affirms that Columbia the Celtic missionary, Ruysbroek the recluse of Groenendaal, John Welsh of Ayr, and many others, were wrapped in a soft and tempered radiance as they prayed. Such legends, no doubt, were created by the remembrance of lives that had been transfigured.

"I saw a Saint. How canst thou tell that he, Thou sawest was a Saint? I saw one like to Christ so luminously, By patient deeds of love, his mortal taint, Seemed made his groundwork for humility."

But a *changed life* is not the only gift which God bestows upon us when we stand in the unseen presence. When Moses came from the Mount he was, as it were, transfigured in the eyes of the children of Israel; but he also bore in his hands the tables of testimony—the pledges of that covenant, ordered and sure, which had been sealed to him for them. His prayer had saved the people of election, and the law-tablets were the sign. John Nelson, hearing one comparing John Wesley, unfavorably, with a pulpit celebrity of the time, replied, "But he has not tarried in the Upper Room as John Wesley has done." It is this tarrying in the Upper Room that secures *the enduement of power*. (This line of thought leads out into the theme of the closing chapter.)

8. The Open Recompense

Jesus, Lord God from all eternity, Whom love of us brought down to shame, I plead Thy life with Thee, I plead Thy death, I plead Thy name. Jesus, Lord God of every living soul, Thy love exceeds its uttered fame, Thy will can make us whole, I plead Thyself. I plead Thy name.

—Christina Rossetti

“None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience. It is a great matter when in extreme need to take hold on prayer. I know, whenever I have prayed earnestly that I have been amply heard, and have obtained more than I prayed for. God indeed sometimes delayed, but at last He came.”

—Luther

“I sought Him in my hour of need; (Lord God now hear my prayer!) For death He gave me life indeed, And comfort for despair. For this my thanks shall endless be, Oh thank Him, thank Him now with me, Give to our God the glory!”—J. J. Schutz

In their anxiety to magnify the personal benefits which are derived from communion with God, the Greek fathers used to employ the figure of a small boat moored to a large ship. If one were to draw upon the rope, they said, the ship would remain unmoved, but the boat would at once respond to the pull. Apparently they forgot, or did not know, that in mechanics “action and reaction are equal and opposite;” as great an effect would take place on the larger vessel as on the smaller, although the greater bulk of the ship would make the displacement much less obvious with regard to it than as it affected the boat. In prayer also, the influence is reciprocal. There is, as we have seen, a heightened exercise of all the Christian graces; but there are also direct answers to petitions offered in faith.

If we do not expect to receive answers to our requests, our whole conception of prayer is at fault. “None ask in earnest,” says Trail, “but they will try how they speed. There is no surer and plainer mark of trifling in prayer than when men are careless what they get by prayer.” And to the same effect Richard Sibbes writes: “We should watch daily, continue instant in prayer; strengthen our supplications with arguments from God’s Word and promises; and mark how our prayers speed. When we shoot an arrow we look to its fall; when we send a ship to sea we look for its return; and when we sow we look for an harvest...It is atheism to pray and not to wait in hope. A sincere Christian will pray, wait, strengthen his heart with the promises, and never leave praying

and looking up till God gives him a gracious answer.”

And if the answer is delayed, we ought to ask ourselves if that which we desire is truly according to the will of God; and if we are satisfied that it is, we ought to continue “instant in prayer.” Bengel gives his judgment that “a Christian should not leave off praying till his heavenly Father give him leave, by permitting him to obtain something.” And George Müller drew encouragement from the fact that he had been enabled to persevere in prayer daily, during twenty-nine years, for a certain spiritual blessing long withheld: “At home and abroad, in this country and in foreign lands, in health and in sickness, however much occupied, I have been enabled, day by day, by God’s help, to bring this matter before Him, and still I have not the full answer yet. Nevertheless, I look for it. I expect it confidently. The very fact that day after day, and year after year, for twenty-nine years, the Lord has enabled me to continue patiently, believingly, to wait on Him for the blessing, still further encourages me to wait on; and so fully am I assured that God hears me about this matter, that I have often been enabled to praise Him beforehand for the full answer which I shall ultimately receive to my prayers on this subject.”⁴⁰

According to the Will of God

We ought not to doubt that those prayers which are according to the Will of God shall have a full answer, for with regard to them we rest our confidence on the Word and Name of Christ. But there are many requests concerning which we do not easily come to full assurance—they do not stand so clearly in the divine will as to yield us certainty. And with regard to many of them our prayers seem to return empty.

