**THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION**

**A PLEA FOR MORE PRAYER**

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**THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION**

THERE is no holy service

But hath its secret bliss:

Yet, of all blessed ministries,

Is one so dear as this?

The ministry that cannot be

A wondering seraph's dower,

Enduing mortal weakness

With more than angel-power;

The ministry of purest love

Uncrossed by any fear,

That bids us meet

At the Master's feet

And keeps us very near.

God's ministers are many,

For this His gracious will,

Remembrancers that day and night

This holy office fill

While some are hushed in slumber,

Some to fresh service wake,

And thus the saintly number

No change or chance can break.

And thus the sacred courses

Are evermore fulfilled,

The tide of grace

By time or place

Is never stayed or stilled.

Oh, if our ears were opened

To hear as angels do

The Intercession-chorus

Arising full and true,

We should hear it soft up-welling

In morning's pearly light;

Through evening's shadows swelling

In grandly gathering might;

The sultry silence filling

Of noontide's thunderous glow,

And the solemn starlight thrilling

With ever-deepening flow.

We should hear it through the rushing

Of the city's restless roar,

And trace its gentle gushing

O'er ocean's crystal floor:

We should hear it far up-floating

Beneath the Orient moon,

And catch the golden noting

From the busy Western noon;

And pine-robed heights would echo

As the mystic chant up-floats,

And the sunny plain Resound again

With the myriad-mingling notes.

Who are the blessed ministers

Of this world-gathering band?

All who have learnt one language,

Through each far-parted land;

All who have learnt the story

Of Jesu's love and grace,

And are longing for His glory

To shine in every face.

All who have known the Father

In Jesus Christ our Lord.

And know the might

And love the light

Of the Spirit in the Word.

Yet there are some who see not

Their calling high and grand,

Who seldom pass the portals,

And never boldly stand

Before the golden altar

On the crimson-stained floor,

Who wait afar and falter,

And dare not hope for more.

Will ye not join the blessed ranks

In their beautiful array?

Let intercession blend with thanks

As ye minister to-day!

There are little ones among them

Child-ministers of prayer,

White robes of intercession

Those tiny servants wear.

First for the near and dear ones

Is that fair ministry,

Then for the poor black children,

So far beyond the sea.

The busy hands are folded,

As the little heart uplifts

In simple love, To God above,

Its prayer for all good gifts.

There are hands too often weary

With the business of the day,

With God-entrusted duties,

Who are toiling while they pray.

They bear the golden vials,

And the golden harps of praise

Through all the daily trials,

Through all the dusty ways,

These hands, so tired, so faithful,

With odours sweet are filled,

And in the ministry of prayer

Are wonderfully skilled.

There are ministers unlettered,

Not of Earth's great and wise,

Yet mighty and unfettered

Their eagle-prayers arise.

Free of the heavenly storehouse!

For they hold the master-key

That opens all the fulness

Of God's great treasury.

They bring the needs of others,

And all things are their own,

For their one grand claim

Is Jesu's name

Before their Father's throne.

There are noble Christian workers,

The men of faith and power,

The overcoming wrestlers

Of many a midnight hour;

Prevailing princes with their God,

Who will not be denied,

Who bring down showers of blessing

To swell the rising tide.

The Prince of Darkness quaileth

At their triumphant way,

Their fervent prayer availeth

To sap his subtle sway.

But in this temple service

Are sealed and set apart

Arch-priests of intercession,

Of undivided heart.

The fulness of anointing

On these is doubly shed,

The consecration of their God

Is on each low-bowed head.

They bear the golden vials

With white and trembling hand;

In quiet room Or wakeful gloom

These ministers must stand, --

To the Intercession-Priesthood

Mysteriously ordained,

When the strange dark gift of suffering

This added gift hath gained.

For the holy hands uplifted

In suffering's longest hour

Are truly Spirit-gifted

With intercession-power.

The Lord of Blessing fills them

With His uncounted gold,

An unseen store, Still more and more,

Those trembling hands shall hold.

Not always with rejoicing

This ministry is wrought,

For many a sigh is mingled

With the sweet odours brought.

Yet every tear bedewing

The faith-fed altar fire

May be its bright renewing

To purer flame, and higher.

But when the oil of gladness

God graciously outpours,

The heavenward blaze,

With blended praise,

More mightily upsoars.

So the incense-cloud ascendeth

As through calm, crystal air,

A pillar reaching unto heaven

Of wreathed faith and prayer.

For evermore the Angel

Of Intercession stands

In His Divine priesthood

With fragrance-filled hands,

To wave the golden censer

Before His Father's throne,

With Spirit-fire intenser,

And incense all His own.

And evermore the Father

Sends radiantly down

All-marvellous responses,

His ministers to crown;

The incense-cloud returning

As golden blessing-showers,

We in each drop discerning

Some feeble prayer of ours,

Transmuted into wealth unpriced,

By Him who giveth thus

The glory all to Jesus Christ,

The gladness all to us!

F. R. HAVERGAL.

**INTRODUCTION**

I HAVE been asked by a friend, who heard of this book being published, what the difference would be between it and the previous one on the same subject, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. An answer to that question may be the best introduction I can give to the present volume.

Any acceptance the former work has had must be attributed, as far as the contents go, to the prominence given to two great truths. The one was, the certainty that prayer will be answered. There is with some an idea that to ask and expect an answer is not the highest form of prayer. Fellowship with God, apart from any request, is more than supplication. About the petition there is something of selfishness and bargaining -- to worship is more than to beg. With others the thought that prayer is so often unanswered is so prominent, that they think more of the spiritual benefit derived from the exercise of prayer than the actual gifts to be obtained by it. While admitting the measure of truth in these views, when kept in their true place, *The School of Prayer* points out how our Lord continually spoke of prayer as a means of obtaining what we desire, and how He seeks in every possible way to waken in us the confident expectation of an answer; I was led to show how prayer, in which a man could enter into the mind of God, could assert the royal power of a renewed will, and bring down to earth what without prayer would not have been given, is the highest proof of his having been made in the likeness of God's Son. He is found worthy of entering into fellowship with Him, not only in adoration and worship, but in having his will actually taken up into the rule of the world, and becoming the intelligent channel through which God can fulfil His eternal purpose. The book sought to reiterate and enforce the precious truths Christ preaches so continually: the blessing of prayer is that you can ask and receive what you will: the highest exercise and the glory of prayer is that persevering importunity can prevail and obtain what God at first could not and would not give.

With this truth there was a second one that came out very strongly as we studied the Master's words. In answer to the question, But why, if the answer to prayer is so positively promised, why are there such numberless unanswered prayers? we found that Christ taught us that the answer depended upon certain conditions. He spoke of faith, of perseverance, of praying in His Name, of praying in the will of God. But all these conditions were summed up in the one central one: "*If ye abide in Me*, ask whatsoever ye will and it shall be done unto you." It became clear that the power to pray the effectual prayer of faith depended *upon the life*. It is only to a man given up to live as entirely in Christ and for Christ as the branch in the vine and for the vine, that these promises can come true. "*In that day*," Christ said, the day of Pentecost, "ye shall ask in MY NAME." It is only in a life full of the Holy Spirit that the true power to ask in Christ's Name can be known. This led to the emphasising the truth that the ordinary Christian life cannot appropriate these promises. It needs a spiritual life, altogether sound and vigorous, to pray in power. The teaching naturally led to press the need of a life of entire consecration. More than one has told me how it was in the reading of the book that he first saw what the better life was that could be lived, and must be lived, if Christ's wonderful promises are to come true to us.

In regard to these two truths there is no change in the present volume. One only wishes that one could put them with such clearness and force as to help every beloved fellowChristian to some right impression of the reality and the glory of our privilege as God's children: "Ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you." The present volume owes its existence to the desire to enforce two truths, of which formerly I had no such impression as now.

The one is -- that Christ actually meant prayer to be the great power by which His Church should do its work, and that the neglect of prayer is the great reason the Church has not greater power over the masses in Christian and in heathen countries. In the first chapter I have stated how my convictions in regard to this have been strengthened, and what gave occasion to the writing of the book. It is meant to be, on behalf of myself and my brethren in the ministry and all God's people, a confession of shortcoming and of sin, and, at the same time, a call to believe that things can be different, and that Christ waits to fit us by His Spirit to pray as He would have us. This call, of course, brings me back to what I spoke of in connection with the former volume: that there is a life in the Spirit, a life of abiding in Christ, within our reach, in which the power of prayer -- both the power to pray and the power to obtain the answer -- can be realised in a measure which we could not have thought possible before. Any failure in the prayer-life, any desire or hope really to take the place Christ has prepared for us, brings us to the very root of the doctrine of grace as manifested in the Christian life. It is only by a full surrender to the life of abiding, by the yielding to the fulness of the Spirit's leading and quickening, that the prayer-life can be restored to a truly healthy state. I feel deeply how little I have been able to put this in the volume as I could wish. I have prayed and am trusting that God, who chooses the weak things, will use it for His own glory.

The second truth which I have sought to enforce is that we have far too little conception of the place that intercession, as distinguished from prayer for ourselves, ought to have in the Church and the Christian life. In intercession our King upon the throne finds His highest glory; in it we shall find our highest glory too. Through it He continues His saving work, and can do nothing without it; through it alone we can do our work, and nothing avails without it. In it He ever receives from the Father the Holy Spirit and all spiritual blessings to impart; in it we too are called to receive in ourselves the fulness of God's Spirit, with the power to impart spiritual blessing to others. The power of the Church truly to bless rests on intercession -- asking and receiving heavenly gifts to carry to men. Because this is so, it is no wonder that where, owing to lack of teaching or spiritual insight, we put the trust in our own diligence and effort, to the influence of the world and the flesh, and work more than we pray, the presence and power of God are not seen in our work as we would wish.

Such thoughts have led me to wonder what could be done to rouse believers to a sense of their high calling in this, and to help and train them to take part in it. And so this book differs from the former one in the attempt to open a practising school, and to invite all who have never taken systematic part in the great work of intercession to begin and give themselves to it. There are tens of thousands of workers who have known and are proving wonderfully what prayer can do. But there are tens of thousands who work with but little prayer. and as many more who do not work because they do not know how or where, who might all be won to swell the host of intercessors who are to bring down the blessings of heaven to earth. For their sakes, and the sake of all who feel the need of help, I have prepared helps and hints for a school of intercession for a month (see the Appendix). I have asked those who would join, to begin by giving at least ten minutes a day definitely to this work. It is in doing that we learn to do; it is as we take hold and begin that the help of God's Spirit will come. It is as we daily hear God's call, and at once put it into practice, that the consciousness will begin to live in us, I too am an intercessor; and that we shall feel the need of living in Christ and being full of the Spirit if we are to do this work aright. Nothing will so test and stimulate the Christian life as the honest attempt to be an intercessor. It is difficult to conceive how much we ourselves and the Church will be the gainers, if with our whole heart we accept the post of honour God is offering us. With regard to the school of intercession, I am confident that the result of the first month's course will be to awake the feeling of how little we know how to intercede. And a second and a third month may only deepen the sense of ignorance and unfitness. This will be an unspeakable blessing. The confession, "We know not how to pray as we ought," is the introduction to the experience, "The Spirit maketh intercession for us" -- our sense of ignorance will lead us to depend upon the Spirit praying in us, to feel the need of living in the Spirit.

We have heard a great deal of systematic Bible study, and we praise God for thousands on thousands of Bible classes and Bible readings. Let all the leaders of such classes see whether they could not open prayer classes -- helping their students to pray in secret, and training them to be, above everything, men of prayer. Let ministers ask what they can do in this. The faith in God's word can nowhere be so exercised and perfected as in the intercession that asks and expects and looks out for the answer. Throughout Scripture, in the life of every saint, of God's own Son, throughout the history of God's Church, God is, first of all, a prayer-hearing God. Let us try and help God's children to know their God, and encourage all God's servants to labour with the assurance: the chief and most blessed part of my work is to ask and receive from my Father what I can bring to others.

It will now easily be understood how what this book contains will be nothing but the confirmation and the call to put into practice the two great lessons of the former one. "*Ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done to you*"; "*Whatever ye ask, believe that ye have received*": these great prayerpromises, as part of the Church's enduement of power for her work, are to be taken as literally and actually true. "*If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you"; "In that day ye shall ask in My Name*": these great prayer-conditions are universal and unchangeable. A life abiding in Christ and filled with the Spirit, a life entirely given up as a branch for the work of the vine, has the power to claim these promises and to pray the effectual prayer that availeth much. Lord, teach us to pray.

A.M.

**I**

**THE LACK OF PRAYER**

**Jas. 4:2.**

**"Ye have not, because ye ask not." -- Jas. 4:2.**

**"And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor." -- Isa.. 59:16.**

**"There is none that calleth upon Thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee." -- Isa. 64:7.**

AT our last Wellington Convention for the Deepening of the Spiritual Life, in April, the forenoon meetings were devoted to prayer and intercession. Great blessing was found, both in listening to what the Word teaches of their need and power, and in joining in continued united supplication. Many felt that we know too little of persevering importunate prayer, and that it is indeed one of the greatest needs of the Church.

During the past two months I have been attending a number of Conventions. At the first, a Dutch Missionary Conference at Langlaagte, Prayer had been chosen as the subject of the addresses. At the next, at Johannesburg, a brother in business gave expression to his deep conviction that the great want of the Church of our day was, more of the spirit and practice of intercession. A week later we had a Dutch Ministerial Conference in the Free State, where three days were spent, after two days' services in the congregation on the work of the Holy Spirit, in considering the relation of the Spirit to prayer. At the ministerial meetings held at most of the succeeding conventions, we were led to take up the subject, and everywhere there was the confession: We pray too little! And with this there appeared to be a fear that, with the pressure of duty and the force of habit, it was almost impossible to hope for any great change.

I cannot say what a deep impression was made upon me by these conversations. Most of all, by the thought that there should be anything like hopelessness on the part of God's servants as to the prospect of an entire change being effected, and real deliverance found from a failure which cannot but hinder our own joy in God, and our power in His service. And I prayed God to give me words that might not only help to direct attention to the evil, but, specially, that might stir up faith, and waken the assurance that God by His Spirit will enable us to pray as we ought.

