

With Christ in the School of Prayer

"Lord, teach us to pray."

Dr. Andrew Murray

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GEORGE MULLER, AND THE SECRET OF HIS POWER IN PRAYER.

INTRODUCTION.

Of all the promises connected with the command, "*abide in Me*", there is none higher than this, "*If you abide in Me... ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you.*" (*Joh.15:4*). And there is no other promise that prompts the confession, "*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*" (*Philippians 3:12. NKJV.*)

Power with God is the highest attainment of the life of full abiding.

And of all the traits of a *life like Christ's*, there is none higher and more glorious than conformity to Him in the work that now engages Him without ceasing in the Father's presence – His all-prevailing intercession. The more we abide in Him, and grow unto His likeness, the more will His priestly life work in us mightily, and our life become what His is, a life that ever pleads and prevails for men.

"*And have made us kings and priests to our God*" (*Revelation 5:10*). The main thing for both the king and priest, is power, influence and blessing. In the king it is the power coming downward; and in the priest, the power rising upward, prevailing with God. In our blessed Priest-King, Jesus Christ, the kingly power is founded on the priestly power: "*Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*" (*Hebrews 7:25*). In us, His priests and kings, it is no otherwise: it is in intercession that the Church is to find and wield its highest power, that each member of the Church is to prove his descent from Israel, who as a prince had power with God and with men, and prevailed.

This book has been written with a deep conviction that the place and power of prayer in the Christian life is too little understood. I feel sure that as long as we look on prayer mainly as the means of maintaining our own Christian life, we shall not fully know what it is meant to be. But when we learn to regard it as the highest part of the work entrusted to us; the root and strength of all other work, we shall see that there is nothing that we so need to study and practise as the art of praying right. If I have at all succeeded in pointing out the progressive teaching of our Lord in regard to prayer, and more distinctly, the references that the wonderful promises given at the last supper (*John 14:16*) have to the works we are to do in His Name, *the greater works*, and to the *bearing much fruit*, we shall all admit that it is only when the Church gives herself up to this holy work of intercession that we can expect the power of Christ to manifest itself on her behalf. It is my prayer that God may use this little book to make clearer to some of His children, the wonderful place of power and influence through prayer that Christ is waiting for them to occupy, and for which a weary world is waiting too.

In connection with this there is another truth that has come to me with wonderful clearness as I studied the teaching of Jesus on prayer. It is this: that the Father waits to hear every prayer of faith, to give us whatsoever we will, and whatsoever we ask in Jesus' name. We have become so accustomed to limit the wonderful love and the large promises of our God, that we cannot read the simplest and clearest statements of our Lord without the qualifying clauses by which we guard

and expound them. If there is one thing I think the Church needs to learn, it is that *God intends prayer to have an answer*, and that it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive what God will do for a child of His, who gives himself to believe that his prayer will be heard. *God hears prayer*. This is a truth universally admitted, but of which very few understand the meaning, or experience the power. If what I have written stir my reader to go to the Master's words, and take His wondrous promises simply and literally as they stand, my object has been attained.

And then just one more thing. Thousands have found an unspeakable blessing in learning how completely *Christ is our life*, and how He undertakes to be and to do all in us that we need. I don't know if we have learned to apply this truth to our prayer-life. Many complain that they have not the power to pray in faith, to pray the effectual prayer that avails much. The message I would gladly bring them is that the blessed Jesus is waiting, is longing, to teach them this. *Christ is our life*: in heaven He ever lives to pray; His life in us is an ever-praying life, if we will but trust Him for it. Christ teaches us to pray not only by example, by instruction, by command, by promises, but by showing us HIMSELF, the ever-living Intercessor, as our Life. It is when we believe this, and go and abide in Him for our prayer-life too, that our fears of not being able to pray right, will vanish, and we shall joyfully and triumphantly trust our Lord to teach us to pray, to be Himself the life and the power of our prayer.

May God open our eyes to see what the holy ministry of intercession is to which, as His own royal priesthood, we have been set apart. May He give us a large and strong heart to believe what mighty influence our prayers can exert. And may all fear vanish as to our being able to fulfil our vocation; as we see Jesus, living ever to pray, living in us to pray, and standing surety for our prayer-life.

ANDREW MURRAY WELLINGTON, 28th October 1895.

LESSON ONE

Lord, teach us to pray
or,
THE ONLY TEACHER

And it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, that when He ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11:1. NKJV.

The disciples had been with Christ, and seen Him pray. They had learnt to understand something of the connection between His wondrous life in public and His secret life of prayer. They had learned to believe in Him as a Master in the art of prayer – none could pray like Him. And so they came to Him with the request, "Lord, teach us to pray." And in later years they would have told us that there were few things more wonderful or blessed that He taught them, than His lessons on prayer.

And now still it comes to pass, as He is praying in a certain place, that disciples who see Him engaged like this, feel the need of repeating the same request, "Lord, teach us to pray." As we grow in the Christian life, the thought and the faith of the Beloved Master in His never-failing intercession becomes ever more precious, and the hope of being like Christ in His intercession gains an attractiveness before unknown. As we see Him pray, and remember that there is none who can pray like Him, and none who can teach like Him, we feel the petition of the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray," is just what we need. And as we think how all He is and has, how He Himself is our very own, how He is Himself our life, we feel assured that we have but to ask, and He will be delighted to take us up into closer fellowship with Himself, and teach us to pray even as He prays.

Come, my brothers and sisters! Shall we not go to the Blessed Master and ask Him to enrol our names too anew in that school which He always keeps open for those who long to continue their studies in the Divine art of prayer and intercession? Yes, let us this very day say to the Master, as they did of old, "Lord, teach us to pray." As we meditate, we shall find each word of the request we bring to be full of meaning.

"Lord, teach us **to pray**." Yes, to pray. This is what we need to be taught. Though in its beginnings prayer is so simple that the feeblest child can pray, yet it is at the same time the highest and holiest work to which man can rise. It is fellowship with the Unseen and Most Holy One. The powers of the eternal world have been placed at its disposal. It is the very essence of true religion, the channel of all blessings, the secret of power and life. Not only for ourselves, but for others, for the Church, for the world, God has given to prayer the right to take hold of Him and His strength. It is on prayer that the promises wait for their fulfilment, the kingdom for its coming, the glory of God for its full revelation. And for this blessed work, how slothful and unfit we are. Only the Spirit of God can enable us to do it right. How speedily we are deceived into resting in the form of prayer, while the power is wanting. Our early training, the teaching of the Church, the influence of

habit, the stirring of the emotions – how easily these lead to prayer which has no spiritual power, and avails but little. True prayer that avails much, takes hold of God's strength to truly open wide the gates of heaven. Who would not cry: "O, for someone to teach me to pray like that?"

Jesus has opened a school, in which He trains His redeemed ones, who specially desire it, to have power in prayer. Shall we not enter it with the petition, "Lord, this is just what we need to be taught! O teach us to pray."

"Lord, teach **us** to pray." Yes, us, Lord. We have read in Your Word with what power Your believing people of old used to pray, and what mighty wonders were done in answer to their prayers. And if this took place under the Old Covenant, in the time of preparation, how much more will You not now, in these days of fulfilment, give Your people this sure sign of Your presence in their midst. We have heard the promises given to Your apostles of the power of prayer in Your name, and have seen how gloriously they experienced their truth. We know for certain, they can become true to us too. We hear continually, even in these days, what glorious tokens of Your power You still give to those who trust You fully. Lord, these all are men with passions like with our own. Teach us to pray this way too. The promises are for us, the powers and gifts of the heavenly world are for us. O, teach us to pray so that we may receive abundantly. To us, too, You have entrusted Your work. The coming of Your kingdom depends on our prayer too. In our prayer, too, You can glorify Your name. "Lord teach **us** to pray." Yes, us, Lord. We offer ourselves as students. We desire indeed to be taught of You. "Lord, teach us to pray."

"Lord, **teach** us to pray." Yes, we feel the need now of being taught to pray. At first there is no work that appears so simple. Later on, none that is more difficult. And the confession is forced from us: We don't how to pray as we should. It is true we have God's Word, with its clear and sure promises; but sin has so darkened our mind, that we don't always how to apply the word. In spiritual things we do not always seek the most needful things, or fail in praying according to the commandments. In temporal things we are still less able to avail ourselves of the wonderful liberty our Father has given us to ask what we need. And even when we know what to ask, how much there is still needed to make prayer acceptable. It must be to the glory of God, in full surrender to His will, in full assurance of faith, in the name of Jesus, and with a perseverance that, if need be, refuses to be denied. All this must be learned. It can only be learned in the school of much prayer, for practice makes perfect. In the midst of the painful consciousness of ignorance and unworthiness, in the struggle between believing and doubting, the heavenly art of effectual prayer is learnt. Because, even when we do not remember it, there is One, the Beginner and Finisher of faith and prayer, who watches over our praying, and sees to it that in all who trust Him for it, their education in the school of prayer shall be carried on to perfection. Let the deep undertone of all our prayer be the teachableness that comes from a sense of ignorance, and from faith in Him as a perfect teacher, and we may be sure we shall be taught, we shall learn to pray in power. Yes, we may depend upon it, He teaches to pray.

"**Lord**, teach us to pray." None can teach like Jesus, therefore we call on Him: "Lord, teach us to pray." A pupil needs a teacher, who knows his work, who has the gift of teaching, who in patience

and love will descend to the pupil's needs. Blessed be God! Jesus is all this and much more. He knows what prayer is. It is Jesus, praying Himself, who teaches to pray. He learned it in the midst of the trials and tears of His earthly life. In heaven it is still His beloved work. His life there is prayer. Nothing delights Him more than to find those whom He can take with Him into the Father's presence, whom He can clothe with power to pray down God's blessing on those around them, whom He can train to be His fellow-workers in the intercession by which the kingdom is to be revealed on earth. He knows how to teach. First by the urgency of felt need, later by the confidence which joy inspires. Here by the teaching of the Word, there by the testimony of another believer who knows what it is to have prayer heard. By His Holy Spirit, He has access to our heart, and teaches us to pray by showing us the sin that hinders the prayer, or giving us the assurance that we please God. He teaches, by giving not only thoughts of what to ask or how to ask, but by breathing within us the very spirit of prayer, living within us as the Great Intercessor. We may indeed and most joyfully say: "Who teaches like Him?" Jesus never taught His disciples how to preach, only how to pray. He did not speak much of what was needed to preach well, but much of praying well. To know how to speak to God, is more than knowing how to speak to man. Not power with men, but power with God is the first thing. Jesus loves to teach us how to pray.

What do you think, my beloved fellow-disciples? Would it not be just what we need, to ask the Master for a month to give us a course of special lessons on the art of prayer? As we meditate on the words He spoke on earth, let us yield ourselves to His teaching in the fullest confidence that, with such a teacher, we will make **progress**. Let us take time not only to meditate, but to pray, to tarry at the foot of the throne, and be trained to the work of intercession. Let us do so in the assurance that in the midst of our faltering words and fears, He is carrying on His work most beautifully. He will breathe His own life, which is all prayer, into us. As He makes us partakers of His righteousness and His life, He will of His intercession too. As the members of His body, as a holy priesthood, we shall take part in His priestly work of pleading and prevailing with God for men. Yes, let us most joyfully say, ignorant and feeble though we be, "Lord, teach us to pray."

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY.

Blessed Lord! You Who ever live to pray, please teach me to pray too, so that I, too, may live to always pray. In this, You love to make me share Your glory in heaven, that I should pray without ceasing, and always stand as a priest in the presence of my God.

Lord Jesus, I ask You this day to enrol my name among those who confess that they know not how to pray as they ought, and specially ask You for a course of teaching in prayer. Lord, teach me to linger with You in the school, and give You time to train me. May a deep sense of my ignorance, of the wonderful privilege and power of prayer, of the need of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of prayer, lead me to let go of my thoughts of what I think I know, and make me kneel before You in true teachableness and poverty of spirit.

And fill me, Lord, with the confidence that with such a teacher as You are I will learn to pray. In the assurance that I have Jesus as my teacher, who is ever praying to the Father, and by His prayer

rules the destinies of His Church and the world, I will not be afraid. As much as I need to know of the mysteries of the prayer-world, You will reveal to me. And when I may not know how, You will teach me to be strong in faith, giving glory to God.

Blessed Lord, You will not put to shame Your student who trusts You, nor, by Your grace, would he put to You to shame either. Amen.

LESSON TWO

In spirit and truth
or,
THE TRUE WORSHIPPERS

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:23-24. NKJV.

These words of Jesus to the woman of Samaria are His first recorded teaching on the subject of prayer. They give us some wonderful first glimpses into the world of prayer. The Father seeks worshippers. Our worship satisfies His loving heart and is a joy to Him. He seeks true worshippers, but finds that many are not such as He would have them. True worship is that which is in spirit and truth. The Son has come to open the way for this worship in spirit and in truth, and teach it to us. And so, one of our first lessons in the school of prayer must be to understand what it is to pray in spirit and in truth, and to know how we can attain to it.

To the woman of Samaria our Lord spoke of a threefold worship. First, there is the ignorant worship of the Samaritans: "*You worship what you do not know...*" (John 4:22). The second, the intelligent worship of the Jew, having the true knowledge of God: "*...we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.*" (John 4:22). And then the new, the spiritual worship which He Himself has come to introduce: "*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth;*" (John 4:23). From the connection it is evident that the words *in spirit and truth* do not mean, as is often thought, earnestly, from the heart, in sincerity. The Samaritans had the five books of Moses and some knowledge of God; there was doubtless more than one among them who honestly and earnestly sought God in prayer. The Jews had the true full revelation of God in His word, as thus far given; there were among them godly men, who called upon God with their whole heart. And yet not *in spirit and truth*, in the full meaning of the words. Jesus says, "*The hour is coming, and now is*" (John 4:23), it is only in and through Him that the worship of God will be *in spirit and truth*.

Among Christians one still finds the three classes of worshippers. Some who in their ignorance hardly know what they ask: they pray earnestly, and yet receive but little. Others there are, who have more correct knowledge, who try to pray with all their mind and heart, and often pray most earnestly, and yet do not attain to the full blessedness of worship in spirit and truth. It is into the third class we must ask our Lord Jesus to take us. He must teach us how to *worship in spirit and truth*. This alone is spiritual worship. This makes us worshippers such as the Father seeks. In prayer, everything will depend on our understanding and practising the *worship in spirit and truth*.

"*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*" (John 4:24). The first thought suggested here by the Master is that there must be harmony between God and His worshippers. Worship of God must be like Him. This is according to a principle which prevails

throughout the universe. We look for correspondence between an object and the organ to which it reveals or yields itself. The eye has an inner fitness for the light, the ear for sound. The man who would truly worship God, must find, know, possess and enjoy God, must be in harmony with Him, must have the capacity for receiving Him. Because God is Spirit, we must worship in spirit. As God is, so His worshipper.

And what does this mean? The woman had asked our Lord whether Samaria or Jerusalem was the true place of worship. He answers that, from that time forward, worship is no longer to be limited to a certain place: *"Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father."* (John 4:21). God is Spirit, not bound by space or time, but in His infinite perfection is always and everywhere the same, so His worship would from that time forward (Christ's coming) no longer be confined by place or form, but is spiritual as God Himself is spiritual. It is a lesson of deep importance. How much our Christianity suffers from the fact that it is confined to certain times and places. A man, who seeks to pray earnestly in the church or in the prayer closet, spends the greater part of the week or the day in a spirit entirely at disagreement with the spirit in which he prayed. His worship was the work of a fixed place or hour, not of his whole being. God is Spirit. He is the Everlasting and Unchangeable One. What He is, He is always in Spirit and in truth. Therefore our worship must also be in spirit and truth. His worship must be the spirit of our life. Our life must be worship in spirit as God is Spirit.

"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24). The second thought that comes to us is that the worship in the spirit must come from God Himself. God is Spirit. He alone has Spirit to give. It was for this He sent His Son, to fit us for such spiritual worship, by giving us the Holy Spirit. It is of His own work that Jesus speaks when He says twice, *"The hour is coming"*, and then adds, *"and now is"* (John 4:23). He came to baptize with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit could not stream forth until He was glorified (John 1:33; 7:37,38; 14:7). It was when He had made an end of sin, and entered into the Holiest of all with His blood, that He had there, on our behalf, received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), that He could send Him down to us as the Spirit of the Father. It was when Christ had redeemed us, and we in Him had received the position of children, that the Father sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts to cry, *"Abba, Father."* (Romans 8:15). The *worship in spirit* is the worship of the Father in the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Sonship.

This is the reason why Jesus here uses the name of *Father*. We never find one of the Old Testament saints personally appropriate the name of child or call God his Father. The worship of the Father is only possible to those to whom the Spirit of the Son has been given. The *worship in spirit* is only possible to those to whom the Son has revealed the Father, and who have received the spirit of Sonship. It is only Christ who opens the way and teaches the *worship in spirit*.

And in truth. That does not only mean, in sincerity. Nor does it only signify praying in accordance with the truth of God's Word. The expression is one of deep and Divine meaning. Jesus is *"the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14). *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."* (John 1:17). Jesus says, *"I am the way, the truth,*

and the life." (John 14:6). In the Old Testament all was shadow and promise. Jesus brought and gives the reality, the substance, of things hoped for. In Him the blessings and powers of the eternal life are our actual possession and experience. Jesus is full of grace and truth. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Through Him the grace that is in Jesus is ours in deed and truth, a positive communication out of the Divine life. And so *worship in spirit* is *worship in truth*; actual living fellowship with God, a real correspondence and harmony between the Father, who is Spirit, and the child praying in the spirit.

What Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, she could not at once understand. Pentecost was needed to reveal its full meaning. We are hardly prepared at our first entrance into the school of prayer to grasp such teaching. We shall understand it better later on. Let us only begin and take the lesson as He gives it. We are fleshly and worldly and cannot bring God the worship He seeks. But Jesus came to give the Spirit. He has given Him to us. Let the attitude in which we set ourselves to pray be what Christ's words have taught us. Let there be the deep confession of our inability to bring God the worship that is pleasing to Him; the childlike teachableness that waits on Him to instruct us; the simple faith that yields itself to the breathing of the Spirit. Above all, let us hold fast the blessed truth – we shall find that the Lord has more to say to us about it – that the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God, the revelation of His infinite Fatherliness in our hearts, the faith in the infinite love that gives us His Son and His Spirit to make us children, is indeed the secret of prayer *in spirit and truth*. This is the new and living way Christ opened up for us. To have Christ the Son, and the Spirit of the Son, dwelling within us, and revealing the Father, this makes us true, spiritual worshippers.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord, I cherish the love with which You taught a woman, who had refused You a cup of water, what the worship of God must be. I rejoice in the assurance that You will also now instruct this disciple, who comes to You with a heart that longs to pray in spirit and in truth. O my Holy Master, teach me this blessed secret.

Teach me that the worship in spirit and truth is not of man, but only comes from You; that it is not only a thing of times and seasons, but the outflowing of a life in You. Teach me to draw near to God in prayer under the deep impression of my ignorance and my having nothing in myself to offer Him, and at the same time the provision You, my Saviour, make for the Spirit's breathing in my childlike stammering. I do bless You that in You I am your child and have a child's freedom of access to the Father; that in You I have the spirit of Sonship and of worship in truth. Teach me, above all, blessed Son of the Father, how it is the revelation of the Father that gives confidence in prayer; and let the infinite Fatherliness of God's heart be my joy and strength for a life of prayer and of worship. Amen.

LESSON THREE

Pray to your Father, which is in secret

Or,

ALONE WITH GOD

"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."
Matthew 6:6. NKJV.

After Jesus had called His first disciples, He gave them their first public teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. There He expounded to them the kingdom of God, its laws and its life. In that kingdom God is not only King, but Father. He not only gives all, but is all. The blessedness of the kingdom is only found in the knowledge of and fellowship with Him alone. Therefore, the revelation of prayer and the prayer-life was a matter of course of His teaching concerning the New Kingdom He came to reveal. Moses gave no command or regulation with regard to prayer. Even the prophets say little directly of the duty of prayer. It is Christ who teaches about prayer.

And the first thing the Lord teaches His disciples is that they must have a private place for prayer. Everyone must have some solitary spot where he can be alone with his God. Every teacher must have a schoolroom. We have learnt to know and accept Jesus as our only teacher in the school of prayer. He has already taught us at Samaria that worship is no longer confined to times and places; that worship, spiritual true worship, is a thing of the spirit and the life. Our whole being and our whole life must be worship in spirit and truth. And yet He wants each one to choose for himself the fixed spot where He can daily meet him. That inner chamber, that solitary place, is Jesus' schoolroom. That spot may be anywhere. That spot may change from day to day if we have to change our abode. But that secret place must be there, with the quiet time in which the pupil places himself in the Master's presence, to be prepared by Him to worship the Father. Only there, but there most certainly, Jesus comes to us to teach us to pray.

A teacher is always anxious that his schoolroom should be bright and attractive, filled with the light and air of heaven, a place where pupils long to come, and love to stay. In His first words on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus seeks to set the inner chamber before us in its most attractive light. If we listen carefully, we soon notice what the chief thing is He has to tell us of our spending time there. Three times He uses the name of Father: "Pray to your **Father**;" "Your **Father** shall recompense you;" "Your **Father** knows what things you need." The first thing in closet-prayer is: *I must meet my **Father***. The light that shines in the closet must be *the light of the **Father's** countenance*. The fresh air from heaven with which Jesus want my prayer room to be filled with, the atmosphere in which I am to breathe and pray, is God's Father-love, God's infinite Fatherliness. Thus each thought or petition we breathe out will be simple, from-the-heart, childlike trust in the Father. This is how the Master teaches us to pray. He brings us into the Father's living presence. What we pray there must profit us. Let us listen carefully to hear what the Lord has to say to us.

*First, Pray to your Father who is **in secret**.* God is a God who hides Himself to the worldly and fleshly person. As long as in our worship of God we are chiefly occupied with our own thoughts and exercises, we shall not meet Him who is a Spirit, the unseen One. But to the man who withdraws himself from all that is of the world and human concerns, and prepares to wait upon God alone, the Father will reveal Himself. As he forsakes and gives up and shuts out the world, and the life of the world, and surrenders himself to be led by Christ into the privacy of God's presence, the light of the Father's love will rise upon him. The secrecy of the inner chamber, the private place and the closed door, the entire separation from all around us, is an image of, and a help to enter that inner spiritual sanctuary, the secret of God's tabernacle, behind the veil. This is where our spirit truly comes into contact with the Invisible One. And so we are taught, at the very outset of our search after the secret of effective prayer, to remember that it is in the inner chamber, where we are alone with the Father, that we shall learn to pray correctly.

*The **Father** is in secret.* In these words Jesus teaches us where He is waiting for us, where He is always to be found. Christians often complain that private prayer is not what it should be. They feel weak and sinful; the heart is cold and dark. It is as if they have so little to pray, and in that little no faith or joy. They are discouraged and kept from prayer by the thought that they cannot come to the Father as they should or as they wish they could. Child of God, listen to your Teacher. He tells you that when you go to private prayer your first thought must be, *The Father is in secret, the Father waits for me there*. It is because your heart is cold and prayerless, that you must enter into the presence of the loving Father. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities you. Do not be thinking of how little you have to bring to God, but of how much He wants to give you. Just place yourself before Him and look up into His face. Think of His love, His wonderful, tender, pitying love. Just tell Him how sinful and cold and dark everything is. It is the Father's loving heart that will give light and warmth to yours. O, do what Jesus says. Just shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. Is it not wonderful? To be able to be alone with God, the infinite God. And then to look up and say: "My Father!"

*And your Father, who sees in secret, **will reward you**.* Here Jesus assures us that secret prayer cannot be fruitless. Its blessing will show itself in our life. We have to fully entrust our public life to God when we are in the private place, alone with Him. He will reward us openly. He will see to it that the answer to prayer is revealed in His blessing upon us. In this way, our Lord wants to teach us that it is in his infinite Fatherliness and Faithfulness that God meets us in secret. Our part should be the childlike simplicity of faith, the confidence that our prayer does bring down a blessing. "... for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6). The blessing of the inner, private place does not depend on the strong or the fervent feeling with which I pray, but upon the love and the power of the Father to whom I entrust my needs. And therefore the Master has only one desire: Remember your Father exists, and sees and hears in secret. Go there and stay there, and leave in the confidence that He will bless. Trust Him for it; depend upon Him. Prayer to the Father cannot be wasted. He will reward you openly.

To further confirm this faith in the Father-love of God, Christ makes a third statement: *"For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."* (Matthew 6:8). At first sight it may appear as if this thought makes prayer less necessary. God knows far better than we what we need. But as we get a deeper insight into what prayer really is, this truth will help much in strengthening our faith. It will teach us that we do not need, as the unbelievers, to force an unwilling God to listen to us, with the multitude and urgency of our words. It will lead to a holy thoughtfulness and silence in prayer as it suggests the question: "Does my Father really know that I need this?" Once we have been led by the Spirit to the certainty that our request is indeed something that, according to the Word, we do need for God's glory, it will give us wonderful confidence to say, "My Father knows I need it and must have it." And if there is any delay in the answer, it will teach us in quiet perseverance to hold on to this fact: **Father, You know I need it.** O the blessed freedom and simplicity of a child that Christ our Teacher wants to cultivate in us! As we draw near to God, let us look up to the Father until His Spirit works it in us. When we are in danger of being so occupied with our fervent, urgent petitions, as to forget that the Father knows and hears, let us sometimes in our prayers become still and just quietly say: "My Father sees, my Father hears, my Father knows." It will help our faith to accept the answer, and to say: "We know that we have the request that we have asked of Him."

And now, all you who have entered the school of Christ to be taught to pray, take these lessons, practise them, and trust Him to perfect you in them. Spend much time in the inner chamber, with the door shut – shut in from men, shut up with God. It is there that **the Father** waits for you. It is there that Jesus will teach you to pray. To be alone in secret with **your Father**, this must be your highest joy. To be assured that **the Father** will openly reward the secret prayer, so that it cannot remain unblessed; this is your strength day by day. And to know that **the Father** knows that you need what you ask, this is your freedom to bring every need in the assurance that your God will supply it according to His riches in Glory in Christ Jesus (Phil.4:19).

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Saviour, with my whole heart I bless You for the appointment of the inner chamber, the secret place, as the school where You meet each of Your students alone, and reveal the Father to them. O my Lord, strengthen my faith in the Father's tender love and kindness, so that as often as I feel sinful or troubled, the first instinctive thought may be to go where I know the Father waits for me, and where prayer never can go unblessed. Let the thought, that He knows my need before I ask, bring me in great restfulness of faith, to trust that He will give what His child requires. O let the place of secret prayer become to me the most beloved spot on earth.

And, Lord, hear me as I pray that You would bless the private prayer rooms of Your children everywhere. Let Your wonderful revelation of a Father's tenderness free all young Christians from every thought of secret prayer as a duty or a burden, and lead them to regard it as the highest privilege of their life, a joy and a blessing. Bring back all who are discouraged, because they cannot find anything to bring You in prayer. O give them to understand that they have only to come with

their emptiness to Him who has all to give, and delights to do it. Let their one thought not be what they have to bring the Father, but what the Father waits to give them.

And bless especially the inner chamber of all Your servants who are working for You, as the place where God's truth and God's grace is revealed to them, where they are daily anointed with fresh oil, where their strength is renewed, and the blessings are received in faith, with which they are to bless their fellow-men. Lord, draw all of us in our private prayer rooms, nearer to Yourself and to the Father. Amen.

LESSON FOUR

After this manner pray

Or,

THE MODEL PRAYER

"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name." Matthew 6:9. NKJV.

Every teacher knows the power of example. He not only tells the child what to do and how to do it, but shows him how it really can be done. Remindful of our weakness, our heavenly Teacher has given us the very words we are to use as we draw near to our Father. In them we have a form of prayer in which there is the breath of the freshness and fullness of the Eternal Life. It is so simple that the child can say it, yet so divinely rich that it comprehends all that God can give. It is a form of prayer that becomes the model and inspiration for all other prayer, and yet always draws us back to itself as the deepest utterance of our souls before our God.

"Our Father in heaven!" To appreciate this word of adoration correctly, I must remember that none of the saints in Old Testament Scripture had ever ventured to address God as their Father. The invocation places us at once in the centre of the wonderful revelation the Son came to make of His Father as our Father too. It comprehends the mystery of redemption – Christ delivering us from the curse that we might become the children of God. The mystery of regeneration – the Spirit in the new birth giving us the new life. And the mystery of faith – even before the redemption is accomplished or understood, the word is given on the lips of the disciples to prepare them for the blessed experience still to come. The words are the key to the whole prayer, to all prayer. It takes time, it takes a lifetime to study them. It will take eternity to understand them fully. The knowledge of God's Father-love is the first and simplest, but also the last and highest lesson in the school of prayer. It is in the personal relationship to the living God, and the personal conscious fellowship of love with Himself, that prayer begins. It is in the knowledge of God's Fatherliness, revealed by the Holy Spirit, that the power of prayer will take root and grow. In the infinite tenderness and pity and patience of the infinite Father, in His loving readiness to hear and to help, that the life of prayer has its joy. O let us take time, until the Spirit has made these words to us spirit and truth, filling heart and life, *"Our Father in heaven"*. Then we are certainly within the veil, in the secret place of power where prayer always prevails.

"Hallowed be Your name" (or *Let Your name be honoured as holy*. The Old English word *hallowed* means *to sanctify, to consecrate something as holy, and to mentally adore something*.) There is something here that strikes us at once. While we normally first bring our own needs to God in prayer, and then think of what belongs to God and His interests, the Master reverses the order. First, Your name, Your kingdom, Your will; then, give us, forgive us, lead us, deliver us. This lesson is of more importance than we think. In true worship the Father must be first, must be all. The sooner I learn to forget myself in the desire that **He** may be glorified, the richer the blessing will be that prayer will bring to myself. No one ever loses by what he sacrifices for the Father.

This order must influence all our prayers. There are two sorts of prayer, personal and intercessory. The latter normally occupies the lesser part of our time and energy. This should not be. Christ has opened the school of prayer specially to train intercessors for the great work of bringing down, by their faith and prayer, the blessings of His work and love on the world around us. There can be no deep growth in prayer unless this becomes our aim. The little child may ask of the father only what it needs for itself; and yet it soon learns to say, "give some for my sister too". But the adult son, who lives only for the father's interest and takes charge of the father's business, asks more extensively, and gets all that is asked. And Jesus wants to train us to the blessed life of consecration and service, in which all our interests are subordinate to the Name, and the Kingdom, and the Will of the Father. O let us live for this. And after each act of adoration, after each "*Our Father*", let there follow in the same breath, "*Your Name, Your Kingdom, Your Will*". For this we look upward and long.