Moses desired to pass over Jordan with the tribes; but Jehovah said to him, “Speak no more unto Me of this matter.” Paul besought the Lord thrice that the thorn which rankled in his flesh might be withdrawn, but the only response assured was, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” John, the beloved disciple, encourages us to pray for the salvation of our brethren, but even as we address ourselves to this holy duty he reminds us that “there is a sin unto death,” in the face of which, apparently, prayer will not prevail.

We may indeed be sure that “Whatsoever is good for God’s children they shall have it; for all is theirs to help them towards heaven; therefore if poverty be good they shall have it; if disgrace or crosses be good they shall have them; for all is ours to promote our greatest prosperity.”⁴¹

When we pray for temporal blessings, we are sometimes conscious of the special aid of the Spirit of intercession. This is, so far, a warrant to believe that our prayer is well-pleasing to God. But we must be careful not to confound the yearnings of nature with the promptings of the Spirit. Only those whose eye is single, and whose whole body, therefore, is full of light, can safely distinguish between the impulses of the flesh and of the Spirit.⁴² Subject to this caution we may very often derive encouragement from the fervor of our petitions. John Livingstone made this note in his private papers: "After prayer, I am to look back and recapitulate what petitions God hath put in my mouth, and these I am to account as blessings promised, and to look for the performance." And Augustus Toplady speaks with even less reserve: "I can, to the best of my remembrance and belief, truly say that I never yet have had one promise, nor assurance, concerning temporal things, impressed upon me beforehand in a way of communion with God, which the event did not realize. I never, that I know of, knew it fail in any one single instance."⁴³

What We Should Ask For

What things should form the burden of our request? Maximus of Tyre declared that he would not ask the gods for anything but goodness, peace, and hope in death. But we Christians may ask our Father for all that we need. Only, let our desires be restrained, and our prayers be unselfish. The personal petitions contained in the Lord's Prayer are very modest—daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from sin's power. Yet these comprise all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Bread and water, and a place of shelter among the munition of rocks, are assured to us. Garrison, and garrison fare!⁴⁴ But we are not often reduced to such simplicity of supply: God is so much better than His word. He feeds us with food convenient; and if ever He should suffer us to hunger, it is only that our spiritual nature may be enriched.

But man does not live by bread alone. Health and comfort, the joys of home, and the pleasures of knowledge, are blessings which we may rightfully ask, and they will not be withheld unless our Father judges it best that we should be deprived of them. But if He should bar our repeated request, and refuse to receive our prayer, we must then reply with the First-born among many brethren, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee: howbeit, not what I will, but what Thou wilt."⁴⁵ When we reach the end of our journey, if not before, we shall be able to say, "There hath not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised."

When we pray for spiritual blessings we shall never ask in vain. James Gilmour writes to one who asked his counsel, "All I know about the process is just going to God and telling what I want, and asking to be allowed to have it. "Seek, and ye shall find; ask, and ye shall receive." I know no secret but this. And again, "You say you want reviving—go direct to Jesus, and ask it straight out, and you'll get it straight away. This revived state is not a thing you need to work yourself up into, or need others to help you to rise into, or need to come to England to have operated upon you. Jesus can effect it anywhere (and does effect it everywhere), whenever a man or woman, or men and women, ask it. "Ask, and ye shall receive." My dear brother, I have learned that the source of much blessing is just to go to Jesus, and tell Him what you need." A Scottish Covenanter reports that he received a greater increase of grace in one afternoon, spent in prayer, than during a year before. After two days' prayer in the woods of Anwoth, Samuel Rutherford received the white stone and the new name, to be "a graced minister of Jesus Christ." And how many kneeling in an upper chamber, have received the heavenly baptism into "a sense of all conditions," and the witness of the tongue of fire. All the storehouses of God open at the voice of faith.

Answers to Prayer

It is probable that answers to prayer always bring their own token to the supplicant; but he may not always be able to convince others that the events which happen are due to the direct interposition of God. Let us take two examples, chosen almost at random.

