

Bear up the hands that hang down, by faith and prayer; support the tottering knees. Have you any days of fasting and prayer? Storm the throne of grace and persevere therein, and mercy will come down.--John Wesley

We must remember that the goal of prayer is the ear of God. Unless that is gained the prayer has utterly failed. The utterings of it may have kindled devotional feeling in our minds, the hearing of it may have comforted and strengthened the hearts of those with whom we have prayed, but (if the prayer has not gained the heart of God, it has failed in its essential purpose.

A mere formalist can always pray so as to please himself. What has he to do but to open his book and read the prescribed words, or bow his knee and repeat such phrases as suggest themselves to his memory or his fancy? Like the Tartarian Praying Machine, give but the wind and the wheel, and the business is full arranged. So much knee-bending and talking, and the prayer is done. The formalist's prayers are always good, or, rather, always bad, alike. But the living child of God never offers a prayer which pleases himself; his standard is above his attainments; he wonders that God listens to him, and though he knows he will be heard for Christ's sake, yet he accounts it a wonderful instance of condescending mercy that such poor prayers as his should ever reach the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth.--C. H. Spurgeon

It may be said with emphasis that no lazy saint prays. Can there be a lazy saint? Can there be a prayerless saint? Does not slack praying cut short sainthood's crown and kingdom? Can there be a cowardly soldier? Can there be a saintly hypocrite? Can there be virtuous vice? It is only when these possibilities are brought into being that we then can find a prayerless saint.

To go through the motion of praying is a dull business, though not a hard one. To say prayers in a decent, delicate way is not heavy work. But to pray really, to pray till hell feels the ponderous stroke, to pray till the iron gates of difficulty are opened, till the mountains of obstacles are removed, till the mists are exhaled and the clouds are lifted, and the sunshine of a cloudless day brightens--this is hard work, but it is God's work and man's best labour. Never was the toil of hand, head and heart less spent in vain than when praying. It is hard to wait and press and pray, and hear no voice, but stay till God answers. The joy of answered prayer is the joy of a travailing mother when a man child is born in to the world, the joy of a slave whose chains have been burst asunder and to whom new life and liberty have just come.

A bird's-eye view of what has been accomplished by prayer shows what we lost when the dispensation of real prayer was substituted by Pharisaical pretence and sham; it shows, too, how imperative is the need for holy men and women who will give themselves to earnest, Christlike praying.

It is not an easy thing to pray. Back of the praying there must lie all the conditions of prayer. These conditions are possible, but they are not to be seized on in a moment by the prayerless. Present they always may be to the faithful and holy, but cannot exist in nor be met by a

frivolous, negligent, laggard spirit. Prayer does not stand alone. It is not an isolated performance. Prayer stands in closest connection with all the duties of an ardent piety. It is the issuance of a character which is made up of the elements of a vigorous and commanding faith. Prayer honours God, acknowledges His being, exalts His power, adores His providence, secures His aid. A sneering half-rationalism cries out against devotion, that it does nothing but pray. But to pray well is to do all things well. If it be true that devotion does nothing but pray, then it does nothing at all. To do nothing but pray fails to do the praying, for the antecedent, coincident, and subsequent conditions of prayer are but the sum of all the energised forces of a practical, working piety.

The possibilities of prayer run parallel with the promises of God. Prayer opens an outlet for the promises, removes the hindrances in the way of their execution, puts them into working order, and secures their gracious ends. More than this, prayer like faith, obtains promises, enlarges their operation, and adds to the measure of their results. God's promises were to Abraham and to his seed, but many a barren womb, and many a minor obstacle stood in the way of the fulfillment of these promises; but prayer removed them all, made a highway for the promises, added to the facility and speediness of their realisation, and by prayer the promise shone bright and perfect in its execution.

The possibilities of prayer are found in its allying itself with the purposes of God, for God's purposes and man's praying are the combination of all potent and omnipotent forces. More than this, the possibilities of prayer are seen in the fact that it changes the purposes of God. It is in the very nature of prayer to plead and give directions. Prayer is not a negation. It is a positive force. It never rebels against the will of God, never comes into conflict with that will, but that it does seek to change God's purpose is evident. Christ said, "The cup which My Father hath given Me shall I not drink it" and yet He had prayed that very night, "If it be possible let this cup pass from Me." Paul sought to change the purposes of God about the thorn in his flesh. God's purposes were fixed to destroy Israel, and the prayer of Moses changed the purposes of God and saved Israel. In the time of the Judges Israel were apostate and greatly oppressed. They repented and cried unto God and He said: "Ye have forsaken Me and served other gods, wherefore I will deliver you no more:" but they humbled themselves, put away their strange gods, and God's "soul was grieved for the misery of Israel," and he sent them deliverance by Jephthah.