*"Hallowed be **Your name**".* What name? This new name of *Father*. The word *Holy* is the central word of the Old Testament; the name *Father* of the New. In this name of Love all the holiness and glory of God are now to be revealed. And how is the name to be sanctified and honoured as holy? By God Himself. "And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations." (Ezekiel 36:23). Our prayer must be that in ourselves, in all God's children, in the presence of the world, God Himself would reveal the holiness, the Divine power, the hidden glory of the name of **Father**. The Spirit of the Father is the **Holy** Spirit. It is only when we yield ourselves to be led of Him, that the Name will be **honoured** as holy in our prayers and our lives. Let us learn the prayer, *Our Father, **Your Name** be honoured as holy.*

*"**Your kingdom come**"* (Matt.6:10). The Father is a King and has a kingdom. The son and heir of a king has no higher ambition than the glory of his father's kingdom. In time of war or danger this becomes his passion. He can think of nothing else. The children of the Father are here in the enemy's territory, where the kingdom, which is in heaven, is not yet fully manifested. What is more natural than that, that when they learn to honour the Father-name, they should long and cry with deep enthusiasm, "*Your kingdom come.*" The **coming of the kingdom** is the one great event on which the revelation of the Father's glory, the blessedness of His children and the salvation of the world depends. The coming of the kingdom also waits for our prayers. Shall we not join in the deep longing cry of the redeemed, "*Your kingdom come*"? Let us learn it in the school of Jesus.

*"**Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**"* (Matt.6:10). This petition is too frequently applied only to the suffering according to the will of God. In heaven God's will is done, and the Master teaches the child of God to ask that the will of the Father may be done on earth just as in heaven, in the spirit of adoring submission and ready obedience. Because the will of God is the glory of heaven, the doing of it is the blessedness of heaven. When the will is done, the kingdom of heaven comes into the heart. And wherever faith has accepted the Father's love, obedience accepts the Father's will. The surrender to, and the prayer for a life of heaven-like obedience, is the spirit of childlike prayer.

"Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt.6:11). When the child has first yielded himself to the Father in the care for His Name, His Kingdom, and His Will, he has full liberty to ask for his daily bread. A master cares for the food of his servant, a general of his soldiers, a father of his child. And will not the Father in heaven care for the child who has in prayer given himself up to His interests? We may certainly say in full confidence, "Father, I live for Your honour and Your work. I know You provide for me". Consecration to God and His will gives wonderful freedom in prayer for earthly things. The whole earthly life is entrusted to the Father's loving care.

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt.6:12). As bread is the first need of the body, so is forgiveness for the soul. And the provision for the one is as sure as it is for the other. We are children but sinners too. We owe our right of access into the Father's presence to the precious blood and the forgiveness it has won for us. Let us be careful that the prayer for forgiveness does not become a formality. Only what is really confessed is really forgiven. Let us in faith accept the forgiveness as promised, as a spiritual reality, an actual transaction between God and us. It is the entrance into all the Father's love and all the privileges of children. Such forgiveness, as a living experience, is impossible without a forgiving spirit to others. As **forgiven** expresses the heavenward, so **forgiving** expresses the earthward relation of God's child. In each prayer to the Father I must be able to say that I know of no one whom I do not love from my heart.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt.6:13). In these three petitions our entire personal need is covered: our daily bread, the pardon of our sins, and then our being kept from all sin and the power of the evil one. The prayer for bread and pardon must be accompanied by the surrender to live in all things in holy obedience to the Father's will, and the believing prayer in everything to be kept by the power of the indwelling Spirit from the power of the evil one.

Children of God, this is how Jesus wants us to pray to the Father in heaven. O let His Name, and kingdom, and will, have the first place in our love. Then His providing, and pardoning, and keeping love will certainly be our portion. In this way the prayer will lead us upward to the true child-life; the Father being everything **to** the child, and the Father being everything **for** the child. We shall understand how **Father** and **child**, the **Yours** and the **ours**, are all one. We will grasp how the heart that begins its prayer with the God-devoted **Yours**, will have the power in faith to speak out the **ours** too. Such prayer will, indeed, be the fellowship and interchange of love, always bringing us back in trust and worship to Him who is not only the Beginning but the End. **"For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen."** Son of the Father, teach us to pray, **"Our Father."**

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O only-begotten Son of God, we ask You, teach us to pray, **"Our Father"**. We thank You, Lord, for these living blessed words which You have given us. We thank You for the millions who have learnt, through them, to know and worship the Father, and for what they have been to us. Lord, they are so full and deep, that it is as if, for each separate petition, we need days and weeks in Your school. But we look to You to lead us deeper into their meaning. Do it, we ask, for Your Name's sake. Your name is Son of the Father.

Lord, You once said, *"Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."* (Matthew 11:27). And again. *"I made known to them Your Name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which You have loved me may be in them, and I in them."* (John 17:26. ESV). Lord Jesus, reveal the Father to us. Let His name, His infinite Father-love, the love with which He loved You, **be in us**, according to Your prayer. Then we shall truly say, **"Our Father!** Then we will grasp Your teaching, and the first spontaneous breathing of our heart will be, **"Our Father, Your Name, Your Kingdom, Your Will."** And we will bring our needs and our sins and our temptations to Him in the confidence that the love of such a Father takes care of everything.

Blessed Lord, we are Your students, we trust You. Teach us to pray, **"Our Father"**. Amen.

LESSON FIVE

Ask, and it will be given you

Or,

THE CERTAINTY OF THE ANSWER TO PRAYER

*Ask, and it **will** be given to you; seek, and you **will** find; knock, and it **will** be opened to you. For everyone who asks **receives**, and he who seeks **finds**, and to him who knocks it **will be opened**. Matthew 7:7-8. NKJV.*

"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives... James 4:3. NIV.

For a second time in the Sermon on the Mount our Lord returns to speak of prayer. The first time He had spoken of the Father who is to be found in secret, and rewards openly, and had given us the model prayer (Matt.6:5-15). Here He wants to teach us what is considered the main thing about prayer in all Scripture, the assurance that prayer will be heard and answered. Observe how He uses words which mean almost the same thing, and each time He repeats the promise so clearly: You **will** receive, you **will** find, it **will** be opened unto you; and then He gives as ground for such assurance the law of the kingdom: He that asks, **receives**; he that seeks, **finds**; to him that knocks, **it will be opened**. We cannot help but feel that in this sixfold repetition He wants to impress deep on our minds this one truth, that we may and must most confidently expect an answer to our prayer. Next to the revelation of the Father's love, there is, in the whole course of the school of prayer, not a more important lesson than this: Every one that asks, receives.

In the three words the Lord uses, **ask**, **seek**, **knock**, a difference in meaning has been searched for. If such was indeed His purpose, then the first, **ask**, refers to the gifts we pray for. But I may ask and receive the gift without the Giver. **Seek** is the word Scripture uses of God Himself; Christ assures me that I can find Himself. But it is not enough to find God in time of need, without coming to abiding fellowship: **knock** speaks of admission to dwell with Him and in Him. Asking and receiving the gift would therefore lead to seeking and finding the Giver, and this again to the knocking and opening of the door of the Father's home and love. One thing is sure: the Lord does want us to count most certainly on it that asking, seeking, knocking, cannot be in vain. Receiving an answer, finding God, the opened heart and home of God, are the certain fruits of prayer.

The fact that the Lord should have thought it necessary to repeat the truth in so many forms, is a lesson of deep importance. It proves that He knows our heart, how doubt and distrust toward God are natural to us, and how easily we are inclined to rest in prayer as a religious work without an answer. He also knows how, even when we believe that God is the Hearer of prayer, believing prayer that lays hold of the promise, is something spiritual, too high and difficult for the half-hearted disciple. Therefore at the very outset of His instruction to those who would learn to pray, He seeks to implant this truth deep into their hearts: prayer does avail much; ask and you shall receive; every one that asks, receives. This is the **fixed eternal law of the kingdom**: if you ask and receive not, it must be because there is something wrong or lacking in the prayer. Hold on, let the

Word and the Spirit teach you to pray correctly, but do not let go the confidence He seeks to awaken: Every one that asks, receives.

Ask, and it will be given to you. Christ has no mightier stimulus to persevering prayer in His school than this. As a child has to prove a maths problem to be correct, so the proof that we have prayed correctly is the answer. If we ask and receive not, it is because we have not learned to pray correctly. Let every learner in the school of Christ therefore take the Master's word in all simplicity: Every one that asks, receives. He had good reasons for speaking so unconditionally. Let us beware of weakening the Word with our human wisdom. When He tells us heavenly things, let us believe Him. His Word will explain itself to those who believe it fully. If questions and difficulties arise, let us not seek to have them settled before we accept the Word. No, let us entrust them all to Him; it is His responsibility to solve them; our work is to first and fully accept and hold fast to His promise. Let the Word be inscribed in letters of light in the inner chamber of our heart: **Every one that asks, receives.**

According to this teaching of the Master, prayer consists of two parts and has two sides, a human and a Divine. The human part is the asking, the Divine part is the giving. Or, looking at both from the human side, there is the asking and the receiving, the two halves that make up a whole. It is as if He would tell us that we are not to rest without an answer, because it is the will of God, the rule in the Father's family: every childlike believing petition is granted. If no answer comes, we are not to sit down in the laziness of resignation, and suppose that it is not God's will to give an answer. No, there must be something in the prayer that is not as God would have it, childlike and believing; we must seek for the grace to pray **so that** the answer may come. It is far easier to the flesh to submit without the answer than to yield itself to be searched and purified by the Spirit, until it has learned to pray the prayer of faith.

It is one of the terrible marks of the diseased state of Christian life in these days, that there are so many who rest content without the distinct experience of answer to prayer. They pray daily, they ask many things, and trust that some of them will be heard, but know little of direct definite answer to prayer as the rule of daily life. And this is the Father's will: He seeks daily fellowship with His children in listening to and granting their petitions. He wills that I should come to Him day by day with distinct requests; He wants to day by day do for me what I ask. It was in His answer to prayer that the saints of old learned to know God as the Living One, and were stirred to praise and love (Psalm 34; 66:19; 116:1). Our Teacher waits to imprint this upon our minds: prayer and its answer, the child asking and the father giving, belonging to each other.

There may be cases in which the answer is a refusal, because the request is not according to God's Word, as when Moses asked to enter Canaan. But still, there was an answer. God did not leave His servant in uncertainty as to His will. The gods of the heathen are dumb and cannot speak. Our Father lets His child know when He cannot give him what he asks, and let him withdraw his petition, even as the Son did in Gethsemane. Both Moses the servant and Christ the Son knew that what they asked was not according to what the Lord had spoken: their prayer was the humble supplication whether it was not possible for the decision to be changed. God will teach those who

are teachable and who give Him time, by His Word and Spirit, whether their request is according to His will or not. Then let us withdraw the request, if it is not according to God's will, or persevere until the answer comes. Prayer is appointed to obtain the answer. It is in prayer and its answer that the interchange of love between the Father and His child takes place.

How deep the estrangement of our hearts from God must be, that we find it so difficult to grasp such promises. Even while we accept the words and believe their truth, the faith of the heart, that fully believes them and rejoices in them, comes so slowly. It is because our spiritual life is still so weak, and the capacity for receiving God's thoughts is so feeble. But let us look to Jesus to teach us as only He can teach. If we take His words in simplicity, and trust Him by His Spirit to make them life and power within us, they will so enter into our inner being, that the divine spiritual reality of the truth they contain will indeed take possession of us; and we will not rest content until every petition we offer is borne heavenward on Jesus' own words: *Ask, and it will be given you.*

Beloved fellow-disciples in the school of Jesus, let us set ourselves to learn this lesson well. Let us take these words just as they were spoken. Let us not allow human reason to weaken their force. Let us take them as Jesus gives them, and believe them. He will teach us in due time how to understand them fully: let us begin by **implicitly believing** them. Let us take time, as often as we pray, to listen to His voice: Every one that asks, receives. Let us not make the feeble experiences of our unbelief the measure of what our faith may expect. Let us seek, not only just in our seasons of prayer, but at all times, to hold fast to the joyful assurance: man's prayer on earth and God's answer in heaven are meant for each other. Let us trust Jesus to teach us to pray in such a way that the answer can come. He will do it, if we hold fast the word He gives today: *Ask, and you will receive.*

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O Lord Jesus, teach me to understand and believe what You have now promised me. It is not hidden from You, O my Lord, how my heart reasons and seeks explanations to satisfy itself, when no answer comes. There is the thought that my prayer is not in harmony with the Father's secret counsel; that there is perhaps something better You would give me; or that prayer as fellowship with God is blessing enough without an answer. And yet, my blessed Lord, I find in Your teaching on prayer that You did not speak of these things, but said so plainly, that prayer may and must expect an answer. You assure us that this is the fellowship of a child with the Father: the child asks and the Father gives.

Blessed Lord, your words are faithful and true. It must be, because I pray with wrong motives, that my experience of answered prayer is not clearer. It must be because I live too little in the Spirit, that my prayer is too little in the Spirit, and that the power for the prayer of faith is lacking.

Lord, teach me to pray! Lord Jesus, I trust You for it; teach me to pray in faith! Lord, teach me this lesson of today: *Every one that asks, receives!* Amen.

LESSON SIX

How much more?

Or,

THE INFINITE FATHERLINESS OF GOD

Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! Matthew 7:9-11. NKJV.

In these words our Lord proceeds further to confirm what He had said of the certainty of an answer to prayer. To remove all doubt, and show us on what sure ground His promise rests, He appeals to what everyone has seen and experienced here on earth. We are all children, and know what we expect of our fathers. We are either fathers ourselves, or continually see them as we grow up. We think of it as the most natural thing, for a father to hear his child. And the Lord asks us to look up from earthly parents, the best of whom are not perfect, and to calculate **how much more** the heavenly Father will give good gifts to them that ask Him. Jesus wants to lead us to see, that as much as God is greater than sinful man, so much greater our assurance ought to be that He will grant our childlike petitions more certainly than any earthly father. As much as God is greater than man, so much more certain it is that prayer will be heard by the Father in heaven than with a father on earth.

Though this parable is so simple and logical, the teaching it contains is truly deep and spiritual. The Lord wants to remind us that the prayer of a child owes its influence entirely to the relation he has with the parent. The prayer can exert that influence only when the child is really living in that relationship, in the home, in the love, in the service of the Father. The power of the promise, "Ask, and it will be given you" (Matt.7:7), lies in the loving relationship between us as children and the Father in heaven. When we live and walk in that relationship, the prayer of faith and its answer will be the natural result. And so the lesson we have today in the school of prayer is this: Live as a child of God, then you will be able to pray as a child, and as a child you will most certainly be heard.

And what is the true child-life? The answer can be found in any home. The child that chooses to forsake the father's house, that finds no pleasure in the presence, love and obedience of the father, and still thinks he can ask and receive what he wants, will surely be disappointed. On the contrary, he to whom the communication, and the will, the honour and the love of the father are the joy of his life, will find that it is the father's joy to grant his requests. Scripture says, "*For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.*" (Romans 8:14. NIV). The childlike privilege of asking for anything is inseparable from the childlike life under the leading of the Spirit. Whoever gives himself to be led by the Spirit in his life, will be led by Him in his prayers too. And he will find that Father-like giving is the Divine response to childlike living.

To see what this childlike living is, in which childlike asking and believing have their basis, we need to only notice what our Lord teaches in the Sermon on the Mount of the Father and His children. In it the prayer-promises are imbedded in the life-precepts. The two are inseparable. They form one whole; and the only ones who can count on the fulfilment of the promise, are those who accept everything that the Lord has connected with it. It is as if in speaking the word, "*Ask, and you shall receive*," He says, I give these promises to:

- those in the beatitudes whom I have pictured in their childlike poverty and purity;
- those of whom I have said, *they shall be called the children of God* (Matt.5:3-9);
- children, *who let your light shine before men, so that they may glorify your Father in heaven* (Matt.5:16);
- those who walk in love, *so that you may be children of your Father which is in heaven*, and who seek to *be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect* (Matt.5:45,48);
- those whose fasting and praying and giving is not before men, *but before your Father which sees in secret* (Matt.6:1-18);
- those who forgive *even as your Father forgives you* (Matt.6:15);
- those who trust the heavenly Father for every earthly need, *seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness* (Matt.6:25-34);
- those who not only say, *Lord, Lord*, but *do the will of My Father which is in heaven* (Matt.7:21).

Such are the children of the Father, and such is the life in the Father's love and service; in such a child-life answered prayers are certain and abundant.

But won't such teaching discourage the feeble ones? If we first have to live up to this example of a child, will many not give up all hope of answers to prayer? The difficulty is removed if we think again of the blessed relationship of father and child. A child is weak and there are a great differences among children in age and ability. The Lord does not demand a perfect fulfilment of the law from us. No, he only asks the childlike and whole-hearted surrender to live with Him as a child in obedience and truth. Nothing more. But also, nothing less. The Father must have the whole heart. When this is given, and He sees the child with honest purpose and a steady will seeking in everything to be and live as a child, then our prayer will count with Him as the prayer of a child. Let anyone simply and honestly begin to study the Sermon on the Mount and take it as his guide in life, and he will find an ever-growing liberty to claim the fulfilment of its promises in regard to prayer, in spite of weakness and failure. In the relationship of Father and child we have the promise that our petitions will be granted.

This is the main thought on which Jesus dwells here, and which He wants all His students to grasp. He wants us to see that the secret of effective prayer is to have the heart filled with the Father-love of God. It is not enough for us to know that God is a Father. He wants us to take time to fully understand the implication of that name. We must take the best earthly father we know. We must think of the tenderness and love with which he regards the request of his child, the love and joy with which he grants every reasonable desire. We must then, as we think in adoring worship of the infinite Love and Fatherliness of God, consider with how much more tenderness and joy He

sees us come to Him, and gives us what we ask for correctly. And then, when we see how much this Divine purpose is beyond our comprehension, and feel how impossible it is for us to grasp God's readiness to hear us, then He wants us to come and open our hearts for the Holy Spirit to pour God's Father-love into our hearts. Let us do this not only when we want to pray, but let us yield heart and life to dwell in that love. The child who only wants to know the love of the father when he has something to ask, will be disappointed. But he who lets God be Father always and in everything, who desires to live his whole life in the Father's presence and love, who allows God in all the greatness of His love to be a Father to him, will experience most gloriously that a life in God's infinite Fatherliness and continual answers to prayer are inseparable.

Beloved fellow-disciple, we begin the reason why we know so little of daily answers to prayer, and what the main lesson is which the Lord has for us in His school. It is all in that name "**Father**". We thought we will receive new and deeper insight into some of the mysteries of the prayer-world as we enrol into Christ's school. He tells us that the first and highest lesson is that we must learn, is to truly say, "*Abba (Daddy) Father!*" "*Our Father who is in heaven.*" Whoever can say this, has the key to all prayer. We must study the heart of our Father, with all its different facets, all the compassion with which a father listens to his weak or sickly child, all the joy with which he hears his stammering child and all the gentle patience with which he bears with a thoughtless child, until every prayer carried upward on the faith of this Divine word: "*How much more shall your heavenly Father give good gifts to them that ask Him.*" (Luke 11:13).

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord, You know that this, though it is one of the first and simplest and most glorious lessons in Your school, is to our hearts one of the hardest to learn because we know so little of the love of the Father. Lord, teach us so to live with the Father that His love may be nearer, clearer, dearer to us than the love of any earthly father. And let the assurance of His hearing our prayer be as much greater than the confidence in an earthly parent, as the heavens are higher than earth, as God is infinitely greater than man. Lord, show us that it is only our un-childlike distance from the Father that hinders the answer to prayer. Lead us to the true life of God's children.

Lord Jesus, it is father-like love that awakens childlike trust. Reveal to us the Father, and His tender, compassionate love, that we may become childlike, and experience that the power of prayer lies in the child-life.

Blessed Son of God, the Father loves You and has given everything to You. And You love the Father, and have done everything He commanded You, and therefore You have the power to ask anything. Lord, give us Your own Spirit, the Spirit of the Son. Make us childlike, as You were on earth. And let every prayer be breathed in the faith that as the heaven is higher than the earth, so God's Father-love, and His readiness to give us what we ask, surpasses all we can think or imagine. Amen.

NOTE 1. *From Thoughts on Holiness, by Mark Guy Pearse.*

What is so beautifully said of the knowledge of God's Fatherliness as the starting-point of holiness is no less true of prayer. "Your Father who is in heaven."

Regrettably we only speak of it as an expression of respectful worship.

We think of it as a picture of an earthly father and with a distant and shallow meaning to be used of God. We are afraid to take God as our own tender and compassionate father. He is a schoolmaster, or almost further away than that as an inspector, that does not know us very well, except through our lessons. We think that His eyes are not on the student but on the book, and all of us must come up to His standard.

Now dear child of God, open the ears of your heart. Let this thought sink right down into the innermost depths of your soul. Here is the starting-point of holiness, in the love and patience and compassion of our heavenly Father. We don't have to learn to be holy as a hard lesson at school, so that God can accept us; we learn it at home with the Father who helps us. God loves you not because you are clever nor because you are good, but because He is your Father. The Cross of Christ does not make God love us. The Cross of Christ is the result and measure of His love to us. He loves all His children, the clumsiest, the stupidest, the worst of His children. His love is behind everything. The solid foundation of our religious life is when we grasp that we are not to grow up into God's love, but to grow out of and because of God's love. We must start there or we will not progress in our relationship with Him. Take hold of this with your whole heart. We must let go of ourselves and not put any hope, or any strength, or any confidence in our own ability. What hope, what strength, what confidence may be ours now that we start here: "*your Father who is in heaven!*"

We need to grasp the tenderness and helpfulness of these words, and to rest upon it: ***your Father***. Speak them over and over to yourself until something of the wonderful truth is felt in your heart. It means that I am bound to God by the closest and most tender relationship; that I have a right to His love and His power and His blessing, like nothing else could give me. O the boldness with which we can draw near! O the great things we have a right to ask for! ***Your Father***. It means that with all His infinite love and patience and wisdom, He bends down to me to help me. It is not only the possibility of holiness that lies in this relationship, no, there is infinitely more than that.

But here we have to start, in the patient love of our Father. Think how He knows each of us individually us, in all our peculiarities and odd habits, in all our weaknesses and difficulties. The schoolmaster judges by the result, but our Father judges by the effort. Failure does not always mean fault. He knows how much things cost, and weighs them where others only measure. ***Your father***. Think how greatly His love treasures the poor beginnings of the little ones, clumsy and meaningless as they may look like to others. All this is to be found in this blessed relationship and infinitely more. Do not fear to take it all as your own.

LESSON SEVEN

How much more the Holy Spirit
Or,
THE ALL-COMPREHENSIVE GIFT.

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! Luke 11:13 NKJV

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had already spoken His wonderful phrase: "*how much more?*" Here in Luke, where He repeats the question, there is a difference. Instead of speaking, of giving good gifts, He says, "*How much more will your heavenly Father give **the Holy Spirit**?*" In this way, He teaches us that the main and the best of these gifts is the Holy Spirit, or rather, that this gift contain all the others. The Holy Spirit is the first of the Father's gifts, and the one He delights the most to give. The Holy Spirit therefore is the gift that we ought seek first and foremost.

We can easily understand the indescribable worth of this gift. Jesus spoke of the Spirit as "the promise of the Father." (Luke 24:49). It is the one promise in which God's Fatherhood revealed itself. The best gift a good and wise father can bestow on a child on earth is his own spirit. This is the great object of a father in education – to reproduce in his child his own nature and character. If the child is to know and understand his father, he must, as he grows up, enter into all his father's will and plans. If he is to have his highest joy in the father, and the father in him, he must be of one mind and spirit with his father. And so it is impossible to conceive of God bestowing any higher gift on His child than this, His own Spirit. God is what He is through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the very life of God. Just think what it means – God giving His own Spirit to His child on earth.

Was this not the glory of Jesus as a Son upon earth, that the Spirit of the Father was in Him? At His baptism in Jordan the two things were united; the voice, proclaiming Him the Beloved Son, and the Spirit, descending upon Him. And so the apostle Paul says of us: "*And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'*" (Gal.4:6). A king seeks in the whole education of his son to evoke in him a kingly spirit. Our Father in heaven desires to educate us as His children for the holy, heavenly life in which He dwells. For this reason He gives us His own Spirit, from the depths of His heart.

This was the whole aim of Jesus when, after having made atonement with His own blood, He entered for us into God's presence, that He might obtain the Holy Spirit for us, and send Him down to dwell in us. As the Spirit of the Father, and of the Son, the whole life and love of the Father and the Son are in the Holy Spirit; and coming down into us, He lifts us up into their fellowship. As Spirit of the Father, He pours the Father's love, with which He loved the Son, into our hearts, and teaches us to live in this love. As the Spirit of the Son, He breathes into us the childlike freedom, and devotion, and obedience in which the Son lived upon earth. The Father can give no higher or more wonderful gift than this: ***His own Holy Spirit, the Spirit of sonship.***

This truth naturally suggests the thought that this first and primary gift of God must be the first and primary object of all prayer. For every need of the spiritual life the Holy Spirit is the one thing we need the most. All the fullness is in Jesus; the fullness of grace and truth, out of which we receive grace upon grace. The Holy Spirit is the appointed instrument, whose special work it is to make Jesus, and all there is in Him for us, our personal possession, in actual experience. He is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative through which He communicates this wonderful life to us. If we can only yield ourselves entirely to the will of the Spirit, and let Him have His way with us, He will manifest the life of Christ within us. He will do this with a divine power, maintaining the life of Christ in us, continually and without interruption. Surely, if there is one prayer that should draw us to the Father's throne and keep us there, it is this: that the Holy Spirit, whom we as children of God have received, will stream into us and out from us in greater fullness.

The Spirit meets every need of the believer in the variety of the gifts which He dispenses. Just think of His names:

- The Spirit of grace who reveals and imparts all of the grace there is in Jesus.
- The Spirit of faith who teaches us to begin, continue and increase in faith.
- The Spirit of adoption and assurance, who witnesses that we are God's children, and inspires us to confidently confess: "Abba, Father!"
- The Spirit of truth, who leads us into all truth, and makes each of God's words ours in deed and in truth.
- The Spirit of prayer, through whom we speak with the Father with prayer that must be heard.
- The Spirit of judgment and burning, who searches the heart, and convinces of sin.
- The Spirit of holiness, manifesting and communicating the Father's holy presence within us.
- The Spirit of power, who strengthens us to boldly testify and efficiently work in the Father's service.
- The Spirit of glory, the pledge of our inheritance, the preparation and the foretaste of the glory to come.

Surely the child of God needs only one thing, to be filled with the Spirit who enables him to really live as a child.

The lesson Jesus teaches us in His school today is this: That the Father is just longing to give Him to us, if we will but ask in the childlike dependence on what He says: *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more** will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"* (Luke 11:13) In the words of God's promise in Titus 3:6, *"I will pour out my Spirit abundantly"*; and of His command, *"Be filled with the Spirit"* (Eph.5:18), we have the measure of what God is ready to give, and what we may obtain. As God's children, we have already received the Spirit. But we still need to ask and pray for His special gifts and works as we need them. And not only this, but for the Spirit to take complete and entire possession of us and guide us moment by moment. Just as the branch, already filled with the sap of the vine, is always

crying for the continued and increasing flow of that sap, that will ripen the fruit, so the believer, rejoicing in the possession of the Spirit, always thirsts and cries for more. What the great Teacher wants us to learn is, that only God's promises and God's commands must be the measure of our expectation and our prayer. He wants us to ask this with the wonderful assurance of *how much more* God's Father-love promises that when we ask, and we will most certainly receive.

Let us now believe this. As we pray to be filled with the Spirit, let us not seek for the answer in our feelings. All spiritual blessings must be received, that is, accepted or taken in faith. The Greek word for receiving and taking is the same. When Jesus said, "*Everyone that asks receives*," He used the same verb as at the Last Supper, "*Take, eat*," or on the morning of His resurrection, "*Receive*," (accept, take,) "*the Holy Spirit*." Receiving implies not only God's bestowment, but also our acceptance. Let us continue steadfastly in the belief that the Father gives the Holy Spirit to His praying child. Even now, while I pray, I must say in faith: "I have what I ask, the fullness of the Spirit is mine". Let us continue steadfast in this faith. The faith that we have what we ask rests on the strength of God's Word. Let us rejoice with thanksgiving that we have been heard, thanking God for what we have received and accepted, and now hold as ours. Let us steadfastly continue in believing prayer that the blessing, which has already been given us, and which we received in faith, may break through and fill our whole being. It is in such believing thanksgiving and prayer, that our soul opens up for the Spirit to take entire and undisturbed possession of God's promises. It is such prayer that not only asks and hopes, but takes and holds, that inherits the full blessing. In all our prayer let us remember the lesson the Saviour wants to teach us today, that, if there is one thing on earth we can be sure of, it is this: the Father desires to be filled with His Spirit, and He delights to give us His Spirit.

Once we have learned to believe this for ourselves, and to daily withdraw from this treasure we have in heaven, with what freedom and power we will pray for the outpouring of the Spirit on the Church of God, on all flesh, on individuals, or on special efforts! Once a believer learned to know the Father in prayer for himself, he will also learn to pray most confidently for others too. The Father gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, not least, but most, when they ask on behalf of others.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Father in heaven! You sent Your Son to reveal Yourself to us, Your fatherly love, and all that that love has in store for us. And Jesus has taught us, that the gift above all gifts that You want to give in answer to prayer, is the Holy Spirit.

O my Father! I come to You with this prayer; there is nothing I want, and may I dare say, that I desire as much as to be filled with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The blessings He brings are so indescribable, and are just what I need. He pours Your love into my heart, and fill my heart with Yourself. I long for this. He breathes the mind and life of Christ in me, so that I can live like He did, by and for the Father's love. I long for this. He endues with power from on high for all my walk and work. I long for this. O Father, I plead with You, give me today the fullness of Your Spirit.

Father, I ask this, believing the words of my Lord: "***How much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit.***" I do believe that You hear my prayer. I receive now what I ask. Father, I claim and I take it. The fullness of Your Spirit is mine. I receive this gift again today as a faith gift. In faith I count on my Father to accomplish all He has promised through the Spirit. The Father delights to breathe His Spirit into this waiting child, as I linger in fellowship with Him. Amen.

LESSON EIGHT.

Because of his persistence
Or,
THE BOLDNESS OF GOD'S FRIENDS.