"A Christian friend once sprang after his boy, who had fallen into the swollen flood of the Wupper; and as he sprang he cried, 'Lord, teach me to swim!' He swam skillfully, though he had never tried it before, and saved his child."⁴⁶

Once when a sudden and terrific hailstorm was pouring down upon the fields, and likely to occasion serious damage, a person rushed into Bengel's room, and exclaimed: 'Alas, sir, everything will be destroyed; we shall lose all!' Bengel went composedly to the window, opened it, lifted up his hands to heaven, and said, 'Father, restrain it;' and the tempest actually abated from that moment."⁴⁷

Often, however, the reward of prayer is so conspicuous that it is scarcely possible to ignore the connection between the petition and the answer. Let us take as an example of this the case of charitable institutions founded by their pious promoters on the promises of God.

The *Pietas Hallensis* is little else than an enumeration of deliverances granted to Dr. Francke in connection with the orphan-

houses at Halle. Here is one: "Another time I stood in need of a great sum of money, insomuch that an hundred crowns would not have served the turn, and yet I saw not the least appearance how I might be supplied with an hundred groats. The steward came, and set forth the want we were in. I bade him come again after dinner, and I resolved to put up my prayers to the Lord for His assistance. When he came in again after dinner, I was still in the same want, and so appointed him to come in the evening. In the meantime a friend of mine had come to see me, and with him I joined in prayers, and found myself much moved to praise and magnify the Lord for all His admirable dealings towards mankind, even from the beginning of the world, and the most remarkable instances came readily to my remembrance whilst I was praying. I was so elevated in praising and magnifying God, that I insisted only on that exercise of my present devotion, and found no inclination to put up many anxious petitions to be delivered of the present necessity. At length my friend taking his leave, I accompanied him to the door, where I found the steward waiting on one side for the money he wanted, and on the other a person who brought an hundred and fifty crowns for the support of the hospital."

The history of George Müller's Homes at Ashley Down is written vividly on the conscience of Christendom. Mr. Müller, among many trials to faith, encountered one which was especially sharp. Looking back to it in later years, he commemorates the Lord's deliverance, and adds: "The only inconvenience that we had in this case was that our dinner was about half an hour later than usual. Such a thing, as far as I remember, scarcely ever occurred before, *and has never occurred since.*"

William Quarrier balanced the accounts of the Homes at Bridge of Weir every month. If at any time it appeared probable that the balance would fall on the wrong side, he called his fellow-workers to prayer, and *invariably* the needed funds came in. Almost at the close of his life, he testified that he had never been in debt one hour. "The God that answereth by orphanages," exclaimed C. H. Spurgeon, "let Him be God."

Extension of the Kingdom

Less tangible, but not less obvious, are the answers granted to prayers for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth. To illustrate this point suitably it would be necessary to outline the history of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ down through the ages. One could almost wish that this were the beginning, and not the close of this small volume. How the instances crowd upon the memory, and stir the imagination!

By prayer a handful of “unlearned and ignorant men,” hard-handed from the oar and the rudder, the mattock and the pruning-hook, “turned the world upside down,” and spread the name of Christ beyond the limits of the Roman power. By prayer the tent-maker of Tarsus won the dissolute Corinthians to purity and faith,⁴⁸ laid the enduring foundations of Western Christianity, and raised the name of Jesus high in the very palace of Nero.

The ruined cells on many barren islets in our Scottish seas remind us of the weeks and months of prayer and fasting by which the Celtic missionaries, in the space of one generation, won Caledonia for Christ.

The prayers of Luther and his colleagues sent the great truths of the Gospel flying across Europe as on the wings of angels.

The moorland and the mountains of Scotland are to this hour witnesses that “a fair meeting” between a covenanting Christ and a covenanted land were drawn on by the prayers of Welsh and Cargill, Guthrie and Blackadder, Peden and Cameron.

Before the great revival in Gallneukirchen broke out, Martin Boos spent hours and days, and often nights, in lonely agonies of intercession. Afterwards, when he preached, his words were as flame, and the hearts of the people as grass.