God sent Isaiah to say to Hezekiah, "Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live." and Hezekiah prayed, and God sent Isaiah back to say, "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold I will add unto thy days fifteen years." "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown," was God's message by Jonah. But Nineveh cried mightily to God, and "God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them; and He did it not."

The possibilities of prayer are seen from the diverse conditions it reaches and the diverse ends it secures. Elijah prayed over a dead child, and it came to life; Elisha did the same thing; Christ prayed at Lazarus's grave, and Lazarus came forth. Peter kneeled down and prayed beside dead Dorcas, and she opened her eyes and sat up, and Peter presented her alive to the distressed company. Paul prayed for Publius, and healed him. Jacob's praying changed Esau's murderous hate into the kisses of the tenderest brotherly embrace. God gave to Rebecca Jacob

and Esau because Isaac prayed for her. Joseph was the child of Rachel's prayers. Hannah's praying gave Samuel to Israel. John the Baptist was given to Elizabeth, barren and past age as she was, in answer to the prayer of Zacharias. Elisha's praying brought famine or harvest to Israel; as he prayed so it was. Ezra's praying carried the Spirit of God in heartbreaking conviction to the entire city of Jerusalem, and brought them in tears of repentance back to God. Isaiah's praying carried the shadow of the sun back ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz.

In answer to Hezekiah's praying an angel slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand of Sennacherib's army in one night. Daniel's praying opened to him the vision of prophecy, helped him to administer the affairs of a mighty kingdom, and sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths. The angel was sent to Cornelius, and the Gospel opened through him to the Gentile world, because his "prayers and alms had come up as a memorial before God." "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets;" of Paul and Peter, and John and the Apostles, and the holy company of saints, reformers, and martyrs, who, through praying, "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

Prayer puts God in the matter with commanding force: "Ask of Me things to come concerning My sons," says God, "and concerning the work of My hands command ye Me." We are charged in God's Word "always to pray," "in everything by prayer," "continuing instant in prayer," to "pray everywhere," "praying always." The promise is as illimitable as the command is comprehensive. "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive," "whatever ye shall ask," "if ye shall ask anything." "Ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." "Whatsoever ye ask the Father He will give it to you." If there is anything not involved in "All things whatsoever," or not found in the phrase "Ask anything," then these things may be left out of prayer. Language could not cover a wider range, nor involve more fully all minutia. These statements are but samples of the all-comprehending possibilities of prayer under the promises of God to those who meet the conditions of right praying.

These passages, though, give but a general outline of the immense regions over which prayer extends its sway. Beyond these the effects of prayer reach and secure good from regions which cannot be traversed by language or thought. Paul exhausted language and thought in praying, but conscious of necessities not covered and realms of good not reached he covers these impenetrable and undiscovered regions by this general plea, "unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." The promise is, "Call upon Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

James declares that "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." How much he could not tell, but illustrates it by the power of Old Testament praying to stir up New Testament saints to imitate by the fervour and influence of their praying the holy men of old, and duplicate and surpass the power of their praying. Elijah, he says, was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the

space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

In the Revelation of John the whole lower order of God's creation and His providential government, the Church and the angelic world, are in the attitude of waiting on the efficiency of the prayers of the saintly ones on earth to carry on the various interests of earth and heaven. The angel takes the fire kindled by prayer and casts it earthward, "and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake." Prayer is the force which creates all these alarms, stirs, and throes. "Ask of Me," says God to His Son, and to the Church of His Son, "and I shall give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thine possessions."

The men who have done mighty things for God have always been mighty in prayer, have well understood the possibilities of prayer, and made most of the possibilities. The Son of God, the first of all and the mightiest of all, has shown us the all-potent and far-reaching possibilities of prayer. Paul was might for God because he knew how to use, and how to get others to use, the mighty spiritual forces of prayer.

The seraphim, burning, sleepless, adoring, is the figure of prayer. It is resistless in its ardour, devoted and tireless. There are hindrances to prayer that nothing but pure, intense flame can surmount. There are toils and outlays and endurance which nothing but the strongest, most ardent flame can abide. Prayer may be low-tongued, but it cannot be cold-tongued. Its words may be few, but they must be on fire. Its feelings may not be impetuous, but they must be white with heat. It is the effectual, fervent prayer that influences God.

God's house is the house of prayer; God's work is the work of prayer. It is the zeal for God's house and the zeal for God's work that makes God's house glorious and His work abide.

When the prayer-chambers of saints are closed or are entered casually or coldly, then Church rulers are secular, fleshly, materialised; spiritual character sinks to a low level, and the ministry becomes restrained and enfeebled.

When prayer falls, the world prevails. When prayer fails the Church loses its Divine characteristics, its Divine power; the Church is swallowed up by a proud ecclesiasticism, and the world scoffs at its obvious impotence.

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