And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. Luke 11:5-8. NKJV.

The first teaching was given by our Lord to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. It was nearly a year later that the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. In answer to their request, He again gave them the Lord's Prayer again and taught them what to pray. He then continues to speak of how they should to pray, and repeats what He previously said concerning God's Fatherliness and the certainty of an answer to prayer. But in between He adds the beautiful parable of the friend at midnight, to teach them the two fold lesson, that God not only wants us to pray for ourselves, but also for those around us who are perishing; and that, what pleases God in such intercession, is the great boldness that is often needed, and allowed, to plead with Him.

The parable is a perfect storehouse of instruction in regard to true intercession. There is, first, the love that seeks to help the needy around us: "*my friend came to me.*" Then the urgent need that makes one cry: "*I have nothing to set before him.*" Then follows the confidence that help will be given: "*which of you shall have a friend, and say, Friend, lend me three loaves.*" Then comes the unexpected refusal: "*I cannot rise and give to you.*" Then again the perseverance that accepts no refusal: "*because of his persistence.*" And lastly, the reward of such prayer: "*he will give him as many as he needs.*" A wonderful description of the manner in which prayer and faith have often sought and found God's blessing.

Let us restrict ourselves to the main thought offered here: prayer as an appeal to the friendship of God. We will find that two lessons are especially suggested. The one, that if we are God's friends, and come as such to Him, we must prove that we ourselves are friends of the needy. God's friendship to us and our friendship to others go hand in hand. The other, that when we come in this way, we may use the utmost freedom to claim an answer.

There is a twofold use of prayer: the one, to obtain strength and blessing for our own life; the other, the higher, the true glory of prayer, for which Christ has taken us into His fellowship and teaching, is intercession, where prayer is the royal power a child of God exercises in heaven on behalf of others and even of the kingdom. We see it in Scripture, how it was in intercession for others that Abraham and Moses, Samuel and Elijah, with all the holy men of old, proved that they had power with God and prevailed. It is when we give ourselves to be a blessing that we can

especially count on the blessing of God. It is when we draw near to God as the friend of the poor and the perishing, that we may count on His friendliness; the righteous man who is the friend of the poor is especially the friend of God. This gives wonderful freedom in prayer. Lord, I have a needy friend whom I must help! As a friend I have undertaken to help him. In You, I have a Friend, whose kindness and riches I know to be infinite. I am sure You will give me what I ask. If I, being evil, am ready to do for my friend what I can, how much more will You, O my heavenly Friend, now do for me, Your friend, what I ask?

The question might suggest itself: If the Fatherhood of God gives us such confidence in prayer, will the thought of His Friendship teach us something else as well? Is a father not more than a friend? If we consider it, this appealing to the friendship of God opens new wonders to us. That a child obtains what he asks of his father looks so perfectly natural, we almost consider it the father's duty to give. But with a friend it is as if the kindness is more free, dependent, not out of one's nature, but out of sympathy and character. Also, the relationship of a child is more that of perfect dependence; two friends are more on an equal level. And so our Lord, in seeking to reveal to us the spiritual mystery of prayer, wants us to approach God in this relationship too, as those whom He has acknowledged as His friends, whose mind and life are in sympathy with His.

But then we must be living as His friends. I am still a child even when I wander from God; but friendship depends upon my behaviour. *"You are my friends if you do what I command you."* (John 15:14). *"Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' And he was called the friend of God."* (James 2:22-23) It is the Spirit, **the same Spirit** who leads us who also bears witness to our acceptance with God; **likewise, also**, the same Spirit helps us in prayer. It is a lifestyle as the friend of God that gives the wonderful freedom to say: "I have a friend to whom I can go to even at midnight". And how much more when I go in the very spirit of that friendship, demonstrating in myself the very kindness I look for in God, seeking to help my friend as I want God to help me. When I come to God in prayer, He always looks to see what is the intention of my petition. If it is merely for my own comfort or joy I seek His grace, I will not receive. But if I can say that it is so that He will be glorified in my dispensing His blessings to others, I will not ask in vain. Or if I ask for others, but I want to wait until God has made me so rich, that it is no sacrifice or act of faith to aid them, I will not obtain it. But if I can say that I have already undertaken for my needy friend, that in my poverty I have already begun the work of love, because I know I had a friend Who would help me, my prayer will be heard. Oh, we don't know not how much this plea avails: the friendship of earth looking in its need to the friendship of heaven: *"He will give him as much as he needs."*

But it will not always be at once. The one thing through which man can honour and enjoy his God is faith. Intercession is part of faith's training-school. There our friendship with men and with God is tested. There it is seen whether my friendship with the needy is so real, that I will take time and sacrifice my rest, will go even at midnight and not stop asking until I have obtained for them what they need. There it is seen whether my friendship with God is so clear, that I can depend on Him not to turn me away and therefore I persist in prayer until He gives.

O what a deep heavenly mystery this is of persevering prayer. The God who has promised, who longs, whose fixed purpose it is to give the blessing, holds it back. To Him it is a matter of such deep importance that His friends on earth should **know** and **fully trust** their rich Friend in heaven, that He trains them, **in the school of delayed answer**, so that they can find out how their perseverance really does prevail, and what the mighty power is they can wield in heaven, if they do only set themselves to pursue it. There is a faith that sees the promise, and embraces it, and yet does not receive it (Heb.11:13, 39). It is when the answer to prayer **does not come**, and the promise we are most firmly trusting appears to be ineffective, that **the trial of faith**, more precious than that of gold, takes place. It is in this trial that the faith that has embraced the promise is purified and strengthened and prepared in personal, holy fellowship with the living God, to see the glory of God. It takes and holds the promise until it has received the fulfilment of what it had claimed in a living faith and truth in the unseen but living God.

Let each child of God who is seeking to work the work of love in his Father's service take courage. The parent with his child, the teacher with his class, the inspector with his district, the Bible reader with his circle, the preacher with his listeners, each one who, in his little circle, has accepted and is bearing the burden of hungry, perishing souls, – let them all take courage. Nothing is at first so strange to us as that God should really require persevering prayer, that there should be a real spiritual need for perseverance. To teach it to us, the Master uses this almost strange parable. If the unfriendliness of a selfish earthly friend can be conquered by perseverance, how much more will it avail with the heavenly Friend, who so loves to give, but is held back by our spiritual unfitness, our incapacity to possess what He has to give. O let us thank Him that in **delaying His answer** He is educating us to our true position and the exercise of all our power with Him, training us to live with Him in the fellowship of undoubting faith and trust, to be indeed the friends of God. And let us hold fast the threefold cord that cannot be broken: the hungry friend needing the help, the praying friend seeking the help, and the Mighty Friend loving to give as much as is needed.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O my Blessed Lord and Teacher, I must come to You in prayer! Your teaching is so glorious, and yet too high for me to grasp. I must confess that my heart is too small to take in these thoughts of the wonderful boldness I may use with our Father as my Friend. Lord Jesus, I trust You to give me Your Spirit with Your Word, and to make the Word alive and powerful in my heart. I desire to keep Your Word of this day: "*Because of his persistence he will give him as many as he needs.*"

Lord, teach me to experience more of the power of persevering prayer. I know that in it the Father's purpose is reached in the fact that we need time for our inner life to grow and mature, so that His grace may indeed be assimilated and made our very own. I know that He wants to train us in this way to exercise that strong faith that does not let Him go even in the face of seeming disappointment. I know He wants to lift us to that wonderful freedom, in which we understand how certainly He has made the dispensing of His gifts dependent on our prayer. Lord, I know this: O teach me to see it in spirit and truth.

And may it now be the joy of my life to become the canal of my Rich Friend in heaven, to care for all the hungry and perishing, even at midnight, because I know MY FRIEND, who always gives to him who perseveres, because of his persistence, as many as he needs. Amen.

LESSON NINE

Pray the Lord of the harvest
Or,
PRAYER PROVIDES LABOURERS

Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Matthew 9:37-38 NKJV

The Lord frequently taught His disciples that they **must** pray, and **how**, but seldom told them **what** to pray. He left this to their sense of need, and the leading of the Spirit. But here we have one thing He expressly commands them to remember. In the light of the bountiful harvest, and the need of reapers, they must cry to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers. Just as in the parable of the friend at midnight, He wanted them to understand that prayer must not be selfish. Here they must pray for the power through which blessing can come to others. The Father is Lord of the harvest; when we pray for the Holy Spirit, we must pray for Him to prepare and send workers into the harvest field.

Isn't it strange that He asked His disciples to pray for this? Could He not pray for it Himself? And would not one of his prayers accomplish more than a thousand of theirs? And didn't God, the Lord of the harvest, see the need? And would He not, in His own good time, send forth workers without their prayer? Such questions lead us up to the deepest mysteries of prayer, and its power in the Kingdom of God. The answer to such questions will convince us that prayer is indeed a power, on which the ingathering of the harvest and the coming of the Kingdom certainly depend.

Prayer is not a form nor a show. The Lord Jesus was Himself the truth; everything He spoke was the deepest truth. It was when "*He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd,*" (Matthew 9:36), that He called on the disciples to pray for labourers to be sent among them. He did so because He really believed that their prayer was needed, and would help. The veil which hides the invisible world from us was wonderfully transparent to the holy human soul of Jesus. He had looked long and deep and far into the hidden connection of cause and effect in the spirit world. He had noticed in God's Word how God called men like Abraham and Moses, Joshua and Samuel and Daniel, and gave them authority over men in His name. At the same time God gave them authority and the right to call in the powers of heaven to their aid as they needed them. He knew that just as God had entrusted the work to these men of old, and to Himself for a time here upon earth, so it was now about to pass over into the hands of His disciples. He knew that when they would be given charge of this work, that it would not be simply a matter of form or show, but that the success of the work would actually depend on them, and them being faithful or unfaithful.

As a single individual, within the limitations of a human body and a human life, Jesus felt how little a short visit can accomplish among these wandering sheep He saw around Him, and He longed for help to have them properly cared for. And so He told His disciples to begin and pray now, and,

when they have taken over the work from Him on earth, to make this one of the main requests in their prayer: "*That the Lord of the harvest Himself would send forth labourers into His harvest*". The God who entrusted them with the work, and made it to such a large extent dependent on them, gives them authority to pray to Him for labourers to help, and makes the supply of labourers totally dependent on their prayer.

How little Christians really think about and mourn the need of labourers in the fields of the world that are so ripe for the harvest. And how little they believe that our supply of workers depends on prayer, that prayer will provide as many workers as He needs. It is not that the lack of labourers is not known or discussed. Nor that efforts are sometimes made to supply in that lack. But how little do we bear the burden of *the sheep wandering without a Shepherd* in the faith that the Lord of the harvest will, in answer to prayer, send forth the labourers; and in the solemn conviction that without this prayer the harvest field of souls that are ready for salvation, will be left to perish. And yet it is so. It is amazing that He surrendered His work into the hands of His Church. That He made Himself so dependent on us as His body, as the only way through which the work will be accomplished. The power which the Lord gives His people to exercise in heaven and earth, is so real that the number of the labourers and the measure of the harvest does actually depend upon their prayer.

What a solemn thought! O why is it that we do not obey the command of the Master more wholeheartedly, and cry more earnestly for labourers? There are two reasons for this. The one is: We lack the compassion of Jesus, which gave rise to this request for prayer. It is only when believers learn that the Father's greatest command to his children is to love their neighbours as themselves and to live entirely for God's glory, that they will accept those who are perishing as the responsibility entrusted to them by their Lord. And not only accepting them as a field of labour, but as the objects of loving care and concern. Then it will not be long before compassion towards the hopelessly perishing will touch their heart, and their prayers will be with an earnestness previously unknown: ***Lord, send labourers!***

The other reason for neglecting the command; the lack of faith, will then become obvious, but will be overcome as our compassion pleads for help. We don't believe enough in the power of prayer to bring about definite results. We do not live close enough to God, and are not entirely given up to His service and Kingdom enough, to be capable of the confidence that He will answer our prayers. O let us pray for a life so united with Christ, that His compassion pours into us, and His Spirit assures us that our prayer is effective.

Such prayer will ask for and receive a twofold blessing. First there will be the desire for more people totally devoted to the service of God. It is a terrible blot upon the Church that there are times when people cannot be found to serve Jesus as ministers, missionaries, or teachers of God's Word. As we make this matter a sincere prayer for our own circle of people or Church, the Lord will respond. The Lord Jesus is now Lord of the harvest. He has been exalted to bestow gifts, the gifts of the Spirit. His main gift is people filled with the Spirit. But the supply and distribution of the gifts depend on the co-operation of Jesus as the Head and the members of the church. Only prayer

will lead to such co-operation. Those praying in faith will find workers and the provision for the work.

The other blessing we need to ask for is no less important. Every believer is a labourer. There is not one of God's children who has not been redeemed for service, and who does not have his work waiting for him. It must be our prayer that the Lord will fill all His people with the spirit of devotion, so that not one may be found standing idle in the vineyard. Wherever there is a complaint about the lack of workers, or of skilled workers in God's work, prayer promises a supply. There is no Sunday school or preachers, no Bible reading or rescue work, where God is not ready and able to provide. It may take time and persistence, but the command of Christ to pray the Lord of the harvest is the guarantee that the prayer will be heard: "*I say to you, he will rise and give him as many as he needs.*" (Luke 11:8)

What a sobering and wonderful thought! The power has been given to us in prayer to provide in the need of the world and to secure the workers for God's work. The Lord of the harvest will hear. Christ, who called us so specially to pray thus, will support our prayers offered in His name and interest. Let us set apart time and give ourselves to this part of our intercessory work. It will lead us into the fellowship of that compassionate heart of His that led Him to call for our prayers. It will elevate us to the insight of our royal position, as those whose prayers lead to the advancement of His Kingdom. It will make us feel that we really are God's fellow-workers on earth, to whom a responsibility in His work been entrusted. It will make us participants in the spiritual travail, and also in the satisfaction of Jesus, when we know that in answer to our prayer, blessing has been given that otherwise would not have come.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord, You have given us another wonderful lesson to learn. We humbly ask You to give us the right understanding of the spiritual realities You are speaking of. There is the harvest which is so large, and perishing, as it waits for lethargic disciples to call the labourers to come. Lord, teach us to view the harvest with a heart moved with compassion and pity. There are so few labourers. Lord, show us how terrible is the sin of the lack of prayer and faith, when the Lord of the harvest is so able and ready to send them forth. Lord, show us how You do indeed wait for our prayer which You promised to answer. Here we are the disciples, to whom You commanded to pray. Lord, show us how You can pour down Your Spirit and breathe upon us, so that Your compassion and the faith in Your promise will rouse us to unceasing, prevailing prayer.

O our Lord, we don't understand how You can entrust such work and give such power to people who are so lazy and unfaithful. We thank You for everyone You teach to cry day and night for workers to be sent forth. Lord, breathe Your own Spirit on all Your children, that we may learn to live for this one thing only, the Kingdom and glory of our Lord, and to become fully alert to believing what our prayer can accomplish. Let our hearts be filled with the assurance that prayer, offered in loving faith in the living God, will bring certain and abundant answer. Amen.

LESSON TEN

What do you want?

Or,

PRAYER MUST BE DEFINITE

So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" Mark 10:51; Luke 18:41. NKJV.

The blind man had been crying out aloud, and that a great deal, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" (Mark 10:47). The cry had reached the ear of the Lord; He knew what the blind man wanted, and was ready to grant it to him. But before He does it, He asks him: "***What do you want Me to do for you?***" He wants to hear from his own lips, not only the general petition for mercy, but the distinct expression of what his desire was. Until he speaks it out, he is not healed.

There are still now many who plead to God; to whom the Lord puts the same question, and who cannot, until they answer, get the help they ask for. Our prayers must not be a vague appeal to His mercy, an indefinite cry for blessing, but the distinct expression of definite need. Not that His loving heart does not understand our cry, or is not ready to hear. But He desires it for our own sake. Such definite prayer teaches us to know our own needs better. It demands time, and thought, and self-scrutiny to find out what really is our greatest need. It searches us and puts us to the test as to whether our desires are honest and real, and if we are ready to persevere in it. It leads us to judge whether our desires are according to God's Word, and whether we really believe that we shall receive the things we ask. It helps us to wait for the special answer, and to mark it when it comes.

And yet how much of our prayer is vague and pointless. Some cry for mercy, but do not take the trouble to know what mercy must do for them. Others ask, perhaps, to be delivered from sin, but do not begin by bringing any sin by name from which the deliverance may be claimed. Still others pray for God's blessing on those around them, for the outpouring of God's Spirit on their land or the world, and yet have no special field where they wait and expect to see the answer. To all the Lord says: What is it you really want and expect Me to do? Every Christian has limited powers, and as such he must have his own special field of labour in which he works. So it is with his prayers too.

Each believer has his own circle, his family, his friends, his neighbours. If he were to take one or more of these by name, he would find that this really brings him into the training school of faith, and leads to personal and pointed dealing with his God. It is when in such distinct matters we have claimed and received answers in faith, that our more general prayers will be believing and effectual.

We all know with what surprise the whole civilised world heard of the way in which trained troops were repulsed by the Transvaal Boers at Majuba (At the time, the British military was considered

the best in the world, while the Boer soldiers were farmers who took up arms). The battle is considered to have been one of the most humiliating defeats of British arms in history. And to what did they owe their success? In the armies of Europe, the soldier fires upon the large masses of the enemy, and never thinks of seeking an aim for every bullet. In hunting game the Boer had learnt a different lesson: his practised eye knew to send every bullet on its special mission, to seek and find its target. Such precise aiming must become the practise in the spiritual world too. As long as we just pour out our hearts in prayer in a multitude of petitions, without taking time to see whether every petition is sent with the purpose and expectation of getting an answer, not many will reach their mark. But if we bow before the Lord in silence of soul, and ask questions like these: What is really my desire? Do I desire it in faith, expecting to receive? Am I now ready to place and leave it in the Father's bosom? Is it settled between God and me that I am to have the answer? We must learn to pray in such a way that God would see and we would know what we really expect.

It is for this, among other reasons, that the Lord warns us against the vain repetitions of the Gentiles, who think they are heard because of their many prayers. We often hear prayers of great earnestness and fervour, in which a multitude of petitions are poured forth, but to which the Saviour would undoubtedly answer: "*What do you want me to do for you?*" If I am in a strange land, in the interests of the business which my father owns, I would certainly write two different sorts of letters. There will be family letters giving expression to all the communication that is prompted by affection; and there will be business letters, containing orders for what I need. And there may be letters in which both are found. The answers will correspond to the letters. To each sentence of the letters containing the family news I do not expect a special answer. But for each order I send I am confident of an answer whether the desired article was mailed to me. In our dealings with God the business element must not be lacking. With our expression of need and sin, of love and faith and consecration, there must be the specific statement of what we ask for and expect to receive. It is in the answer that the Father loves to give us the token of His approval and acceptance.

But the word of the Master teaches us more. He does not say, "*What do you **wish**?*" but, "*What do you **will**?*" One often wishes for a thing without willing it. I **wish** to have a certain article, but I find the price too high; so I resolve not to take it; I wish, but do not will to have it. The sluggard wishes to be rich, but does not will it. Many people wish to be saved, but perish because they do not will it. The will rules the whole heart and life. If I really will to have anything that is within my reach, I do not rest until I have it. And so, when Jesus says to us, "*What will you?*" He asks whether it is indeed our purpose to have what we ask at any price, however great the sacrifice. Do you indeed so **will** to have it that, although He delay it long, you do not hold your peace until He hears you? Alas! how many prayers are wishes, sent up for a short time and then forgotten, or sent up year after year as a matter of duty, while we rest content with the prayer without the answer.

But, it may be asked, is it not best to make our wishes known to God, and then to leave it to Him to decide what is best, without asserting our will? By no means. This is the very essence of the prayer of faith, to which Jesus sought to train His disciples, that it does not only make known its

desire and then leave the decision to God. That would be the prayer of submission, for cases in which we cannot know God's will. But the prayer of faith, finding God's will in some promise of the Word, pleads for it until it comes. In Matthew 9:28 we read that Jesus said to the blind man: "**Do you believe that I am able to do this?**" Here, in Mark, He says: "**What do you want me to do for you?**" In both cases He said that faith had saved them. And so He said to the Syrophenician woman, too: "*O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.*" (Matthew 15:28). Faith is nothing but the purpose of the will resting on God's word, and saying: I must have it. To believe truly is to will firmly.

But is not such a will in conflict with our dependence on God and our submission to Him? By no means; it is much rather the true submission that honours God. It is only when the child has yielded his own will in entire surrender to the Father, that he receives from the Father liberty and power to **will** what he would have. But once the believer has accepted the will of God, as revealed through the Word and Spirit, as his will, too, then it is the will of God that His child should use this renewed will in His service. A person's will is the highest power in the soul. God in his grace wants above everything to sanctify and restore this will, one of the chief characteristics of God's image, to full and free exercise. As a son, who lives solely for his father's interests, who seeks not his own but his father's will, is trusted by the father with his business. So God speaks to His child in all truth, "*What will you?*" It is often spiritual laziness that, under the appearance of humility, professes to have no will, because it fears the trouble of searching out the will of God, or, when found, the struggle of claiming it in faith. True humility is always accompanied with strong faith, which only seeks to know what is according to the will of God, and then boldly claims the fulfilment of the promise: "*Ask whatever you desire, and it shall be done for you.*" (John 15:7)

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Lord Jesus, teach me to pray with all my heart and strength, that there may be no doubt with You or with me as to what I have asked. May I be so certain about what I desire that, even as my petitions are recorded in heaven, I can record them on earth too, and note each answer as it comes. And may my faith in what Your Word has promised be so clear that the Spirit may indeed work in me the freedom to will that it shall come. Lord, renew, strengthen and completely sanctify my will for the work of effective prayer!

Blessed Saviour, I beg You to reveal to me the wonderful respect You show us, by asking us to say what we will that You should do, and promising to do whatever we will. Son of God, I cannot understand it! I can only believe that You have indeed redeemed us completely for Yourself, and seek to make our will, the noblest part of our beings, serving You. Lord, without any reservation, I yield my will to You, so that the power of Your Spirit will rule my whole being! Let your Holy Spirit take possession of my will, and lead it into the truth of Your promises, and make my will so strong in prayer that I may always hear Your voice saying: "*Great is your faith, let it be done for you according to your will.*" Amen.

LESSON ELEVEN

Believe that you have received
Or,
THE FAITH THAT RECEIVES

"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." Mark 11:24. NKJV.

What a promise! So large, so Divine, that our little hearts cannot take it in. In every possible way we seek to limit God's promise to what we think is safe or probable, instead of allowing it, in its quickening power and energy, just as He gave it. And allow it to enter in, and to enlarge our hearts to the measure of what His love and power are really ready to do for us. Faith is very far from being a mere conviction of the truth of God's word, or a conclusion drawn from certain principles. It is the ear which has heard God say what He will do, the eye which has seen Him doing it, and, therefore, where there is true faith, knowing that it is impossible for the answer not to come. If we can only do the one thing that He asks of us as we pray: "**Believe that you have received**", He will see to it that He does the thing He has promised: "*You shall have them.*"

The key-note of Solomon's prayer, "*Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who has fulfilled with His hands what He spoke with His mouth to my father David.*" (2 Chronicles 6:4), is the key-note of all true prayer: the joyful adoration of a God whose hand always secures the fulfilment of what His mouth has spoken. Let us in this spirit listen to the promise Jesus gives; each part of it has its Divine message.

"*Whatever...*" At this first word our human wisdom at once begins to doubt and ask: This surely cannot be literally true? But if it is not, why did the Master say it, using the very strongest expression He could find: "*Whatever...*" And it is not as if this were the only time He spoke this; is it not He who also said, "*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.*" (Mark 9:23). "*If you have faith ... nothing will be impossible for you.*" (Matthew 17:20). Faith is so entirely the work of God's Spirit through His word in the prepared heart of the believing disciple, that it is impossible that the fulfilment should not come. Faith is the pledge and forerunner of the coming answer.

Yes, **whatever** things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. The tendency of human reason is to interrupt here, and with certain qualifying clauses, "if expedient", "if according to God's will," to break the force of a statement which appears dangerous. O let us beware of dealing this way with the Master's words. His promise is most literally true. He wants His often repeated "**whatever things**" to enter into our hearts, and reveal to us how mighty the power of faith is, how truly the Head calls the members to share with Him in His power, how wholly our Father places His power at the disposal of the child that completely trusts Him. In this "*whatever things*", faith is to have its nourishment and strength: if we weaken it we weaken faith.

The "**whatever**" is unconditional. The only condition is what is meant by believing. Before we can believe we must find out and know what God's will is. Believing is the exercise of a soul surrendered and given up to the influence of the Word and the Spirit; but once we truly do believe nothing shall be impossible. God forbid that we should try and bring down His "*whatever things*" to the level of what we think possible. Let us now simply take Christ's "**whatever**" as the measure and the hope of our faith. It is a seed-word which, if taken just as He gives it, and kept in the heart, will unfold itself and take root, fill our life with its fullness, and bring forth abundant fruit.

"Whatever things you pray and ask for." It is in prayer that these "*whatever*" is to be brought to God, to be asked and received of Him. The faith that receives them is the fruit of prayer. In one aspect there must be faith before there can be prayer; in another the faith is the outcome and the growth of prayer. It is in the personal presence of the Saviour, in interaction with Him, that faith rises to grasp what at first appeared too high. It is in prayer that we hold up our desire to the light of God's Holy Will, that our motives are tested, and proof given whether we ask indeed in the name of Jesus, and only for the glory of God. It is in prayer that we wait for the leading of the Spirit to show us whether we are asking the right thing and in the right spirit. It is in prayer that we become conscious of our lack of faith, that we are led to say to the Father that we do believe, and that we prove the reality of our faith by the confidence with which we persevere. It is in prayer that Jesus teaches and inspires faith. He that postpones prayer, or loses heart in prayer, because he does not yet feel the faith needed to get the answer, will never learn to believe. He who begins to pray and ask will find the spirit of faith is given nowhere so surely as at the foot of the Throne.

"Believe that you have received." It is clear that what we are to believe is, that we receive the very things we ask for. The Saviour does not hint that because the Father knows what is best He may give us something else. The very mountain faith commands to depart is cast into the sea. There is a prayer in which, in everything, we make known our requests with prayer and supplication, and the reward is the sweet peace of God keeping heart and mind. This is the prayer of trust. It refers to things of which we cannot find out if God is going to give them. As children we make known our desires in the countless things of daily life, and leave it to the Father to give or not as He thinks best. But the prayer of faith of which Jesus speaks is something different, something higher. Whether in the greater interests of the Master's work, or in the lesser concerns of our daily life, the soul is led to see how there is nothing that so honours the Father as the faith that is assured that He will do what He has said in giving us whatever we ask for, and takes its stand on the promise as brought home by the Spirit. Such a soul may know most certainly that it does receive exactly what it asks. Just see how clearly the Lord sets this before us in verse 23: "*if anyone... does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.*" (Mark 11:23, NIV). This is the blessing of the prayer of faith of which Jesus speaks.

"Believe that you have received." This word is of central importance, of which the meaning is too often misunderstood. Believe that you have received **now**, while praying, the thing you ask for. It may only be later that you shall have it in personal experience, that you shall see what you

believe; but **now**, without seeing, you are to believe that it has been given to you by the Father in heaven. The receiving or accepting of an answer to prayer is just like the receiving or accepting of Jesus or of forgiveness. It is a spiritual thing, an act of faith apart from all feeling. When I come as a petitioner for forgiveness, I believe that Jesus in heaven is for me, and so I receive or accept Him. When I come as a petitioner for any special gift, which is according to God's word, I believe that what I ask has been given to me. I believe that I have it, I hold it in faith. I thank God that it is mine. *"And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."* (1 John 5:15).

"And you shall have them." That is, the gift which we first receive in faith as bestowed upon us in heaven, will also become ours in personal experience. But will it be necessary to pray longer once we know we have been heard and have received what we asked? There are cases in which such prayer will not be necessary, in which the blessing is ready to break through at once, if we only hold fast our confidence, and prove our faith by praising God for what we have received, even if we have not yet have it in experience. There are other instances in which the faith that has received needs to be still further tried and strengthened in persevering prayer. Only God knows when everything in and around us is fully ripe for the manifestation of the blessing that has been given to faith. Elijah knew for certain that rain would come; God had promised it; and yet he had to pray the seven times. And that prayer was not a show or a game. It was an intense spiritual reality in the heart of him who lay there pleading, and in the heaven above where prayer had its powerful work to do. It is through *"faith and patience"* that we inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12). Faith says with absolute confidence, I have received it. Patience perseveres in prayer until the gift bestowed in heaven is seen on earth. *"Believe that you have received it, and you shall have them."* Between the *have received in heaven*, and the *will have of earth*, believe. Believing praise and prayer is the link.

And now, remember one more thing: It is Jesus who said this. As we see heaven opened to us in this way, and the Father on the Throne offering to give us whatever we ask in faith, our hearts feel full of shame that we have taken so little advantage of our privilege. And we are full of fear lest our feeble faith still fail to grasp what is so clearly placed within our reach. There is one thing that must make us strong and full of hope: it is Jesus who has brought us this message from the Father. He Himself, when He was on earth, lived the life of faith and prayer. It was when the disciples expressed their surprise at what He had done to the fig tree, that He told them that the very same life He led could be theirs; that they could not only command the fig tree, but the very mountain, and it must obey. And He is our life. All that He was on earth He is in us now. All He teaches He really gives. He is Himself the Author and the Perfecter of our faith. He gives the spirit of faith. Let us not be afraid that such faith is not meant for us. It is meant for every child of the Father. It is within reach of each one who will but be childlike, yielding himself to the Father's Will and Love, trusting the Father's Word and Power. Dear fellow-Christian, let the thought that this word comes through Jesus, the Son, our Brother, give us courage, and let our answer be: Yes, Blessed Lord, we do believe Your Word, we do believe that we receive.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord! You came from the Father to show us all His love, and all the treasures of blessing that love is waiting to bestow.

Lord, today You have flung the gates open so wide again, and given us such promises about our freedom in prayer, that we must blush that our poor hearts have taken in so little of it. It has been too large for us to believe.

Lord, we now look up to You to teach us to take and keep and use this precious word of Yours: *"whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."* Blessed Jesus, it is in You that our faith must be rooted if it is to grow strong. Your work has freed us completely from the power of sin, and opened the way to the Father. Your Love is always longing to bring us into the full fellowship of Your glory and power. Your Spirit is always drawing us upward into a life of perfect faith and confidence. We are assured that in Your teaching we shall learn to pray the prayer of faith. You will train us to pray so that we believe that we receive, to believe that we really have what we ask. Lord, teach me to so completely know and trust and love You, to live and abide in You in such a way, that all my prayers rise up and come before God in You, and that in You, my soul may have the assurance that I am heard. Amen.