A sermon preached in Clynnog, Caernarvonshire, by Robert Roberts, was the apparent cause of a widespread awakening in Wales. It is said that a hundred persons were savingly impressed at its delivery. Some days later, a friend of the preacher, John Williams of Dolyddelen, asked, “Tell me, Roberts, where did you get that wonderful sermon?” “Come here, John,” said Roberts, as he led him to a small parlor, and continued, “It was here I found that sermon you speak of—on the floor here, all night long, turning backward and forward, with my face sometimes on the earth.”

Ah! it is always so. Those who have turned many to righteousness have labored early and late with the weapon called “All-prayer.”

Of Joseph Alleine, who “was infinitely and insatiably greedy of the conversion of souls,” it is related: “At the time of his health, he did rise constantly at or before four of the clock...From four till eight he spent in prayer, holy contemplation, and singing of psalms, in which he much delighted...Sometimes he would suspend the routine of parochial engagements and devote whole days to these secret exercises, in order to which he would plan to be alone in some empty house, or else in some barren spot in the open valley.”

Of William Grimshaw, the apostle of Yorkshire, it was said: “It was his custom to rise early in the morning—at five in the winter, and at four in the summer—that he might begin the day with God.”

George Whitefield frequently spent whole nights in meditation and prayer, and often rose from his bed in the night to intercede for perishing souls. He says: “Whole days and weeks have I spent prostrate on the ground in silent or vocal prayer.”

The biographer of Payson observes that “prayer was pre-eminently the business of his life,” and he himself used to strongly assert that he pitied that Christian who could not enter into the meaning of the words, “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). It is related of him that he “wore the hardwood boards into grooves where his knees pressed so often and so long.”

In a word, every gracious work which has been accomplished within the kingdom of God has been begun, fostered, and consummated by prayer.

“What is the secret of this revival?” said one in 1905 to Evan Roberts. “There is no secret,” was the reply, “It is only, ‘*Ask, and receive.*’”



Notes

¹ “Believe me, to pray with all your heart and strength, with the reason and the will, to believe vividly that God will listen to your voice through Christ, and, verily, to do the thing He pleaseth thereupon this is the last, the greatest achievement of the Christian’s warfare upon earth. *Teach us to pray, O Lord.*” Coleridge.

² Dr. Horton, *Verbum Dei*, p. 214.

³ “It is a tremendously hard thing to pray aright. Yea, it is verily the science of all sciences even to pray so that the heart may approach unto God with all gracious confidence, and say, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven.’ For he who can take to himself such confidence of grace is already over the hill Difficulty, and has laid the foundation-stone of the temple of prayer.”—Luther, *Parting Words* (Edin., 1903) p. 73. “Perfect prayer is not attained by the use of many words, but through deep desire.”—*Catherine of Sienna*.

⁴ “We know the utility of prayer from the efforts of the wicked spirits to distract us during the divine office; and we experience the fruit of prayer in the defeat of our enemies.”—John Climacus, *The Holy Ladder of Perfection*, xxviii. 64. “When we go to God by prayer. the devil knows we go to fetch strength against him, and therefore he opposeth us all he can.”—R. Sibbes, *divine Meditations*, 164.

⁵ “If thou find a weariness in this duty, suspect thyself, purge and refine thy heart from the love of all sin, and endeavor to put it into a heavenly and spiritual frame; and then thou wilt find this no unpleasant exercise, but full of delight and satisfaction. In the meantime. complain not of the hardness of the duty, but of the untowardness of thy own heart.”—*The Whole Duty of Man* (Lond., 1741), p. 122.

⁶ F. W. H. Myers, *Poems*.

⁷ “In our mutual intercourse and conversation—amidst all the busiest scenes of our pilgrimage—we may be moving to and fro on the rapid wing of prayer, of mental prayer—that prayer that lays the whole burden of the heart on a single sigh. A sigh breathed in the Spirit. though inaudible to all around us but God, may sanctify every conversation, every event in the history of the day. We must have fellowship at all times either with the spirit of the world or with the Spirit of God....Prayer will be fatiguing to flesh and blood if uttered aloud and sustained long. Oral prayer, and prayer mentally ordered in words though not uttered aloud, no believer can engage in without ceasing; but there is an undercurrent of prayer that may run continually under the stream of our thoughts, and never weary us. Such prayer is the silent breathing of the Spirit of God, who dwells in our hearts (*vide* Rom. 8:9, and 1 Col. 3:16); it is the