Let me begin, for the sake of those who have never had their attention directed to the matter, by stating some of the facts that prove how universal is the sense of shortcoming in this respect.

Last year there appeared a report of an address to ministers by Dr. Whyte, of Free St. George's, Edinburgh. In that he said that, as a young minister, he had thought that, of the time he had over from pastoral visitation, he ought to spend as much as possible with his books in his study. He wanted to feed his people with the very best he could prepare for them. But he had now learned that prayer was of more importance than study. He reminded his brethren of the election of deacons to take charge of the collections, that the twelve might "give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word," and said that at times, when the deacons brought him his salary, he had to ask himself whether he had been as faithful in his engagement as the deacons had been to theirs. He felt as if it were almost too late to regain what he had lost, and urged his brethren to pray more. What a solemn confession and warning from one of the high places: We pray too little!

During the Regent Square Convention two years ago the subject came up in conversation with a well-known London minister. He urged that if so much time must be given to prayer, it would involve the neglect of the imperative calls of duty "There is the morning post, before breakfast, with ten or twelve letters which *must* be answered. Then there are committee meetings waiting, with numberless other engagements, more than enough to fill up the day. It is difficult to see how it can be done."

My answer was, in substance, that it was simply a question of whether the call of God for our time and attention was of more importance than that of man. If God was waiting to meet us, and to give us blessing and power from heaven for His work, it was a short-sighted policy to put other work in the place which God and waiting on Him should have.

At one of our ministerial meetings, the superintendent of a large district put the case thus: "I rise in the morning and have half an hour with God, in the Word and prayer, in my room before breakfast. I go out, and am occupied all day with a multiplicity of engagements. I do not think many minutes elapse without my breathing a prayer for guidance or help. After my day's work, I return in my evening devotions and speak to God of the day's work. But of the intense, definite, importunate prayer of which Scripture speaks one knows little.” What, he asked, must I think of such a life?

We all know the difference between a man whose profits are just enough to maintain his family and keep up his business, and another whose income enables him to extend the business and to help others. There may be an earnest Christian life in which there is prayer enough to keep us from going back, and just maintain the position we have attained to, without much of growth in spirituality or Christlikeness. The attitude is more defensive, seeking to ward off temptation, than aggressive, reaching out after higher attainment. If there is indeed to be a going from strength to strength, with some large experience of God's power to sanctify ourselves and to bring down real blessing on others, there must be more definite and persevering prayer. The Scripture teaching about crying day and night, continuing steadfastly in prayer, watching unto prayer, being heard for his importunity, must in some degree become our experience if we are really to be intercessors.

At the very next Convention the same question was put in somewhat different form. "I am at the head of a station, with a large outlying district to care for. I see the importance of much prayer, and yet my life hardly leaves room for it. Are we to submit? Or tell us how we can attain to what we desire?" I admitted that the difficulty was universal. I recalled the words of one of our most honoured South African missionaries, now gone to his rest: he had the same complaint. "In the morning at five the sick people are at the door waiting for medicine. At six the printers come, and I have to set them to work and teach them, At nine the school calls me, and till late at night I am kept busy with a large correspondence." In my answer I quoted a Dutch proverb: "'What is heaviest must *weigh* heaviest,' -- -must have the first place. The law of God is unchangeable: as on earth, so in our traffic with heaven, we only get as we give. Unless we are willing to pay the price, and sacrifice time and attention and what appear legitimate or necessary duties, for the sake of the heavenly gifts, we need not look for a large experience of the power of the heavenly world in our work. The whole company present joined in the sad confession; it had been thought over, and mourned over, times without number; and yet, somehow, there they were, all these pressing claims, and all the ineffectual resolves to pray more, barring the way. I need not now say to what further thoughts our conversation led; the substance of them will be found in some of the later chapters in this volume.

Let me call just one more witness. In the course of my journey I met with one of the Cowley Fathers, who had just been holding Retreats for clergy of the English Church. I was interested to hear from him the line of teaching he follows. In the course of conversation he used the expression -- "the distraction of business," and it came out that he found it one of the great difficulties he had to deal with in himself and others. Of himself, he said that by the vows of his Order he was bound to give himself specially to prayer. But he found it exceedingly difficult. Every day he had to be at four different points of the town he lived in; his predecessor had left him the charge of a number of committees where he was expected to do all the work; it was as if everything conspired to keep him from prayer.

All this testimony surely suffices to make clear that prayer has not the place it ought to have in our ministerial and Christian life; that the shortcoming is one of which all are willing to make confession; and that the difficulties in the way of deliverance are such as to make a return to a true and full prayer-life almost impossible. Blessed be God -- "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God"! "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye. always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to all good work." Do let us believe that God's call to much prayer need not be a burden and cause of continual self-condemnation. He means it to be a joy. He can make it an inspiration, giving us strength for all our work, and bringing down His power to work through us in our fellowmen. Let us not fear to admit to the full the sin that shames us, and then to face it in the name of our Mighty Redeemer. *The light that shows us our sin and condemns us for it, will show us the way out of it into the life of liberty that is well-pleasing to God*. If we allow this one matter, unfaithfulness in prayer, to convict us of the lack in our Christian life which lies at the root of it, God will use the discovery to bring us not only the power to pray that we long for, but the joy of a new and healthy life, of which prayer is the spontaneous expression.

And what is now the way by which our sense of the lack of prayer can be made the means of blessing, the entrance on a path in which the evil may be conquered? How can our intercourse with the Father, in continual prayer and intercession, become what it ought to be, if we and the world around us are to be blessed? As it appears to me, we must begin by going back to God's Word, to study what *the place is God means prayer to have* in the life of His child and His Church. A fresh sight of what prayer is *according to the will of God*, of what our prayers can be, *through the grace of God*, will free us from those feeble defective views, in regard to the absolute necessity of continual prayer, which lie at the root of our failure. As we get an insight into the reasonableness and rightness of this divine appointment, and come under the full conviction of how wonderfully it fits in with God's love and our own happiness, we shall be freed from the false impression of its being an arbitrary demand. We shall with our whole heart and soul consent to it and rejoice in it, as the one only possible way for the blessing of heaven to come to earth. All thought of task and burden, of self-effort and strain, will pass away in the blessed faith that as simple as breathing is in the healthy natural life, will praying be in the Christian life that is led and filled by the Spirit of God.

As we occupy ourselves with and accept this teaching of God's Word on prayer, we shall be led to see how our failure in the prayer-life was owing to failure in the Spirit-life. Prayer is one of the most heavenly and spiritual of the functions of the Spirit-life. How could we try or expect to fulfil it so as to please God, except as our soul is in perfect health, and our life truly possessed and moved by God's Spirit? The insight into the place God means prayer to take, and which it only can take, in a full Christian life, will show us that we have not been living the true, the abundant life, and that any thought of praying more and effectually will be vain, except as we are brought into a closer relation to our Blessed Lord Jesus. Christ is our life, Christ liveth in us, in such reality that His life of prayer on earth, and of intercession in heaven, is breathed into us in just such measure as our surrender and our faith allow and accept it. Jesus Christ is the Healer of all diseases, the Conqueror of all enemies, the Deliverer from all sin; if our failure teaches us to turn afresh to Him, and find in Him the grace He gives to pray as we ought, this humiliation may become our greatest blessing. Let us all unite in praying God that He would visit our souls and fit us for that work of intercession, which is at this moment the greatest need of the Church and the world. It is only by intercession that that power can be brought down from Heaven which will enable the Church to conquer the world. Let us stir up the slumbering gift that is lying unused, and seek to gather and train and band together as many as we can, to be God's remembrancers, and to give Him no rest till He makes His Church a joy in the earth. Nothing but intense believing prayer can meet the intense spirit of worldliness, of which complaint is everywhere made.

**II**

**THE MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT AND PRAYER**

**Luke 11:13.**

**"If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" -- Luke 11:13.**

CHRIST had just said (Luke 11:9), "Ask, and it shall be given": God's giving is inseparably connected with our asking. He applies this especially to the Holy Spirit. As surely as a father on earth gives bread to his child, so God gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. The whole ministration of the Spirit is ruled by the one great law: God must give, we must ask. When the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost with a flow that never ceases, it was in answer to prayer. The inflow into the believer's heart, and His outflow in the rivers of living water, ever still depend upon the law: "Ask, and it shall be given." In connection with our confession of the lack of prayer, we have said that what we need is some due apprehension of the place it occupies in God's plan of redemption: we shall perhaps nowhere see this more clearly than in the first half of the Acts of the Apostles. The story of the birth of the Church in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and of the first freshness of its heavenly life in the power of that Spirit, will teach us how *prayer on earth*, whether as cause or effect, *is the true measure of the presence of the Spirit of heaven*.

We begin with the well-known words (Acts 1:14), "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." And then there follows: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls." The great work of redemption had been accomplished. The Holy Spirit had been promised by Christ "not many days hence." He had sat down on His throne and received the Spirit from the Father. But all this was not enough. One thing more was needed: the ten days' united continued supplication of the disciples. It was intense, continued prayer that prepared the disciples' hearts, that opened the windows of heaven, that brought down the promised gift. As little as the power of the Spirit could be given without Christ sitting on the throne, *could it descend without the disciples on the footstool of the throne*. For all the ages the law is laid down here, at the birth of the Church, that whatever else may be found on earth, the power of the Spirit must be prayed down from heaven. The measure of believing, continued prayer will be the measure of the Spirit's working in the Church. Direct, definite, determined prayer is what we need.

See how this is confirmed in chapter 4. Peter and John had been brought before the Council and threatened with punishment. When they returned to their brethren, and reported what had been said to them, "all lifted up their voice to God with one accord," and prayed for boldness to speak the word. “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken. and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were one heart and one soul. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." It is as if the story of Pentecost is repeated a second time over, with the prayer, the shaking of the house, the filling with the Spirit. the speaking God's word with boldness and power, the great grace upon all, the manifestation of unity and love -- to imprint it ineffaceably on the heart of the Church: it is prayer that lies at the root of the spiritual life and power of the Church. The measure of God's giving the Spirit is our asking. He gives as a father to him who asks as a child.

Go on to the sixth chapter. There we find that, when murmurings arose as to the neglect of the Grecian Jews in the distribution of alms, the apostles proposed the appointment of deacons to serve the tables. "We," they said, "will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word." It is often said, and rightly said, that there is nothing in honest business, when it is kept in its place as entirely subordinate to the kingdom, which must ever be first, that need prevent fellowship with God. Least of all ought a work like ministering to the poor hinder the spiritual life. And yet the apostles felt it would hinder them in their giving themselves to the ministry of prayer and the word. What does this teach! That the maintenance of the spirit of prayer, such as is consistent with the claims of much work, is not enough for those who are the leaders of the Church. To keep up the communication with the King on the throne and the heavenly world clear and fresh; to draw down the power and blessing of that world, not only for the maintenance of our own spiritual life, but for those around us; continually to receive instruction and empowerment for the great work to be done -- the apostles, as the ministers of the word, felt the need of being free from other duties, that they might give themselves to much prayer. James writes: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." If ever any work were a sacred one, it was that of caring for these Grecian widows. And yet, even such duties might interfere with the special calling to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. As on earth, so in the kingdom of heaven, there is power in the division of labour; and while some, like the deacons, had specially to care for serving the tables and ministering the alms of the Church here on earth, others had to be set free for that steadfast continuance in prayer which would uninterruptedly secure the downflow of the powers of the heavenly world. The minister of Christ is set apart to give himself as much to prayer as to the ministry of the word. In faithful obedience to this law is the secret of the Church's power and success. As before, so *after Pentecost*, the apostles were men given up to prayer.

In chapter 8, we have the intimate connection between the Pentecostal gift and prayer, from another point of view. At Samaria, Philip had preached with great blessing, and many had believed. But the Holy Ghost was, as yet, fallen on none of them. The apostles sent down Peter and John to pray for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. The power for such prayer was a higher gift than preaching -- the work of the men who had been in closest contact with the Lord in glory, the work that was essential to the perfection of the life that preaching and baptism, faith and conversion had only begun. Surely of all the gifts of the early Church for which we should long there is none more needed than the gift of prayer -- prayer that brings down the Holy Ghost on believers. This power is given to the men who say: "We will give ourselves to prayer."

In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, in the house of Cornelius at Caesarea, we have another testimony to the wondrous interdependence of the action of prayer and the Spirit, and another proof of what will come to a man who has given himself to prayer. Peter went up at midday to pray on the housetop. And what happened? He saw heaven opened, and there came the vision that revealed to him the cleansing of the Gentiles: with that came the message of the three men from Cornelius, a man who "prayed alway," and had heard from an angel, "Thy prayers are come up before God"; and then the voice of the Spirit was heard saying, "Go with them." It is Peter praying, to whom the will of God is revealed, to whom guidance is given as to going to Caesarea, and who is brought into contact with a praying and prepared company of hearers. No wonder that in answer to all this prayer a blessing comes beyond all expectation, and the Holy Ghost is poured out upon the Gentiles. A much-praying minister will receive an entrance into God's will he would otherwise know nothing of; will be brought to praying people where he does not expect them; will receive blessing above all he asks or thinks. The teaching and the power of the Holy Ghost are alike unalterably linked to prayer.

Our next reference will show us faith in the power that the Church's prayer has with its glorified King, as it is found, not only in the apostles, but in the Christian community. In Acts 12 we have the story of Peter in prison on the eve of execution. The death of James had aroused the Church to a sense of real danger, and the thought of losing Peter too, wakened up all its energies. It betook itself to prayer. "Prayer was made of the Church without ceasing to God for him." That prayer availed much; Peter was delivered. When he came to the house of Mary, he found "many gathered together praying." Stone walls and double chains, soldiers and keepers, and the iron gate, all gave way before the power from heaven that prayer brought down to his rescue. The whole power of the Roman Empire, as represented by Herod, was impotent in presence of the power the Church of the Holy Spirit wielded in prayer. They stood in such close and living communication with their Lord in heaven; they knew so well that the words, "all power is given unto Me," and "Lo I am with you alway," were absolutely true; they had such faith in His promise to hear them whatever they asked -- that they prayed in the assurance that the powers of heaven could work on earth, and would work at their request and on their behalf. The Pentecostal Church believed in prayer, and practised it.