LESSON TWELVE

Have faith in God
Or,
THE SECRET OF BELIEVING PRAYER

So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." Mark 11:22-24.

The promise of answer to prayer which formed yesterday's lesson is one of the most wonderful in all Scripture. Yet how many hearts it has raised the question: How ever can I attain the faith that knows that it receives all it asks? It is this question our Lord wants to answer today. Before He gave that wonderful promise to His disciples, He spoke another word, in which He points out where the faith in the answer to prayer originates from, and ever finds its strength. **Have faith in God!** This word precedes the other lesson to have faith in the promise of an answer to prayer. The power to believe a promise depends entirely, and only, on faith in the promiser. Trust in the person leads to trust in his word. It is only where we live and associate with God in personal, loving intimacy, where **God Himself** is all to us, where our whole being is continually opened up and exposed to the mighty influences that are at work where His Holy Presence is revealed, that the *capacity* will be developed for believing that He gives whatever we ask.

This connection between faith in God and faith in His promise will become clear to us if we think what faith really is. It is often compared to the *hand* or the *mouth*, by which we take and appropriate what is offered to us. But it is of importance that we should understand that faith is also the *ear* by which I hear what is promised, the *eye* by which I see what is offered me. The power of receiving depends on hearing and seeing. I must hear the person who gives me the promise. The very tone of his voice gives me courage to believe. I must see him. The light in his eyes and in his countenance will remove all fear and doubts as to my right to receive. The value of the promise depends on the promiser. My faith in the promise depends on my knowledge of who and what the promiser is.

It is for this reason that Jesus, before He gives that wonderful prayer-promise, first says, "**Have faith in God.**" That is, let your eye be open to the Living God, and gaze on Him, seeing Him who is Invisible. It is through the eye that I yield myself to the influence of what is before me. I just allow it to enter, to exert its influence, to leave its impression upon my mind. So believing God is simply looking to God and what He is, allowing Him to reveal His presence, giving Him time and yielding the whole being to take in the full impression of what He is as God, while the soul is opened up to receive and rejoice in the overshadowing of His love. Yes, faith is the eye to which God shows what He is and does. Through faith the light of His presence and the workings of His mighty power stream into the soul. As that which I see lives in me, so by faith God lives in me too.

And in a similar way faith is also the ear through which the voice of God is always heard and communion with Him kept up. It is through the Holy Spirit that the Father speaks to us. The Son is the Word, the substance of what God says. The Spirit is the living voice. The child of God needs this to lead and guide him. The secret voice from heaven must teach him, as it taught Jesus, what to say and what to do. An ear opened towards God, that is, a believing heart waiting on Him, to hear what He says, will hear Him speak. The words of God will not only be the words of a Book, but, proceeding from the mouth of God, they will be spirit and truth, life and power. They will bring action and living experience to what are otherwise only thoughts. Through this opened ear the soul stays under the influence of the life and power of God Himself. As the words I hear enter the mind and dwell and work there, so through faith God enters the heart, and dwells and works there.

When faith is fully employed as eye and ear, as the faculty of the soul by which we see and hear God, then it will be able to exercise its full power as hand and mouth, by which we appropriate God and His blessing, making it our own. The power of reception will depend entirely on the power of spiritual perception. For this reason Jesus said, before He gave the promise that God would answer believing prayer: "**Have faith in God.**" *Faith is simply surrender.* I yield myself to the impression the news I hear make on me. By faith I yield myself to the living God. His glory and love fill my heart, and have the mastery over my life.

Faith is fellowship. I give myself up to the influence of the friend who makes me a promise, and become linked to him by it. And it is when we enter into this living fellowship with God Himself, in a faith that always sees and hears Him, that it becomes easy and natural to believe His promise as to prayer. Faith in the promise is the fruit of faith in the promiser. The *prayer of faith* is rooted in the *life of faith*. And in this way the faith that prays effectively is indeed a gift of God. Not as something that He bestows or infuses at once, but in a far deeper and truer sense, as the blessed character or habit of soul which is formed and grows up in us in a life of interaction with Him. Surely for one who knows his Father well, and lives in constant close fellowship with Him, it is a simple thing to *believe the promise* that He will do the will of His child who lives in union with Himself.

It is because so many of God's children do not understand this connection between the *life of faith* and the *prayer of faith* that their experience of the power of prayer is so limited. When they desire earnestly to obtain an answer from God, they fix their whole heart upon the promise, and try their utmost to grasp that promise in faith. When they do not succeed, they are ready to give up hope. The promise is true, but it is beyond their power to take hold of it in faith. Listen to the lesson Jesus teaches us this day: **Have faith in God**, the Living God. Let faith look to God more than to the thing promised. It is His love, His power, His living presence that will awaken and work the faith. A physician would say to someone asking for a way to get more strength in his arms and hands to seize and hold, that his whole constitution must be built up and strengthened. So the *cure* of a feeble faith can only be found in the invigoration of our whole spiritual life by interaction or fellowship with God. *Learn* to believe in God, to take hold of God, to let God take

possession of your life, and it will be easy to take hold of the promise. He that knows and trusts God finds it easy to trust the promise too.

Just note how distinctly this is true for the saints of old. Every special exhibition of the power of faith was the fruit of a special revelation of God. See it in Abraham: *"After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.'* ...and the Scriptures says **"Abraham believed in the LORD"** (Genesis 15:1-6). And later again: *"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.'" Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations."* (Genesis 17:1-4). It was the revelation of God Himself that gave the promise its living power to enter the heart and work the faith. Because they knew God, these men of faith could not do anything but trust His promise. God's promise will be to us what God Himself is. It is the man who walks before the Lord, and falls upon his face to listen while the living God speaks to him, who will really receive the promise. Though we have God's promises in the Bible, with full liberty to take them, the spiritual power is lacking, except when God Himself speaks them to us. And He speaks to those who walk and live with Him. Therefore, **have faith in God**. Let faith be all eye and ear, the surrender to let God make His full impression, and reveal Himself fully in the soul.

Count it one of the chief blessings of prayer to exercise faith in God, as the Living Mighty God who waits to fulfil in us all the good pleasure of His will, and the work of faith with power. See in Him the God of Love, whose delight it is to bless and impart Himself. In such worship of faith in God the power will quickly come to believe the promise too: **"Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you received it."** Yes, you will see that when you make God your own in faith; the promise will be yours too.

Precious lessons that Jesus is teaching us today. We seek God's gifts; God wants to give us **Himself** first. We think of prayer as the power to draw down good gifts from heaven and Jesus as the means to draw ourselves up to God. We want to stand at the door and cry but Jesus would rather want us to first enter in and realize that we are friends and children. Let us accept the teaching. Let every experience of the littleness of our faith in prayer urge us to first have and exercise more faith in the living God, and in such faith to yield ourselves to Him. A heart full of God has power for the prayer of faith. Faith in God gives birth to faith in the promise, and also faith in the promise of an answer to prayer too.

Therefore, child of God, take time, take time, to bow before Him, to wait on Him to reveal Himself. Take time, and let your soul in holy awe and worship exercise and express its faith in the Infinite One, and as He imparts Himself and takes possession of you, the prayer of faith will crown your faith in God.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O my God! I do believe in You. I believe in You as the Father, Infinite in Your Love and Power. And as the Son, my Redeemer and my Life. And as the Holy Spirit, Comforter and Guide and Strength. Three-in-One God, I have faith in You. I know and am sure that all that You are You are to me, that all You have promised You will perform.

Lord Jesus, increase this faith! Teach me to take time, and wait and worship in the Holy Presence until my faith receives all there is in my God for me. Let it see Him as the Fountain of all Life, working with Almighty Strength to accomplish His will on the world and in me. Let it see Him in His love longing to meet and fulfil my desires. Let it so take possession of my heart and life that through faith God alone may dwell there. Lord Jesus, help me! With my whole heart I want to believe in God. Let faith in God fill me every moment.

O my Blessed Saviour! How can Your Church glorify You? How can it fulfil that work of intercession through which Your kingdom must come, unless our whole life be **faith in God**? Blessed Lord! Speak Your Word, "**Have faith in God**," into the depths of our souls.

LESSON THIRTEEN

Prayer and fasting
Or,
THE CURE OF UNBELIEF

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." Matthew 17:19-21. NKJV.

When the disciples saw Jesus cast the evil spirit out of the epileptic whom they could not cure, they asked the Master for the cause of their failure. He had given them *power and authority over all demons, and to cure all diseases* (Luk.9:1). They had often exercised that power, and joyfully told how the demons were subject to them. And yet now, while He was on the mountain, they had utterly failed. That was nothing in the will of God or in the nature of the case to render deliverance impossible, because at Christ's command the evil spirit had gone out. From their expression, "*Why couldn't we...?*" it is evident that they had wished and tried to do so; they had probably used the Master's name, and called upon the evil spirit to go out. Their efforts had been vain, and in the presence of the multitude, they had been put to shame. "*Why couldn't we...?*"

Christ's answer was direct and plain: "*Because of your **unbelief**.*" The cause of His success and their failure, was not because He had a special power which they did not have. No, the reason was not hard to find. He had so often taught them that there is one power, that of faith, to which, in the kingdom of darkness, as in the kingdom of God, everything must bow. In the spiritual world failure has but one cause, the lack of faith. Faith is the one condition on which all Divine power can enter into man and work through him. It is the receptiveness to the unseen: man's will yielded up to, and moulded by, the will of God. The power they had received to cast out devils, they did not hold in themselves as a permanent gift or possession. The power was in Christ, to be received, and held, and used by faith alone, living faith in Himself. Had they been full of faith in Him as Lord and Conqueror in the spirit-world, had they been full of faith in Him as having given them authority to cast out in His name, this faith would have given them the victory. "*Because of your unbelief*" was, for all time, the Master's explanation of and rebuke to the impotence and failure in His Church.

But such lack of faith must have a cause too. The disciples may very well have asked: "*And why could we not believe? Our faith has cast out demons before this, why have we now failed to believe?*" The Master proceeds to tell them before they ask: "*This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*" Faith is the simplest, and at the same time, the highest exercise of the spiritual life, where our spirit yields itself in perfect receptivity to God's Spirit and so is strengthened to its highest activity. This faith depends entirely upon the state of the spiritual life. Only when this is strong and in full health, when the Spirit of God has full sway in our life, is there

the power of faith to do its mighty deeds. And therefore Jesus adds: "*However this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*" The faith that can overcome such stubborn resistance as you have just seen in this evil spirit, Jesus tells them, is not possible except to people living in very close fellowship with God, and in very special separation from the world: *in prayer and fasting*. And so He teaches us two very important lessons in regard to prayer. The one, that faith needs a life of prayer in which to grow and keep strong. The other, that prayer needs fasting for its full and perfect development.

Faith needs a life of prayer for its full growth. In all the different parts of the spiritual life, there is such close union, such unceasing action and re-action, that each may be both cause and effect. Thus it is with faith. There can be no true prayer without faith; some measure of faith must precede prayer. And yet prayer is also the way to more faith; there can be no higher degrees of faith except through much prayer. This is the lesson Jesus teaches here. There is nothing that needs to grow so much as our faith. "*Your faith grows exceedingly,*" is said of one Church (2 Thess. 1:3). When Jesus spoke the words, "*According to your faith let it be to you*" (Matt.9:29), He announced the *law of the kingdom*, which tells us that all do not have equal degrees of faith, that the same person does not always have the same degree, and that the measure of faith must always determine the measure of power and of blessing. If we want to know where and how our faith is to grow, the Master points us to the throne of God. It is in prayer, in the exercise of the faith I have, in fellowship with the living God, that faith can increase. Faith can only live by feeding on what is Divine, on God Himself.

It is in the adoring worship of God, the waiting on Him and for Him, the deep silence of soul that yields itself for God to reveal Himself, that the capacity for knowing and trusting God will be developed. It is as we take His word from the Blessed Book, and bring it to Himself, asking him to speak it to us with His living loving voice, that the power will come fully to believe and receive the word as God's own word to us. It is in prayer, in living contact with God in living faith, that faith, the power to trust God will become strong in us. And in that trust, to accept everything He says, and every possibility He has offered to our faith. Many Christians cannot understand what is meant by the *much prayer* they sometimes hear spoken of. They can form no conception, nor do they feel the need, of spending hours with God. But what the Master says, was confirmed by the experience of His people: men of strong faith are men of much prayer.

This just brings us back again to the lesson we learned when Jesus, prior to telling us to "*believe that we receive what we ask for*", first said, "*Have faith in God.*" (Mark 11:22). It is God, the living God, into whom our faith must strike its roots deep and broad; then it will be strong to remove mountains and cast out demons. "*If you have faith, nothing shall be impossible to you.*" (Mark 17:20). Oh, If we would only give ourselves up to the work God has for us in the world, coming into contact with the mountains and the demons that are to be cast away and cast out, we will understand the need for much faith, and of much prayer, as the only soil in which faith can be cultivated. Christ Jesus is our life. He is the life of our faith too. It is His life in us that makes us strong, and makes us able to simply believe. It is in the dying to self, implied by *much prayer*, and

in closer union to Jesus, that the spirit of faith will come in power. Faith needs prayer for its full growth.

And prayer needs fasting for its full growth: this is the second lesson. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible; fasting, the other, with which we let loose and cast away the visible. In nothing is man more closely connected with the world of sense than in his need of food, and his enjoyment of it. It was the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that was good for food, with which man was tempted and fell in Paradise. It was with bread to be made of stones that Jesus, when he was hungry, was tempted in the wilderness, and in fasting that He triumphed. The body has been redeemed to be a temple of the Holy Spirit. In both body and spirit, and especially, Scripture says, in eating and drinking, that we are to glorify God. It is to be feared that there are many Christians to whom this *eating to the glory of God* has not yet become a spiritual reality. And the first thought suggested by Jesus' words in regard to fasting and prayer, is, that it is only in a life of moderation and abstinence and self-denial that there will be the heart or the strength to pray much.

But then there is also its **more literal meaning**. Sorrow and anxiety cannot eat. Joy celebrates its feasts with eating and drinking. There may come times of intense desire, when it is strongly felt how the body, with its appetites, lawful though they be, still hinder the spirit in its battle with the powers of darkness, and the need is felt of keeping it under control. We are creatures of the senses. Our mind is helped by what comes to us in concrete material form. Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice ourselves, to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God. And He who accepted the fasting and sacrifice of the Son, knows to value and accept and reward with spiritual power the soul that is in this manner ready to give up all for Christ and His kingdom.

And then follows a **still wider application**. Prayer is the reaching out after God and the unseen; fasting, the letting go of all that is of the seen and temporal. While ordinary Christians imagine that all that is not positively forbidden and sinful is lawful to them, and seek to retain as much as possible of this world, with its property, its literature, its enjoyments, the truly consecrated soul is like the soldier who carries only what he needs for the warfare. Laying aside every weight, as well as the easily besetting sin, afraid of entangling himself with the affairs of this life, he seeks to lead a Nazarite life, as one *specially set apart for the Lord* and His service. Without such voluntary separation, even from what is lawful, no one will attain power in prayer. "*This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*"

Disciples of Jesus, who have asked the Master to teach you to pray, come now and accept His lessons. He tells you that *prayer is the path to faith*, strong faith, that can cast out devils. He tells you: "*If you have faith, nothing will be impossible to you.*" Let this glorious promise encourage you to pray much. Is the prize not worth the price? Shall we not give up all to follow Jesus in the path He opens to us here; shall we not, if need be, fast? Shall we not do anything so that neither the body nor the world around hinder us in our great life-work, having communion with our God in

prayer, that we may become men and women of faith, whom He can use in His work of saving the world.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O Lord Jesus, how continually You have to rebuke us for our unbelief! How strange it must appear to You, this terrible incapacity of trusting our Father and His promises. Lord, let Your rebuke, with its searching, "*Because of your unbelief*," sink into the very depths of our hearts, and reveal to us how much of the sin and suffering around us is our fault. And then teach us, Blessed Lord, that there is a place *where faith can be learned and gained*, even in the prayer and fasting that brings us into living and abiding fellowship with Yourself and the Father.

O Saviour! You Yourself are the Author and the Perfecter of our faith. Teach us what it is to let You live in us by Your Holy Spirit. Lord, our efforts and prayers for grace to believe have been so ineffective. We know why it was: we sought for strength in ourselves to be given from You. Holy Jesus, teach us the mystery of Your life in us, and how You, by Your Spirit, undertake to live in us the life of faith and to see to it that our faith will not fail. O let us see that our faith will just be a part of that wonderful prayer-life which You give to those who expect their training for the ministry of intercession, not in word and thought only, but in the holy anointing You give, the inflowing of the Spirit of Your own life. And teach us how, in fasting and prayer, we may grow up to the faith to which nothing shall be impossible. Amen.

Testimony of Johann Blumhardt, a German theologian (1805 – 1880)

At the time when Blumhardt was passing through his terrible conflict with the evil spirits in those who were possessed, and seeking to cast them out by prayer, he often wondered what it was that hindered the answer. One day a friend, to whom he had spoken of his trouble, directed his attention to our Lord's words about fasting. Blumhardt resolved to give himself to fasting, sometimes for more than thirty hours. From reflection and experience he gained the conviction that it is of more importance than is generally thought. He says: "Inasmuch as the fasting is before God, a practical proof that the thing we ask is to us a matter of true and pressing interest, and inasmuch as in a high degree it strengthens the intensity and power of the prayer, and becomes the unceasing practical expression of a prayer without words, I could believe that it would not be without efficacy, especially as the Master's words had reference to a case like the present. I tried it, without telling anyone, and in truth the later conflict was extraordinarily lightened by it. I could speak with much greater restfulness and decision. I did not require to be present with the sick one so long; and I felt that I could influence without being present."

LESSON FOURTEEN

When you stand praying, forgive
Or,
PRAYER AND LOVE

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." Mark 11:25. NKJV.

These words follow immediately after the great prayer-promise, *"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."* (Mark 11:24). We have already seen how the words that preceded that promise, *"Have faith in God,"* taught us that in prayer everything depends upon our relation to God being without any hindrance. These words that follow on it remind us that our relation with fellowmen must be unhindered too. Love to God and love to our neighbour are inseparable. The prayer from a heart, that is either not right with God on the one side, or with men on the other, cannot prevail. Faith and love are essential to each other.

We find that this is a thought to which our Lord frequently gave expression. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5:23-24), when speaking of the sixth commandment, He taught His disciples how impossible acceptable worship to the Father was if everything was not right with the brother: *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."* (Matthew 5:23-24). And so later, when speaking of prayer to God, after having taught us to pray, *"And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors."* (Matthew 6:12), He added at the close of the prayer: *"But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* (Matthew 6:15). At the close of the parable of the unmerciful servant He applies His teaching in the words: *"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."* (Matthew 18:35). And so here, beside the dried-up fig-tree, where He speaks of the wonderful power of faith and the prayer of faith, He all at once, apparently without connection, introduces the thought, *"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."* Mark 11:25. It is as if the Lord had learned during His life at Nazareth and afterwards that disobedience to *the law of love to men* was the great sin, even of people who pray, and the great cause of the weakness of their prayer. And it is as if He wanted to lead us into His own blessed experience that nothing gives such freedom of access and such power in believing as the awareness that we have given ourselves in love and compassion, for those whom God loves.

The first lesson taught here is that of **a forgiving disposition**. We pray, *"Forgive, even as we have been forgiven."* Scripture says, *"forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."* (Eph.4:32). God's full and free forgiveness is to be the rule of ours with other people. Otherwise our reluctant, half-hearted forgiveness, which is not forgiveness at all, will be God's rule with us.

Every prayer rests upon our faith in God's pardoning grace. If God dealt with us according to our sins, not one prayer could be heard. Pardon opens the door to all God's love and blessing. Because God has pardoned all our sin, our prayer can prevail to obtain all we need. The deep sure ground of answer to prayer is God's forgiving love. When it has taken possession of the heart, we pray in faith. But also, when it has taken possession of the heart, we live in love. God's forgiving disposition, revealed in His love to us, becomes a disposition in us. As the power of His forgiving love is poured into and dwelling within us, we forgive even as He forgives.

If there is great and grievous injury or injustice done us, we seek first of all to possess a Godlike disposition; to be kept from a sense of wounded honour, from a desire to maintain our rights, or from rewarding the offender as he has deserved. In the little annoyances of daily life, we are watchful not to excuse the hasty temper, the sharp word, the quick judgment, with the thought that "we mean no harm" or that "we do not keep the anger long". We should not delude ourselves with the thought that it would be too much to expect from feeble human nature, but we should really forgive the way God and Christ do. We must take the command literally, "*forgive, even as God in Christ forgave you.*" The blood that cleanses the conscience from dead works, cleanses from selfishness too. The love it reveals is pardoning love, that takes possession of us and flows through us to others. Our forgiving love to men is the evidence of the reality of God's forgiving love in us, and also the condition of the prayer of faith.

There is a second, more general lesson: our daily life in the world is made ***the test of our interaction with God in prayer.*** How often the Christian, when he comes to pray, does his utmost to cultivate certain frames of mind which he thinks will be pleasing. He does not understand, or forgets, that life does not consist of so many loose pieces, of which now the one, then the other, can be taken up. Life is a whole, and the pious frame of the hour of prayer is judged by God within the complete frame of the ordinary life of which the hour of prayer is but a small part. Not the feeling I call up, but the tone of my life during the day, is God's measurement of what I really am and desire. My drawing near to God is of one fabric with my interaction with people and earth. Failure in the earthly will cause failure in the heavenly. And that is not only when there is the distinct consciousness of anything wrong between my neighbour and myself; but the ordinary current of my thinking and judging, the unloving thoughts and words I allow to pass unnoticed, can hinder my prayer. The effectual prayer of faith comes out from a life given up to the will and the love of God. My prayer is dealt by God, not according to what I try to be when praying, but what I am when not praying.

We may gather these thoughts into a third lesson: In our life with men ***the one thing on which everything depends is love.*** The spirit of forgiveness is the spirit of love. Because God is love, He forgives. It is only when we are dwelling in love that we can forgive as God forgives. In love to our fellow man we have the evidence of love to the Father, the ground of confidence before God, and the assurance that our prayer will be heard (1 John 4:20). "*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth... For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.*" (1 John 3:18, 20-21). Neither faith nor work will profit if we do not have love. It is love that unites

with God, it is love that proves the reality of faith. As essential as the word that precedes the great prayer-promise in Mark 11:24, "*Have faith in God*," is this one that follows it, "*Love your neighbour*." The right relations to the living God above me, and the living people around me, are the conditions of effective prayer.

This love is of special consequence when we labour for and pray for people. We sometimes give ourselves to work for Christ, from zeal for His cause, as we call it, or for our own spiritual health, without giving ourselves in personal self-sacrificing love for those whose souls we seek. No wonder that our faith is feeble and does not conquer. To look on each wretched one, however unlovable he be, in the light of the tender love of Jesus the Shepherd seeking the lost; to see Jesus Christ in him, and to take him up, for Jesus' sake, in a heart that really loves, this is the secret of believing prayer and successful effort. Jesus, in speaking of forgiveness, speaks of love as its root. Just as in the Sermon on the Mount He connected His teaching and promises about prayer with the call to be merciful, as the Father in heaven is merciful (Matt.5:7,9,22,38-48), so we see it here: a loving life is the condition of believing prayer.

It has been said: There is nothing so heart-searching as believing prayer, or even the honest effort to pray in faith. O let us not deflect the knife-edge of that self-examination by thinking that God does not hear our prayer for reasons known to Himself alone. By no means. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives." (James 4:3). Let that word of God search us. Let us ask whether our prayer is indeed the expression of a life wholly given over to the will of God and the love of man. Love is the only soil in which faith can strike its roots and thrive. As it throws its arms up, and opens its heart heavenward, the Father always looks to see if it has also opened them towards the evil and the unworthy too. Only in that love, not the love of perfect attainment, but the love of fixed purpose and sincere obedience, can faith alone obtain the blessing. It is he who gives himself to let the love of God dwell in him, and who in the practice of daily life gives himself to love as God loves, who will have the power to believe in the Love that hears his every prayer. It is the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne with His suffering and forbearing love that prevails with God in prayer. The merciful shall obtain mercy; the meek shall inherit the earth.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Father! You are Love, and only he that abides in love abides in You and in fellowship with You. The Blessed Son has this day again taught me how deeply true this is of my fellowship with You in prayer. O my God, let Your love, poured into my heart by the Holy Spirit, be in me a fountain of love to all around me, that out of a life of love may spring the power of believing prayer. O my Father, grant by the Holy Spirit that this may be my experience, that a life in the love to all around me is the gate to a life in the love of my God. And especially grant me to find in the joy with which I day by day forgive anyone who might offend me, the proof that Your forgiveness to me is power and life.

Lord Jesus, my Blessed Teacher, teach me to forgive and to love. Let the power of Your blood make the pardon of my sins such a reality, that forgiveness, as shown by You to me, and by me to

others, may be the very joy of heaven. Show me if there is anything in my interaction with fellowmen that might hinder my fellowship with God, so that my daily life in my own home and in society may be the school in which strength and confidence are gathered for the prayer of faith. Amen.

LESSON FIFTEEN

"If two agree"

Or,

THE POWER OF UNITED PRAYER

"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:19-20). NKJV.

One of the first lessons of our Lord in His school of prayer was that prayer was not a show for people to see. Enter your private room and be alone with the Father. After teaching us that the meaning of prayer is personal individual contact with God, He comes with a second lesson: You have need not only of secret solitary, but also of public united prayer. And He gives us a very special promise for the united prayer of two or three who agree in what they ask. As a tree has its root hidden in the ground and its stem growing up into the sunlight, so prayer in a similar way needs to fully develop in both the hidden secrecy in which the soul meets God alone, and the public fellowship with those who find their common meeting-place in the name of Jesus.

The reason why this must be so is plain. The bond that unites a man to his fellow-men is no less real and close than that which unites him to God: he is one with them. Grace renews not only our relation to God but to man too. We not only learn to say *My Father*, but *Our Father*. Nothing would be more unnatural than that the children of a family should always meet their father separately, but never in the united expression of their desires or their love. Believers are not only members of one family, but even of one body. Just as each member of the body depends on the other, and the full action of the spirit dwelling in the body depends on the union and co-operation of all, so Christians cannot reach the full blessing God is ready to bestow through His Spirit, except when they seek and receive it in fellowship with each other. It is in the union and fellowship of believers that the Spirit can manifest His full power. It was to the hundred and twenty continuing in one place together, and praying with one accord, that the Spirit came from the throne of the glorified Lord.

The marks of true united prayer are given us in these words of our Lord. The first is **agreement** as to the thing asked. There must not only be general consent to agree with anything another may ask: there must be some special thing, matter of distinct united desire; the agreement must be, as all prayer, in spirit and in truth. In such agreement it will become very clear to us what exactly we are asking, whether we may confidently ask according to God's will, and whether we are ready to believe that we have received what we ask.

The second mark is the gathering **in**, or into, **the Name of Jesus**. We shall afterwards have much more to learn of the need and the power of the Name of Jesus in prayer; here our Lord teaches us that the Name must be the central point to which believers gather, the bond of union that makes them one, just as a home contains and unites all who are in it. *"The name of the LORD is a strong*

tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." (Prov.18:10) That Name is such a reality to those who understand and believe it, that to meet within it is to have Himself present. The love and unity of His disciples have an infinite attraction to Jesus: *"Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there am I in the midst of them."* It is the living presence of Jesus, in the fellowship of His loving praying disciples, that gives united prayer its power.

The third mark is, the **sure answer**: *"It will be done for them by my Father in heaven."* A prayer-meeting for maintaining religious fellowship, or seeking our own edification, may have its use; this was not the Saviour's reason for recommending it. He meant it as a means of securing special answer to prayer. A prayer meeting without recognised answer to prayer ought to be an exception to the rule. When any of us have distinct desires in regard to which we feel too weak to exercise the needful faith, we ought to seek strength in the help of others. In the unity of faith and of love and of the Spirit, the power of the Name and the Presence of Jesus acts more freely and the answer comes more surely. The mark that there has been true united prayer is the fruit, the answer, the receiving of the thing we have asked: *Again I say unto you: "It will be done for them by my Father in heaven."* What an extraordinary privilege united prayer is, and what potential power it holds! O, who can say what blessing might be gained by those who in this way agree to trust God to fulfil His promise.

- If the believing husband and wife knew that they were joined together in the Name of Jesus to experience His presence and power in united prayer (1 Peter);
- if friends were aware what mighty help two or three praying in concert could give each other;
- if in every prayer meeting the coming together in the Name, the faith in the Presence, and the expectation of the answer, stood in the foreground;
- if in every church united effective prayer were regarded as one of the chief purposes for which they are banded together, the highest exercise of their power as a Church;
- if in the universal church the coming of the kingdom, the coming of the King Himself, first in the mighty outpouring of His Holy Spirit, then in His own glorious person, were really matter of unceasing united crying to God.

The apostle Paul had great faith in the power of united prayer. To the Romans he wrote: *"Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,"* (Rom.15:30). He expected, in answer to their united prayer, to be delivered from his enemies, and to prosper in his work. To the Corinthians he declared: *"you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many."* (2 Cor.1:11). Their prayer was to have a real share in his deliverance. To the Ephesians he wrote: *"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, ... for all the saints— and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,"* (Eph.6:18-19). His power and success in his ministry depended on their prayers. With the Philippians he expected that his trials will turn to his deliverance and the progress of the gospel through their prayers: *"For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,"* (Philippians 1:19). When telling the Colossians to continue steadfast in prayer he added:

"meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains," (Col.4:3). And to the Thessalonians he wrote: "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you," (2 Thess.3:1).

It is everywhere evident that Paul felt himself a member of a body, whose sympathy and co-operation he depended on. He counted on the prayers of these churches to gain for him, what otherwise might not be given. The prayers of the church were to him as real a factor in the work of the kingdom, as the power of God.

Who can say what power a church could develop and exercise, if it gave itself to the work of prayer day and night for the coming of the kingdom, for God's power on His servants and His word, for the glorifying of God in the salvation of souls? Most churches think their members are gathered together simply to take care of and build each other up. They don't know that God rules the world by the prayers of His saints; that prayer is the power by which Satan is conquered; that by prayer the church on earth has access to the powers of the heavenly world. They do not remember that Jesus has, by His promise, consecrated every assembly in His Name to be a gate of heaven, where His Presence is to be felt, and His Power experienced in the Father fulfilling their desires.