temper and habit of the spiritual mind; it is the pulse of our life which is hid with Christ in God.”—Hewitson’s *Life*, pp. 100, 101. “My mind was greatly fixed on divine things: almost perpetually in the contemplation of them. I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and it was always my manner to sing forth my contemplations. I was almost constantly in ejaculatory prayer, wherever I was. Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent.”—Jonathan Edwards, *Memoirs*. chap. i. “I see that unless I keep up short prayer every day throughout the whole day, at intervals, I lose the spirit of prayer. I would never lose sight any hour of the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and if I have this sight I shall be able to pray.—Andrew A. Bonar, *Diary*. 7th October 1860.

⁸ “Is not the name of Prayer usual to signify even all the service that ever we do God?”—Hooker, *Eccles. Polity*, v. 23.

⁹ Dr. A. B. Davidson, *Waiting upon God*, p. 14.

¹⁰ Compare the sentence of Thomas Hooker, of Hartford—“Prayer is the principal work of a minister, and it is by this he must carry on the rest.”

¹¹ “Whoever is diligent in public prayers, and yet negligent in private. it is much to be feared he rather seeks to approve himself to men than to God.” *The Whole Duty of Man* (Lond., 1741), p. 119.

¹² Harvey’s *The Rise of the Quakers*, pp. 73, 74.

¹³ *The Scale of Perfection*, I. i. 1.

¹⁴ The late Dr. John Paton, of the New Hebrides, tells of such a prayer-chamber in his father’s modest dwelling:—“Our home consisted of a ‘but’ and a ‘ben,’ and a mid-room, or chamber, called the ‘closet.’ . . . The closet was a very small apartment betwixt the other two, having room only for a bed, a little table, and a chair, with a diminutive window shedding a diminutive light on the scene. This was the sanctuary of that cottage home. There daily, and many times a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and—shut the door; and we children got to understand, by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about), that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most Holy Place. We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice, pleading as for life, and we learned to slip out and in past that door on tip-toe, not to disturb the holy change. The outside world might not know, but we knew, whence came that happy light, as of a new-born smile, that always was dawning on my father’s face: it was a reflection from the divine Presence, in the consciousness of which he lived. Never, in temple or cathedral, in mountain or in glen, can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, more visibly walking and talking

with men, than under that humble cottage roof of thatch and oaken wattles.”—Dr. John G. Paton, *Autobiography*, pp. 10, 11.

¹⁵ “On his return from the West Indies to the Clyde, Hewitson was privileged to lead to Christ one of the sailors. “I am not in want of a closet to pray in,” said he one day, as the voyage drew near its termination; “I can just cover my face with my hat, and I am as much alone with God as in a closet.” The man had sailed from Antigua a careless sinner.—Hewitson’s *Life*, p. 283.

¹⁶ “Let no man that can find time to bestow upon his vanities...say he wants leisure for prayer.”—*The Whole Duty of Man* (Lond. 1741), p. 120.

¹⁷ In all his journeyings John Wesley used to carry about with him a little notebook for jottings, the first crude draft of his *Journals*. On the front page of each successive copy of this memorandum book he always recorded a resolution to spend two hours daily in private prayer, *no evasion or proviso being admitted*. Perhaps such a rule may seem to some to be rigid even to formality. Let no one be bound by another’s practice; but in every case let due provision be made for intercourse with God.

¹⁸ “And here I was counseled to set up one other sail, for before I prayed but twice a day, I here resolved to set some time apart at mid-day for this effort, and, obeying this, I found the effects to be wonderful.”—*Memoirs of the Rev. James Fraser* (Wodrow), p. 208.

¹⁹ But Fraser of Brea gives a caution respecting this which is worth remembering: — “Under the pretense of waiting on the Lord for strength, I have been driven to gaze, and neglect the duty itself, when there hath been an opportunity; so in preparing for prayer have neglected prayer.” *Memoirs*, p. 290.