Just one more illustration of the place and the blessing of prayer among men filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 13 we have the names of five men at Antioch who had given themselves specially to ministering to the Lord with prayer and fasting. Their giving themselves to prayer was not in vain: as they ministered to the Lord, the Holy Spirit met them, and gave them new insight into God's plans. He called them to be fellow-workers with Himself; there was a work to which He had called Barnabas and Saul; their part and privilege would be to separate these men with renewed fasting and prayer, and to let them go, "sent forth of the Holy Ghost." God in heaven would not send forth His chosen servants without the co-operation of His Church; men on earth were to have a real partnership in the work of God. It was prayer that fitted and prepared them for this; it was to praying men the Holy Ghost gave authority to do His work and use His name. It was to prayer the Holy Ghost was given. It is still prayer that is the only secret of true Church extension, that is guided from heaven to find and send forth God-called and God-empowered men. To prayer the Holy Spirit will show the men He has selected; to prayer that sets them apart under His guidance He will give the honour of knowing that they are men, "sent forth by the Holy Ghost." It is prayer which is the link between the King on the throne and the Church at His footstool -- the human link that has its divine strength in the power of the Holy Ghost, who comes in answer to it.

As one looks back upon these chapters in the history of the Pentecostal Church, how clear the two great truths stand out: where there is much prayer there will be much of the Spirit; where there is much of the Spirit there will be everincreasing prayer. So clear is the living connection between the two, that when the Spirit is given in answer to prayer it ever wakens more prayer to prepare for the fuller revelation and communication of His Divine power and grace. If prayer was thus the power by which the Primitive Church flourished and triumphed, it is not the one need of the Church of our days? Let us learn what ought to be counted axioms in our Church work: --

Heaven is still as full of stores of spiritual blessing as it was then. God still delights to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Our life and work are still as dependent on the direct impartation of Divine power as they were in Pentecostal times. Prayer is still the appointed means for drawing down these heavenly blessings in power on ourselves and those around us. God still seeks for men and women who will, with all their other work of ministering, specially give themselves to persevering prayer.

And we -- you, my reader, and I -- may have the privilege of offering ourselves to God to labour in prayer, and bring down these blessings to this earth. Shall we not beseech God to make all this truth so living in us that we may not rest till it has mastered us, and our whole heart be so filled with it. that the practice of intercession shall be counted by us our highest privilege, and we find in it the sure and only measure for blessing on ourselves, on the Church, and on the world?

**III**

**A MODEL OF INTERCESSION**

**Luke 11:5-8.**

**"And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and shall say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine is come unto me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: I cannot rise and give thee? I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet, because of his importunity, he will arise and give him as many as he needeth." -- Luke 11:5-8.**

**"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, keep not silence, and give Him no rest." -- Isa. 62:6-7.**

WE have seen in our previous chapter what power prayer has. It is the one power on earth that commands the power of heaven. The story of the early days of the Church is God's great object-lesson, to teach His Church what prayer can do, how it alone, but it most surely, can draw down the treasures and powers of heaven into the life of earth.

Just remember the lessons we learnt of how prayer is at once indispensable and irresistible. Did we not see how unknown and untold power and blessing is stored up for us in heaven? -- how that power will make us a blessing to men, and fit us to do any work or face any danger? how it is to be sought in prayer continually and persistently? how they who have the heavenly power can pray it down upon others? how in all the intercourse of ministers and people, in all the ministrations of Christ's Church, it is the one secret of success? how it can defy all the power of the world, and fit men to conquer that world for Christ? It is the power of the heavenly life, the power of God's own Spirit, the power of Omnipotence, that waits for prayer to bring it down.

In all this prayer there was little thought of personal need or happiness. It was the desire to witness for Christ and bring Him and His salvation to others, it was the thought of God's kingdom and glory, that possessed these disciples. If we would be delivered from the sin of restraining prayer, we must enlarge our hearts for the work of intercession. The attempt to pray constantly for ourselves must be a failure; it is in intercession for others that our faith and love and perseverance will be aroused, and that power of the Spirit be found which can fit us for saving men. We are asking how we may become more faithful and successful in prayer; let us see how the Master teaches us, in the parable of the Friend at Midnight, that intercession for the needy calls forth the highest exercise of our power of believing and prevailing prayer. Intercession is the most perfect form of prayer: it is the prayer Christ ever liveth to pray on His throne. Let us learn what the elements of true intercession are.

**1. Notice the urgent need:**

Here intercession has its origin. The friend came at midnight -- an untimely hour. He was hungry, and could not buy bread. If we are to learn to pray aright we must open eye and heart to the need around us.

We hear continually of the thousand millions of heathen and Mohammedans living in midnight darkness, perishing for lack of the bread of life. We hear of five hundred millions of nominal Christians, the great majority of them almost as ignorant and indifferent as the heathen. We see millions in the Christian Church, not ignorant or indifferent, and yet knowing little of a walk in the light of God or in the power of a life fed by bread from heaven. We have each of us our own circles -- congregations, schools, friends, missions -- in which the great complaint is that the light and life of God are too little known. Surely, if we believe what we profess, that God alone is able to help, that God certainly will help in answer to prayer, -- all this need ought to make intercessors of us, people who give their lives to prayer for those around them.

Let us take time to consider and realise the need. Each Christless soul going down into outer darkness, perishing of hunger, with bread enough and to spare! Thirty millions a year dying without the knowledge of Christ! Our own neighbours and friends, souls intrusted to us, dying without hope! Christians around us living a sickly, feeble, fruitless life! Surely there is need for prayer. Nothing, nothing but prayer to God for help, will avail.

**2. Note the willing love.**

The friend took his weary, hungry friend into his house, and into his heart too. He did not excuse himself by saying he had no bread: he gave himself at midnight to seek it for him. He sacrificed his night's rest, his comfort, to find the needed bread. "Love seeketh not its own." It is the very nature of love to give up and forget itself for the sake of others. It takes their needs and makes them its own, it finds its real joy in living and dying for others as Christ did.

It is the love of a mother to her prodigal son that makes her pray for him. True love to souls will become in us the spirit of intercession. It is possible to do a great deal of faithful, earnest work for our fellowmen without true love to them. Just as a lawyer or a physician, from a love of his profession and a high sense of faithfulness to duty, may interest himself most thoroughly in clients or patients without any special love to each, so servants of Christ may give themselves to their work with devotion and even self-sacrificing enthusiasm without the Christlike love to souls being strong. It is this lack of love that causes so much shortcoming in prayer. It is as love of our profession and work, delight in thoroughness and diligence, sink away in the tender compassion of Christ, that love will compel us to prayer, because we cannot rest in our work if souls are not saved. True love must pray.

**3. Note the sense of impotence.**

We often speak of the power of love. In one sense this is true; and yet the truth has its limitations, which must not be forgotten. The strongest love may be utterly impotent. A mother might be willing to give her life for her dying child, and yet not be able to save it. The friend at midnight was most willing to give his friend bread, but he had none. It was this sense of impotence, of his inability to help, that sent him a-begging: "My friend is come to me, and *I have nothing* to set before him." It is this sense of impotence with God's servants that is the very strength of the life of intercession.

"I have nothing to set before them": at this consciousness takes possession of the minister or missionary, the teacher or worker, intercession will become their only hope and refuge. I may have knowledge and truth, a loving heart, and the readiness to give myself for those under my charge; but the bread of heaven I cannot give them. With all my love and zeal, "I have nothing to set before them." Blessed the man who has made that "I have nothing," the motto of his ministry. As he thinks of the judgment day and the danger of souls, as he sees what a supernatural power and life is needed to save men from sin, as he feels how utterly insufficient all he can ever do is to give them life, that "*I have nothing*" urges him to pray. Intercession appears to him, as he thinks of the midnight darkness and the hungry souls, as his only hope, the one thing in which his love can take refuge.

Let us take the lesson to heart, for a warning to all who are strong and wise to work, for the encouragement of all who are feeble. The sense of our impotence is the soul of intercession. The simplest, feeblest Christian can pray down blessing from an Almighty God.

**4. Note the faith in prayer.**

What he has not himself, another can supply. He has a rich friend near, who will be both able and willing to give the bread. He is sure that if he only asks, he will receive. This faith makes him leave his home at midnight: if he has not the bread himself to give, he can ask another.

It is this simple, confident faith that God will give, that we need: where it really exists, there will surely be no mistake about our not praying. And in God's word we have everything that can stir and strengthen such faith in us. Just as the heaven our natural eye can see is one great ocean of sunshine, with its light and heat, giving beauty and fruitfulness to earth, Scripture shows us God's true heaven, filled with all spiritual blessings, -- divine light and love and life, heavenly joy and peace and power, all shining down upon us. It reveals to us God waiting, delighting to bestow these blessings *in answer to prayer*. By a thousand promises and testimonies it calls and urges us to believe that prayer will be heard, that what we cannot possibly do ourselves for those whom we want to help, *can be got by prayer*. Surely there can be no question as to our believing that prayer will be heard, that through prayer the poorest and feeblest can dispense blessings to the needy, and each of us, though poor, may yet be making many rich.

**5. Note the importunity that prevails.**

The faith of the friend met a sudden and unexpected check: the rich friend refuses to hear -- "I cannot rise and give thee." How little the loving heart had counted on this disappointment; it cannot consent to accept it. The supplicant presses his threefold plea: here is my needy friend, you have abundance, I am your friend; and refuses to accept a denial. The love that opened his house at midnight, and then left it to seek help, must win.

This is the central lesson of the parable. In our intercession we may find that there is difficulty and delay with the answer. It may be as if God says, "I cannot give thee." It is not easy, against all appearances, to hold fast our confidence that He will hear, and to persevere in full assurance that we shall have what we ask. And yet this is what God looks for from us. He so highly prizes our confidence in Him, it is so essentially the highest honour the creature can render the Creator, that He will do anything to train us in the exercise of this trust in Him. Blessed the man who is not staggered by God's delay, or silence, or apparent refusal, but is strong in faith, giving glory to God. Such faith perseveres, importunately, if need be, and cannot fail to inherit the blessing.

**6. Note, last, the certainty of a rich reward.**

"I say unto you, because of his importunity, he will give him as many as he needeth." Oh that we might learn to believe in the certainty of an abundant answer. A prophet said of old: "Let not your hands be weak; *your work shall be rewarded*." Would that all who feel it difficult to pray much, would fix their eye on the recompense of the reward, and in faith learn to count upon the Divine assurance that their prayer cannot be vain. If we will but believe in God and His faithfulness, intercession will become to us the very first thing we take refuge in when we seek blessing for others, and the very last thing for which we cannot find time. And it will become a thing of joy and hope, because, all the time we pray, we know that we are sowing seed that will bring forth fruit an hundredfold. Disappointment is impossible: "I say unto you, He will rise and give him as many as he needeth."

Let all lovers of souls, and all workers in the service of the gospel, take courage. Time spent in prayer will yield more than that given to work. Prayer alone gives work its worth and its success. Prayer opens the way for God Himself to do His work in us and through us. Let our chief work as God's messengers, be intercession: in it we secure the presence and power of God to go with us.

"Which of you shall have a friend at midnight, and shall say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves?" This friend is none other but our God. Do let us learn that in the darkness of midnight, at the most unlikely time, and in the greatest need, when we have to say of those we love and care for, "I have nothing to set before them," we have a rich Friend in heaven, the Everlasting God and Father, who only waits to be asked aright. Let us confess before Him our lack of prayer. Let us admit that the lack of faith, of which it is the proof, is the symptom of a life that is not spiritual, that is yet all too much under the power of self and the flesh and the world. Let us in the faith of the Lord Jesus, who spake this parable, and Himself waits to make every trait of it true in us, give ourselves to be intercessors. Let every sight of souls needing help, let every stirring of the spirit of compassion, let every sense of our own impotence to bless, let every difficulty in the way of our getting an answer, just combine to urge us to do this one thing: with importunity to cry to the God who alone can help, who, in answer to our prayer, will help. And let us, if we indeed feel that we have failed, do our utmost to train a young generation of Christians, who profit by our mistake and avoid it. Moses could not enter the land of Canaan, but there was one thing he could do: he could at God's bidding "charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him" (Deut. 3:28). If it is too late for us to make good our failure, let us at least encourage those who come after us to enter into the good land, the blessed life of unceasing prayer.

The Model Intercessor is the Model Christian Worker. First to get from God, and then to give to men what we ourselves secure from day to day, is the secret of successful work. Between our Impotence and God's Omnipotence intercession is the blessed link.

**IV**

**BECAUSE OF HIS IMPORTUNITY**

**Luke 11:8.**

**"I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet *because of his importunity* he will arise and give him as many as he needeth." -- Luke 11:8.**

**"And He spake a parable unto them, to the end, they ought always to pray and not to faint . . . Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which *cry to Him day and night*, and *He is long-suffering with them*? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." -- Luke 18:1-8.**

Our Lord Jesus thought it of such importance that we should know the need of perseverance and importunity in prayer, that He spake two parables to teach us this. This is proof sufficient that in this aspect of prayer we have at once its greatest difficulty and its highest power. He would have us know that in prayer all will not be easy and smooth; we must expect difficulties, which can only be conquered by persistent, determined perseverance.

In the parables our Lord represents the difficulty as existing on the side of the persons to whom the petition was addressed, and the importunity as needed to overcome their reluctance to hear. In our intercourse with God the difficulty is not on His side, but on ours. In connection with the first parable He tells us that our Father is more willing to give good things to those who ask Him than any earthly father to give his child bread. In the second, He assures us that God longs to avenge His elect speedily. The need of urgent prayer cannot be because God must be made willing or disposed to bless: the need lies altogether in ourselves. But because it was not possible to find any earthly illustration of a loving father or a willing friend from whom the needed lesson of importunity could be taught, He takes the unwilling friend and the unjust judge to encourage in us the faith, that perseverance can overcome every obstacle.

The difficulty is not in God's love or power, but in ourselves and our own incapacity to receive the blessing. And yet, because there is this difficulty with us, this lack of spiritual preparedness, there is a difficulty with God too. His wisdom His righteousness, yea His love, dare not give us what would do us harm, if we received it too soon or too easily. The sin, or the consequence of sin, that makes it impossible for God to give at once, is a barrier on God's side as well as ours; to break through this power of sin in ourselves, or those for whom we pray, is what makes the striving and the conflict of prayer such a reality. And so in all ages men have prayed, and that rightly too, under a sense that there were difficulties in the heavenly world to overcome. As they pleaded with God for the removal of the unknown obstacles, and in that persevering supplication were brought into a state of utter brokenness and helplessness, of entire resignation to Him, of union with His will, and of faith that could take hold of Him, the hindrances in themselves and in heaven were together overcome. As God conquered them, they conquered God. As God prevails over us, we prevail with God.