We cannot sufficiently thank God for the blessed week of united prayer, with which Christendom in our days opens every year. It is of unspeakable value, as proof of our unity and our faith in the power of united prayer, as a training-school for the enlargement of our hearts to take in all the needs of the church worldwide and as a help to united persevering prayer. But it has been a special blessing as a stimulus to continued union in prayer in the smaller circles. When God's people realise what it means to meet as one in the name of Jesus, with his presence in the midst of a body united in the Holy Spirit, they will boldly claim the promise that it shall be done of the Father what they agree to ask.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord, You ask so earnestly in your high-priestly prayer for the unity of Your people. Teach us how You invite and urge us to this unity by Your precious promise given to united prayer. Show us that when we are one in love and desire, our faith has Your presence and the Father's answer.

O Father, we pray for Your people, and for every smaller circle of those who meet together, that they may be one. Remove, we pray, all selfishness and self-interest, all narrowness of heart and estrangement, that hinders that unity. Cast out the spirit of the world and the flesh, through which Your promise loses all its power. O let the thought of Your presence and the Father's favour draw all of us nearer to each other.

Grant especially, blessed Lord, that Your church may believe that it is by the power of united prayer that she can bind and loose in heaven; that Satan can be cast out; that souls can be saved;

that mountains can be removed; that the coming of the kingdom can be hastened. And grant, good Lord, that in my prayer circle, the prayer of the church may indeed be the power through which Your Name and Word are glorified. Amen.

LESSON SIXTEEN

Speedily, though bearing long
Or,
THE POWER OF PERSEVERING PRAYER

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' " Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8). NKJV.

Of all the mysteries of the prayer world, the need of persevering prayer is one of the greatest. We cannot easily understand that the Lord, who is so loving and longing to bless, should have to be petitioned time after time, sometimes year after year, before the answer comes. It is also one of the greatest practical difficulties in the exercise of believing prayer. When, after persevering supplication, our prayer remains unanswered, it is often easiest for our lazy flesh, maintaining its appearance of pious submission, to think that we must now cease praying, because God may have His secret reason for withholding His answer to our request. It is by faith alone that the difficulty is overcome. When once faith has taken its stand upon God's word, and the Name of Jesus, and has yielded itself to the leading of the Spirit to seek God's will and honour alone in its prayer, it need not be discouraged by delay. It knows from Scripture that the power of believing prayer is simply irresistible; real faith can never be disappointed.

Faith knows how, just as water must be gathered up and accumulated until the stream can come down in full force with irresistible power, there must often be a heaping up of prayer, until God sees that the measure is full, and the answer comes. Just as the farmer has to prepare his land and sow his ten thousand seeds, each one a part of the preparation for the final harvest, so there is need for often repeated persevering prayer, all working out some desired blessing. Every single believing prayer has its effect in heaven, without failure, and it is treasured up to work out an answer in due time to him who perseveres to the end. It has nothing to do with human thoughts or possibilities, but with the word of the living God. Abraham, for so long and through so many years, "*contrary to hope, in hope believed*" (Rom.4:18) and then through "*through faith and patience inherited the promises.*" (Heb.6:12). It shows that the patient delay of the Lord is salvation, waiting and hurrying until the coming of its Lord to fulfil His promise.

When the answer to our prayer does not come at once, and to enable us to combine quiet patience and joyful confidence in our persevering prayer, we must specially try to understand the two words in which our Lord sets forth the character and conduct, not of the unjust judge, but of

our God and Father towards those whom He allows to cry day and night to Him. Will He delay to help them? "*He will avenge them speedily.*"

He will avenge them speedily, the Master says. The blessing is all prepared. He is not only willing but most anxious to give them what they ask. His everlasting love burns with the longing desire to reveal itself fully to his beloved, and to satisfy their needs. God will not delay one moment longer than is absolutely necessary. He will do all in His power to have and speed the answer.

But why, if this is true and His power is infinite, does it often take so long with the answer to prayer? And why must God's own elect so often, in the midst of suffering and conflict, cry day and night? "*He is patient with you.*" (2Pet.3:9). Therefore brothers be patient until the Lord's coming. Look at the farmer who waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and is patient with it "*until it receives the early and the late rains.*" (James 5:7). The farmer does indeed long for his harvest, but knows that it must have its full time of sunshine and rain, and has long patience. A child so often wants to pick the half-ripe fruit but the farmer knows to wait until the proper time.

Man, in his spiritual nature too, is under the law of gradual growth that reigns in all created life. It is only in the path of development that he can reach his divine destiny. And it is the Father, in whose hands are the times and seasons, who alone knows the moment when the soul or the church is ripened to that fullness of faith in which it can really take and keep the blessing. As a father who longs to have his only child home from school, and yet waits patiently till the time of training is completed, so it is with God and His children: He is the long-suffering One, and answers speedily.

Insight into this truth should lead the believer to cultivate the corresponding attitudes: patience and faith, waiting and having, are the secrets of his perseverance. By faith in the promise of God, we know that we have the petitions we have asked of Him. Faith takes and holds the answer in the promise, as an unseen spiritual possession, rejoices in it, and praises for it. But there is a difference between the faith that holds the word like this and knows that it has the answer, and the clearer, fuller, riper faith that obtains the promise as a present experience. It is in persevering, not unbelieving, but confident and praising prayer, that the soul grows up into that full union with its Lord in which it can enter upon the possession of the blessing in Him.

There may be things around us, in that great system of being of which we are part, in God's government, that have to be corrected through our prayer, before the answer can fully come. The faith that has, according to the command, believed that it has received, can allow God to take His time. It knows it has prevailed and must prevail. In quiet, persistent, and determined perseverance it continues in prayer and thanksgiving until the blessing come. And so we see a combination of what at first sight appeared so contradictory; the faith that rejoices in the answer of the unseen God as a present possession, combined with the patience that cries day and night until it be revealed. The *speedily* of God's patience is met by the triumphant but patient faith of His waiting child.

The great danger in this lesson of delayed answer is the temptation to think that, after all, it may not be God's will to give us what we ask. If our prayers are according to God's word, and under the leading of the Spirit, let us not give way to these fears.

Let us learn to give God time. God needs time with us. If we only give Him time, that is, time in the daily fellowship with Himself, for Him to exercise the full influence of His presence on us; and time, day by day, as we are kept waiting, it is necessary that faith be given time to prove its reality and to fill our beings entirely. God Himself will lead us from faith to vision; we shall see the glory of God.

Don't let delay shake our faith. Look at the faith of the farmer: *"For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head."* (Mark 4:28). Each believing prayer brings a step nearer to the final victory. Each believing prayer helps to ripen the fruit and bring us nearer to it; it fills up the measure of prayer and faith known to God alone; it conquers the hindrances in the unseen world; it hastens the end. Child of God, give the Father time. He is patient with you. He wants the blessing to be rich, and full, and sure; give Him time, while you cry day and night. Only remember the word: *"I tell you, He will avenge them speedily."*

The blessing of such persevering prayer is indescribable. There is nothing so heart-searching as the prayer of faith. It teaches you to discover and confess, and give up everything that hinders the coming of the blessing, everything that may be not in accordance with the Father's will. It leads to closer fellowship with Him who alone can teach to pray, to a more complete surrender to the covering of the blood and the Spirit. It calls for a closer and more simple abiding in Christ alone. Christian, give God time. He will perfect that which concerns you (Ps.138:8). *"Patient delay, speedily,"* this is God's watchword as you enter the gates of prayer. May it be yours too.

Let your attitude be the same whether you pray for yourself, or for others. All labour, bodily or mental, needs time and effort. We must give ourselves up to it. Nature discloses her secrets and yields her treasures only to diligent and thoughtful labour. However little we can understand it, in the spiritual husbandry it is the same: the seed we sow in the soil of heaven, the efforts we put forth, and the influence we seek to exert in the world above, need our whole being. We must surrender ourselves completely in prayer. But let us hold on tightly to our confidence, that in due season we shall reap, if we do not give up.

Let us especially learn this lesson as we pray for the church of Christ. She is indeed like the poor widow, in the absence of her Lord, apparently at the mercy of her adversary, helpless to correct the situation. When we pray for His Church or any portion of it, under the power of the world, let us ask Him to visit her with the mighty workings of His Spirit and to prepare her for His coming. Let us pray with confident faith: prayer does help, praying always and not giving up will bring the answer. Only give God time. And then keep crying day and night. Hear what the unrighteous judge said. *"And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry to Him day and night, and He is long-suffering over them. I say unto you, He will avenge them speedily."*

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O Lord my God, teach me how to know Your way, and in faith to grasp what Your Beloved Son has taught: "*He will avenge them speedily.*" Let Your tender love, and the delight You have in hearing and blessing Your children, lead me implicitly to accept Your promise, that we receive what we believe, that we have the petitions we ask, and that the answer will be seen in due time. Lord, we understand nature's season, and know to patiently wait for the fruit we desire. O, fill us with the assurance that You won't delay one moment longer than is needed, and that faith will have the answer.

Blessed Master, You have said that it is a sign of God's elect that they cry day and night. O teach us to understand this. You know how quickly we become weak and tired. Perhaps we feel that the divine majesty of the Father is so far beyond the need or the reach of continued supplication, that we do not want to be too persistent. O Lord, teach me how real the labour of prayer is! I know how here on earth, when I have failed in an undertaking, I can often succeed by renewed and more continuing effort, by giving more time and thought. Show me how, by giving myself more entirely to prayer, to live in prayer, I shall obtain what I have asked for.

And above all, O my blessed Teacher, Author and Perfecter of my faith, by your grace, let my whole life be one of faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. You in whom my prayer gains acceptance, in whom I have the assurance of the answer, in whom the answer will be mine. Lord Jesus, in this faith I will pray always and not faint. Amen.

Author's note

The need of persevering importunate prayer appears to some to be at variance with the faith which knows that it has received what it asks (Mark 11:24). One of the mysteries of the divine life is the harmony between the gradual and the sudden, the immediate full possession and the slow imperfect appropriation. Here persevering prayer appears to be the school in which the soul is strengthened for the boldness of faith. Considering the diversity of operations of the Spirit there may be some in whom faith takes the form of persistent waiting; while to others, triumphant thanksgiving appears the only proper expressions of the assurance of having been heard.

In a remarkable way the need of persevering prayer, and the gradual rising into greater ease in obtaining answer, is illustrated in the life of Johann Blumhardt (*a German theologian (1805 – 1880)*). Complaints had been lodged against him of neglecting his work as a minister of the gospel, and devoting himself to the healing of the sick; and especially his unauthorized healing of the sick belonging to other congregations. In his defence he wrote: "I simply ventured to do what one who has the charge of souls must do, and to pray according to the command of the Lord in James 1:6-7. In no way did I trust in my own power, or imagine that I had any gift that others had not. But this is true, I set myself to the work as a minister of the gospel, who has a right to pray. But I speedily discovered that the gates of heaven were not fully opened to me. Often I was inclined to retire in despair. But the sight of the sick ones, who could not find help anywhere else, gave me no rest. I

thought of the word of the Lord: "*Ask, and it shall be given you*" (Luke 11:9-10). And beyond that, I thought that if the church and her ministers had, through unbelief, laziness, and disobedience lost what was needed for overcoming of the power of Satan, it was just for such times of leanness and famine that the Lord had spoken the parable of the friend at midnight and his three loaves. I felt that I was not worthy in this manner at midnight, in a time of great darkness, to appear before God as His friend and ask for a member of my congregation what he needed. And yet I could not leave him uncared for, either.

And so I kept knocking, as the parable directs, or, as some have said, with great presumption and tempting God. Be this as it may, I could not leave my guest unprovided. At this time the parable of the widow became very precious to me. I saw that the church was the widow, and I was a minister of the church. I had the right to be her mouthpiece against the adversary; but for a long time the Lord would not listen. I asked nothing more than the three loaves; what I needed for my guest. At last the Lord listened to the persistent beggar, and helped me. Was it wrong of me to pray like this? The two parables must surely be applicable somewhere, and where was greater need to be conceived?

And what was the fruit of my prayer? The Friend who was at first unwilling, did not say, Go now; I will myself give to your friend what he needs; I do not require you; but gave it to me as His friend, to give to my guest. And so I used the three loaves, and had to spare. But the supply was small, and new guests came; because they saw I had a heart to help them, and that I would take the trouble even at midnight to go to my Friend. When I asked for them, too, I got what was needed again, and there was again to spare. How could I help that the needy continually came to my house? Was I to harden myself, and say, Why do you come to me? There are large and better homes in the city, go there. Their answer was, dear sir, we cannot go there. We have been there: they were very sorry to send us away so hungry, but they could not undertake to go and ask a friend for what we wanted. Do go, and get us bread for we suffer great pain. What could I do? They spoke the truth, and their suffering touched my heart. However much labour it cost me, I went each time again, and got the three loaves. Often I got what I asked much quicker than at first, and also much more abundantly. But all did not care for this bread, so some left my home hungry."

In his first struggles with the evil spirits, it took him more than eighteen months of prayer and labour before the final victory was gained. Afterwards he had such ease of access to the throne, and stood in such close communication with the unseen world, that often, when letters came asking prayer for sick people, he could, after just looking upward for a single moment, obtain the answer as to whether they would be healed. – *From: Johann Christophe Blumhardt, His life and work, by F. Etindel.*

LESSON SEVENTEEN

I know that You hear me always

Or,

PRAYER IN HARMONY WITH THE BEING OF GOD

And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." (John 11:41-42)

"I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You...' (Psalms 2:7-8)

In the New Testament we find a distinction made between faith and knowledge. *"For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit," (1 Cor.12:8-9).* In a child or a simple-minded Christian there may be much faith with little knowledge. Childlike simplicity accepts the truth without difficulty, and often cares little to give itself or others any reason for its faith but this: God has said. But it is the will of God that we should love and serve Him, not only with the whole heart but also with the whole mind. It is his will that we should grow up into an insight into the divine wisdom and beauty of all His ways and words and works. It is only in this way that the believer will be able fully to approach and to rightly adore the glory of God's grace. And only in this manner that our heart can intelligently grasp the treasures of wisdom and knowledge there are in redemption, and be prepared to enter fully into the highest note of the song that rises before the throne: *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom.11:33).*

This truth has its full application in our prayer life. While prayer and faith are so simple that the new-born convert can pray with power, honest Christian analysis finds in the doctrine of prayer some of its deepest problems. In how far is the power of prayer a reality? If so, how can God grant to prayer such mighty power? How can the action of prayer be harmonized with the will and the decrees of God? How can God's sovereignty and our will, God's liberty and ours, be reconciled? These and other similar questions are fit subjects for Christian meditation and inquiry. The more earnestly and reverently we approach such mysteries, the more will we in adoring wonder fall down to praise Him who has given such power to man in prayer.

One of the secret difficulties with regard to prayer is derived from the perfection of God, His absolute independence of all that is outside of Himself. This thought is seldom expressed but is often hindering prayer. Is He not the Infinite Being, who owes what He is to Himself alone, who determines Himself, and whose wise and holy will has determined all that is to be? How can prayer influence Him? How can He be moved by prayer to do what He otherwise wouldn't have done? Isn't the promise of an answer to prayer simply a condescension to our weakness? Is the power, the much-availing power of prayer anything more than an accommodation to our way of

thinking, because the Deity never can be dependent on any action outside of Himself for his plans? And isn't the real blessing of prayer simply the influence it exerts on us?

In seeking an answer to such questions, we find the key in the very being of God, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. If God was only one Person, enclosed within Himself, there could be no thought of nearness to Him or influence on Him. But in God there are three Persons. In God we have Father and Son, who have in the Holy Spirit their living bond of unity and fellowship. When eternal Love gave birth to the Son, and the Father gave the Son as the Second Person a place next Himself as his equal and his counsellor, He opened a way for prayer and its influence in the very inmost life of Deity itself. On earth, just as in heaven, the whole relationship between Father and Son is that of giving and taking. And if that taking is to be as voluntary and self-determined as the giving, the Son must ask and receive. "*The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You...'*" (Psalm 2:7-8). In the holy fellowship of the divine Persons, this asking of the Son was one of the great strategies of the blessed life of the Triune God.

The Father gave the Son the place and the power to influence Him. The asking of the Son wasn't just for show or shadow. It was one of those life movements in which the love of the Father and the Son met and completed each other. The Father had determined that He would not be alone in His counsels: their fulfilment would depend on the Son's asking and receiving. And so there was in the very Being and Life of God an asking of which prayer on earth was to be the reflection and the outflow. It was with this in mind that Jesus said, "*And I know that You always hear Me,*" (John 11:42). Just as the Sonship of Jesus on earth cannot be separated from His Sonship in heaven, so His prayer on earth is the continuation and the counterpart of His asking in heaven. The prayer of the man Christ Jesus is the link between the eternal asking of the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father and the prayer of people upon earth. Prayer has its rise and its deepest source in the very Being of God. In the bosom of the Deity nothing is ever done without prayer: the asking of the Son and the giving of the Father. (See Author's note at the end of the chapter).

This may help us somewhat to understand how the prayer of man, coming through the Son, can affect God. The decrees of God are not decisions made by Him without reference to the Son, or His petitions, or the petitions to be sent up through Him. By no means. The Lord Jesus is the firstborn, the Head and Heir of all things. All things were created through Him and to Him. All things consist in Him. In the counsels of the Father, the Son, as representative of all creation, always had a voice. In the decrees of the eternal purpose there was always room left for the liberty of the Son as Mediator and Intercessor. The same holds true for the petitions of all who draw near to the Father in the Son.

And if the thought comes that this liberty and power of the Son to influence the Father is inconsistent with the immutability of the divine decrees, let us remember that God does not have a past, like man does, by which He is irrevocably bound. God does not live in time with its past and future. The distinctions of time have no reference to Him who inhabits eternity. Eternity is an ever-present Now, in which the past is never past, and the future is always present. To allow for our human limitations of understanding, Scripture must speak of past decrees, and a coming

future. In reality, the unchanging nature of God's counsel is still always in perfect harmony with His liberty to do whatever He wills. The prayers of the Son and His people do not affect the eternal decrees in a superficial way. The Father's heart holds itself open and free to listen to every prayer that rises through the Son, and God does indeed allow Himself to be influenced by prayer to do what He otherwise would not have done.

This perfect harmony and union of divine sovereignty and human liberty is to us an unfathomable mystery, because God as **the Eternal One** is beyond all our comprehension. But let it be our comfort and strength to be assured that in the eternal fellowship of the Father and the Son, the power of prayer has its origin and certainty, and that through our union with the Son, our prayer is taken up and can have its influence in the inner life of the blessed Trinity. God's decrees are no iron framework against which man's liberty would vainly seek to struggle. No. God Himself is the living love, who in His Son who became flesh, has entered into the tenderest relationship with all that is human. Through the Holy Spirit He takes up all that is human into the divine life of love, leaving Himself free to give every human prayer its place in His government of the world.

It is in the light of such thoughts that the doctrine of the blessed Trinity no longer is an abstract speculation, but the living manifestation of the way in which it is possible for man to be taken up into the fellowship of God, and his prayer to become a real factor in God's rule of this earth. And we can, as though from afar, catch glimpses of the light that shines from the eternal world on words such as these: *"For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father."* (Eph.2:18)

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Everlasting God, the Three-One, in deep reverence and with unveiled face I worship before the holy mystery of your divine Being. If it pleases You, O most glorious God, reveal some of that mystery to me, I would bow with fear and trembling, lest I sin against You, as I meditate on Your glory.

Father, I thank You that You bear this name not only as the Father of Your children here on earth, but as having existed from eternity as the Father with Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. I thank You that as Father You can hear our prayer, because You have from eternity given a place in Your counsels to the requests of Your Son. I thank You that we have seen in Him on earth, what the blessed interaction He had with You in heaven, and how from eternity there has always been room in all Your counsels and decrees for His prayer and their answers. I thank You above all that through His human nature on Your throne above, and through Your Holy Spirit in our human nature here below, a way has been opened up by which every human cry of need can be received into and touch the life and the love of God, and receive an answer in whatever it asks.

Blessed Jesus, as the Son you have opened a path of prayer for us, and gives us assurance of the answer. We beg You, teach your people to pray. O let this daily be the sign of our sonship, that, like You, we know that the Father always hears us. Amen.

Author's note.

"*God hears prayer.*" This simplest view of prayer is taken throughout Scripture. It does not dwell on the influence of prayer on our heart and life, but makes the connection between prayer as an act, and prayer as a state. It determines with great certainty the objective or real purposes of prayer, to obtain blessing, gifts, deliverances from God. "*Ask and it shall be given*" Jesus says.

However true and valuable the reflection may be, that God, foreseeing and foreordaining all things, has also foreseen and foreordained our prayers as links in the chain of events, of cause and effect, as a real power, we sometimes are not yet convinced in our minds or at peace with this subject. Nor do we think that here is the attractive power to draw us in prayer. We feel rather that such a reflection diverts the attention from the object from which comes the impulse, life, and strength of prayer, the living God, contemporary and not merely eternal, the living, merciful, holy One. God manifesting Himself to the soul, and saying, "*Seek my face,*" is the magnet that draws us, that alone can open heart and lips in prayer.

"In Jesus Christ the Son of God we have the full solution of the difficulty. He prayed on earth, and that not merely as man, but as the Son of God incarnate. His prayer on earth is only the manifestation of His prayer from all eternity, when in the divine counsel He was set up as the Christ..." The Son was appointed to be heir of all things. From all eternity the Son of God was the Way, the Mediator. He was, to use our imperfect language, "from eternity speaking unto the Father on behalf of the world." - *SAPHIR, The Hidden Life, chapter 6.*

LESSON EIGHTEEN

Whose is this image?

Or,

PRAYER IN HARMONY WITH THE DESTINY OF MAN

"And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" (Matthew 22:20)

"Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness."" (Genesis 1:26)

"Whose image is this?" It was by this question that Jesus frustrated His enemies, when they thought they could trap Him, and settled the matter of duty in regard to the temple tax. The question and the principle it involves are universally applicable, nowhere more truly than in man himself. The image he bears decides his destiny. Bearing God's image, he belongs to God. Prayer to God is what he was created for. Prayer is part of the amazing likeness he bears to his Creator. Prayer is the earthly image and likeness of the deep mystery of the fellowship of love in which the Trinity has His blessedness.

The more we meditate on what prayer is, and the wonderful power it has with God, the more we feel constrained to ask who and what man is, that such a place in God's counsels should have been allotted to him. Sin has so degraded him, that from what he is now we can form no conception of what he was meant to be. We must turn back to God's own record of man's creation to discover there what God's purpose was, and what the capacities are with which man was endowed for the fulfilment of that purpose.

Man's destiny appears clearly from God's language at creation. It was to fill, to subdue, to have dominion over the earth and all in it. All three these expressions show us that man was meant, as God's representative, to rule here on earth. As God's representative he was to fill God's place. Since he himself was subject to God, he was to keep all else in subjection to Him. It was the will of God that all that was to be done on earth should be done through man. The history of the earth was to be entirely in his hands.

The position he was to occupy, and the power at his disposal were in accordance with such a destiny. When an earthly sovereign sends a representative or ambassador to a distant province, it is understood that the sovereign advises his representative as to the policy to be adopted, and that the advice is acted on. That representative is at liberty to apply for troops and the other means needed for carrying out the policy or maintaining the dignity of the empire. If his policy is not approved of, he is recalled to make way for someone who better understands his sovereign's desires. As long as he is trusted, his advice is carried out.

As God's representative man should have ruled; all was meant to be done under his will and rule; on his advice and at his request heaven should have bestowed its blessing on earth. His prayer should have been the wonderful, though simple and most natural channel, in which the interaction between the King in heaven and His faithful servant man, as lord of this world, should

have been maintained. The destinies of the world were given into the power of the wishes, the will and the prayer of man.

With the advent of sin all this underwent a terrible change. Man's fall brought all creation under the curse. With redemption the beginning was seen of a glorious restoration. No sooner had God begun in Abraham to form for Himself a people from whom kings, yes the Great King, should come forth, than we see what power the prayer of God's faithful servant has, to decide the destinies of those who come into contact with him. In Abraham we see how prayer is not only, or even chiefly, the means of obtaining blessing for ourselves, but is the exercise of his royal prerogative to influence the destinies of men, and the will of God which rules them. We do not once find Abraham praying for himself. His prayer for Sodom and Lot, for Abimelech, for Ishmael, prove what power a man, who is God's friend, has to shape the history of those around him.

This had been man's destiny from the first. Scripture not only tells us this, but also teaches us how it was that God could entrust man with such a high calling. It was because He had created him in His own image and likeness. The external authority was not committed to him without the inner fitness. Man bearing God's image in having dominion, in being lord of all, had its root in the inner likeness, in his nature. There was an inner agreement and harmony between God and man, an embryonic Godlikeness, which gave man a real fitness for being the mediator between God and His world. He was to be prophet, priest, and king, to interpret God's will, to represent nature's needs, to receive and dispense God's bounty. It was in bearing God's image that he could bear God's rule. He was indeed so like God, so capable of entering into God's purposes, and carrying out His plans, that God could trust him with the wonderful privilege of asking and obtaining what the world might need. And although sin has for a time frustrated God's plans, prayer still remains what it would have been if man had never fallen: the proof of man's Godlikeness, the vehicle of his interaction with the Infinite Unseen One, the power that is allowed to hold the hand that holds the destinies of the universe. Prayer is not merely the cry of the petitioner for mercy; it is the highest execution of God's will by man, knowing himself to be of divine origin, created for and capable of being, in king-like liberty, the executor of the counsels of the Eternal.

What sin destroyed, grace has restored. What the first Adam lost, the second has won back. In Christ man regains his original position, and the Church, abiding in Christ, inherits the promise: *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."* (John 15:7). Such a promise does by no means, in the first place, refer to the grace or blessing we need for ourselves. It has reference to our position as the fruit-bearing branches of the Heavenly Vine, who, like Him, only live for the work and glory of the Father. It is for those who abide in Him, who have forsaken self to take up their abode in Him with His life of obedience and self-sacrifice, who have lost their life and found it in Him, who are now entirely given up to the interests of the Father and His kingdom. It is these who understand how their new creation has brought them back to their original destiny, has restored God's image and likeness, and with it the power to have dominion.

Such people indeed have the power, each in their own circle, to obtain and dispense the powers of heaven here on earth. With holy boldness they may make known what they will. They live as priests in God's presence. As kings, the powers of the world yet to come, begin to be at their disposal. (See note at end of chapter). They enter upon the fulfilment of the promise: *"Ask whatever you desire, and it will be done for you."*

Church of the living God! Your calling is higher and holier than you know. Through your members, as kings, and priests unto God, God wants to rule the world. Your prayers bestow and withhold the blessing of heaven. God wants to prove how wonderful man's original destiny was through His elect, who are not just content to be themselves saved, but yield themselves wholly to God. So that through them, even as through the Son, the Father may fulfil all His glorious counsel, in these His elect, who cry day and night unto Him. As the image-bearer of God on earth, the earth was indeed given into man's hand. When he fell, all fell with him. The whole creation groans and travails in pain together.

But now man is redeemed and the restoration of the original dignity has begun. It is God's purpose that the fulfilment of His eternal purpose, and the coming of His kingdom, should depend on His people. They abide in Christ and are ready to take up their position in Him as their Head, the great Priest-King, and in their prayers are bold enough to say what they will that their God should do. As image-bearer and representative of God on earth, redeemed man has to determine the history of the earth by his prayers. Man was created, and has now again been redeemed, to pray, and by his prayer to have dominion.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

"What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honour. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet...O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!" (Psalms 8:4-6,9)

Lord God, man has sunk so low because of sin. His mind has been terribly darkened, so that he does not even know his divine destiny, to be Your servant and representative. How sad it is, that even Your people are so unready to accept their calling and to seek to have power with God, so that they may also have power with men to bless them. This is often true even when their eyes are opened.

Lord Jesus! It is in You that the Father has crowned man again with glory and honour, and opened the way for us to be what He wants us to be. O Lord, have mercy on Your people, and visit Your heritage! Work mightily in us Your Church. Teach us, your royal priesthood, to use the power of prayer, to which You have given such wonderful promises, to serve your kingdom, to rule over the nations, and make the name of God glorious in the earth. Amen.

God is seeking priests among the sons of men. A human priesthood is one of the essential parts of His eternal plan. To rule creation by man is His design. To carry on the worship of creation by man is no less part of His design. Priesthood is the appointed link between heaven and earth, the channel of interaction between the sinner and God. Such a priesthood, in so far as punishment is concerned, is in the hands of the Son of God alone. In so far as it is to be the medium of communication between Creator and creature, is also in the hands of redeemed people, of the Church of God. God is seeking kings. Not out of the ranks of angels. Fallen man must supply Him with the rulers of His universe. Human hands must wield the sceptre, human heads must wear the crown. – ***The Rent Veil***, by Dr. H. Bonar.

LESSON NINETEEN

I go unto the Father!

Or,

POWER FOR PRAYING AND WORKING

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (John 14:12-13)

As the Saviour opened His public ministry among His disciples with the Sermon on the Mount, so He closes it by the parting address preserved to us by John. In both He speaks more than once of prayer. But with a difference. In the Sermon on the Mount it is as to disciples who have only just entered His school, who scarcely know that God is their Father, and whose prayer chiefly has reference to their personal needs. In His closing address He speaks to disciples whose training time has now come to an end, and who are ready as His messengers to take His place and His work. In the former the chief lesson is: **Be childlike, pray believingly, and trust the Father** that He will give you all good gifts. Here He points to something higher: They are now His **friends** to whom He has made known all that He has heard of the Father; His **messengers**, who have entered into His plans, and into whose hands the care of His work and kingdom on earth is **to be entrusted**. They are now to go out and do His works, and in the power of His approaching glorification, even greater works. Prayer is now to be the channel through which that power is to be received for their work. With Christ's ascension to the Father a new era commences for both their working and praying.

See how clearly this connection comes out in our text. As His body here on earth, as those who are one with Him in heaven, they are now to do greater works than He had done; their success and their victories are to be greater than His. He mentions two reasons for this. The one, because He was to go to the Father, to receive all power; the other, because they might now ask and expect everything in His Name. "**Because I go to My Father,**" – and notice this – "**and whatever you ask in My name, that I will do.**" Note that His going to the Father would bring the double blessing. They would ask and receive everything in His Name, and as a consequence, would do the greater works. This first mention of prayer in our Saviour's parting words thus teaches us two most important lessons. Anyone who wants to do the works of Jesus **must pray** in His Name. Anyone that prays in His Name **must work** in His Name.