²⁰ “It was a saying of the martyr Bradford that he would never leave a duty till he had brought his heart into the frame of the duty; he would not leave confession of sin till his heart was broken for sin; he would not leave petitioning for grace till his heart was quickened and enlivened in a hopeful expectation of more grace; he would not leave the rendering of thanks till his heart was enlarged with the sense of the mercies which he enjoyed and quickened in the return of praise.”—Bickersteth, *A Treatise on Prayer*, p. 93.

²¹ “This helping of the Spirit (Rom 8:26) is very emphatic in the original; as a man taking up a heavy piece of timber by the one end cannot alone get it up till some other man takes it up at the other end, and so helps him; so the poor soul that is pulling and tugging with his own heart he finds it heavy and dull, like a log in a ditch, and he can do no good with it, till at last the Spirit of God comes at the other end, and takes the heaviest end of the burden, and so helps the soul to lift it up.”—I. Ambrose, *Prima Media et Ultima*, p. 333. Père La Combe says: “I have never found any one who prayed so well as those who had never

been taught how. They who have no master in man have one in the Holy Spirit.”—*Spiritual Maxims*, 43.

²² The reader will find a striking passage, hearing on this point, in the *Autobiography of George Mueller* (Lond., 1905), pp. 152, 153.

²³ “Always enter upon prayer by putting yourself in the divine Presence” (Francois de Sales). Gaston de Renty defines this posture of the soul as “a state of modest presence before God, in which you maintain yourself, looking to His Spirit to suggest what He pleases to you, and receiving it in simplicity and confidence, just as if He were uttering words in your hearing.” Avila, a Spanish writer on religion tells us that “we ought to address ourselves to prayer rather in order to listen than to speak.”

²⁴ “Prayer discovers to us the true state of our soul, for, according to theologians, it is the mirror which shows us our correct portrait.”—St. John Climacus, *The Holy Ladder of Perfection*, xx iii. 38.

²⁵ “The petitions of believers...are echoes, so to speak, of the Master’s own words. Their prayer is only some fragment of His teaching transformed into a supplication. It must then be heard, for it is the expression of His will.”—Bishop Westcott, on John 15:7.

²⁶ “Prayer is heard when it passes from the believer’s heart to the Redeemer’s heart, and is appropriated by the Redeemer, or made His own.”—W. H. Hewitson, *Life*, p. 375.

²⁷ Epictetus, *Eph.* 1:16.

²⁸ Richard Baxter advises that on Sabbath days we should be briefer in confession and lamentation, and give ourselves more to praise and thanksgiving (*Method of Peace and Comfort*). It was Grimshaw’s custom to begin his morning devotions by singing the doxology. Of Joseph Alleine it was said, “Such was the vehement heavenliness of his spirit, that his favorite employment was praise.”

²⁹ Chrysostom, quoted by Thomas Watson.

³⁰ “No doubt the angels think themselves as insufficient for the praises of the Lord as we do.”—*John Livingstone’s Diary*, 14 Dec., 1634 (Wodrow Society).

³¹ “Think of the *guilt of sin*, that you may be humbled. Think of the *power of sin*, that you may seek strength against it. Think not of the *matter of sin*...lest you be more and more entangled.” John Owen.

³² The biographer of Charles Simeon, of Cambridge, remarks: “Simeon in his private hours was peculiarly broken and prostrate before the Lord.”

³³ By Dr. Payson, *Lift*, p. 79.

³⁴ “In prayer we tempt God if we ask for that which we labor not for; our faithful endeavors must second our devotion....If we pray for grace and neglect the spring from whence it comes, how can we speed? It was a rule in ancient

times, 'Lay thy hand to the plow, and then pray.' No man should pray without plowing, nor plow without prayer."—R. Sibbes, *divine Meditations*, p. 174.

³⁵ "Prayer not only obtains mercies; it sweetens and sanctifies them."—Flavel, *Works*, v. 351. "God does not delay to hear our prayers, because He has no mind to give; but that, by enlarging our desires, He may give us the more largely."—*Anselm of Canterbury*.

³⁶ "We must draw off from prayer, from resting in it, or trusting upon it; a man may preach much, and instead of drawing nigh to God, or enjoying sweet communion with Christ, he may draw nigh to prayer, his thoughts may be more upon his prayer than upon God to whom he prays; and he may live more upon his cushion than upon Christ; but when a man indeed draws nigh to God in prayer, he forgets prayer, and remembers God, and prayer goes for nothing, but Christ is all."—Isaac Ambrose, *Prima Media et Ultima*, p. 332.