God has so constituted us that the dearer our insight is into the reasonableness of a demand, the more hearty will be our surrender to it. One great cause of our remissness in prayer is that there appears to be something arbitrary, or at least something incomprehensible, in the call to such continued prayer. If we could be brought to see that this apparent difficulty is a Divine necessity, and in the very nature of things the source of unspeakable blessing, we should be more ready with gladness of heart to give ourselves to continue in prayer. Let us see if we cannot understand how the difficulty that the call to importunity throws in our way is one of our greatest privileges.

I do not know whether you have ever noticed what a part difficulties play in our natural life. They call out man's powers as nothing else can. They strengthen and ennoble character. We are told that one reason of the superiority of the Northern nations, like Holland and Scotland, in strength of will and purpose, over those of the sunny South, as Italy and Spain, is that the climate of the latter has been too beautiful, and the life it encourages too easy and relaxing -- the difficulties the former had to contend with have been their greatest boon; how all nature has been so arranged by God that in sowing and reaping, as in seeking coal or gold, nothing is found without labour and effort. What is education but a daily developing and disciplining of the mind by new difficulties presented to the pupil to overcome? The moment a lesson has become easy, the pupil is moved on to one that is higher and more difficult. With the race and the individual, it is in the meeting and the mastering of difficulties that our highest attainments are found.

It is even so in our intercourse with God. Just imagine what the result would be if the child of God had only to kneel down and ask, and get, and go away. What unspeakable loss to the spiritual life would ensue. It is in the difficulty and delay that calls for persevering prayer, that the true blessing and blessedness of the heavenly life will be found. We there learn how little we delight in fellowship with God, and how little we have of living faith in Him. We discover how earthly and unspiritual our heart still is, how little we have of God's Holy Spirit. We there are brought to know our own weakness and unworthiness, and to yield to God's Spirit to pray in us, to take our place in Christ Jesus, and abide in Him as our only plea with the Father. There our own will and strength and goodness are crucified. There we rise in Christ to newness of life, with our whole will dependent on God and set upon His glory. Do let us begin to praise God for the need and the difficulty of importunate prayer, as one of His choicest means of grace.

Just think what our Lord Jesus owed to the difficulties in His path. In Gethsemane it was as if the Father would not hear: He prayed yet more earnestly, until "He was heard" In the way He opened up for us, He learned obedience by the things He suffered, and so was made perfect; His will was given up to God; His faith in God was proved and strengthened; the prince of this world, with all his temptation, was overcome. This is the new and living way He consecrated for us; it is in persevering prayer we walk with and are made partakers of His very Spirit. Prayer is one form of crucifixion, of our fellowship with Christ's Cross of our giving up our flesh to the death. O Christians! shall we not be ashamed of our reluctance to sacrifice the flesh and our own will and the world, as it is seen in our reluctance to pray much? Shall we not learn the lesson which nature and Christ alike teach? The difficulty of importunate prayer is our highest privilege; the difficulties to be overcome in it bring us our richest blessings.

In importunity there are various elements. Of these the chief are perseverance, determination, intensity. It begins with the refusal to at once accept a denial. It grows to the determination to persevere, to spare no time or trouble, till an answer comes. It rises to the intensity in which the whole being is given to God in supplication, and the boldness comes to lay hold of God's strength. At one time it is quiet and restful; at another passionate and bold. Now it takes time and is patient; then again it claims at once what it desires. In whatever different shape, it always means and knows -- God hears prayer: I must be heard.

Remember the wonderful instances we have of it in the Old Testament saints. Think of Abraham, as he pleads for Sodom. Time after time he renews his prayer until the sixth time 'he has to say, "Let not my Lord be angry." He does not cease until he has learnt to know God's condescension in each time consenting to his petition, until he has learnt how far he can go, has entered into God's mind, and now rests in God's will. And for his sake Lot was saved. "God remembered Abraham, and delivered Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." And shall not we, who have a redemption and promises for the heathen which Abraham never knew, begin to plead more with God on their behalf.

Think of Jacob, when he feared to meet Esau. The angel of the Lord met him in the dark, and wrestled with him. And when the angel saw that he prevailed not, he said, "Let me go." And Jacob said, "I will not let thee go." And he blessed him there. And that boldness that said, "I will not," and forced from the reluctant angel the blessing, was so pleasing in God's sight, that a new name was there given to him: "Israel, he who striveth with God, for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed." And through all the ages God's children have understood, what Christ's two parables teach, that God holds Himself back, and seeks to get away from us, until what is of flesh and self and sloth in us is overcome and we so prevail with Him that He can and must bless us. Oh! why is it that so many of God's children have no desire for this honour -- being princes of God, strivers with God, and prevailing? What our Lord taught us, "What things soever ye desire, *believe that ye have received*," is nothing but His putting of Jacob's words, "I will not let Thee go except thou bless me." This is the importunity He teaches, and we must learn: to claim and take the blessing.

Think of Moses when Israel had made the golden calf. Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin -- ;and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." That was importunity, that would rather die than not have his people given him. Then, when God had heard him, and said He would send His angel with the people, Moses came again, and would not be content until, in answer to his prayer that God Himself should go with them (Ex. 33:12, 17, 18), He had said, "I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken." After that, when in answer to his prayer, "Show me Thy glory," God made His goodness pass before him, he at once again began pleading, "Let my Lord, I pray Thee, go among us." And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights (Ex. 34:28). Of these days he says, "I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights, I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sin which ye sinned." As an intercessor Moses used importunity with God, and prevailed. He proves that the man who truly lives near to God, and with whom God speaks face to face, becomes partaker of that same power of intercession which there is in Him who is at God's right hand and ever lives to pray.

Think of Elijah in his prayer, first for fire, and then for rain. In the former you have the importunity that claims and receives an immediate answer. In the latter, bowing himself down to the earth, his face between his knees, his answer to the servant who had gone to look toward the sea, and come with the message, "There is nothing," was "Go again seven times." Here was the importunity of perseverance. He had told Ahab there would be rain; he knew it was coming; and yet he prayed till the seven times were fulfilled. And it is of this Elijah and this prayer we are taught, "Pray for one another. Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Will there not be some who feel constrained to cry out, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" -- this God who draws forth such effectual prayer, and hears it so wonderfully. His name be praised: He is still the same. Let His people but believe that He still waits to be inquired of! Faith in a prayer-hearing God will make a prayer-loving Christian.

We remember the marks of the true intercessor as the parable taught us them. A sense of the need of souls; a Christlike love in the heart; a consciousness of personal importance; faith in the power of prayer; courage to persevere in spite of refusal; and the assurance of an abundant reward; -- these are the dispositions that constitute a Christian an intercessor, and call forth the power of prevailing prayer. These are the dispositions that constitute the beauty and the health of the Christian life, that fit a man for being a blessing in the world, that make him a true Christian worker, who does indeed get from God the bread of heaven to dispense to the hungry. These are the dispositions that call forth the highest, the heroic virtues of the life of faith. There is nothing to which the nobility of natural character owes so much as the spirit of enterprise and daring which in travel or war, in politics or science, battles with difficulties and conquers. No labour or expense is grudged for the sake of victory. And shall we who are Christians not be able to face the difficulties that we meet in prayer? It is as we "labour" and "strive" in prayer that the renewed will asserts its royal right to claim in the name of Christ what it will, and wields its God-given power to influence the destinies of men. Shall men of the world sacrifice ease and pleasure in their pursuits, and shall we be such cowards and sluggards as not to fight our way through to the place where we can find liberty for the captive and salvation for the perishing? Let each servant of Christ learn to know his calling. His King ever lives to pray. The Spirit of the King ever lives in us to pray. It is from heaven the blessings, which the world needs, must be called down in persevering, importunate, believing prayer. It is from heaven, in answer to prayer, the Holy Spirit will take complete possession of us to do His work through us. Let us acknowledge how vain our much work has been owing to our little prayer. Let us change our method, and let henceforth more prayer, much prayer, unceasing prayer, be the proof that we look for all to God, and that we believe that He heareth us.

**V**

**THE LIFE THAT CAN PRAY**

**John 15:7.**

**"*If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you*, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you." -- John 15:7.**

**"The supplication of *a righteous man* availeth much in its working." -- James 5:16.**

**"Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, *because* we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." -- 1 John 3:21, 22.**

Here on earth the influence of one who asks a favour for others depends entirely on his character, and the relationship he bears to him with whom he is interceding. It is what he is that gives weight to what he asks. It is no otherwise with God. Our power in prayer depends upon our life. Where our life is right we shall know how to pray so as to please God, and prayer will secure the answer. The texts quoted above all point in this direction. "*If ye abide in Me*," our Lord says, ye shall ask, and it shall be done unto you. It is the prayer of a *righteous man*, according to James, that availeth much. We receive whatsoever we ask, John says, *because* we obey and please God. All lack of power to pray aright and perseveringly, all lack of power in prayer with God, points to some lack in the Christian life. It is as we learn to live the life that pleases God, that God will give what we ask. Let us learn from our Lord Jesus, in the parable of the vine, what the healthy, vigorous life is that may ask and receive what it will. Hear His voice, "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." And again at the dose of the parable: "Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide: that *whatsoever ye shall ask* the Father in My name, *He may give it you*."

And what is now, according to the parable, the life that one must lead to bear fruit, and then ask and receive what we will? What is it we are to be or do, that will enable us to pray as we should, and to receive what we ask? The answer is in one word: it is the branch life that gives power for prayer. We are branches of Christ, the Living Vine. We must simply live like branches, and abide in Christ, then we shall ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us.

We all know what a branch is, and what its essential characteristic. It is simply a growth of the vine, produced by it and appointed to bear fruit. It has only one reason of existence; it is there at the bidding of the vine, that through it the vine may bear and ripen its precious fruit. Just as the vine only and solely and wholly lives to produce the sap that makes the grape, so the branch has no other aim and object but this alone, to receive that sap and bear the grape. Its only work is to serve the vine, that through it the vine may do its work.

And the believer, the branch of Christ the Heavenly Vine, is it to be understood that he is as literally, as exclusively, to live only that Christ may bear fruit through him? Is it meant that a true Christian as a branch is to be just as absorbed in and devoted to the work of bearing fruit to the glory of God as Christ the Vine was on earth, and is now in heaven? This, and nothing less, is indeed what is meant. It is to such that the unlimited prayer promises of the parable are given. It is the branch-life, existing solely for the Vine. that will have the power to pray aright. With our life abiding in Him, and His words abiding, kept and obeyed, in our heart and life, transmuted into our very being, there will be the grace to pray aright, and the faith to receive the whatsoever we will.

Do let us connect the two things, and take them both in their simple, literal truth, and their infinite. divine grandeur. The promises of our Lord's farewell discourse, with their wonderful six-fold repetition of the unlimited, *anything, whatsoever* (John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24), appear to us altogether too large to be taken literally, and they are qualified down to meet our human ideas of what appears seemly. It is because we separate them from that life of absolute and unlimited devotion to Christ's service to which they were given. God's covenant is ever: Give all and take all. He that is willing to be wholly branch, and nothing but branch, who is ready to place himself absolutely at the disposal of Jesus the Vine of God, to bear His fruit through him, and to live every moment only for Him, will receive a Divine liberty to claim Christ's *whatsoever* in all its fulness, and a Divine wisdom and humility to use it aright. He will live and pray, and claim the Father's promises, even as Christ did, only for God's glory in the salvation of men. He will use his boldness in prayer only with a view to power in intercession, and getting men blessed. The unlimited devotion of the branch life to fruit-bearing, and the unlimited access to the treasures of the Vine life, are inseparable. It is the life abiding wholly in Christ that can pray the effectual prayer in the name of Christ.

Just think for a moment of the men of prayer in Scripture, and see in them what the life was that could pray in such power. We spoke of Abraham as intercessor. What gave Him such boldness? He knew that God had chosen and called him away from his home and people to walk before Him, that all nations might be blessed in him. He knew that he had obeyed, and forsaken all for God. Implicit obedience, to the very sacrifice of his son, was the law of his life. He did what God asked: he dared trust God to do what he asked. We spoke of Moses as intercessor. He too had forsaken all for God, "counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt." He lived at God's disposal: "as a servant he was faithful in all His house." How often it is written of him, "According to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did he." No wonder that he was very bold: his heart was right with God: he knew God would hear him. No less true is this of Elijah, the man who stood up to plead for the Lord God of Israel. The man who is ready to risk all for God can count upon God to do all for him.

It is as men live that they pray. It is the life that prays. It is the life that, with wholehearted devotion, gives up all for God and to God, that can claim all from God. Our God longs exceedingly to prove Himself the Faithful God and Mighty Helper of His people. He only waits for hearts wholly turned from the world to Himself, and open to receive His gifts. The man who loses all will find all; he dare ask and take it. The branch that only and truly lives abiding in Christ, the Heavenly Vine, entirely given up, like Christ, to bear fruit in the salvation of men, and has His words taken up into and abiding in its life, may and dare ask what it will -- it shall be done. And where we have not yet attained to that full devotion to which our Lord had trained His disciples, and cannot equal them in their power of prayer, we may, nevertheless, take courage in remembering that, even in the lower stages of the Christian life, every new onward step in the striving after the perfect branch life, and every surrender to live for others in intercession, will be met from above by a corresponding liberty to draw nigh with greater boldness, and expect larger answers. The more we pray, and the more conscious we become of our unfitness to pray in power, the more we shall be urged and helped to press on towards the secret of power in prayer -- a life abiding in Christ entirely at His disposal.