He who wants to work **must pray**. It is in prayer that the power for work is obtained. He that in faith wants to do the works that Jesus did, must pray in His Name. As long as Jesus was here on earth, He Himself did the greatest works. Devils that the disciples could not cast out fled at His word. After He went to the Father, He was no longer here on earth bodily to physically do the work. The disciples were now His body. All His work from the throne in heaven must and could be done through them here on earth. One might have thought that now He was leaving the scene Himself, and could only work through representatives, the works might be fewer and weaker. He

assures us of the contrary: "**Most assuredly**, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do." His approaching death was to be a real breaking down and making an end of the power of sin. With the resurrection, the powers of the eternal Life would so fully take possession of the human body and obtain supremacy over human life. With His ascension, He was to receive the power to communicate the Holy Spirit so completely to His own. The union, the oneness between Himself on the throne and those on earth, was to be so intensely and divinely perfect, that He meant it as the literal truth: "*Greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.*" And the issue proved how true it was. While Jesus, during three years of personal labour on earth, gathered little more than five hundred disciples, and the most of them so feeble that they were but little credit to His cause. It was given to men like Peter and Paul to do greater things than He had done. From the throne He could do through them what He Himself in His humble human state could not yet do. But there is one condition: "*He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do.*" His going to the Father would give Him a new power to hear prayer. For the doing of the greater works, two things were needed: **His going to the Father** to receive all power, **our prayer in His Name** to receive all power from Him again. As He asks the Father, He receives and bestows on us the power of the new dispensation for the greater works. As we believe, and ask in His Name, the power comes and takes possession of us to do the greater works.

Sadly, how much work is done as the work of God, in which there is little or nothing to be seen of the power to do anything like Christ's works, to say nothing of greater works. There can be but one reason: the lack of believing on Him and the lack of believing prayer in His Name. O that every labourer and leader in church, or school, in the ministry of local or foreign missions might learn the lesson: **Prayer in the Name of Jesus** is the way to share in the mighty power which Jesus has received of the Father for His people, and it is in this power alone that they who believe can do the greater works. To every complaint of weakness or unfitness, of difficulties or lack of success, Jesus gives this one answer: "**He who believes in Me**, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, **that I will do.**" We must understand that the first and foremost thing for everyone who wants to do the work of Jesus, is to believe, and so to get linked to Him, the Almighty One, and then to pray the prayer of faith in His Name. Without this our work is but human and carnal. It may have some use in restraining sin, or preparing the way for blessing, but the real power is lacking. Effective work first needs effective prayer.

And now the second lesson: He who prays **must work**. It is for power to work that prayer has such great promises. It is through working for Jesus that the power for the effective prayer of faith will be attained. In these parting words of our blessed Lord we find that He no less than six times (John 14:13, 14; 15:7,1; 16:23,24) repeats those unlimited prayer-promises which have so often awakened our anxious questionings as to their real meaning: "**whatever**," "**anything**," "**what you will**," "**ask and you shall receive.**" How many a believer has read these words with joy and hope, and in deep earnestness of soul has sought to plead them for his own need. And he has come out disappointed. The simple reason was this: he had removed the promise from its context. The Lord

gave the wonderful promise of the unrestricted use of His Name with the Father in connection with the doing of His works. It is the disciple who gives himself wholly to live for Jesus' work and kingdom, for His will and honour, to whom the power will come to receive the promise. He that tries to grasp the promise when he wants something very special for himself, will be disappointed, because he would make Jesus the servant of his own comfort. But to him who seeks to pray the effective prayer of faith, because he needs it for the work of the Master, to him it will be given to learn it, because he has made himself the servant of his Lord's interests. Prayer not only teaches and strengthens us to work, work teaches and strengthens us to pray.

This is in perfect harmony with what holds true in both the natural and the spiritual world. Whoever has, to him shall be given; or, He that is faithful in a little, is faithful also in much. Let us with the small measure of grace already received, give ourselves to the Master for His work. Work will be to us a real school of prayer. It was when Moses had to take full charge of a rebellious people that he felt the need, but also the courage, to speak boldly to God and to ask great things of Him (Ex.33:12,15,18). As you give yourself entirely to God for His work, you will feel that nothing less than these great promises are what you need, that nothing less is what you may most confidently expect.

Believer in Jesus, you are called, you are appointed, to do the works of Jesus, and even greater works, because He has gone to the Father to receive the power to do them in and through you. *"Whatever you shall ask in my Name, that will I do."* Give yourself, and live, to do the works of Christ and you will learn to pray so as to obtain wonderful answers to prayer. Give yourself, and live, to pray and you will learn to do the works He did, and greater works. With disciples full of faith in Himself, and bold in prayer to ask great things, Christ can conquer the world.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O my Lord, I have today again heard words from You which are beyond my comprehension. And yet I cannot do anything else but in simple childlike faith take and keep them as Your gift to me too. You have said that because of Your going to the Father, he that believes in You will do the works which You have done, and greater works. Lord, I worship You as the Glorified One, and look for the fulfilment of Your promise. May my whole life be one of continued believing in You. Purify and sanctify my heart, make it so tenderly susceptible to Yourself and your love, that believing in You may be the very life I breathe.

And You have said that because You go to the Father, whatever we ask, You will do. From your throne of power You would make Your people share the power given to You, and work through them as the members of Your body, in response to their believing prayers in Your Name. Power in prayer with You, and power in work with men, is what You have promised Your people and me too.

Blessed Lord, forgive us all that we have believed You and Your promise so little, and so little proved Your faithfulness in fulfilling it. O forgive us that we have so little honoured your all-prevailing Name in heaven or upon earth.

Lord, Teach me to pray so that I may prove that Your Name is indeed all-prevailing with God and men and devils. Yes, teach me to so work and to so pray that You can glorify Yourself in me as the Omnipotent One, and do Your great work through me too. Amen.

LESSON TWENTY

That the Father may be glorified

Or,

THE CHIEF END OF PRAYER

"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."
(John 14:13)

"That the Father may be glorified in the Son." It is to this end that Jesus on His throne in glory will do everything we ask in His Name. Every answer to prayer He gives will have this as its object. When there is no prospect of this object being obtained, He will not answer. It follows as a matter of course, that as with Jesus, this must be the essential element in our petitions. The glory of the Father must be the aim and end, the very soul and life of our prayer.

So it was with Jesus when He was on earth. *"And I do not seek My own glory; "* (John 8:50). *I seek the honour of Him that sent Me.* In words like these we have the keynote of His life. In the first words of the high-priestly prayer He expressed it: "Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,"* (John 17:1). *"I have glorified You on the earth. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself."* (John 17:4-5). The grounds on which He asked to be taken up into the glory He had with the Father, is twofold: He has glorified Him on earth; He will still glorify Him in heaven. What He asks is only to enable Him to glorify the Father more. It is when we enter into sympathy with Jesus on this point, and gratify Him by making the Father's glory our chief object in prayer too, that our prayer cannot fail to be answered. The Beloved Son stressed this point very clearly, there is nothing that will glorify the Father more than this, that He will do what we ask. He will not, therefore, let any opportunity go to achieve this purpose. Let us make His aim ours: let the glory of the Father be the link between our asking and His doing. Such prayer must prevail.

This word of Jesus certainly comes as a sharp two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. Jesus in His prayers on earth, in His intercession in heaven, in His promise of an answer to our prayers from there, makes this His first object: the glory of His Father. Is it so with us too? Or are self-interest and self-will the strongest motives urging us to pray? Or, if we don't recognise this is the case, must we not admit that the distinct, conscious longing for the glory of the Father is not what animates our prayers? And yet it must be so.

It is not as if the believer does not at times desire it. But he has to regret that he has so little attained to it. And he knows the reason of his failure too. It was, because the separation between the spirit of daily life and the spirit of the hour of prayer was too extensive. We begin to see that the desire for the glory of the Father is not something that we can awaken and present to our Lord when we prepare ourselves to pray. No, it is only when the whole life, in all its parts, is given up to God's glory, that we can really pray to His glory too. *"Do everything to the glory of God."*

(1Cor.10:31) and, "*Ask everything to the glory of God.*" These twin commands are inseparable: obedience to the former is the secret of grace for the latter. A life to the glory of God is the condition of the prayers that Jesus can answer, "*that the Father may be glorified.*"

This demand in connection with prevailing prayer, that it should be to the glory of God, is only right and natural. There is none more glorious but the Lord. There is no higher glory but His, and what He bestows on His creatures. Creation exists to show forth His glory. The only things that are not for His glory are sin, and darkness, and death. It is only in the glorifying of God that the creatures can find glory. What the Son of Man did, to give Himself wholly, His whole life, to glorify the Father, is nothing but the simple duty of every redeemed one. And Christ's reward will be his too. Because He gave Himself so entirely to the glory of the Father, the Father crowned Him with glory and honour, giving the kingdom into His hands, with the power to ask what He will, and, as Intercessor, to answer our prayers. And just as we become one with Christ in this, and as our prayer is part of a life totally surrendered to God's glory, will the Saviour be able to glorify the Father to us by the fulfilment of the promise: "*Whatever you shall ask, I will do it.*"

We cannot attain to such a life, with God's glory our only aim, by any effort of our own. It is only in the man Christ Jesus that such a life is to be seen. It is in Him that we will find it. Yes blessed be God! His life is our life; He gave Himself for us; He Himself is now our life. The discovery, and the confession, and the denial of self, as usurping the place of God, of self-seeking and self-trusting, are essential, and yet is what we cannot accomplish in our own strength. It is the incoming and indwelling in the heart, the presence and the rule of our Lord Jesus who glorified the Father on earth, and is now glorified with Him, that He might glorify Him in us. It is Jesus Himself coming in, who can cast out all self-glorifying, and give us instead His own God-glorifying life and Spirit. It is Jesus, who longs to glorify the Father in hearing our prayers, who will teach us to live and to pray to the glory of God.

And what motive, what power is there that can urge our lazy hearts to yield themselves to our Lord to work this in us? Surely nothing more is needed than a sight of how glorious, how alone worthy of glory the Father is. Let our faith learn in adoring worship to bow before Him, to ascribe to Him alone the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. To yield ourselves to dwell in His light as the ever-blessed, ever-loving One. Surely we shall be stirred to say, "*To Him alone be glory.*" And we shall look to our Lord Jesus with new intensity of desire for a life that refuses to see or seek anything else but the glory of God. When there is so little prayer that can be answered, the Father is not glorified. It is our duty, for the glory of God, to live and pray in such a way that our prayer can be answered. For the sake of God's glory, let us learn to pray well.

What a humbling thought that so often there is earnest prayer for a child or a friend, for a work or a group, in which the thought of our own joy or pleasure was far stronger than any yearnings for God's glory. No wonder that there are so many unanswered prayers. Here we have the secret. God would not be glorified when that glory was not our object. He that would pray the prayer of faith, will have to give himself to live literally so that the Father in all things may be glorified in him. This must be his aim. Without this there cannot be the prayer of faith. Jesus said: "*How can you*

believe, who receive honour from one another, and do not seek the honour that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44). All seeking of our own glory with men makes faith impossible. It is the deep, intense self-sacrifice that gives up its own glory, and seeks the glory of God alone, that awakens in the soul that spiritual susceptibility of the Divine, which is faith. Surrendering to God to seek His glory, and the expectation that He will show His glory in hearing us, have one root: He that seeks God's glory will be the only one who sees the answer to his prayer.

And how, we ask again, shall we attain to it? Let us begin with confession. How little has the glory of God been an all-absorbing passion. How little our lives and our prayers have been full of it. How little have we lived in the likeness of the Son, and in sympathy with Him, for God and His glory alone. Let us take time, until the Holy Spirit reveal it to us, and we see how we have been lacking in this. True knowledge and confession of sin are the sure path to deliverance.

And then let us look to Jesus. In Him we can see by what death we can glorify God. In death He glorified Him; through death He was glorified with Him. It is by dying, being dead to self and living to God, that we can glorify Him. And this, this death to self, this life to the glory of God, is what Jesus gives and lives in each one who can trust Him for it. Let nothing less than these be the spirit of our daily life:

- The desire, the decision to live only for the glory of the Father, even as Christ did;
- The acceptance of Him with His life and strength working it in us;
- The joyful assurance that we can live to the glory of God, because Christ lives in us.

Jesus is our guarantee that we can live like this. The Holy Spirit is given, and waiting to make it our experience, if we will only trust and let Him. O let us not hold back through unbelief, but confidently take as our watchword: **All to the glory of God!** The Father accepts the will. The sacrifice is well-pleasing to Him. The Holy Spirit will seal us within with the confidence the awareness that we **are** living for God and His glory.

And then what quiet peace and power there will be in our prayers, as we realise through His grace, that we ourselves are in perfect harmony with Him. We feel confident because He promises to do what we ask: *"So that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* With our whole being intentionally yielded to the inspiration of the Word and Spirit, our desires will be no longer ours but His. The main aim of our prayers will be to the glory of God. With increasing freedom we shall be able to pray: "Father, You know, we ask it only for Your glory." And this condition for answers to our prayers, instead of being a mountain we cannot climb, will only give us greater confidence that we shall be heard, because we have seen that prayer has no higher beauty or blessedness than this, that it glorifies the Father. The precious privilege of prayer will become even more precious because it brings us into perfect unison with the Beloved Son in the wonderful partnership He proposes: ***"You ask, and I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."***

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord Jesus, I come again to You. Every lesson You give me convinces me more deeply how little I know to pray in the right way. But every lesson also inspires me with hope that You are going to teach me, that You are teaching me not only to know what prayer should be, but actually to pray as I should. O my Lord! I look with courage to You, the Great Intercessor, who prayed and hear prayer, only that the Father may be glorified. Teach me to also live and to pray for the glory of God.

Saviour, for this reason I yield myself to You again. I desire to be nothing. I give myself over to death, as already crucified with You. Through the Spirit the works of the flesh are mortified and put to death. Your life and love of the Father are taking possession of me. A new longing begins to fill my soul, that every day, every hour, that in every prayer the glory of the Father may be everything to me. O my Lord, I am in Your school to learn this. Teach me.

And my God and my Father, the God of glory, the Father of glory, accept the desire of a child who has seen that Your glory is truly the only thing worth living for. O Lord, show me Your glory. Let it overshadow me. Let it fill the temple of my heart. Let me dwell in it as revealed in Christ. Please fulfil in me your own good pleasure, that I, your child should find my glory in seeking the glory of my Father. Amen.

(See the note on George Muller, at the close of this volume, how he was led to make God's glory his first object.)

LESSON TWENTY-ONE

If you abide in me
Or,
THE ALL-INCLUSIVE CONDITION

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." (John 15:7)

In all God's interaction with us, the promise and its conditions are inseparable. If we fulfil the conditions, He fulfils the promise. What He is to be to us depends upon what we are willing to be to Him. *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."* (James 4:8). And so in prayer the unlimited promise, *"Ask whatever you will,"* has its one simple and natural condition, *"If you abide in Me."* It is Christ whom the Father always hears; God is in Christ, and can only be reached by being in Him; to be **in Him** is the way to have our prayer heard; fully and wholly **abiding in Him**, we have the right to ask whatever we will, and the promise that it will be done for us.

When we compare this promise with the experiences of most believers, we are startled by a terrible discrepancy. Who can count the countless prayers that rise and bring no answer? The cause must be either that we do not fulfil the condition, or God does not fulfil the promise. Believers are not willing to admit either, and therefore have devised a way of escape from the dilemma. They add to the promise the qualifying clause our Saviour did not put there, *"if it be God's will"*, and so maintain both God's integrity and their own. O, if they would only accept the promise and hold it fast as it stands, trusting Christ to vindicate His truth. And experience how God's Spirit would lead them to see the Divine correctness of such a promise to those who really abide in Christ in the sense in which He means it, and to confess that the one sufficient explanation of unanswered prayers is the failure to fulfil the condition: **"Abide in Me"**. And how the Holy Spirit would then make our feebleness in prayer one of the mightiest motives to urge us on to discover the secret, and obtain the blessing, of full abiding in Christ.

"If you abide in Me." As a Christian grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, he is often surprised to find how the words of God grow too, in the new and deeper meaning with which they come to him. He can look back to the day when some word of God was opened up to him and he rejoiced in the blessing he had found in it. After some time a deeper experience gave it a new meaning, and it was as if he never had seen what it contained. And yet once again, as he advanced in the Christian life, the same word stood before him again as a great mystery, until the Holy Spirit leads him still deeper into its Divine fullness. One of these ever-growing, never-exhausted words, opening up to us step-by-step the fullness of the Divine life, is the Master's precious *"Abide in Me."* As the union of the branch with the vine is one of growth, never-ceasing growth and increase, so our abiding in Christ is a **life process** in which the Divine life takes ever fuller and more complete possession of us. The young and feeble believer may be really abiding in Christ up to the measure of his light. But it is he who reaches onward to the full abiding in the sense in which the Master meant the words, who inherits all the promises connected with it.

In the growing life of abiding in Christ, the first stage is faith. As the believer sees that, with all his feebleness, the command is really meant for him, his great aim is simply to believe that abiding in Christ is his immediate duty and a blessing within his reach simply because he knows that he is in Christ in spite of unfaithfulness and failure. As he occupies himself with the love, and power, and faithfulness of the Saviour, he understands that his one need is to believe. It will not be long before he sees that something more is needed. Obedience and faith must go together. Not as if obedience must be added to faith, but faith must be demonstrated in obedience. Faith is obedience at home looking to the Master. Obedience is faith going out to do His will. The believer will see how he has been more occupied with the privilege and the blessings of this abiding than with its duties and its fruit. He realises there is much of self and self-will that were unnoticed or tolerated. The peace which, as a young and feeble disciple, he could enjoy in believing, flees from him. The abiding must be maintained by practical obedience: *"If you keep my commands, you will abide in my love."* (John 15:10). Before this, his great aim was through the mind, taking hold of the truth, and let his heart rest on Christ and his promises. Now, in this stage, his main effort is to get his will united with the will of his Lord, and his heart and life brought entirely under His rule.

And yet it is as if there is something lacking. The will and the heart are on Christ's side. He obeys and he loves his Lord. But still, why is it that the fleshly nature has still so much power, that the spontaneous actions and emotions of the innermost being are not what they should be? Even though the will does not approve of these actions and emotions, there is a region beyond control of the will. And why also, even when there is not so much actions to condemn, why is there so much of omission, the absence of that beauty of holiness, that zeal of love, that conformity to Jesus and His death, in which the life of self is lost, and which is surely implied in the abiding, as the Master meant it? There must surely be something in our abiding in Christ and Christ in us, which he has not yet experienced.

It is so. Faith and obedience are but the pathway of blessing. Before giving us the parable of the vine and the branches, Jesus had very distinctly told us what the full blessing is to which faith and obedience are to lead us. Three times He repeated: *"If you love Me, keep my commandments,"* (John 14:15,21; 15:10), and spoke of the threefold blessing with which He would crown such obedient love:

- the Holy Spirit would come from the Father;
- the Son would manifest Himself;
- the Father and the Son would come and make their home in us.

It is as our faith grows into obedience, and in obedience and love our whole being goes out and clings itself to Christ, that our inner life becomes opened up, and the capacity is formed within of receiving the life and the spirit of the glorified Jesus, as a distinct and conscious union with Christ and with the Father. The word is fulfilled in us: *"At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."* (John 14:20). We understand how, just as Christ is in God, and God in Christ, one together not only in will and in love, but in identity of nature and life, because they exist in each other, so we are in Christ and Christ in us, in union not only of will and love, but of life and nature too.

It was after Jesus had spoken of us, knowing through the Holy Spirit that He is in the Father, and we are in Him and He in us, that He said: "*Abide in Me, and I in you.* (John 15:4). Accept this and consent to receive that Divine life of union with Myself, and then, *as you abide in Me, I will also abide in you, even as I abide in the Father. So that your life is Mine and Mine is yours.* This is the true abiding, the occupying of the position in which Christ can come and abide; so abiding in Him that the soul has come away from self to find that He has taken the place of our self and become our life. It is becoming as little children who have no care, and find their happiness in trusting and obeying the love that has done all for them.

It is to those who abide in this way, that the promise comes as their rightful inheritance: "*Ask whatever you will.*" It cannot be otherwise. Christ has got full possession of them. Christ dwells in their love, their will, their life. Not only has their will been given up; Christ has entered it, and dwells and breathes in it by His Spirit. He whom the Father always hears, prays in them; they pray in Him. What they ask shall be done unto them.

Beloved fellow-believer! let us confess that it is because we do not abide in Christ as He would have us, that the Church is so impotent in the presence of the unfaithfulness and worldliness and paganism, in the midst of which the Lord is able to make her more than a conqueror. Let us believe that He means what He promises, and accept the condemnation the confession implies. But let us not be discouraged. The abiding of the branch in the Vine is a life of never-ceasing growth. The abiding, as the Master meant it, is within our reach, for He lives to give it us. Let us but be ready to count all things loss, and to say, "*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*" (Philippians 3:12). Let us not be so much occupied with the abiding, as with Him to whom the abiding links us, and His fullness. Let it be Him, the whole Christ, in His obedience and humiliation, in His exaltation and power, in whom our soul moves and operates. He Himself will fulfil His promise in us.

And then as we abide, and grow evermore into the full abiding, let us exercise our right, the will to enter into all God's will. Obeying what that will commands, let us claim what it promises. Let us yield to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to show each of us, according to his growth and measure, what the will of God is that which we may claim in prayer. And let us rest content with nothing less than the personal experience of what Jesus gave when He said, "*If you abide in Me, ask whatever you will, it shall be done unto you.*" (see note)

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Beloved Lord! Teach me to take this promise afresh in all its simplicity, and to be sure that the only measure of Your holy giving is our holy willing. Lord! Let each word of Your promise be made quick and powerful in my soul in a fresh new way.

You say: "*Abide in me!*" O my Master, my Life, my All, I do abide in You. Help me to grow up into all Your fullness. It is not the effort of faith, seeking to cling to You, nor even the rest of faith, trusting You to keep me; it is not the obedience of the will, nor the keeping the commandments; but it is Yourself living in me and in the Father, that alone can satisfy me. It is Yourself, my Lord, no longer before me and above me, but one with me, and abiding in me; it is this I need, it is this I seek. It is this I trust You for.

You say: "*Ask whatsoever you will!*" Lord! I know that the life of full, deep abiding will so renew and sanctify and strengthen my will that I shall have the light and the liberty to ask great things. Lord, let my will, dead in Your death, living in Your life, be bold and large in its petitions.

You say: "*It shall be done.*" O, You who are the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, give me in Yourself the joyous confidence that You will make this word more wonderfully true to me than ever, because it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive what God has prepared for them that love Him. Amen.

NOTE

On a thoughtful comparison of what we mostly find in books or sermons on prayer, and the teaching of the Master, we shall find one great difference: the importance assigned to the answer to prayer is by no means the same. In the former we find a great deal on the blessing of prayer as a spiritual exercise even if there are no answer, and on the reasons why we should be content without it. "God's fellowship should be more to us than the gift we ask"; "God's wisdom only knows what is best"; "God may bestow something better than what He withholds". Though this teaching looks very high and spiritual, it is remarkable that we find nothing of it with our Lord. The more carefully we gather together everything He spoke on prayer, the clearer it becomes that He wished us to think of prayer simply as the means to an end, and that the answer was to be the proof that we and our prayer are acceptable to the Father in heaven. It is not that Christ would have us count the gifts of higher value than the fellowship and favour of the Father. By no means. But the Father means the answer to be the token of His favour and of the reality of our fellowship with Him. "*Today your servant knows that I have found favour in your sight, my lord, O king, in that the king has fulfilled the request of his servant.*" (2 Samuel 14:22).

A life marked by daily answer to prayer is the proof of our spiritual maturity; that we have indeed attained to the true abiding in Christ; that our will is truly at one with God's will; that our faith has grown strong to see and take what God has prepared for us; that the Name of Christ and His nature have taken full possession of us; and that we have been found fit to take a place among

those whom God admits to His counsels, and according to whose prayer He rules the world. These are they in whom something of man's original dignity has been restored, in whom, as they abide in Christ, His power as the all-prevailing Intercessor can manifest itself, in whom the glory of His Name is shown forth. Prayer is very blessed; the answer is more blessed still, as the response from the Father that our prayer, our faith, our will are indeed as He would wish them to be.

I make these remarks with the one desire of leading my readers themselves to put together all that Christ has said on prayer, and to yield themselves to the full impression of the truth that when prayer is what it should be, or rather when we are what we should be, abiding in Christ, the answer must be expected. **It will bring us out from those refuges where we have comforted ourselves with unanswered prayer.** It will reveal to us the place of power to which Christ has appointed His Church, and which it so little occupies. It will reveal the terrible feebleness of our spiritual life as the cause of our not knowing to pray boldly in Christ's Name. It will urge us mightily to rise to a life in the full union with Christ, and in the fulness of the Spirit, as the secret of effective prayer. And it will so lead us on to realize our destiny: *"And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."* (John 16:23-24). Prayer that is true, spiritually in union with Jesus, is always answered.

LESSON TWENTY-TWO

My words in you
Or,
THE WORD AND PRAYER

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." (John 15:7)

The vital connection between the Word and prayer is one of the simplest and earliest lessons of the Christian life. As a newly-converted person put it: I pray, I speak to my Father; I read, my Father speaks to me. Before I pray, God's word prepares me for it by revealing what the Father has commanded me to ask. In prayer, it is God's word that strengthens me by giving my faith its guarantee and its plea. And after prayer, it is God's Word that brings me the answer when I have prayed, for in the Word the Spirit helps me to hear the Father's voice. Prayer is not a monologue but a dialogue. God's voice in response to mine is prayer's most essential part. Listening to God's voice is the secret of the assurance that He will listen to mine. *"Listen and hear"; "Listen to my words"; "Listen to my voice,"* are words which God speaks to man as well as man to God. His listening will depend on ours. The entrance of His words within me, will be the measure of the power of my words to Him. What God's words are to me, is the test of what He Himself is to me, and determines the righteousness and worthiness of my desire for Him in prayer.

It is this connection between His word and our prayer that Jesus points to when He says, *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."* The deep importance of this truth becomes clear if we notice His other similar expressions. *"Abide in me and I in you."* His abiding in us is the crowning and completion of our abiding in Him. But here, instead of *"You in me and I in you,"* He says, *"You in me and my words in you."* His words abiding in us are the equivalent of He Himself abiding.

What a revelation of the place the words of God in Christ are to have in our spiritual life, and especially in our prayer! In a man's words he reveals himself. In his promises he gives himself away and binds himself to the one who receives his promise. In his commands he sets forth his will, seeks to make himself master of him whose obedience he claims, to guide and use him as if he were part of himself. It is through our words to each other that spirit holds fellowship with spirit, that the spirit of one man passes over and transfers itself into another. It is through the words of a man, heard and accepted, and held fast and obeyed, that he can impart himself to another. But all this is done in a very relative and limited sense.

But when God, the infinite Being, in whom everything is life and power, spirit and truth, in the very deepest meaning of the words, when God speaks forth Himself in His words, He does indeed give **Himself**, His Love and His Life, His Will and His Power, to those who receive these words, in a reality beyond comprehension. In every promise He puts Himself in our power to lay hold of and possess his promise. In every command He puts Himself in our power for us to share with Him His

Will, His Holiness, His Perfection. In God's Word God gives us **Himself**. His Word is nothing less than the Eternal Son, Christ Jesus. And so all Christ's words are God's words, full of a Divine quickening life and power. "*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*" (John 6:63)

Those who have made the deaf and dumb their study, tell us how much the power of speaking depends on that of hearing, and how the loss of hearing in children is followed by the loss of speaking too. This is true in a wider sense: as we hear, so we speak. This is true in the highest sense of our interaction with God. To offer a prayer, to give utterance to certain wishes and to appeal to certain promises, is an easy thing, and can be learned from other people by human wisdom. But to pray in the Spirit, to speak words that reach and touch God, that affect and influence the powers of the unseen world, such praying, such speaking, depends entirely upon our hearing God's voice. Just as far as we listen to the voice and language that God speaks, and in the words of God receive His thoughts, His mind, His life, into our heart, we shall learn to speak in the voice and the language that God hears. It is the ear of the learner, awakened morning by morning, that prepares the tongue of the learned, to speak to God as well as men, as it should be (Isa.50:4).

This hearing the voice of God is something more than the thoughtful study of the Word. There may be a study and knowledge of the Word, in which there is but little real fellowship with the living God. But there is also a reading of the Word, in the very presence of the Father, and under the leading of the Spirit, in which the Word comes to us in living power from God Himself. It is to us the very voice of the Father, a real personal fellowship with Himself. It is the living voice of God that enters the heart, that brings blessing and strength, and awakens the response of a living faith that reaches the heart of God again.

It is on this hearing the voice, that the power both to obey and believe depends. The main thing is, not to know what God has said we must do, but that God Himself says it to us. It is not the law, and not the book, not the knowledge of what is right, that works obedience, but the personal influence of God and His living fellowship. And even so it is not the knowledge of what God has promised, but the presence of God Himself as the Promiser, that awakens faith and trust in prayer. It is only in the full presence of God that disobedience and unbelief become impossible.

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." We see what this means. In the words the Saviour gives Himself. We must have the words in us, taken up into our will and life, reproduced in our character and conduct. We must have them abiding in us, our whole life one continued demonstration of the words that are within, and filling us. The words revealing Christ within, and our lifestyle revealing Him without. It is when the words of Christ enter our very heart, become our life and influence it, that our words will enter His heart and influence Him. My prayer will depend on my life: what God's words are to me and in me, my words will be to God and in God. If I do what God says, God will do what I say.

How well the Old Testament saints understood this connection between God's words and ours, and how prayer was to them the loving response to what they had heard God speak! If the word was a promise, they counted on God to do as He had spoken. "*Do as You have said;*" "*For You,*

Lord, have spoken it;" *"According to Your promise;"* *"According to Your word."* In such expressions they showed that what God spoke in promise was the root and the life of what they spoke in prayer. If the word was a command, they simply did as the Lord had spoken: *"So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken."* Their life was fellowship with God, the interchange of word and thought. What God spoke they heard and did; what they spoke God heard and did. In each word He speaks to us, the whole Christ gives Himself to fulfil it for us. For each word He asks no less that we give the whole man to obey that word, and to receive its fulfilment.