³⁷ "The brief, childlike letters that were sent to him by them [his sons] were bound up into a paper volume, which he carried about with him during his Mongolian wanderings, and in looking over them he found an unfailing solace and refreshment." *Life of Gilmour of Mongolia*, pp. 241, 251.

³⁸ "It was seven years before William Carey baptized his first convert in India; it was seven years before Judson won his first disciple in Burma; Morrison toiled seven years before the first Chinaman was brought to Christ; Moffat declares that he waited seven years to see the first evident moving of the Holy Spirit upon his Bechuanas of Africa; Henry Richards wrought seven years on the Congo before the first convert was gained at Banza Manteka." A. J. Gordon, *The Holy Spirit in Missions*, pp. 139, 140.

³⁹ Jeremy Taylor, *The Return of Prayers*. This applies also on a lower level. George Müller writes, "These last three days I have had very little real communion with God, and have therefore been very weak spiritually, and have several times felt irritability of temper. May God in mercy help me to have more secret prayer." *Autobiography*, p. 67.

⁴⁰ On this point Müller says elsewhere: "It is not enough to begin to pray, nor to pray aright; nor is it enough to continue *for a time* to pray; but we must patiently, believingly, continue in prayer until we obtain an answer; and further we have not only to *continue* in prayer unto the end, but we have also to *believe* that God does hear us, and will answer our prayers. Most frequently we fail *in not continuing* in prayer until the blessing is obtained, and *in not expecting* the blessing."—*Autobiography*, p. 320.

⁴¹ Richard Sibbes *divine Meditations*, p. 5.

⁴² The following extract from the *Life of John Howe* may serve to point a caution which has sometimes been too lightly heeded: "At that time [in the days of the English Commonwealth] an erroneous opinion, still cherished by some few pious people, respecting the efficacy of a special faith in prayer,

pervaded the religious community. The idea was entertained that if a believer was led to seek a favor in prayer, such as the recovery or conversion of a child, or victory on the battlefield, with unusual fervor, and with the strong persuasion that the prayer would be favorably answered, such would certainly be the case. This notion was carried by some to still greater lengths of extravagancy, until it amounted to a virtual assertion of inspiration. The court of Cromwell was not unfavorable soil for the nourishment of a conceit like this; indeed, it appears to have taken deep hold of the mind of the Protector himself. Thoroughly convinced of its erroneous nature and unhallowed tendencies, and having listened to a sermon at Whitehall, the avowed design of which was to maintain and defend it, how he felt himself bound in conscience to expose its absurdity when next he should preach before Cromwell. This he did... Cromwell's brow furnished indications of his displeasure during the delivery of the discourse, and a certain coolness in his manner afterwards, but the matter was never mentioned between them."

⁴³ This "particular faith in prayer" sometimes engages itself in receiving the answer to prayers offered for spiritual interests. Speaking of the memorable revival in Kilsyth, of which the first fruits were seen on Tuesday, 23rd July. 1839 "a morning fixed from all eternity in Jehovah's counsel as an era in the history of redemption"—William Burns wrote: "I have since heard that some of the people of God in Kilsyth, who had been longing and wrestling for a time of refreshing from the Lord's presence, and who had, during much of the previous night, been travailing in birth for souls, came to the meeting," not only with the hope, but with well-nigh the certain anticipation of God's glorious appearing, from the impressions they had upon their own souls of Jehovah's approaching glory and majesty."

⁴⁴ "Being asked by a lady if he would have bread and a glass of wine, he replied, 'If you please, I'll have bread and a glass of water.' 'Prison fare,' remarked the lady. 'No, garrison fare: He shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.'—John Duncan, *The Pulpit and Communion Table*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Mr. D. L. Moody used to say that he thanked God with all his heart that many of his most earnest prayers had not been granted.

⁴⁶ F. W. Krummacher, *Autobiography* (Edin., 1869). p. 143.

⁴⁷ *Memoir of J. A. Bengel*. by J. C. F. Burk (Lond., 1837), pp. 491, 492.

⁴⁸ "'The Church of God in Corinth,' a blessed and astounding paradox!"
—*Bengel*.