And if any are asking, with somewhat of a despair of attainment, what the reason may be of the failure in this blessed branch life, so simple and yet so mighty, and how they can come to it, let me point them to one of the most precious lessons of the parable of the Vine. It is one that is all too little noticed. Jesus spake, "I am the true Vine, *and my Father is the Husbandman*." We have not only Himself, the glorified Son of God, in His divine fulness, out of whose fulness of life and grace we can draw, -- this is very wonderful, -- but there is something more blessed still. We have the Father, as the Husbandman, watching over our abiding in the Vine, over our growth and fruitbearing. It is not left to our faith or our faithfulness to maintain our union with Christ: the God, who is the Father of Christ, and who united us with Him, -- God Himself will see to it that the branch is what it should be, will enable us to bring forth just the fruit we were appointed to bear. Hear what Christ said of this, "Every branch that beareth fruit, He cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit." More fruit is what the Father seeks; more fruit is what the Father will Himself provide. It is for this that He, as the Vinedresser, cleanses the branches.

Just think a moment what this means. It is said that of all fruitbearing plants on earth there is none that produces fruit so full of spirit, from which spirit can be so abundantly distilled, as the vine. And of all fruitbearing plants there is none that is so ready to run into wild wood, and for which pruning and cleansing are so indispensable. The one great work that a vinedresser has to do for the branch every year is to prune it. Other plants can for a time dispense with it, and yet bear fruit: the vine *must* have it. And so the one thing the branch that desires to abide in Christ and bring forth much fruit, and to be able to ask whatsoever it will, must do, is to trust in and yield itself to this Divine cleansing. What is it that the vinedresser cuts away with his pruning-knife? Nothing but the wood that the branch has produced -- true, honest wood, with the true vine nature in it. This must be cut away. And why? Because it draws away the strength and life of the vine, and hinders the flow of the juice to the grape. The more it is cut down, the less wood there is in the branch, the more all the sap can go to the grape. The wood of the branch must decrease, that the fruit for the vine may increase; in obedience to the law of all nature, that death is the way to life, that gain comes through sacrifice, the rich and luxuriant growth of wood must be cut off and cast away, that the life more abundant may be seen in the cluster.

Even so, child of God, branch of the Heavenly Vine, there is in thee that which appears perfectly innocent and legitimate, and which yet so draws out thy interest and thy strength that it must be pruned and cleansed away. We saw what power in prayer men like Abraham and Moses and Elijah had, and we know what fruit they bore. But we also know what it cost them; how God had to separate them from their surroundings, and ever again to draw them from any trust in themselves, to seek their life in Him alone, It is only as our own will, and strength and effort and pleasure, even where these appear perfecfly natural and sinless, are cut down, so that the whole energies of our being are free and open to receive the sap of the Heavenly Vine, the Holy Spirit, that we shall bear much fruit. It is in the surrender of what nature holds fast, it is in the full and willing submission to God's holy pruning-knife, that we shall come to what Christ chose and appointed us for -- to bear fruit, that whatsoever we ask the Father in Christ's name, He may give to us.

What the pruning-knife is, Christ tells us in the next verse. "Ye are clean *through the word* which I have spoken to you." As He says later, "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth." "The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit." What heart-searching words Christ had spoken to His disciples on love and humility, on being the least, and, like Himself, the servant of all, on denying self, and taking the cross, and losing the life. Through His word the Father had cleansed them, cut away all confidence in themselves or the world, and prepared them for the inflowing and filling of the Spirit of the Heavenly Vine. It is not we who can cleanse ourselves: God is the Vinedresser: we may confidently intrust ourselves to His care.

Beloved brethren, -- ministers, missionaries, teachers, workers, believers old and young, -- are you mourning your lack of prayer, and, as a consequence, your lack of power in prayer? Oh! come and listen to your beloved Lord as He tells you, "only be a branch, united to, identified with, the Heavenly Vine, and your prayers will be effectual and much availing." Are you mourning that just this is your trouble-you do not, cannot, live this branch-life, abiding in Him? Oh! come and listen again. "*More fruit*" is not only your desire, but the Father's too. He is the Husbandman who cleanseth the fruitful branch, that it may bear more fruit. Cast yourself upon God, to do in you what is impossible to man. Count upon a Divine cleansing, to cut down and take away all that self-confidence and self-effort, that has been the cause of your failure. The God who gave you His beloved Son to be your Vine, who made you His branch, will He not do His work of cleansing to make you fruitful in every good work, in the work of prayer and intercession too?

Here is the life that can pray. A branch entirely given up to the Vine and its aims, with all responsiblity for its cleansing cast on the Vinedresser; a branch abiding in Christ, trusting and yielding to God for His cleansing, can bear much fruit. In the power of such a life we shall love prayer, we shall know how to pray, we shall pray, and receive whatsoever we ask.

**VI**

**RESTRAINING PRAYER -- IS IT SIN?**

**Job 15:4.**

**"Thou restrainest prayer before God." -- Job 15:4.**

**"What profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?" -- Job 21:15.**

**"God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." -- 1 Sam. 12:23.**

**"Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you." -- Josh. 7:12.**

ANY deep quickening of the spiritual life of the Church will always be accompanied by a deeper sense of sin. This will not begin with theology; that can only give expression to what God works in the life of His people. Nor does it mean that that deeper sense of sin will only be seen in stronger expressions of self-reproach or penitence: that is sometimes found to consist with a harbouring of sin, and unbelief as to deliverance. But the true sense of the hatefulness of sin, the hatred of it, will be proved by the intensity of desire for deliverance, and the struggle to know to the very utmost what God can do in saving from it -- a holy jealousy, in nothing to sin against God.

If we are to deal effectually with the lack of prayer we must look at it from this point of view and ask, Restraining prayer, is it sin? And if it be, how is it to be dear with, to be discovered, and confessed, and cast out by man, and cleansed away by God? Jesus is a Saviour from sin. It is only as we know sin truly that we can truly know the power that saves from sin. The life that can pray effectually is the life of the cleansed branch -- the life that knows deliverance from the power of self. To see that our prayer-sins are indeed sins, is the first step to a true and Divine deliverance from them.

In the story of Achan we have one of the strongest proofs in Scripture that it is sin that robs God's people of His blessing, and that God will not tolerate it; and at the same time the clearest indication of the principles under which God deals with it, and removes it. Let us see in the light of the story if we can learn how to look at the sin of prayerlessness, and at the sinfulness that lies at the root of it. The words I have quoted above, "Neither will I be with you any more, except ye put away the accursed thing from among you," take us into the very heart of the story, and suggest a series of the most precious lessons around the truth they express, that the presence of sin makes the presence of God impossible.

**1. The presence of God is the great privilege of God's people.**

And their only power against the enemy. -- God had promised to Moses, I will bring you in unto the land. Moses proved that he understood this when God, after the sin of the golden calf, spoke of withdrawing His presence and sending an angel. He refused to accept anything less than God's presence. "For whereby shall it be known that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not that *Thou goest with us*?" It was this gave Caleb and Joshua their confidence: The Lord is with us. It was this gave Israel their victory over Jericho: the presence of God. This is throughout Scripture the great central promise: I am with thee. This marks off the whole-hearted believer from the worldling and worldly Christians around him: he lives consciously hidden in the secret of God's presence.

**2. Defeat and failure are always owing to the loss of God's presence.**

It was thus at Ai. God had brought His people into Canaan with the promise to give them the land. When the defeat at Ai took place Joshua felt at once that the cause must be in the withdrawal of God's power. He had not fought for them. His presence had been withheld.

In the Christian life and the work of the Church, defeat is ever a sign of the loss of God's presence. If we apply this to our failure in the prayer-life, and as a result of that to our failure in work for God, we are led to see that all is simply owing to our not standing in clear and full fellowship with God. His nearness, His immediate presence, has not been the chief thing sought after and trusted in. He could not work in us as He would. Loss of blessing and power is ever caused by the loss of God's presence.

**3. The loss of God's presence is always owing to some hidden sin.**

Just as pain is ordered in nature to warn of some hidden evil in the system, defeat is God's voice telling us there is something wrong. He has given Himself so wholly to His people, He delights so in being with them, and would so fain reveal in them His love and power, that He never withdraws Himself unless they compel Him by sin.

Throughout the Church there is a complaint of defeat. The Church has so little power over the masses, or the educated classes. Powerful conversions are comparatively rare. The fewness of holy, consecrated, spiritual Christians, devoted to the service of God and their fellowmen, is felt everywhere. The power of the Church for the preaching of the gospel to the heathen is paralysed by the scarcity of money and men; and all owing to the lack of the effectual prayer which brings the Holy Spirit in power, first on ministers and believers, then on missionaries and the heathen. Can we deny it that the lack of prayer is the sin on account of which God's presence and power are not more manifestly seen among us?

**4. God Himself will discover the hidden sin.**

We may think we know what the sin is: it is only God who can discover its real deep meaning. When He spoke to Joshua, before naming the sin of Achan, God first said, "They have transgressed My covenant which I commanded them." God had commanded (Jos. 7:11) that all the booty of Jericho, gold and silver and all that was in it, was to be a devoted thing, consecrated unto the Lord, and to come into His treasury. And Israel had broken this consecration vow: it had not given God His due; it had robbed God.

It is this we need: God must discover to us how the lack of prayer is the indication of unfaithfulness to our consecration vow, that God should have all our heart and life. We must see that this restraining prayer, with the excuses we make for it, is greater sin than we have thought; for what does it mean? That we have little taste or relish for fellowship with God; that our faith rests more on our own work and efforts than on the power of God; that we have little sense of the heavenly blessing God waits to shower down; that we are not ready to sacrifice the ease and confidence of the flesh for persevering waiting on God; that the spirituality of our life, and our abiding in Christ, is altogether too feeble to make us prevail in prayer. When the pressure of work for Christ is allowed to be the excuse for our not finding time to seek and secure His own presence and power in it, as our chief need, it surely proves that there is no right sense of our absolute dependence upon God; no deep apprehension of the Divine and supernatural work of God in which we are only His instruments, no true entrance into the heavenly, altogether other-worldly, character of our mission and aims, no full surrender to and delight in Christ Jesus Himself.

If we were to yield to God's Spirit to show us that all this is in very deed the meaning of remissness in prayer, and of our allowing other things to crowd it out, all our excuses would fall away, and we should fall down and cry, "We have sinned! we have sinned!" Samuel once said, "As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." Ceasing from prayer is sin against God. May God discover this to us. (Note A.)

**5. When God discovers sin, it must be confessed and cast out.**

When the defeat at Ai came, Joshua and Israel were ignorant of the cause. God dealt with Israel as a nation, as one body, and the sin of one member was visited on all. Israel as a whole was ignorant of the sin, and yet suffered for it. The Church may be ignorant of the greatness of this sin of restraining prayer, individual ministers or believers may never have looked upon it as actual transgression, none the less does it bring its punishment. But when the sin is no more hidden, when the Holy Spirit begins to convince of it, then comes the time of heart-searching. In our story the combination of individual and united responsibility is very solemn. The individual: as we find it in the expression, "man for man"; each man felt himself under the eye of God, to be dealt with. And when Achan had been taken, he had to make confession. The united: as we see it in all Israel first suffering and dealt with by God, then taking Achan, and his family, and the accursed thing, and destroying them out of their midst.

If we have reason to think this is the sin that is in the camp, let us begin with personal and united confession. And then let us come before God to put away and destroy the sin. Here stands at the very threshold of Israel's history in Canaan the heap of stones in the valley of Achor, to tell us that God cannot bear sin, that God will not dwell with sin, and that if *we really want God's presence in power, sin must be put away*. Let us look the solemn fact in the face. There may be other sins, but here is certainly one that causes the loss of God's presence -- we do not pray as Christ and Scripture teach us. Let us bring it out before God, and give up this sin to the death. Let us yield ourselves to God to obey His voice. Let no fear of past failure, let no threatening array of temptations, or duties, or excuses, keep us back. It is a simple question of obedience. Are we going to give up ourselves to God and His Spirit to live a life in prayer, well-pleasing to Him? Surely, if it is God who has been withholding His presence, who has been discovering the sin, who is calling for its destruction, and a return to obedience, surely we can count upon His grace to accept and strengthen for the life He asks of us. It is not a question of what you can do; it is the question of whether you now, with your whole heart, turn to give God His due, and give yourself to let His will and grace have their way with you.

**6. With sin cast out God's presence is restored.**

From this day onwards there is not a word in Joshua of defeat in battle. The story shows them going on from victory to victory. God's presence secured gives power to overcome every enemy.

This truth is so simple that the very ease with which we acquiesce in it robs it of its power. Let us pause and think what it implies. God's presence restored means victory secured. Then, we are responsible for defeat. Then, there must be sin somewhere causing it. Then, we ought at once to find out and put away the sin. We may confidently expect God's presence the moment the sin is put away. Surely each one is under the solemn obligation to search his life and see what part he may have in this evil.

God never speaks to His people of sin except with a view to saving them from it. *The same light that shows the sin will show the way out of it*. The same power that breaks down and condemns will, if humbly yielded to and waited on in confession and faith, give the power to rise up and conquer. It is God who is speaking to His Church and to us about this sin: "HE WONDERED that there was no intercessor." "I WONDERED that there was none to uphold." "I SOUGHT for a man that should stand in the gap before Me, and found none." The God who speaks thus is He who will work the change for His children who seek His face. He will make the valley of Achor, of trouble and shame, of sin confessed and cast out, a door of hope. Let us not fear, let us not cling to the excuses and explanations which circumstances suggest, but simply confess, "We have sinned; we are sinning; we dare not sin longer." In this matter of prayer we are sure God does not demand of us impossibilities. He does not weary us with an impracticable ideal. He asks us to pray no more than He gives grace to enable us to. He will give the grace to do what He asks, and so to pray that our intercessions shall, day by day, be a pleasure to Him and to us, a source of strength to our conscience and our work, and a channel of blessing to those for whom we labour.

God dealt personally with Joshua, with Israel, with Achan. Let each of us allow Him to deal personally with us concerning this sin, of restraining prayer, and its consequences in our life and work; concerning the deliverance from sin, its certainty and blessedness. Just bow in stillness and wait before God, until, as God, He overshadow you with His presence, lead you out of that region of argument as to human possibilities, where conviction of sin can never be deep, and full deliverance can never come. Take quiet time, and be still before God, that He may take this matter in hand. "Sit still, for He will not be in rest until He have finished this thing this day." Leave yourself in God's hands.