"If my words abide in you;" the condition is simple and clear. In His words His will is revealed. As the words abide in me, His will rules me. My will becomes the empty vessel which His will fills, the willing instrument which His will wields, He fills my inner being. In the exercise of obedience and faith my will becomes ever stronger, and is brought into deeper inner harmony with Him. He can fully trust it to will nothing but what He wills. He is not afraid to give the promise, *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."* To all who believe it, and act upon it, He will make it literally true.

Disciples of Christ! Is it not becoming more and more clear to us that while we have been excusing our unanswered prayers, our impotence in prayer, with a fancied submission to God's wisdom and will, the real reason has been that our own feeble life has been the cause of our feeble prayers. Nothing can make us strong but the word, by that we must live, coming to us from God's mouth. It is the word of Christ, loved, lived in, abiding in us, becoming part of our being through obedience and action, that makes us one with Christ, that fits us spiritually for touching and for taking hold of God. *"And the world is passing away, but he who does the will of God abides forever."* (1 John 2:17). O let us yield our heart and life to the words of Christ, the words in which He always gives **Himself**, the personal living Saviour, and His promise will be our rich experience: *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."*

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord! Your lesson this day has again revealed to me my stupidity. I see how it is that my prayer has not been more believing and prevailing. I was more occupied with my speaking to You than You speaking to me. I did not understand that the secret of faith is this: there can be only so much faith as there is of the Living Word dwelling in the soul. And Your word had taught me so clearly: *"Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak."* (James 1:19); Let not your heart be in a hurry to utter anything before God. Lord, teach me that it is only when Your word is taken up into my life that my words can be taken into Your heart; that Your word, if it is a living power within me, my words will be a living power with You. What Your mouth has spoken Your hand will perform.

Lord, deliver me from the uncircumcised ear. Give me the opened ear of the learner, awakened morning by morning to hear the Father's voice. Even as You only spoke what You heard, may my speaking be the echo of You speaking to me. *"Now when Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of One speaking to him from above the mercy seat."*

(Numbers 7:89). Lord, may it be so with me too. Let my life and character bear only one mark, that Your words abide and are seen in me, and be the preparation for the full blessing: "*Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you.*" Amen.

LESSON TWENTY-THREE

Bear fruit, that the Father may give what you ask

Or,

OBEDIENCE - THE PATH TO POWER IN PRAYER

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

(John 15:16)

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (James 5:16)

The promise of the Father's giving whatever we ask is once again repeated here, in such a connection as to show us to whom it is that such wonderful influence in the heavenly council chamber of the Most High is to be granted. *"I chose you,"* the Master says, *"and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain;"* and then He adds, to the end that *"whatsoever you,"* the fruit-bearing ones, *"shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it to you."* This is nothing but the fuller expression of what He had spoken in the words, *"If you abide in Me."* He had spoken of the object of this abiding as the *"bearing fruit," "more fruit," "much fruit."* In this was God to be glorified, and the mark of discipleship seen. No wonder that He now adds, that where the reality of the abiding is seen in fruit abounding and abiding, this would be the qualification for praying so as to receive what we ask. Entire consecration to the fulfilment of our calling is the condition of effective prayer, is the key to the unlimited blessings of Christ's wonderful prayer-promises.

There are Christians who fear that such a statement is in conflict with the doctrine of free grace. But surely not if free grace is rightly understood, nor with so many express statements of God's blessed Word. Take for example the words of John: *"Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."* (1 John 3:18-22). Or take the often quoted words of James: *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much,"* that is, of a man of whom, according to the definition of the Holy Spirit, it can be said, *"He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous."* (1 John 3:7). Notice the spirit of so many of the Psalms, with their confident appeal to the integrity and righteousness of the suppliant. In Psalm 18 David says: *"The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me." "I was also blameless before Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight."* (Psalm 18:20-26). See also Psalm 7:3-5; 15:1-2; 18:3, 6; 26:1-6; 119:121, 153). If we carefully consider such utterances in the light of the New Testament, we shall find them in perfect harmony with the explicit teaching of the Saviour's parting words: *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love."* (John 15:10); *"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."* (John 15:14). The

word is indeed meant literally: "*I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, that,*" then, "*whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.*"

Let us seek to enter into the spirit of what the Saviour teaches us here. There is a danger in our evangelical religion of looking too much at what it offers from one side, as a certain experience to be obtained in prayer and faith. There is another side which God's Word puts very strongly, that of **obedience as the only path** to blessing. What we need is to realize that in our relationship to the Infinite Being whom we call God, who has created and redeemed us, the first sentiment that ought to animate us is that of **subjection**: the surrender to His supremacy, His glory, His will, His pleasure, ought to be the first and uppermost thought of our life. The question is not, how we are to obtain and enjoy His favour, for in this the main thing may still be self. But what this Being in the very nature of things rightfully claims, and is infinitely and unspeakably worthy of, is that His glory and pleasure should be my one object. Surrender to His perfect and blessed will, a life of service and obedience, is the beauty and the attraction of heaven. Service and obedience, these were the thoughts that were uppermost in the mind of the Son, when He dwelt upon earth. Service and obedience, these must increasingly be the chief objects of our desire and aim, more so than rest or light, or joy or strength. In them we shall find the path to all the higher blessedness that awaits us.

Just note what a prominent place the Master gives it, not only in the 15th chapter of John, in connection with the abiding, but in the 14th, where He speaks of the indwelling of the Three-in-One God. In verse 15 we have it: "*If you love Me, keep My commandments and He will give you the Spirit.*" (John 14:15-16). Then verse 21: "*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*" (John 14:21). And then again, verse 23, one of the highest of all the exceeding great and precious promises: "*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*" (John 14:23). Could words put it more clearly that obedience is the way to the indwelling of the Spirit, to His revealing the Son within us, and to Him preparing us to be the dwelling place, the home of the Father? The indwelling of the Three-in-One God is the inheritance of them that obey. Obedience and faith are but two aspects of one act, surrender to God and His will. As faith strengthens for obedience, it is in turn strengthened by it: faith is made perfect by works. It is to be feared that often our efforts to believe have been unsuccessful because we have not taken up the only position in which a large faith is legitimate or possible, that of entire surrender to the honour and the will of God. It is the man who is entirely consecrated to God and His will who will find the power to claim everything that His God has promised to be for him.

The application of this in the school of prayer is very simple, but very solemn. "*I chose you,*" the Master says, "*and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit,*" much fruit (Joh. 15:5, 8, 16), "*and that your fruit should remain,*" that your life might be one of abiding fruit and abiding fruitfulness, that thus, as fruitful branches abiding in Me, "*whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it to you.*" O how often we have sought to be able to pray the effective prayer for much grace to bear fruit, and have wondered why the answer did not come. It was

because we were reversing the Master's order. We wanted to have the comfort and the joy and the strength first, that we might do the work easily and without any feeling of difficulty or self-sacrifice. And He wanted us in faith, without asking whether we felt weak or strong, whether the work was hard or easy, in the obedience of faith to do what He said. The path of fruit-bearing would have led us to the place and the power of prevailing prayer. **Obedience is the only path that leads to the glory of God.** Not obedience instead of faith, nor obedience to supply the shortcomings of faith; no, but faith's obedience gives access to all the blessings our God has for us. The baptism of the Spirit (14:16), the manifestation of the Son (14:21), the indwelling of the Father (14:23), the abiding in Christ's love (15:10), the privilege of His holy friendship (15:14), and the power of all-prevailing prayer (15:16), all wait for the obedient.

Let us take these lessons to heart. Now we know the great reason why we have not had power in faith to pray prevailingly. Our life was not as it should have been: simple downright obedience, abiding fruitfulness, was not its chief character. And with our whole heart we approve of the Divine appointment: men to whom God will give such influence in the rule of the world, as at their request will do what otherwise would not have taken place, men whose will is to follow the path in which God's will is to work, must be men who themselves have learned obedience, whose loyalty and submission to authority must be above all suspicion. Our whole soul approves the law: obedience and fruit-bearing, the path to prevailing prayer. And with shame we acknowledge how little our lives have yet borne this stamp.

Let us yield ourselves to take up the appointment the Saviour gives us. Let us study His relationship to us as Master. Let us no more seek with each new day to think in the first place of comfort, or joy, or blessing. Let the first thought be: I belong to the Master. Every moment and every action I must act as His property, as a part of Himself, as one who only seeks to know and do His will. A servant, a slave of Jesus Christ, let this be the spirit that animates me. If He says, "*No longer do I call you servants, but I have called you friends,*" let us accept the place of friends: "*You are my friends if you do the things which I command you.*"

The one thing He commands us as His branches is to bear fruit. Let us live to bless others, to testify of the life and the love there is in Jesus. Let us in faith and obedience give our whole life to that which Jesus chose us for and appointed us to **fruit-bearing**. As we think of His electing us to this, and take up our appointment as coming from Him who always gives all He demands, we shall grow strong in the confidence that a life of fruit-bearing, abounding and abiding, is within our reach. And we shall understand why this fruit-bearing alone can be the path to the place of all prevailing prayer. It is the man who, in obedience to the Christ of God, is proving that he is doing what his Lord wills, for whom the Father will do whatever he will: "*And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*" (1 John 3:22).

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Master! Teach me to fully understand what I only partly realise, that it is only through the will of God, accepted and acted out in obedience to His commands, that we obtain the power to grasp His will in His promises and to fully appropriate them in our prayers. And teach me that it is in the path of fruit-bearing that the deeper growth of the branch into the Vine can be perfected, and we can attain to the perfect oneness with Yourself in which we ask whatever we will.

O Lord! Reveal to us, we pray, how with all the hosts of heaven, and with Yourself as the Son on earth, and with all the men of faith who have glorified You on earth, obedience to God is our highest privilege, because it gives access to oneness with God Himself in that which is His highest glory: His all perfect will. And reveal to us, we pray, how in keeping Your commandments and bearing fruit according to Your will, our spiritual nature will grow up to the full stature of the perfect man, with power to ask and to receive whatever we will.

O Lord Jesus! Reveal Yourself to us, and the reality of Your purpose and Your power to make these Your wonderful promises the daily experience of all who utterly yield themselves to You and Your words. Amen.

LESSON TWENTY-FOUR

In my Name
Or,
THE ALL-PREVAILING PLEA

"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." (John 14:13-14)

"That whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." (John 15:16)

"Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive." (John 16:23-24)

"In that day you will ask in My name." (John 16:26)

Up to this stage in their relationship with Jesus, the disciples had not asked in the Name of Christ, nor had He Himself ever used the expression. The nearest approach to this was *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18:20). Here in His parting words, He repeats the word unceasingly in connection with those promises of unlimited meaning, "Whatever," "Anything," "What you will," to teach them, and us, that His Name is our only, but also our all-sufficient plea. The power of prayer and the answer depend on the right use of **the Name**.

What is a person's name? It is a word or expression in which the person is called to mind or represented to us. When I mention or hear a name, it calls up before me the whole person, what I know of him, and also the impression he has made on me. The name of a king includes his honour, his power, his kingdom. His name is the symbol of his power. And so each name of God embodies and represents some part of the glory of the Unseen One. And the Name of Christ is the expression of all He has done, all He is, and lives to do as our Mediator.

And what is it to do a thing in the name of another? It is to come with the power and authority of that other person, as his representative and substitute. We know how such a use of another person's name always supposes a common interest. No one would give another the free use of his name without first being assured that his honour and interest were as safe with that other person as it was with himself. And what is it when Jesus gives us power in His Name, the free use of it, with the assurance that whatever we ask in it will be given to us? The ordinary comparison of one person giving another, on some special occasion, the liberty to ask something in his name, falls far short here: Jesus solemnly gives to all His disciples a general and unlimited power of the free use of His Name at all times for everything they desire. He could not do this if He did not know that He could trust them, and us, with His interests, that His honour would be safe in our hands. The free use of the name of another is always the token of great confidence, of close union. He who gives his name to another steps aside, to let that other person act for him. He who takes the name of another, gives up his own name as of no value. When I go in the name of another, I deny myself, I take not only his name, but himself and what he is, instead of myself and what I am.

Such a use of the name of a person may be a legal union benefitting both parties. A merchant leaving his home and business, gives his chief clerk a general power, by which he can draw thousands of pounds in the merchant's name. The clerk does this, not for himself, but only in the interests of the business. It is because the merchant knows and trusts his clerk as wholly devoted to his interests and business, that he dares put his name and property at his command. When the Lord Jesus went to heaven, He left His work, the management of His kingdom on earth, in the hands of His servants. He could not do otherwise than also give them **His Name** to draw all the supplies they needed for the appropriate management of His business. They have the spiritual power of the Name of Jesus available to themselves just to the extent to which they yield themselves to live only for the interests and the work of the Master. The use of **the Name** always supposes the surrender of our interests to Him whom we represent.

Such a use of the name may be to the benefit of a life union. In the case of the merchant and his clerk, the union is temporary. But we know how oneness of life on earth gives oneness of a name: a child has the father's name, or surname, because he has his life. And often the child of a good father has been honoured or helped by others for the sake of the name he bore. But this would not last long if it were found that it was only a name, and that the father's character was lacking in the child. The name and the character or spirit must be in harmony. When such is the case, the child will have a double claim on the father's friends: the character of the child secures and increases the love and esteem rendered first for the father's name's sake. So it is with Jesus and the believer: we are one, we have one life, one Spirit with Him; for this reason we may come in His Name. Our power in using **that Name**, whether with God, or men, or devils, depends on the measure of our spiritual life-union. The use of **the Name** rests on the unity of our life with His Life: the Name and the Spirit of Jesus are one. (See note).

The union that empowers someone to the use of the name of another person may be the union of love. When a bride, whose life has been one of poverty, becomes united to the bridegroom, she gives up her own name, to be called by his, and has now the full right to use it. She makes her purchases in his name, and that name is not refused. And this is done because the bridegroom has chosen her for himself, counting on her to care for his interests: they are now one. And so the Heavenly Bridegroom could do nothing less; having loved us and made us one with Himself, what could He do but give those who bear His Name the right to present it before the Father, or to come with it to Himself for everything they need. And there is no one, who truly gives himself to live in the Name of Jesus, who does not receive, in ever-increasing measure, the spiritual capacity to ask and receive in **that Name** whatever he wills. The bearing of the name of another supposes that I have given up my own name, and with it my own independent life; but then, just as surely, I have taken possession of all there is in the name I have taken on, instead of my own.

Such illustrations show us how defective the common view is praying in the Name of Jesus as if we are a messenger sent to ask in the name of another, or a guilty one appealing to the name. Now Jesus Himself is with the Father. We are not coming in the Name of someone who is absent. Even when we pray to Jesus Himself, it must be in His Name. The Name represents the Person. To ask in the Name is to ask in full union of interest and life and love with Himself, as one who lives in and

for Him. If I let the Name of Jesus have undivided supremacy in my heart and life, my faith will grow to the assurance that what I ask in that Name cannot be refused. The Name and the power of asking go together: when the Name of Jesus has become the power that rules my life, its power in prayer with God will be seen too.

So we see that everything depends on our own relationship to **the Name**. The power it has on my life is the power it will have in my prayers. There is more than one expression in Scripture which can make this clear to us. When it says, "*do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Colossians 3:17), we see how this is the counterpart of the other, "Ask all." To **do all** and to **ask all** in His Name, these go together. When we read, "*But we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.*" (Micah 4:5), we see how the power of the Name must rule in the whole life; only then will it have power in prayer. God looks to see what the Name is to us in our whole lives not only in what we say. When Scripture speaks of "*men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" (Acts 15:26), or of one "*ready ... to die ... for the name of the Lord Jesus,*" (Acts 21:13), we see what our relationship to the Name must be. When it is everything to me, it will obtain everything for me. If I let it have all I have, it will let me have all it has.

"*Whatever you ask in **my Name**, that will I do.*" Jesus means this promise literally. Christians have sought to limit it: it looked too free; it was hardly safe to trust man so unconditionally. We did not understand that the word "*in my Name*" is its own safeguard. It is a spiritual power which no one can use unless he obtained the capacity for it, by daily living and acting in that Name. When we faithfully bear that Name before men, we have power to use it before God. O let us plead for God's Holy Spirit to show us what the Name means, and what the right use of it is. It is through the Spirit that the Name, which is above every name in heaven (Philippians 2:9), will take the place of supremacy in our heart and life too.

Disciples of Jesus, let the lessons of today enter deep into your hearts. The Master says: "Only pray in my Name; whatsoever you ask will be given." Heaven is open to you! The treasures and powers of God in the spiritual world are placed at your disposal to help those around you. O come, and let us learn to pray in the Name of Jesus. He says to us the same as what He said to his disciples: "*Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive.*" (John 16:23-24)

Let each disciple of Jesus seek to accept for himself the rights of his royal priesthood, and use the power placed at his disposal for his circle and his work. Let Christians awake and hear the message: your prayer can obtain what otherwise will be withheld. It can accomplish what otherwise remains undone. O wake up, and use the Name of Jesus to open the treasures of heaven for this perishing world. Learn, as the servants of the King, to use His Name: "***Whatever you will ask in my Name, that will I do.***"

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord! It is as if each lesson You give me has such fullness and depths of meaning, that if I can only learn that one, I shall know how to pray correctly. Today I feel again as if I needed but one prayer every day: Lord, teach me what it is to pray in Your Name. Teach me so live and act, to walk and speak, to do all in the Name of Jesus in such a way, that my prayer cannot be anything else but in that blessed Name too.

And teach me, Lord, to hold fast the precious promise that **whatever** we ask in Your Name, You will do and the Father will give. Though I do not yet fully understand, and still less have fully attained the wondrous union You refer to when You say, "**in My Name**," I would still hold on tightly to the promise until it fills my heart with the undoubting assurance: Anything in the Name of Jesus.

O my Lord, let Your Holy Spirit teach me this. You did say concerning Him, "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name," (John 14:26). He knows what it is to be sent from heaven in Your Name, to reveal and to honour the power of that Name in Your servants, to use that Name alone, and so to glorify You. Lord Jesus, let Your Spirit dwell in me, and fill me. I yield my whole being to His rule and leading. Your Name and Your Spirit are one; through Him Your Name will be the strength of my life and my prayer. Then I shall be able to forsake all for Your Name's sake, to speak to men and to God in Your Name, and to prove that this is indeed **the Name above every name**.

Lord Jesus! O teach me by Your Holy Spirit to pray in Your Name. Amen.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

*What is meant by praying in Christ's name? It cannot mean to simply mention the Name of Christ at the end of our prayer, or appearing before God with faith in the mediation of the Saviour. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He gave them no rules about prayer but He supplied them with petitions. And afterwards Jesus said to them, "Until now you have asked nothing in My Name." Until the Spirit came, the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer laid as it were dormant within them. When by the Holy Spirit Christ descended into their hearts, they desired the very blessings which Christ as our High Priest obtains for us by His prayer from the Father. And such petitions are always answered. The Father is always willing to give what Christ asks. The Spirit of Christ always teaches and influences us to offer the petitions which Christ approves of and presents to the Father. To pray in Christ's Name is therefore to be identified with Christ for our righteousness, and to **be identified with Christ in our desires through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit**. To pray **in the Spirit**, to pray **according to the will of the Father**, to pray **in Christ's Name**, are **identical expressions**. The Father Himself loves us, and is willing to hear us: two intercessors, Christ the Advocate above, and the Holy Spirit – the Advocate within – are the gifts of His love.*

This view may appear at first less consoling than the more frequently used one, which refers to prayer in Christ's Name chiefly to our trust in Christ's worth and accomplishments. The defect of this opinion is, that it does not combine the intercession of the Saviour with the will of the Father, and the indwelling Spirit's aid in prayer. Nor does it fully apprehend the mediation of Christ; for the mediation consists not merely in the fact that, for Christ's sake, the Holy Father is able to regard me and my prayer; but also, in the fact that Christ Himself presents my petitions as His petitions, desired by Him for me, even as all blessings are purchased for me by His precious blood.

*In all prayer, the one essential condition is that we are able to offer it in the name of Jesus, as according to His desire for us, according to the Father's will, according to the Spirit's teaching. And thus praying in Christ's name is impossible without self-examination, without reflection, without self-denial; in short, without the aid of the Spirit. – Adolph Saphir, **The Lord's Prayer**, pp. 411, 142.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE 2.

*"Whatever you ask in My Name," that is, in My nature; With God, all things are called according to their nature. We ask in Christ's Name, not when at the end of some request we say, "This I ask in the Name of Jesus Christ," but when we pray **according to His nature**, which is love, which seeks not its own will but only the will of God and the good of all creatures. Such asking is the cry of His own Spirit in our hearts. – Andrew Jukes. **The New Man**.*

LESSON TWENTY-FIVE

At that day

Or,

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PRAYER

"And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you;" (John 16:23-26)

"Praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God." (Jude 1:20-21)

The words of John (1 John 2:12-14) to little children, to young men, and to fathers suggest the thought that there often are in the Christian life three great stages of experience. The first, that of the new-born child, with the assurance and the joy of forgiveness. The second, the transition stage of struggle and growth in knowledge and strength: young men growing strong, God's Word doing its work in them and giving them victory over the Evil One. And then the final stage of maturity and ripeness: the Fathers, who have entered deeply into the knowledge and fellowship of the Eternal One.

In Christ's teaching on prayer there appear to be three stages in the prayer-life, somewhat similar. In the Sermon on the Mount we have the initial stage: His teaching is all comprised in one word, Father. *Pray to your Father, your Father sees, hears, knows, and will reward*: how much more than any earthly father! Only be childlike and trustful. Later comes something like the transition stage of conflict and conquest, in words like these: *"This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."* (Mark 9:29). *"And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?"* (Luke 18:7). And then we have in the parting words, a higher stage. The children have become men: they are now the Master's friends, from whom He has no secrets, to whom He says, *"all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."* (John 15:15), and to whom, in the oft-repeated *"whatever you will,"* He hands over the keys of the kingdom. Now the time has come for the power of prayer in His Name to be proved.

The contrast between this final stage and the previous preparatory ones our Saviour emphasises most distinctly in the words we are to meditate on: *"Until now you have asked nothing in My name."* (John 16:24). *"In that day you will ask in My name,"* (John 16:26). We know what *"In that day"* means. It is the day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The great work Christ was to do on the cross, the mighty power and the complete victory to be manifested in His resurrection and ascension, were to issue in the coming down from heaven, as never before, of the glory of God to dwell in men. The Spirit of the glorified Jesus was to come and be the life of His disciples. And one of the marks of that wonderful spirit-dispensation was to be a power in prayer until then unknown: prayer in the Name of Jesus, asking and obtaining whatever they would, is to be the manifestation of the reality of the Spirit's indwelling.

To understand how the coming of the Holy Spirit was indeed to commence a new era in the prayer-world, we must remember who He is, what His work, and what the significance is of Him not being given until Jesus was glorified. It is in the Spirit that God exists, for He is Spirit. It is in the Spirit that the Son was begotten of the Father. It is in the fellowship of the Spirit that the Father and the Son are one. The eternal never-ceasing giving to the Son which is the Father's prerogative, and the eternal asking and receiving which is the Son's right and blessedness: it is through the Spirit that this communion of life and love is maintained. It has been so from all eternity. It is so specially now, when the Son as Mediator ever lives to pray. The great work which Jesus began on earth of reconciling in His own body God and man, He carries on in heaven. To accomplish this He took up into His own person the conflict between God's righteousness and our sin. On the cross He once for all ended the struggle in His own body. And then He ascended to heaven, that from there He might, in each member of His body, carry out the deliverance and manifest the victory He had obtained. It is to do this that He ever lives to pray. In His unceasing intercession He places Himself in living fellowship with the unceasing prayer of His redeemed ones. Or rather, it is His unceasing intercession which shows itself in their prayers, and gives them a power they never had before.

And He does this through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, was not, could not be given, until He had been glorified (John 7:39). This gift of the Father was something distinctively new, entirely different from what Old Testament saints had known. The work that the blood effected in heaven when Christ entered within the veil, was something so true and new; the redemption of our human nature into fellowship with His resurrection-power and His exaltation-glory was so intensely real; the taking up of our humanity in Christ into the life of the Triune God was an event of such inconceivable significance, that the Holy Spirit, who had to come from Christ's exalted humanity to testify in our hearts of what Christ had accomplished, was indeed no longer only what He had been in the Old Testament. It was literally true "*the Holy Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*" (John 7:39). He came now for the first time as the Spirit of the glorified Jesus. Even as the Son, who was from eternity God, had entered upon a new existence as man, and returned to heaven with what He had not before, so the Blessed Spirit, whom the Son, on His ascension, received from the Father (Acts 2:33) into His glorified humanity, came to us with a new life, which He had not previously to communicate. Under the Old Testament He was invoked as the Spirit of God. At Pentecost He descended as the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, bringing down and communicating to us the full fruit and power of the accomplished redemption.

It is in the intercession of Christ that the continued efficacy and application of His redemption is maintained. And it is through the Holy Spirit descending from Christ to us that we are drawn up into the great stream of His ever-ascending prayers. The Spirit prays for us without words. In the depths of a heart where even thoughts are at times formless, the Spirit takes us up into the wonderful flow of the life of the Triune God. Through the Spirit, Christ's prayers become ours, and ours are made His: we ask what we will, and it is given to us. We then understand from experience, "*Until now you have asked nothing in My name. In that day you shall ask in my Name.*" (John 16:24,26).

Brothers and sisters! What we need to pray in the Name of Christ, to ask that we may receive that our joy may be full, is the baptism of this Holy Spirit. This is more than the Spirit of God under the Old Testament. This is more than the Spirit of conversion and regeneration the disciples had before Pentecost. This is more than the Spirit with a measure of His influence and working. This is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the glorified Jesus in His exaltation-power, coming on us as the Spirit of the indwelling Jesus, revealing the Son and the Father within. (John 14:16-23) It is when this Spirit is the Spirit not of our hours of prayer, but of our whole life and walk, when this Spirit glorifies Jesus in us by revealing the completeness of His work, and making us wholly one with Him and like Him, that we can pray in His Name, because we are in very deed one with Him. Then it is then that we have that immediateness of access to the Father of which Jesus says, *"I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you;"* (John 16:26). Oh! We need to understand and believe that to be filled with this, the Spirit of the glorified One, is the one need of God's believing people. Then shall we realize what it is, *"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,"* (Ephesians 6:18) and what it is, *"praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God."* (Jude 1:20-21). *"In that day you shall ask in my Name."*

And so once again the lesson comes: What our prayer avails, depends upon what we are and what our life is. It is living in the Name of Christ that is the secret of praying in the Name of Christ; living in the Spirit that fits us for praying in the Spirit. It is abiding in Christ that gives the right and power to ask what we will: the extent of the abiding is the exact measure of the power in prayer. It is the Spirit dwelling within us that prays, not in words and thoughts always, but in a breathing and a being deeper than utterance. Just so much as there is of Christ's Spirit in us, is there real prayer. Our lives, our lives, O let our lives be full of Christ, and full of His Spirit, and the wonderfully unlimited promises to our prayer will no longer appear strange. *"Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."* (John 16:24); *"In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you;"* (John 16:26); *"And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you."* (John 16:23).

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O my God! in holy awe I bow before You, the Three in One. Again I have seen how the mystery of prayer is the mystery of the Holy Trinity. I adore the Father who ever hears, and the Son who ever lives to pray, and the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, to lift us up into the fellowship of that ever-blessed, never-ceasing asking and receiving. I bow, my God, in adoring worship, before the infinite condescension that thus, through the Holy Spirit, takes us and our prayers into the Divine Life, and its fellowship of love.

O my Blessed Lord Jesus! Teach me to understand Your lesson, that it is the indwelling Spirit, streaming from You, uniting to You, who is the Spirit of prayer. Teach me what it is as an empty, wholly consecrated vessel, to yield myself to His being my life. Teach me to honour and trust Him, as a living Person, to lead my life and my prayer. Teach me specially in prayer to wait in holy

silence, and give Him place to breathe within me His unutterable intercession. And teach me that through Him it is possible to pray without ceasing, and to pray without failing, because He makes me partaker of the never-ceasing and never-failing intercession in which You, the Son, appears before the Father. Yes, Lord, fulfil in me Your promise, "*And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*" (John 16:23). Amen.

NOTE

Prayer has often been compared to breathing: we have only to carry out the comparison fully to see how wonderful the place is which the Holy Spirit occupies. With every breath we expel the impure air which would soon cause our death, and inhale again the fresh air to which we owe our life. So we give out from us, in confession the sins, in prayer the needs and the desires of our heart. And in drawing in our breath again, we inhale the fresh air of the promises, and the love, and the life of God in Christ. We do this through the Holy Spirit, who is the breath of our life. And this He is because He is the breath of God. The Father breathes Him into us, to unite Himself with our life. And then just as on every expiration there follows again the inhaling or drawing in of the breath, so God draws in again His breath, and the Spirit returns to Him laden with the desires and needs of our hearts. And thus the Holy Spirit is the breath of the life of God, and the breath of the new life in us. As God breathes Him out, we receive Him in answer to prayer; as we breathe Him back again, He rises to God laden with our supplications. As the Spirit of God, in whom the Father and the Son are one, and the intercession of the Son reaches the Father, He is to us the Spirit of prayer. True prayer is the living experience of the truth of the Holy Trinity. The Spirit's breathing, the Son's intercession, the Father's will, these three become one in us.

LESSON TWENTY-SIX

I have prayed for you
Or,
CHRIST THE INTERCESSOR

"But I have prayed for you." (Luke 22:32)

"I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you;" (John 16:26)

"He always lives to make intercession." (Hebrews 7:25)

All growth in the spiritual life is connected with the clearer insight into what Jesus is to us. The more I realize that Christ must be all to me and in me, that all in Christ is indeed for me, the more I learn to live the real life of faith, which, by dying to self, lives wholly in Christ. The Christian life is no longer the vain struggle to live right, but the resting in Christ and finding strength in Him as our life, to fight the fight and gain the victory of faith. This is especially true of the life of prayer. As it too comes under the law of faith alone, and is seen in the light of the fullness and completeness there is in Jesus, the believer understands that it need no longer be a matter of strain or anxious care, but an experience of what Christ will do for him and in him: a participation in that life of Christ which, as on earth, so in heaven, ever ascends to the Father as prayer. And he begins to pray, not only trusting in the merits of Jesus, or in the intercession by which our unworthy prayers are made acceptable, but in that near and close union in virtue of which He prays in us and we in Him. (See Note). Complete salvation is Christ Himself: He has given HIMSELF to us; He Himself lives in us. Because He prays, we pray too. As the disciples, when they saw Jesus pray, asked Him to make them partakers of what He knew of prayer, so we, now we see Him as intercessor on the throne, know that He makes us participate with Himself in the life of prayer.