**VII**

**WHO SHALL DELIVER?**

**Jer. 8:22.**

**"Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" -- Jer. 8:22.**

**"Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord our God." -- Jer. 3:22.**

**"Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed." -- Jer. 12:14.**

**"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death." -- Rom. 7:24, 8:2.**

DURING one of our conventions a gentleman called upon me to ask advice and help. He was evidently an earnest and well-instructed Christian man. He had for some years been in most difficult surroundings, trying to witness for Christ. The result was a sense of failure and unhappiness. His complaint was that he had no relish for the Word, and that though he prayed, it was as if his heart was not in it. If he spoke to others, or gave a tract, it was under a sense of duty: the love and the joy were not present. He longed to be filled with God's Spirit, but the more he sought it, the farther off it appeared to be. What was he to think of his state, and was there any way out of it?

My answer was, that the whole matter appeared to me very simple; he was living under the law and not under grace. As long as he did so, there could be no change. He listened attentively, but could not exactly see what I meant.

I reminded him of the difference, the utter contrariety, between law and grace. Law demands; grace bestows. Law commands, but gives no strength to obey; grace promises, and performs, does all we need to do. Law burdens, and casts down and condemns; grace comforts, and makes strong and glad. Law appeals to self, to do its utmost; grace points to Christ to do all. Law calls to effort and strain, and urges us towards a goal we never can reach; grace works in us all God's blessed will. I pointed out to him how his first step should be, instead of striving against all this failure, fully to accept of it, and the lesson of his own impotence, as God had been seeking to teach it him, and, with this confession, to sink down before God in utter helplessness. There would be the place where he would learn that, unless grace gave him deliverance and strength, he never could do better than he had done, and that grace would indeed work all for him. He must come out from under law and self and effort, and take his place under grace, allowing God to do all.

In later conversations he told me the diagnosis of the disease had been correct. He admitted grace must do all. And yet, so deep was the thought that we must do something, that we must at least bring our faithfulness to secure the work of grace, he feared that his life would not be very different; he would not be equal to the strain of new difficulties into which he was now going. There was, amid all the intense earnestness, an undertone of despair: he could not live as he knew he ought to. I have already said, in the opening chapter, that in some of our meetings I had noticed this tone of hopelessness. And no minister who has come into close contact with souls seeking to live wholly for God, to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all well pleasing," but knows that this renders true progress impossible. To speak specially of the lack of prayer, and the desire of living a fuller prayer-life, how many are the difficulties to be met! We have so often resolved to pray more and better, and have failed. We have not the strength of will some have, with one resolve to turn round and change our habits. The press of duty is as great as ever it was; it is so difficult to find time for more prayer; real enjoyment in prayer, which would enable us to persevere, is what we do not feel; we do not possess the power to supplicate and to plead, as we should; our prayers, instead of being a joy and a strength, are a source of continual serf-condemnation and doubt. We have at times mourned and confessed and resolved; but, to tell the honest truth, we do not expect, for we do not see the way to, any great change.

It is evident that as long as this spirit prevails, there can be very little prospect of improvement. Discouragement must bring defeat. One of the first objects of a physician is ever to waken hope; without this he knows his medicines will often profit little. No teaching from God's Word as to the duty, the urgent need, the blessed privilege of more prayer, of effectual prayer, will avail, while the secret whisper is heard: There is no hope. Our first care must be to find out the hidden cause of the failure and despair, and then to show how divinely sure deliverance is. We must, unless we are to rest content with our state, listen to and join in the question, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people restored?" We must listen, and receive into our heart, the Divine promise with the response it met with: "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God." We must come with the personal prayer, and the faith that there will be a personal answer. Shall we not even now begin to claim it in regard to the lack of prayer, and believe that God will help us: "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed."

It is always of consequence to distinguish between the symptoms of a disease and the disease itself. Feebleness and failure in prayer is a sign of feebleness in the spiritual life. If a patient were to ask a physician to give him something to stimulate his feeble pulse, he would be told that this would do him little good. The pulse is the index of the state of the heart and the whole system: the physician strives to have health restored. What everyone who would fain pray more faithfully and effectually must learn is this, that his whole spiritual life is in a sickly state, and needs restoration. It is as he comes to look, not only at his shortcomings in prayer, but at the lack in the life of faith, of which this is the symptom, that he will become fully alive to the serious nature of the disease. He will then see the need of a radical change in his whole life and walk, if his prayer-life, which is simply the pulse of the spiritual system, is to indicate health and vigour. God has so created us that the exercise of every healthy function causes joy. Prayer is meant to be as simple and natural as breathing or working to a healthy man. The reluctance we feel, and the failure we confess, are God's own voice calling us to acknowledge our disease, and to come to Him for the healing He has promised.

And what is now the disease of which the lack of prayer is the symptom? We cannot find a better answer than is pointed out in the words, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace."

Here we have suggested the possibility of two types of Christian life. There may be a life partly under the law and partly under grace; or, a life entirely under grace, in the full liberty from serf-effort, and the full experience of the Divine strength which it can give. A true believer may still be living partly under the law, in the power of self-effort, striving to do what he cannot accomplish. The continued failure in his Christian life to which he confesses is owing to this one thing: he trusts in himself, and tries to do his best. He does, indeed, pray and look to God for help, but still it is he in his strength, helped by God, who is to do the work. In the Epistles to the Romans, and Corinthians, and Galatians, we know how Paul tells them that they have not received the spirit of bondage again, that they are free from the law, that they are no more servants but sons; that they must beware of nothing so much as to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Everywhere it is the contrast between the law and grace, between the flesh, which is under the law, and the Spirit, who is the gift of grace, and through whom grace does all its work. In our days, just as in those first ages, the great danger is living under the law, and serving God in the strength of the flesh. With the great majority of Christians it appears to be the state in which they remain all their lives. Hence the lack to such a large extent of true holy living and power in prayer. They do not know that all failure can have but one cause: *Men seek to do themselves what grace alone can do in them*, what grace most certainly will do.

Many will not be prepared to admit that this is their disease, that they are not living "under grace." Impossible, they say. "From the depth of my heart," a Christian cries, "I believe and know that there is no good in me, and that I owe everything to grace alone." "I have spent my life," a minister says, "and found my glory in preaching and exalting the doctrines of free grace." "And I," a missionary answers, "how could I ever have thought of seeing the heathen saved, if my only confidence had not been in the message I brought, and the power I trusted, of God's abounding grace." Surely you cannot say that our failures in prayer, and we sadly confess to them, are owing to our not living "under grace"? This cannot be our disease.

We know how often a man may be suffering from a disease without knowing it. What he counts a slight ailment turns out to be a dangerous complaint. Do not let us be too sure that we are not, to a large extent, still living "under the law," while considering ourselves to be living wholly "under grace." Very frequently the reason of this mistake is the limited meaning attached to the word "grace." Just as we limit God Himself, by our little or unbelieving thoughts of Him, so we limit His grace at the very moment that we are delighting in terms like the "riches of grace," "grace exceeding abundant." Has not the very term, "grace abounding," from Bunyan's book downward, been confined to the one great blessed truth of free justification with ever renewed pardon and eternal glory for the vilest of sinners, while the other equally blessed truth of "grace abounding" in sanctification is not fully known. Paul writes: "Much more shall they which receive the abundance of grace reign in life through Jesus Christ." That reigning in life, as conqueror over sin, is even here on earth. "Where sin abounded" in the heart and life, "grace did abound more exceedingly, that grace might reign through righteousness" in the whole life and being of the believer. It is of this reign of grace in the soul that Paul asks, "Shall we sin because we are under grace?" and answers, "God forbid." Grace is not only pardon of, but power over, sin; grace takes the place sin had in the life, and undertakes, as sin had reigned within in the power of death, to reign in the power of Christ's life. It is of this grace that Christ spoke, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and Paul answered, "I will glory in my weakness; for, when I am weak, then am I strong." It is of this grace, which, when we are willing to confess ourselves utterly impotent and helpless, comes in to work all in us, that Paul elsewhere teaches, "God is able to make *all grace* abound unto you, that ye, *always* having *all sufficiency* in *all things*, may abound unto *all good works*."

It has often happened that a seeker after God and salvation has read his Bible long, and yet never seen the truth of a free and full and immediate justification by faith. When once his eyes were opened, and he accepted it, he was amazed to find it everywhere. Even so many believers, who hold the doctrines of free grace as applied to pardon, have never seen its wondrous meaning as it undertakes to work our whole life in us, and *actually give us strength every moment* for whatever the Father would have us be and do. When God's light shines into our heart with this blessed truth, we know what Paul means, "Not I, but the grace of God." There again you have the twofold Christian life. The one, in which that "Not I" -- I am nothing, I can do nothing -- has not yet become a reality. The other, when the wondrous exchange has been made, and grace has taken the place of our effort, and we say and know, "I live, yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." It may then become a lifelong experience: "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

Beloved child of God! what think you, is it not possible that this has been the want in your life, the cause of your failure in prayer? You knew not how grace would enable you to pray, if once the whole life were under its power. You sought by earnest effort to conquer your reluctance or deadness in prayer, but failed. You strove by every motive of shame or love you could think of to stir yourself to it, but it would not help. Is it not worth while asking the Lord whether the message I bring you as His servant may not be more true for you than you think? Your lack of prayer is owing to a diseased state of life, and the disease is nothing but this -- you have not accepted, for dally life and every duty, the full salvation which the word brings: "Ye are not under the law, but under grace." As universal and deepreaching as the demand of the law and the reign of sin, yea, more exceeding abundant, is the provision of grace and the power by which it makes us reign in life. (Note B.)

In the chapter that follows that in which Paul wrote, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace," he gives us a picture of a believer's life under law, with the bitter experience in which it ends: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" His answer to the question, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," shows that there is deliverance from a life held captive under evil habits that have been struggled against in vain. That deliverance is by the Holy Spirit giving the full experience of what the life of Christ can work in us: "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The law of God could only deliver us into the power of the law of sin and death. The grace of God can bring us into, and keep us in, the liberty of the Spirit. We can be made free from the sad life under the power that led us captive, so that we did not what we would. The Spirit of life in Christ can free us from our continual failure in prayer, and enable us in this, too, to walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing.

Oh! be not hopeless, be not despondent; there is a balm in Gilead; there is a Physician there; there is healing for our sickness. What is impossible with man is possible with God. What you see no possibility of doing, grace will do. Confess the disease; trust the Physician; claim the healing; pray the prayer of faith, "Heal me, and I shall be healed." You too can become a man of prayer, and pray the effectual prayer that availeth much.[1.1]

**VIII**

**WILT THOU BE MADE WHOLE?**

**John 5:6-9.**

**"Jesus saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool. Jesus saith unto him, Rise and walk. Immediately the man was made whole, and walked." -- John 5:6-9.**

**"Peter said, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk . . . The faith which is by Him hath given this man this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." -- Acts 3:6, 16.**

**"Peter said, AEneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise. And he arose immediately." -- Acts 9:34.**

FEEBLENESS in prayer is the mark of disease. Impotence to walk is, in the Christian, as in the natural life, a terrible proof of some evil in the system that needs a physician. The lack of power to walk joyfully in the new and living way that leads to the Father and the throne of grace is specially grievous. Christ is the great Physician, who comes to every Bethesda where impotent folk are gathered, and speaks out His loving, searching question, Wilt thou be made whole? For all who are still clinging to their hope in the pool, or are looking for some man to put them in, who are hoping, in course of time, somehow to be helped by just continuing in the use of the ordinary means of grace, His question points to a better way. He offers them healing in a way of power they have never understood. And to all who are willing to confess, not only their own impotence, but their failure to find any man to help them, His question brings the sure and certain hope of a near deliverance. We have seen that our weakness in prayer is part of a life smitten with spiritual impotence. Let us listen to our Lord as He offers to restore our spiritual strength, to fit us for walking like healthy, strong men in all the ways of the Lord, and so be fit rightly to fill our place in the great work of intercession. As we see what the wholeness is He offers, how He gives it, and what He asks of us, we shall be prepared for giving a willing answer to His question.

**WHAT THE HEALTH THAT JESUS OFFERS.**

I might mention many marks of spiritual health. Our text leads us to take one, -- walking. Jesus said to the sick man, Rise and walk, and with that restored him to his place among men in full health and vigour, able to take his part in all the work of life. It is a wonderfully suggestive picture of the restoration of spiritual health. To the healthy, walking is a pleasure; to the sick, a burden, if not an impossibility. How many Christians there are to whom, like the maimed and the halt and the lame and the impotent, movement and progress in God's way is indeed an effort and a weariness. Christ comes to say, and with the word He gives the power, Rise and walk.

Just think of this walk to which He restores and empowers us. It is a life like that of Enoch and Noah, who "walked with God." A life like that of Abraham, to whom God said, "Walk before Me," and who himself spake, "The Lord before whom I walk." A life of which David sings, "They shall walk in the light of Thy countenance," and Isaiah prophesies, 'They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.' Even as God the Creator fainteth not nor is weary, shall they who walk with Him, waiting on Him, never be exhausted or feeble. It is a life concerning which it could be said of the last of the Old Testament saints, Zacharias and Elisabeth, "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." This is the walk Jesus came to make possible and true to His people in greater power than ever before.

Hear what the New Testament speaks of it: "That like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life." It is the Risen One who says to us, Rise and walk: He gives the power of the resurrection life. It is a walk in Christ. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye also in Him." It is a walk like Christ. "He that saith he abideth in Him ought so to walk even as He walked." It is a walk by the Spirit and after the Spirit. "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." "Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." It is a walk worthy of God and well pleasing to Him. "That ye would walk worthy of the Lord, unto all well pleasing, being fruitful in every good work." "I beseech you, that as ye received of us, how ye should walk and please God, *even as ye do walk*, that ye would abound more and more." It is a walk in heavenly love. "Walk in love, even as Christ loved you." It is a "walk in the light, as He is in the light." It is a walk of faith, all its power coming simply from God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, to the soul turned away from the world. "We walk by faith, and not by sight."

How many believers there are who regard such a walk as an impossible thing -- so impossible that they do not feel it a sin that they "walk otherwise"; and so they do not long for this walk in newness of life. They have become so accustomed to the life of impotence, that the life and walk in God's strength has little attraction. But some there are with whom it is not thus. They do wonder if these words really mean what they say, and if the wonderful life each one of them speaks of is simply an unattainable ideal, or meant to be realised in flesh and blood. The more they study them, the more they feel that they are spoken as for daily life. And yet they appear too high. Oh that they would believe that God sent His Almighty Son, and His Holy Spirit, indeed to bring us and fit us for a life and walk from heaven beyond all that man could dare to think or hope for.

**HOW JESUS MAKES US WHOLE.**

When a physician heals a patient, he acts on him from without, and does something which is, if possible, ever after to render him independent of his aid. He restores him to perfect health, and leaves him. With the work of our Lord Jesus it is in both respects the very opposite. Jesus works not from without, but from within, by entering Himself in the power of His Spirit into our very life. And instead of, as in the bodily healing, being rendered, if possible, independent of a physician for the future, Christ's one purpose in healing is, as we said, the exact opposite. His one condition of success, is to bring us into *such dependence upon Himself as that we shall not be able one single moment to do without Him*. Christ Jesus Himself is our life, in a sense that many Christians have no conception of. The prevailing feeble and sickly life is entirely owing to the lack of the apprehension of the Divine truth, that as long as we expect Christ continually to do something for us from heaven, in single acts of grace from time to time, and each time trust Him to give us what will last a little while, we cannot be restored to perfect health. But when once we see how there is to be nothing of our own for a single moment, and it is to be all Christ moment by moment, and learn to accept it from Him and trust Him for it, the life of Christ becomes the health of our soul. Health is nothing but life in its normal, undisturbed action. Christ gives us health by giving us Himself as our life; so He becomes our strength for our walk. Isaiah's words find their New Testament fulfilment: They that wait on the Lord shall walk and not faint, because Christ is now the strength of their life.

It is strange how believers sometimes think this life of dependence too great a strain, and a loss of our personal liberty. They admit a need of dependence, of much dependence, but with room left for our own will and energy. They do not see that even a partial dependence makes us debtors, and leaves us nothing to boast of. They forget that our relationship to God, and co-operation with Him, is not that He does the larger part and we the lesser, but that God does all and we do all -- God all in us, we all through God. This dependence upon God secures our true independence; when our will seeks nothing but the Divine will, we reach a Divine nobility, the true independence of all that is created. He that has not seen this must remain a sickly Christian, letting self do part and Christ part. He that accepts the life of unceasing dependence on Christ, as life and health and strength, is made whole. As God, Christ can enter and become the life of His creature. As the Glorified One who received the Holy Spirit from the Father to bestow, He can renew the heart of the sinful creature and make it His home, and by His presence maintain it in full health and strength.

O ye all who would fain walk and please God, and in your prayer-life not have your heart condemn you, listen to Christ's words: "Wilt thou be made whole?" He can give soul-health. He can give a life that can pray, and know that it is wellpleasing to the Father. If you would have this, come and hear how you can receive it.

**WHAT CHRIST ASKS OF US.**

The story invites us to notice three things very specially. Christ's question first appeals to the will, and asks for the expression of its consent. He then listens to man's confession of his utter helplessness. Then come the ready obedience to Christ's command, that rises up and walks.

1. Wilt thou be made whole? About the answer of the impotent man there could be no doubt. Who would not be willing to have his sickness removed? But, alas, in the spiritual life what need to press the question. Some will not admit that they are so sick. And some will not believe that Christ can make a man whole. And some will believe it for others, but they are sure it is not for them. At the root of all lies the fear of the self-denial and the sacrifice which will be needed. They are not willing to forsake entirely the walk after the course of this world, to give up all self-will, and self-confidence, and self-pleasing. The walk in Christ and like Christ is too straight and hard: they do not will it, they do not will to be made whole. My brother, if thou art willing, speak it out: "Lord! at any price, I will!" From Christ's side the act is one of the will: "I will, be thou clean." From your side equally: "Be it unto thee as thou wilt." If you would be delivered from your impotence -- oh, fear not to say, "I will, I will!"

Then comes the second step. Christ wants us to look up to him as our only Helper. "I have no man to put me in," must be our cry. Here on earth there is no help for me. Weakness may grow into strength in the ordinary use of means, if all the organs and functions are in a sound state. Sickness needs special measures. Your soul is sick; your impotence to walk joyfully the Christian walk in God's way is a sign of disease; fear not to confess it, and to admit that there is no hope for restoration unless by an act of Christ's mercy healing you. Give up the idea of growing out of your sickly into a healthy state, of growing out from under the law into a life under grace. A few days ago I heard a student plead the cause of the Volunteer pledge. "The pledge calls you," he said, "to a decision. Do not think of growing into a missionary: unless God forbids you, take the step; the decision will bring joy and strength, will set you free to grow up in all needed for a missionary, and will be a help to others." It is even so in the Christian life. Delay and struggle will equally hinder you; do confess that you cannot bring yourself to pray as you would, because you cannot give yourself the healthy, heavenly life that loves to pray, and that knows to count upon God's Spirit to pray in us. Come to Christ to heal you. He can in one moment make you whole. Not in the sense of working a sudden change in your feelings, or in what you are in yourself, but in the heavenly reality of coming in, in response to your surrender and faith, and taking charge of your inner life, and filling it with Himself and Spirit.

The third thing Christ asks is this, the surrender of faith. When He spoke to the impotent man His word of command had to be obeyed. The man believed that there was truth and power in Christ's word; in that faith he rose and walked. By faith he obeyed. And what Christ said to others was for him too -- "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole." Of us, too, Christ asks this faith, that His word changes our impotence into strength, and fits us for that walk in newness of life for which we have been quickened in Him. If we do not believe this, if we will not take courage and say, with Paul, "I can do all things in Christ, which strengtheneth me," we cannot obey. But if we will listen to the word that tells us of the walk that is not only possible, but has been proved and seen in God's saints from of old, if we will fix our eye on the mighty, living, loving Christ, who speaks in power, “Rise and walk," we shall take courage and obey. We shall rise and begin to walk in Him and His strength. In faith, apart from and above all feeling, we shall accept and trust an unseen Christ as our strength, and go on in the strength of the Lord God. We shall know Christ as the strength of our life. We shall know, and tell, and prove that Jesus Christ hath made us whole.

Can it indeed be? Yes, it can. He has done it for many: He will do it for you. Beware of forming wrong conceptions of what must take place. When the impotent man was made whole he had still all to learn as to the use of his new-found strength. If he wanted to dig, or build, or learn a trade, he had to begin at the beginning. Do not expect at once to be a proficient in prayer or any part of the Christian life. No; but expect and be confident of this one thing, that, as you have trusted yourself to Christ to be your health and strength, He will lead and teach you. Begin to pray in a quiet sense of your ignorance and weakness, but in a joyful assurance that He will work in you what you need. Rise and walk each day in a holy confidence that He is with you and in you. Just accept Jesus Christ the Living One, and trust Him to do His work.

Will you do it? Have you done it? Even now Jesus speaks, "Rise and walk." "Amen, Lord! at Thy word I come. I rise to walk with Thee, and in Thee, and like Thee."

**IX**

**THE SECRET OF EFFECTUAL PRAYER**

**Mark 11:24.**

**"What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them?” -- Mark 11:24.**

HERE we have a summary of the teaching of our Lord Jesus on prayer. Nothing will so much help to convince us of the sin of our remissness in prayer, to discover its causes, and to give us courage to expect entire deliverance, as the careful study and then the believing acceptance of that teaching. The more heartily we enter into the mind of our blessed Lord, and set ourselves simply just to think about prayer as He thought, the more surely will His words be as living seeds. They will grow and produce in us their fruit, -- a life and practice exactly corresponding to the Divine truth they contain. Do let us believe this: Christ, the living Word of God, gives in His words a Divine quickening power which brings what they say, which works in us what He asks, which actually fits and enables for all He demands. Learn to look upon His teaching on prayer as a definite promise of what He, by His Holy Spirit dwelling in you, is going to work into your very being and character.

Our Lord gives us the five marks, or essential elements, of true prayer. There must be, first, the heart's *desire*; then the expression of that desire in *prayer*; with that, the *faith* that carries the prayer to God; in that faith, the *acceptance of God's answer*; then comes the *experience* of the desired blessing. It may help to give definiteness to our thought, if we each take a definite request in regard to which we would fain learn to pray believingly. Or, perhaps better still, we might all unite and take the one thing that has been occupying our attention. We have been speaking of failure in prayer; why should we not take as the object of desire and supplication the "grace of supplication," and say, I want to ask and receive in faith the power to pray just as, and as much as, my God expects of me? Let us meditate on our Lord's words, in the confidence that He will teach us how to pray for this blessing.

**1. "What things soever ye desire."**

Desire is the secret power that moves the whole world of living men, and directs the course of each. And so desire is the soul of prayer, and the cause of insufficient or unsuccessful prayer is very much to be found in the lack or feebleness of desire. Some may doubt this: they are sure that they have very earnestly desired what they ask. But if they consider whether their desire has indeed been as whole-hearted as God would have it, as the heavenly worth of these blessings demands, they may come to see that it was indeed the lack of desire that was the cause of failure. What is true of God is true of each of His blessings, and is the more true the more spiritual the blessing: "Ye shall seek Me, and shall find, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Of Judah in the days of Asa it is written, "They sought Him with *their whole desire*" (2 Chron. 15:15). A Christian may often have very earnest desires for spiritual blessings. But alongside of these there are other desires in his daily life occupying a large place in his interests and affections. The spiritual desires are not all-absorbing. He wonders that his prayer is not heard. It is simply that God wants the whole heart. "The Lord thy God is *one Lord*, therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God *with all thy heart*." The law is unchangeable: God offers Himself, gives Himself away, to the whole-hearted who give themselves wholly away to Him. He always gives us according to our heart's desire. But not as we think it, but as He sees it. If there be other desires which are more at home with us, which have our heart more than Himself and His presence, He allows these to be fulfilled, and the desires that engage us at the hour of prayer cannot be granted.

We desire the gift of intercession, grace and power to pray aright. Our hearts must be drawn away from other desires: we must give ourselves wholly to this one. We must be willing to live wholly in intercession for the kingdom. By fixing our eye on the blessedness and the need of this grace, by thinking of the certainty that God will give it us, by giving ourselves up to it, for the sake of the perishing world, desire may be strengthened, and the first step taken towards the possession of the coveted blessing. Let us seek the grace of prayer, as we seek the God with whom it will link us, "with our whole desire"; we may depend upon the promise, "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him." Let us not fear to say to Him, "I desire it with my whole heart."

**2. "What things soever ye desire when ye pray."**

The desire of the heart must become the expression of the lips. Our Lord Jesus more than once asked those who cried to Him for mercy, "What wilt thou?" He wanted them to say what they would. To speak it out roused their whole being into action, brought them into contact with Him, and wakened their expectation. To pray is to enter into God's presence, to claim and secure His attention, to have distinct dealing with Him in regard to some request, to commit our need to His faithfulness and to leave it there: it is in so doing that we become fully conscious of what we are seeking.

There are some who often carry strong desires in their heart, without bringing them to God in the clear expression of definite and repeated prayer. There are others who go to the Word and its promises to strengthen their faith, but do not give sufficient place to that pointed asking of God which helps the soul to the assurance that the matter has been put into God's hands. Still others come in prayer with so many requests and desires, that it is difficult for themselves to say what they really expect God to do. If you would obtain from God this great gift of faithfulness in prayer and power to pray aright, begin by exercising yourself in prayer in regard to it. Say of it to yourself and to God: "Here is something I have asked, and am continuing to ask till I receive. As plain and pointed as words can make it, I am saying, 'My Father! I do desire, I do ask of Thee, and expect of Thee, the grace of prayer and intercession.'"

**3. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe."**

As it is only by faith that we can know God, or receive Jesus Christ, or live the Christian life, so faith is the life and power of prayer. If we are to enter upon a life of intercession, in which there is to be joy and power and blessing, if we are to have our prayer for the grace of prayer answered, we must learn anew what faith is, and begin to live and pray in faith as never before.

Faith is the opposite of sight, and the two are contrary the one to the other. "We walk by faith, and not by sight." If the unseen is to get full possession of us, and heart and life and prayer are to be full of faith, there must be a withdrawal from, a denial of, the visible. The spirit that seeks to enjoy as much as possible of what is innocent or legitimate, that gives the first place to the calls and duties of daily life, is inconsistent with a strong faith and close intercourse with the spiritual world. "We *look not* at the things that are seen" -- the negative side needs to be emphasised if the positive, "but at the things which are not seen," is to become natural to us. In praying, faith depends upon our living in the invisible world.

This faith has specially to do with God. The great reason of our lack of faith is our lack of knowledge of God and intercourse with Him. "Have faith in God," Jesus said when He spoke of removing mountains. It is as a soul knows God, is occupied with His power, love, and faithfulness, comes away out of self and the world, and allows the light of God to shine on it, that unbelief will become impossible. All the mysteries and difficulties connected with answers to prayer will, however little we may be able to solve them intellectually be swallowed up in the adoring assurance: "This God is our God. He will bless us. He does indeed answer prayer. And the grace to pray I am asking for He will delight to give." (Note C.)

**4. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye have received."**

"What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that *ye have received*," now as you pray. *Faith has to accept the answer, as given by God in heaven, before it is found or felt upon earth*. This point causes difficulty, and yet it is of the very essence of believing prayer, its real secret. Try and take it in. Spiritual things can only be spiritually apprehended or appropriated. The spiritual heavenly blessing of God's answer to your prayer must be spiritually recognised and accepted before you feel anything of it. It is faith does this. A soul that not only seeks an answer, but seeks first the God who gives the answer, receives the power to know that it has what it has asked of Him. If it knows that it has asked according to His will and promises, and that it has come to and found Himself to give it, it does believe that it has received. "We know that He heareth us."

There is nothing so heart-searching as this faith, "*Believe that ye have received*." As we strive to believe, and find we cannot, it leads us to discover what there is that hinders. Blessed is the man who holds nothing back, and lets nothing hold him back, but, with his eye and heart on God alone, refuses to rest till he has believed what our Lord bids him, "that he has received." Here is the place where Jacob becomes Israel, and the power of prevailing prayer is born out of human weakness and despair. Here comes in the real need for persevering and ever-importunate prayer, that will not rest, or go away, or give up, till it knows it is heard, and believes that it has received.

You pray for "the Spirit of grace and supplication"? As you ask for it in strong desire, and believe in God who hears prayer, do not be afraid to press on and believe that your life can indeed be changed, that the world with its press of duties, whether religious or not, hindering prayer, can be overcome, and that God gives you your heart's desire, grace to pray both in measure and in spirit, just as the Father would have His child do. "Believe that you have received."

**5. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye have received, and ye shall have them."**

The receiving from God in faith, the believing acceptance of the answer with the perfect, praising assurance that it has been given, is not necessarily the experience or subjective possession of the gift we have asked for. At times there may be a considerable, or even a long, interval. In other cases the believing supplicant may at once enter upon the actual enjoyment of what he has received. It is specially in the former case that we have need of faith and patience: faith to rejoice in the assurance of the answer bestowed and received, and to begin and act upon that answer though nothing be felt; patience to wait if there be for the present no sensible proof of its presence. We can count upon it: *Ye shall have,* in actual enjoyment.

If we apply this to the prayer for the power of faithful intercession, the grace to pray earnestly and perseveringly for souls around us, let us learn to hold fast the Divine assurance that, as surely as we believe we receive, and that faith therefore, apart from all failing, may rejoice in the certainty of an answered prayer. The more we praise God for it, the sooner will the experience come. We may begin at once to pray for others, in the confidence that grace will be given us to pray more perseveringly and more believingly than we have done before. If we do not find any special enlargement or power in prayer, this must not hinder or discourage us. We have accepted, apart from feeling, a spiritual Divine gift by faith; in that faith we are to pray, nothing doubting. The Holy Spirit may for a little time be hiding Himself within us; we may count upon Him, even though it be with groanings which cannot find expression, to pray in us; in due time we shall become conscious of His presence and power. As sure as there is desire and prayer and faith, and faith's acceptance of the gift, there will be, too, the manifestation and experience of the blessing we sought.

Beloved brother! do you truly desire that God should enable you so to pray that your life may be free from continual self-condemnation, and that the power of His Spirit may come down in answer to your petition? *Come and ask it of God*. Kneel down and pray for it in a single definite sentence. When you have done so, kneel stir in faith, believing in God who answers. Believe that you do now receive what you have prayed: believe that you have received. If you find it difficult to do this, kneel still, and say that you do it on the strength of His own word. If it cost time, and struggle, and doubt -- fear not; at His feet, looking up into His face, faith will come. "Believe that you have received": at His bidding you dare claim the answer. Begin in that faith, even though it be feeble, a new prayer-life, with this one thought as its strength: "You have asked and received grace in Christ to prepare you, step by step, to be faithful in prayer and intercession. The more simply you hold to this, and expect the Holy Spirit to work it in you, the more surely and fully will the word be made true to you: Ye shall have it. God Himself who gave the answer will work it in you.,

**X**

**THE SPIRIT OF SUPPLICATION**

**Zech. 12:10.**

**"I will pour upon the house of David the Spirit of grace and of supplication." -- Zech. 12:10.**

**"The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity; for we know not how to pray as we ought: but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to God." -- Rom. 8:26, 27.**

**"With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." -- Eph. 6:18.**

**"Praying in the Holy Spirit." -- Jude 20.**

THE Holy Spirit has been given to every child of God to be his life. He dwells in him, not as a separate Being in one part of his nature, but as his very life. He is the Divine power or energy by which his life is maintained and strengthened. All that a believer is called to be or to do, the Holy Spirit can and will work in him. If he does not know or yield to the Holy Guest, the Blessed Spirit cannot work, and his life is a sickly one, full of failure and of sin. As he yields, and waits, and obeys the leading of the Spirit, God works in him all that is pleasing in His sight.

This Holy Spirit is, in the first place, a Spirit of prayer. He was promised as a "Spirit of grace and supplication," the grace for supplication. He was sent forth into our hearts as "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." He enables us to say, in true faith and growing apprehension of its meaning, Our Father which art in heaven. "He maketh intercession for the saints according to God." And as we pray in the Spirit, our worship is as God seeks it to be, "in spirit and in truth." Prayer is just the breathing of the Spirit in us; power in prayer comes from the power of the Spirit in us, waited on and trusted in. Failure in prayer comes from feebleness of the Spirit's work. in us. Our prayer is the index of the measure of the Spirit's work in us. To pray aright, the life of the Spirit must be right in us. For praying the effectual, much-availing prayer of the righteous man everything depends on being full of the Spirit.

There are three very simple lessons that the believer, who would enjoy the blessing of being taught to pray by the Spirit of prayer, must know.

**The first is: Believe that the Spirit dwells in you (Eph. 1:13).**

Deep in the inmost recesses of his being, hidden and unfelt, every child of God has the Holy, Mighty Spirit of God dwelling in him. He knows it by faith, the faith that, accepting God's word, realises that of which he sees as yet no sign. "We receive the promise of the Spirit by faith." As long as we measure our power, for praying aright and perseveringly, by what we feel, or think we can accomplish, we shall be discouraged when we hear of how much we ought to pray. But when we quietly believe that, in the midst of all our conscious weakness, the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of supplication is dwelling within us, *for the very purpose of enabling us to pray in such manner and measure as God would have us*, our hearts will be filled with hope. We shall be strengthened in the assurance which lies at the very root of a happy and fruitful Christian life, *that God has made an abundant provision for our being what He wants us to be*. We shall begin to lose our sense of burden and fear and discouragement about our ever praying sufficiently, because we see that the Holy Spirit Himself will pray, is praying, in us.

**The second lesson is: Beware above everything of grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30).**

If you do, how can He work in you the quiet, trustful, and blessed sense of that union with Christ which makes your prayers well pleasing to the Father? Beware of grieving Him by sin, by unbelief, by selfishness, by unfaithfulness to His voice in conscience. Do not think grieving Him a necessity: that cuts away the very sinews of your strength. Do not consider it impossible to obey the command, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit." He Himself is the very power of God to make you obedient. The sin that comes up in you against your will, the tendency to sloth, or pride, or self-will, or passion that rises in the flesh, your will can, in the power of the Spirit, at once reject, and cast upon Christ and His blood, and your communion with God is immediately restored. Accept each day the Holy Spirit as your Leader and Life and Strength; you can count upon Him to do in your heart all that ought to be done there. He, the Unseen and Unfelt One, but known by faith, gives there, unseen and unfelt, the love and the faith and the power of obedience you need, because He reveals Christ unseen within you, as actually your Life and Strength. Grieve not the Holy Spirit by distrusting Him, because you do not feel His presence in you.

Especially in the matter of prayer grieve Him not. Do not expect, when you trust Christ to bring you into a new, healthy prayer-life, that you will be able all at once to pray as easily and powerfully and joyfully as you fain would. No; it may not come at once. But just how quietly before God in your ignorance and weakness. That is the best and truest prayer, to put yourself before God just as you are, and to count on the hidden Spirit praying in you. "We know not what to pray as we ought"; ignorance, difficulty, struggle, marks our prayer all along. But, "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities." How? "The Spirit Himself," deeper down than our thoughts or feelings, "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." When you cannot find words, when your words appear cold and feeble, just believe: The Holy Spirit is praying in me. Be quiet before God, and give Him time and opportunity; in due season you will learn to pray. Beware of grieving the Spirit of prayer, by not honouring Him in patient, trustful surrender to His intercession in you.

**The third lesson: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).**

I think that we have seen the meaning of the great truth: It is only the healthy spiritual life that can pray aright. The command comes to each of us: "Be filled with the Spirit." That implies that while some rest content with the beginning, with a small measure of the Spirit's working, it is God's will that we should be filled with the Spirit. That means, from our side, that our whole being ought to be entirely yielded up to the Holy Spirit, to be possessed and controlled by Him alone. And, from God's side, that we may count upon and expect the Holy Spirit to take possession and fill us. Has not our failure in prayer evidently been owing to our not having accepted the Spirit of prayer to be our life; to our not having yielded wholly to Him, whom the Father gave as the Spirit of His Son, to work the life of the Son in us? Let us, to say the very least, be willing to receive Him, to yield ourselves to God and trust Him for it. Let us not again wilfully grieve the Holy Spirit by declining, by neglecting, by hesitating to seek to have Him as fully as He is willing to give Himself to us. If we have at all seen that prayer is the great need of our work and of the Church, if we have at all desired or resolved to pray more, let us turn to the very source of all power and blessing -- let us believe that the Spirit of prayer, even in His fulness, is for us.

We all admit the place the Father and the Son have in our prayer. It is to the Father we pray, and from whom we expect the answer. It is in the merit, and name, and life of the Son, abiding in Him and He in us, that we trust to be heard. But have we understood that in the Holy Trinity all the Three Persons have an equal place in prayer, and that the faith in the Holy Spirit of intercession as praying in us is as indispensable as the faith in the Father and the Son? How clear we have this in the words, "Through Christ we have access by one Spirit to the Father." As much as prayer must be *to* the Father, and *through* the Son, it must be *by* the Spirit. And the Spirit can pray in no other way in us, than as He lives in us. It is only as we give ourselves to the Spirit living and praying in us, that the glory of the prayer-hearing God, and the ever-blessed and most effectual mediation of the Son, can be known by us in their power. (Note D.)

**Our last lesson: Pray in the Spirit for all saints (Eph. 6:18).**

The Spirit, who is called "the Spirit of supplication," is also and very specially the Spirit of intercession. It is said of Him, "the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." "He maketh intercession for the saints." It is the same word as is used of Christ, "who also maketh intercession for us." The thought is essentially that of mediation -- one pleading for another. When the Spirit of intercession takes full possession of us, all selfishness, as if we wanted Him separate from His intercession for others, and have Him for ourselves alone, is banished, and we begin to avail ourselves of our wonderful privilege to plead for men. We long to live the Christ-life of self-consuming sacrifice for others, as our heart unceasingly yields itself to God to obtain His blessing for those around us. Intercession then becomes, not an incident or an occasional part of our prayers, but their one great object. Prayer for ourselves then takes its true place, simply as a means for fitting us better for exercising our ministry of intercession more effectually.

May I be allowed to speak a very personal word to each of my readers? I have humbly besought God to give me what I may give them -- Divine light and help truly to forsake the life of failure in prayer, and to enter, even now, and at once, upon the life of intercession which the Holy Spirit can enable them to lead. It can be done by a simple act of faith, claiming the fulness of the Spirit, that is, the full measure of the Spirit which you are capable in God's sight of receiving, and He is therefore willing to bestow. Will you not, even now, accept of this by faith?

Let me remind you of what takes place at conversion. Most of us, you probably too, for a time sought peace in efforts and struggles to give up sin and please God. But you did not find it thus. The peace of God's pardon came by faith, trusting God's word concerning Christ and His salvation. You had heard of Christ as the gift of His love, you knew that He was for you too, you had felt the movings and drawings of His grace; but never till in faith in God's word you accepted Him as God's gift to you, did you know the peace and joy that He can give. Believing in Him and His saving love made all the difference, and changed your relation from one who had ever grieved Him, to one who loved and served Him. And yet, after a time, you have a thousand times wondered you love and serve Him so ill.

At the time of your conversion you knew little about the Holy Spirit. Later on you heard of His dwelling in you, and His being the power of God in you for all the Father intends you to be, and yet His indwelling and inworking have been something vague and indefinite, and hardly a source of joy or strength. At conversion you did not yet know your need of Him, and still less what you might expect of Him. But your failures have taught it you. And now you begin to see how you have been grieving Him, by not trusting and not following Him, by not allowing Him to work in you all God's pleasure.

All this can be changed. Just as you, after seeking Christ, and praying to Him, and trying without success to serve Him, found rest in accepting Him by faith, just so you may even now yield yourself to the full guidance of the Holy Spirit, and claim and accept Him to work in you what God would have. Will you not do it? Just accept Him in faith as Christ's gift, to be the Spirit of your whole life, of your prayer-life too, and you can count upon Him to take charge. You can then begin, however feeble you feel, and unable to pray aright, to bow before God in silence, with the assurance that He will teach you to pray.

My dear brother, as you consciously by faith accepted Christ, to pardon, you can consciously now in the like faith accept of Christ who gives the Holy Spirit to do His work in you. "Christ redeemed us that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith." Kneel down, and simply believe that the Lord Christ, who baptizeth with the Holy Spirit, does now, in response to your faith, begin in you the blessed life of a full experience of the power of the indwelling Spirit. Depend most confidently upon Him, apart from all feeling or experience, as the Spirit of supplication and intercession to do His work. Renew that act of faith each morning, each time you pray; trust Him, against all appearances, to work in you, -- be sure He is working, -- and He will give you to know what the joy of the Holy Spirit is as the power of your life.

"I will pour out the Spirit of supplication." Do you not begin to see that the mystery of prayer is the mystery of the Divine indwelling. God in heaven gives His Spirit in our hearts to be there the Divine power praying in us, and drawing us upward to our God. God is a Spirit, and nothing but a like life and Spirit within us can hold communion with Him. It was for this man was created, that God might dwell and work in Him, and be the life of his life. It was this Divine indwelling that sin lost. It was this that Christ came to exhibit in His life, to win back for us in His death, and then to impart to us by coming again from heaven in the Spirit to live in His disciples. It is this, the indwelling of God through the Spirit, that alone can explain and enable us to appropriate the wonderful promises given to prayer. God gives the Spirit as a Spirit of Supplication, too, to maintain His Divine life within us as a life out of which prayer ever rises upward.

Without the Holy Spirit no man can call Jesus Lord, or cry, Abba, Father; no man can worship in spirit and truth, or pray without ceasing. The Holy Spirit is given the believer to be and do in him all that God wants him to be or do. He is given him especially as the Spirit of prayer and supplication. Is it not clear that everything in prayer depends upon our trusting the Holy Spirit to do His work in us; yielding ourselves to His leading, depending only and wholly on Him?

We read, "Stephen was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit." The two ever go together, in exact proportion to each other. As our faith sees and trusts the Spirit in us to pray, and waits on Him, He will do His work; and it is the longing desire, and the earnest supplication, and the definite faith the Father seeks. Do let us know Him, and in the faith of Christ who unceasingly gives Him, cultivate the assured confidence, we can learn to pray as the Father would have us.

[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Andrew Murray. *The Ministry of Intercession*. Joseph Kreifels. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)