How clearly is this revealed in the last night of His life. In His high-priestly prayer (John 17), He shows us how and what He has to pray to the Father, and what He will pray when once ascended to heaven. And yet in His parting address He repeatedly connected His going to the Father with their new life of prayer. The two would be ultimately connected: His entrance on the work of His eternal intercession would be the commencement and the power of their new prayer-life in His Name. It is the sight of Jesus in His intercession that gives us power to pray in His Name. All authority and power of prayer is Christ's. He makes us share in His intercession.

To understand this, think first of His intercession: He always lives to intercede. The work of Christ on earth as Priest was only a beginning. It was like Aaron: He shed His blood; it is like Melchizedek that He now lives within the veil to continue His work, according to the power of the eternal life. As Melchizedek is more glorious than Aaron, so it is in the work of intercession that the atonement has its true power and glory. *"It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."* (Romans 8:34). That intercession is an intense reality, a work that is absolutely necessary, and without which the continued application of redemption cannot take place. In the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus the wondrous reconciliation took place, by which man became partaker of the Divine life and blessedness. But

the real personal appropriation of this reconciliation in each of His members here below cannot take place without the unceasing exercise of His Divine power by Him as the head in heaven. In all conversion and sanctification, in every victory over sin and the world, there is a real execution of the power of Him who is mighty to save. And this exercise of His power only takes place through His prayer: He asks of the Father, and receives from the Father. *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."* (Hebrews 7:25). Whenever His people has a need, He receives in intercession what the Godhead has to give. His mediation on the throne is as real and indispensable as on the cross. Nothing takes place without His intercession: it engages all His time and powers, is His unceasing occupation at the right hand of the Father.

And we participate not only in the benefits of this His work, but in the work itself. This because we are His body. Body and members are one *"The head cannot say to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"* (1 Corinthians 12:21). We share with Jesus in all He is and has: *"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one"* (John 17:22). We are partakers of His life, His righteousness, His work. We share with Him in His intercession too; it is not a work He does without us. We do this because we are partakers of His life: *"Christ who is our life"* (Colossians 3:4); *"it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."* (Galatians 2:20). The life in Him and in us is identical, one and the same. His life in us is an ever-praying life.

When it descends and takes possession of us, it does not lose its character; in us too it is the every-praying life: a life that without ceasing asks and receives from God. And this not as if there were two separate currents of prayer rising upwards, one from Him, and one from His people. No, but the substantial life-union is also prayer-union: what He prays passes through us, what we pray passes through Him. He is the angel with the golden censer: *"He was given much incense,"* the secret of acceptable prayer, *"that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne."* (Revelation 8:3). We live, we abide in Him, the Interceding One.

The Only-begotten is the only one who has the right to pray: **to Him alone** it was said, *"Ask of Me, and I will give You..."* (Psalms 2:8). As in all other things the fullness dwells in Him, so the true prayer-fullness too; He alone has the power of prayer. And just as the growth of the spiritual life consists in the clearer insight that all the treasures are in Him, and that we too are in Him, to receive each moment what we possess in Him, grace for grace, so with the prayer-life too. Our faith in the intercession of Jesus must not only be that He prays in our stead, when we do not or cannot pray, but that, as the Author of our life and our faith, He draws us on to pray in unison with Himself. Our prayer must be a work of faith in this sense too, that as we know that Jesus communicates His whole life in us, He also out of that prayerfulness which is His alone breathes into us our praying.

To many a believer it was a new epoch in his spiritual life when it was revealed to him how truly and entirely Christ was his life, standing good as the guarantee for him to remain faithful and obedient. It was then first that he really began to live a faith-life. No less blessed will be the

discovery that Christ is the guarantee for our prayer-life too, the centre and embodiment of all prayer, to be communicated by Him through the Holy Spirit to His people. "*He always lives to make intercession for them.*" (Hebrews 7:25), as the Head of the body, as the Leader in that new and living way which He has opened up, as the Author and the Perfecter of our faith. He provides in everything for the life of His redeemed ones by giving His own life in them: He cares for their life of prayer, by taking them up into His heavenly prayer-life, by giving and maintaining His prayer-life within them. "*But I have prayed for you,*" not to render your faith needless, but "*that your faith should not fail.*" (Luke 22:32). Our faith and prayer of faith is rooted in His. It is, "*if you abide in Me,*" the ever-living Intercessor, and pray with Me and in Me: "*ask whatsoever you will, and it shall be done unto you.*"

The thought of our fellowship in the intercession of Jesus reminds us of what He has taught us more than once before, how all these wonderful prayer-promises have as their aim and their justification, the glory of God in the manifestation of His kingdom and the salvation of sinners. As long as we only or chiefly pray for ourselves, the promises of the last night before his crucifixion must remain a sealed book to us. It is to the fruit-bearing branches of the Vine; it is to disciples sent into the world as the Father sent Him, to live for perishing men; it is to His faithful servants and intimate friends who take up the work He leaves behind, who have like their Lord become as the corn of wheat, losing its life to multiply it manifold; it is to such that the promises are given. Let us each find out what the work is, and who the souls are that are entrusted to our special prayers; let us make our intercession for them our life of fellowship with God, and we shall not only find the promises of power in prayer made true to us, but we shall then first begin to realize how our abiding in Christ and His abiding in us makes us share in His own joy of blessing and saving men.

O most wonderful intercession of our Blessed Lord Jesus, to which we not only owe everything, but in which we are taken up as active partners and fellow-workers! Now we understand what it is to pray in the Name of Jesus, and why it has such power. In His Name, in His Spirit, in Himself, in perfect union with Him. O the wondrous, ever active, and most effective intercession of the Man Christ Jesus! When shall we be completely taken up into it and always pray in it?

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord! In lowly adoration I again bow before You. Your whole redemption work has now passed into prayer; all that now occupies You in maintaining and dispensing what You purchased with Your blood, is only prayer. You always live to pray. And because we abide in You, the direct access to the Father is always open, and our life can be one of unceasing prayer, and the answer to our prayer is certain.

Blessed Lord! You have invited Your people to be Your fellow-workers in a life of prayer. You have united Yourself with Your people and make them as Your body, share with You in that ministry of intercession through which alone, the world can be filled with the fruit of Your redemption and

the glory of the Father. With more liberty than ever I come to You, my Lord, and plead with You: Teach me to pray. Your life is prayer, Your life is mine. Lord! teach me to pray, in You, like You.

And, O my Lord! Give me especially to know, as You promised Your disciples, that You are in the Father, and I in You, and You in me. Let the uniting power of the Holy Spirit make my whole life an abiding in You and Your intercession, so that my prayer may be its echo, and the Father hear me in You and You in me. Lord Jesus! Let Your mind in everything be in me, and my life in everything be in You. So shall I be prepared to be the channel through which Your intercession pours its blessing on the world. Amen.

NOTE

The new era of prayer in the Name of Jesus is pointed out by Christ as the time of the outpouring of the Spirit, in which the disciples enter upon a more revealed expectation of the economy of redemption, and become as clearly conscious of their oneness with Jesus as of His oneness with the Father. Their prayer in the Name of Jesus is now directly to the Father Himself. "*I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you,*" (John 16:26-27), Jesus said; while He had previously spoken of the time before the Spirit's coming: "*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper.*" (John 14:16). This prayer has as its central thought the insight into our being united to God in Christ as on both sides the living bond of union between God and us (John 17:23: "*I in them and You in Me*"), so that in Jesus we behold the Father as united to us, and ourselves as united to the Father.

Jesus Christ must have been revealed to us, not only through the truth in the mind, but in our inmost personal consciousness as the living personal reconciliation, as He in whom God's Fatherhood and Father-love have been perfectly united with human nature and it with God. Not that with the immediate prayer to the Father, the mediatorship of Christ is set aside; but it is no longer looked at as something external, existing outside of us, but as a real living spiritual existence within us, so that the Christ for us, the Mediator, has really become Christ in us.

When the consciousness of this oneness between God in Christ and us in Christ still is lacking, or has been darkened by the sense of guilt, then the prayer of faith looks to our Lord as the Advocate, who pays the Father for us. (Compare John 16:26 with John 16:17; Luke 22:32; 1 John 2:1.) To take Christ in this way in prayer as Advocate, is according to John 16:26 not perfectly the same as the prayer in His Name. Christ's advocacy is meant to lead us on to that inner self-standing life-union with Him, and with the Father in Him, in virtue of which Christ is He in whom God enters into immediate relation and unites Himself with us, and in whom we in all circumstances enter into immediate relation with God. Even so the prayer in the Name of Jesus does not consist in our prayer at His command: the disciples had prayed in this way ever since the Lord had given them His "*Our Father*," and yet He says, "*Until now you have not prayed in my Name.*" Only when the mediation of Christ has become, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, life and power within us; and so that His mind, as it found expression in His word and work, has taken possession of and filled our personal consciousness and will; so that in faith and love we have Jesus in us as the Reconciler who has actually made us one with God: only then His Name,

which included His nature and His work, has become truth and power in us (not only for us). Then we have in the Name of Jesus the free, direct access to the Father which is sure of being heard. Prayer in the Name of Jesus is the liberty of a son with the Father, just as Jesus had this as the First-born. We pray in the place of Jesus, not as if we could put ourselves in His place, but in as far as we are in Him and He in us. We go directly to the Father, but only as the Father is in Christ, not as if He were separate from Christ. Wherever thus the inner man does not live in Christ and has Him not present as the Living One, where His word is not ruling in the heart in its Spirit-power, where His truth and life have not become the life of our soul, it is vain to think that a formula like "for the sake of Your dear Son" will avail. *From: **Christliche Ethik**, von Dr. I. T. Beck, Tübingen, iii. 39.*

See the difference between having Christ as an Advocate or Intercessor who stands outside of us, and the having Him within us, we abiding in Him and He in us through the Holy Spirit perfecting our union with Him, so that we ourselves can come directly to the Father in His Name.

LESSON TWENTY-SEVEN

Father, I will
Or,
CHRIST THE HIGH PRIEST

"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am." (John 17:24)

In His parting address, Jesus gives His disciples the full revelation of what the New Life was to be, when once the kingdom of God had come in power. In the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, in union with Him the heavenly Vine, in their going forth to witness and to suffer for Him, they were to find their calling and their blessedness. In between His setting forth of their future new life, the Lord had repeatedly given the most unlimited promises as to the power their prayers might have. And now in closing, He Himself proceeds to pray. To let His disciples have the joy of knowing what His intercession for them in heaven as their High Priest will be, He gives this precious legacy of His prayer to the Father in John 17. He does this at this time because they as priests are to share in His work of intercession, that they and we might know how to perform this holy work. In the teaching of our Lord on this last night, we have learned to understand that these astonishing prayer-promises have not been given in our own behalf, but in the interest of the Lord and His kingdom: it is from the Lord Himself alone that we can learn what the prayer in His Name is to be and to obtain. We have understood that to pray in His Name is to pray in perfect unity with Himself: the high-priestly prayer will teach all that the prayer in the Name of Jesus may ask and expect.

This prayer is ordinarily divided into three parts. Our Lord first prays for Himself (v. 1-5), then for His disciples (6-19), and last for all the believing people through all ages (20-26). The follower of Jesus, who gives himself to the work of intercession, and wants to see how much blessing he can pray down upon his circle in the Name of Jesus, will in all humility let himself be led of the Spirit to study this wonderful prayer as one of the most important lessons of the school of prayer.

First of all, Jesus prays for Himself, for Him being glorified, so that He may glorify the Father. *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,"* (John 17:1). And He presents the grounds on which He prays this way. A holy covenant had been concluded between the Father and the Son in heaven. The Father had promised Him power over all flesh as the reward of His work: He had done the work, He had glorified the Father, and His one purpose is now still further to glorify Him. With the utmost boldness He asks that the Father may glorify Him, that He may now be and do for His people all that He has undertaken.

Disciple of Jesus! Here you have the first lesson in your work of priestly intercession, to be learned from the example of your great High Priest. To pray in the Name of Jesus is to pray in unity, in sympathy with Him. As the Son began His prayer by making clear His relation to the Father, pleading His work and obedience and His desire to see the Father glorified, do so too. Draw near and appear before the Father in Christ. Plead His finished work. Say that you are one with it, that you trust on it, live in it. Say that you too have given yourself to finish the work the Father has

given you to do, and to live alone for His glory. And ask then confidently that the Son may be glorified in you. This is praying in the Name, in the very words, in the Spirit of Jesus, in union with Jesus Himself. Such prayer has power. If with Jesus you glorify the Father, the Father will glorify Jesus by doing what you ask in His Name. It is only when your own personal relation on this point, like Christ's, is clear with God, when you are glorifying Him, and seeking all for His glory, that like Christ, you will have power to intercede for those around you.

Our Lord next prays for the circle of His disciples. He speaks of them as those whom the Father has given Him. Their chief mark is that they have received Christ's word. He says of them that He now sends them into the world in His place, just as the Father had sent Himself. And He asks two things for them: that the Father keep them from the evil one, and sanctify them through His Word, because He sanctifies Himself for them. Just like the Lord, each believing intercessor has his own immediate circle for whom he first prays. Parents have their children, teachers their pupils, pastors their flocks, all workers their special charge, all believers those whose care lies upon their hearts.

It is of great consequence that intercession should be personal, pointed, and definite. And then our first prayer must always be that they may receive the Word. But this prayer will not avail unless with our Lord we say, "*For I have given to them the words which You have given Me;*" (John 17:8). It is this that gives us freedom and power in intercession for souls. Not only pray for them, but speak to them. And when they have received the Word, let us pray much for them to be protected from the evil one and that they will be sanctified through that Word. Instead of being hopeless or judging or giving up those who fall away, let us pray for our circle: "Father! Keep through Your name those whom You have given Me." (John 17:11). "*Sanctify them by Your truth.*" (John 17:17). Prayer in the Name of Jesus accomplishes much: "*Ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*" (John 15:7)

And then follows our Lord's prayer for a still wider circle. "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;*" (John 17:20). His priestly heart enlarges itself to embrace all places and all time, and He prays that all who belong to Him may everywhere be one, as God's proof to the world of the divinity of His mission, and then that they may ever be with Him in His glory. Until "*the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.*" (John 17:26).

The disciple of Jesus, who has first in his own circle proved the power of prayer, cannot confine himself within its limits: he prays for the Church worldwide and for its different branches. He prays specially for the unity of the Spirit and of love. He prays for its being one in Christ, as a witness to the world that Christ, who has worked such a wonder as to make love triumph over selfishness and separation, is indeed the Son of God sent from heaven. Every believer ought to pray much that the unity of the Church, not in external organizations, but in spirit and in truth, may be made evident.

So much for the matter of the prayer. Now for its mode. Jesus says, "**Father, I desire...**" (John 17:24). On the ground of His right as Son, and the Father's promise to Him, and His finished work,

He might do so. The Father had said to Him, "*Ask of Me, and I will give You.*" (Psalms 2:8). He simply availed Himself of the Father's promise. Jesus has given us a similar promise: "*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*" (John 15:7). He asks me in His Name to say what I will. Abiding in Him, in a living union with Him in which man is nothing and Christ all, the believer has the freedom to take up that word of His High Priest and, in answer to the question "*What do you will?*" to say, "**Father! I will (desire)** all that You have promised." This is nothing but true faith; this is honouring God: to be assured that such confidence in saying what I will is indeed acceptable to Him. At first sight, our heart shrinks from the expression; we feel neither the freedom nor the power to speak like this. It is a promise that will only be fulfilled in the complete abandonment of our will. But grace will most certainly be given to each one who loses his will in his Lord's. He that loses his will shall find it; he that gives up his will entirely shall find it again renewed and strengthened with a Divine Strength. **Father! I will (desire)** this is the keynote of the everlasting, ever-active, all-prevailing intercession of our Lord in heaven. It is only in union with Him that our prayer achieves anything. In union with Him it accomplishes much. If we but abide in Him, living, and walking, and doing all things in His Name; if we but come and bring each separate petition, tested and touched by His Word and Spirit, and cast it into the mighty stream of intercession that goes up from Him, to be borne upward and presented before the Father, then we shall have the full confidence that we receive the petitions we ask. The "**Father! I will**" will be breathed into us by the Spirit Himself. We shall lose ourselves in Him, and become nothing, to find that in our weakness we have power and can prevail.

Disciples of Jesus! Called to be like your Lord in His priestly intercession, when, O when! shall we awaken to the glory, passing all understanding, of this destiny of ours to plead and prevail with God for perishing men? O when shall we shake off the laziness that clothes itself with the pretence of humility, and yield ourselves wholly to God's Spirit, that He may fill our wills with light and with power, to know, and to take, and to possess all that our God is waiting to give to a will that lays hold on Him.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O my Blessed High Priest! who am I that You should invite me like this to share with You in Your power of prevailing intercession! And why, O my Lord! am I so slow of heart to understand and believe and exercise this wonderful privilege to which You have redeemed Your people? O Lord! Give Your grace that this may increasingly be my unceasing life-work: praying without ceasing to draw down the blessing of heaven on all my surroundings on earth.

Blessed Lord! I come now to accept this as my calling. For this I would forsake all and follow You. Into Your hands I would believingly yield my whole being: transform, train, inspire me to be one of Your prayer-legion, wrestlers who watch and strive in prayer, joined with Israel, God's princes, who have power and prevail. Take possession of my heart, and fill it with the one desire for the glory of God in the ingathering, and sanctification, and union of those whom the Father hath given You. Take my mind and let this be my study and my wisdom, to know when prayer can bring a blessing. Take me wholly and fit me as a priest ever to stand before God and to bless in His Name.

Blessed Lord! Let it be here, as through all the spiritual life: You all, I nothing. And let it be here my experience too that he who has and seeks nothing for himself, receives all, even the wonderful grace of sharing with You in Your everlasting ministry of intercession. Amen.

LESSON TWENTY-EIGHT

Father! Not what I will
Or,
CHRIST THE SACRIFICE

And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." (Mark 14:36)

What a contrast within the space of a few hours! What a transition from the quiet elevation of that, He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, "**Father I will...**" (John 17:24) to that falling on the ground and crying in agony: "**Abba Father, not what I will...**" In the one we see the High Priest within the veil in His all-prevailing intercession; in the other, the sacrifice on the altar opening the way through the rent veil. The high-priestly "*Father! I will,*" in order of time precedes the sacrificial "*Father! Not what I will,*" but this was only by anticipation, to show what the intercession would be when once the sacrifice was brought. In reality it was that prayer at the altar, "*Father! Not what I will,*" in which the prayer before the throne, "*Father! I will,*" had its origin and its power. It is from the entire surrender of His will in Gethsemane that the High Priest on the throne has the power to ask what He will, has the right to make His people share in that power too, and ask what they will.

For all who would learn to pray in the school of Jesus, this Gethsemane lesson is one of the most sacred and precious. To a superficial scholar it may appear to take away the courage to pray in faith. If even the earnest supplication of the Son was not heard, if even the Beloved had to say, "*Not what I will,*" how much more do we need to pray that way. It appears impossible that the promises which the Lord had given only a few hours previously, "*Whatever things you ask...you will have them*" (Mark 11:24), "*Ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you*" (John 15:7), could have been meant literally. A deeper insight into the meaning of Gethsemane teach us that right here we have the sure ground and the open way to the assurance of an answer to our prayer. Let us draw near in reverent and adoring wonder, to gaze on this great sight: God's Son offering up prayer and supplications with strong crying and tears, and not obtaining what He asks. He Himself is our Teacher, and will open up to us the mystery of His holy sacrifice, as revealed in this wonderful prayer.

To understand the prayer, let us note the infinite difference between what our Lord prayed a little while ago as a Royal High Priest, and what He pleads here in His weakness. There it was for the glorifying of the Father He prayed, and the glorifying of Himself and His people as the fulfilment of distinct promises that had been given to Him. He asked what He knew to be according to the word and the will of the Father; He boldly said: "*Father! I will.*" Here He prays for something in regard to which the Father's will is not yet clear to Him. As far as He knows, it is the Father's will that He should drink the cup. He had told His disciples of the cup He must drink: a little later He would again say, "*Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?*" (John 18:11). It was for this He had come to this earth. But when, in the unutterable agony of soul that burst upon him as the

power of darkness came upon Him, and He began to taste the first drops of death as the wrath of God against sin. His human nature, as it shuddered in the presence of the awful reality of being made a curse, gave utterance in this cry of anguish, to its desire that, if God's purpose could be accomplished without it, He might be spared the awful cup: "*Let this cup pass from Me.*" That desire was the evidence of the intense reality of His humanity. The "*Not as I will,*" kept that desire from being sinful. As He pleadingly cries, "*Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me,*" (Mark 14:36) and returns again to still more earnest prayer that the cup may be removed, it is His three times repeated: "*Not what I will,*" that constitutes the very essence and worth of His sacrifice. He had asked for something of which He could not say: *I know it is Your will.* He had pleaded God's power and love, and had then withdrawn it in His final, "*Your will be done!*" The prayer that the cup should pass away could not be answered; the prayer of submission that God's will be done was heard, and gloriously answered in His victory first over the fear, and then over the power of death.

It is in this denial of His will, this complete surrender of His will to the will of the Father, that Christ's obedience reached its highest perfection. It is from the sacrifice of the will in Gethsemane that the sacrifice of the life on Calvary derives its value. It is here, as Scripture says, that He learned obedience, and became the author of everlasting salvation to all that obey Him (Heb.5:8). It was because He there, in that prayer, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, that God has highly exalted Him, and given Him the power to ask what He will (Phil.2:8). It was in that "*Father! **Not what I want,***" that He obtained the power for that other "*Father! I will.*" It was by Christ's submission in Gethsemane to not have His will done, that He secured for His people the right to say to them, "*Ask **whatever you want.***"

Let me look at them again, the deep mysteries that Gethsemane offers to my view. There is the first: the Father offers His Beloved Son the cup, the cup of wrath. The second: the Son, always so obedient, shrinks back, and begs that He may not have to drink it. The third: the Father does not grant the Son His request, but instead still gives the cup. And then the last: the Son yields His will, is content that His will be not done, and goes out to Calvary to drink the cup. O Gethsemane! I see now how my Lord could give me such unlimited assurance of an answer to my prayers. He won the guarantee for me by His consent to have His prayer go unanswered.

This is in harmony with the whole scheme of redemption. Our Lord always wins for us the opposite of what He suffered. He was bound that we might go free. He was made sin that we might become the righteousness of God. He died that we might live. He bore God's curse that God's blessing might be ours. He endured not having His prayer answered, that our prayers might find an answer. Yes, He spoke, "*Not as I will,*" that He might say to us, "*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*" (John 15:7).

Yes, "*If you abide in Me.*" Here in Gethsemane the word acquires new force and depth. Christ is our Head, who stands in our place as our guarantee, and bears what otherwise we must have carried for eternity. We had deserved that God should turn a deaf ear to us, and never listen to our cry. Christ comes, and suffers this for us too. He suffers what we had deserved. For our sins He

suffers beneath the burden of that unanswered prayer. But now His suffering achieves this for me. What He has carried is taken away for me. His accomplishment has won for me the answer to every prayer, *if I abide in Him*.

Yes, I must abide in Him, as He bows there in Gethsemane. As my Head, He not only once suffered for me, but lives in me forever, breathing and working His own character in me too. The Eternal Spirit, through which He offered Himself unto God, is the Spirit that dwells in me too, and makes me partaker of the very same obedience, and the sacrifice of the will unto God. That Spirit teaches me to yield my will entirely to the will of the Father, to give it up even unto death, in Christ to be dead to my will. He teaches me to fear and flee whatever is my own mind and thought and will, even though it may not be directly sinful. He opens my ear to wait in great gentleness and teachableness of soul for what the Father wants to speak and teach day by day. He reveals to me how union with God's will in the love of His will, is union with God Himself; how entire surrender to God's will is the Father's claim, the Son's example, and the true blessedness of the soul. He leads my will into the fellowship of Christ's death and resurrection. My will dies in Him, to be made alive in Him again. He breathes into it, as a renewed and quickened will, a holy insight into God's perfect will, a holy joy in yielding itself to be an instrument of that will, a holy liberty and power to lay hold of God's will to answer prayer. With my whole will I learn to live for the interests of God and His kingdom, to exercise the power of that will – crucified but risen again – in nature and in prayer, on earth and in heaven, with men and with God. The more deeply I enter into the "*Father! Not what I want*" of Gethsemane, and into Him who said it, to abide in Him, the fuller is my spiritual access into the power of His "*Father! I want.*" And the soul experiences that it is the will, which has become nothing that God's will may be all, which now becomes inspired with a divine strength to really will what God wills, and to claim what has been promised it in the name of Christ.

O let us listen to Christ in Gethsemane, as He calls, "*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*" (John 15:7). Being of one mind and spirit with Him in His giving up everything to God's will, living like Him in obedience and surrender to the Father; this is abiding in Him; this is the secret of power in prayer.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Lord Jesus! Gethsemane was Your school, where You learned to pray and to obey. It is still Your school, where You lead all Your disciples who want learn to obey and to pray even as You did. Lord! Teach me there to pray, in the faith that You have atoned for and conquered our self-will, and can indeed give us grace to pray like You.

O Lamb of God! I would follow You to Gethsemane, there to become one with You, and to abide in You as You yield Your will unto the Father. With You, through You, in You, I yield my will in absolute and entire surrender to the will of the Father. Conscious of my own weakness, and the secret power with which self-will would assert itself and again take its place on the throne, I claim in faith the power of Your victory. You triumphed over it and delivered me from it. In Your death I

would daily live; in Your life I would daily die. As I abide in You, let my will, through the power of Your eternal Spirit, only be the tuned instrument which yields to every touch of the will of my God. With my whole soul I say with You and in You, "*Father! Not what I want, but what You want.*"

And then, Blessed Lord! Open my heart and that of all Your people, to fully grasp the glory of the truth, that a will surrendered to God is a will accepted by God to be used in his service, to desire, and purpose, and determine, and will what is according to God's will. A will which, in the power of the Holy Spirit the indwelling God, is to exercise its royal privilege in prayer, to loose and to bind in heaven and upon earth, to ask whatever it will, and to say it shall be done.

O Lord Jesus! Teach me to pray. Amen.

LESSON TWENTY-NINE

According to His will
Or,
OUR BOLDNESS IN PRAYER

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." (1 John 5:14-15)

One of the greatest hindrances to believing prayer with many is undoubtedly this: they don't know if what they ask is according to the will of God. As long as they are in doubt on this point, they cannot have the boldness to ask in the assurance that they will certainly receive. And they soon begin to think that, if once they have made known their requests, and receive no answer, it is best to leave it to God to do according to His good pleasure. Certainty as to the answer to prayer is impossible, as they understand the words of John, *"If we ask **anything according to His will**, He hears us,"* because they cannot be sure of what the will of God really is. They think of God's will as His hidden counsel. How could man possibly be able to fathom what really may be the purpose of the all-wise God?

This is the very opposite of what John aimed at in writing these words. He wanted to stir us to boldness, to confidence, to full assurance of faith in prayer. He says, *"This is the boldness which we have toward Him,"* that we can say: Father! You know and I know that I ask according to Your will. I know You hear me. *"This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* On this account He adds at once: *"If we know that He hears us whatever we ask, we know,"* through this faith, *"that we have,"* that we now while we pray *"we have the petition,"* the special things, we *"have asked of Him."* John supposes that when we pray, we first find out if our prayers are according to the will of God. They may be according to God's will, and yet not come at once, nor without the persevering prayer of faith. It is to give us courage to persevere and to be strong in faith, that He tells us: This gives us boldness and confidence in prayer, *"if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* It is evident that if it is a matter of uncertainty to us whether our requests are according to His will, we cannot have the comfort of what he says, *"We know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him."*

But just this is the difficulty. More than one believer says: "I do not know if what I desire is according to the will of God. God's will is the purpose of His infinite wisdom. It is impossible for me to know whether He may not consider something else better for me than what I desire, or may have some reasons for withholding what I ask." Such thoughts are common. Believers feel that the prayer of faith is an impossibility. There may be the prayer of submission, and of trust in God's wisdom, but there cannot be the prayer of faith. The great mistake here is that God's children do not really believe that it is possible to know God's will. Or if they believe this, they do not take the time and trouble to find it out. What we need is to see clearly in which direction the Father leads His waiting, teachable child to know that his or her petition is according to His will. It is through

God's holy Word, taken up and kept in the heart, the life, the will; and through God's Holy Spirit, accepted in His indwelling and leading, that we shall learn to know that our petitions are according to His will.

Through the Word. We often fear that there is a secret will of God which may disagree with our requests. What we have to deal with in our prayers, is not this secret will of God, but His will as revealed in His word. Our ideas concerning the dictates of the secret will, and of how it might render the answers to our prayers impossible, are mostly very wrong. Childlike faith as to what He is willing to do for His children, simply keeps to the Father's assurance, that it is His will to hear prayer and to do what faith in His Word desires and accepts. In the Word, the Father has revealed the great principles of His will with His people, in general promises. The child has to take the promise and apply it to the special circumstances in His life to which it refers to. Whatever he asks within the limits of that revealed will, he can know to be according to the will of God, and he may confidently expect an answer. In His Word, God has given us the revelation of His will and plans with us, with His people, and with the world, with the most precious promises of the grace and power with which, through His people, He will carry out His plans and do His work. As faith becomes strong and bold enough to claim the fulfilment of the general promise in the special case, we may have the assurance that our prayers are heard, that they are according to God's will. Take the words of John in the verse following our text as an illustration: "*If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life.*" (1 John 5:16, ESV). Such is the general promise; and the believer who pleads on the ground of this promise, prays according to the will of God, and John would give him boldness to know that he has the petition which he asks.

But this understanding of God's will is something spiritual, and must be spiritually discerned. It is not as a matter of logic that we can argue it out: God has said it; I must have it. Nor has every Christian the same gift or calling. While God's general will revealed in the promise is the same for all, there is for each one a specific different will according to God's purpose. And herein is the wisdom of the saints, to know this specific will of God for each of us, according to the measure of grace given to us, and so to ask in prayer just what God has prepared and made possible for each. It is to communicate this wisdom that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. The personal application of the general promises of the Word to our special personal needs – it is for this that the leading of the Holy Spirit is given to us.

It is this union of the teaching of the Word and Spirit that many do not understand, causing a twofold difficulty in knowing what God's will may be. Some seek the will of God in an inner feeling or conviction, and would have the Spirit lead them without the Word. Others seek it in the Word, without the living leading of the Holy Spirit. The two must be united: only in the Word, only in the Spirit, but in these most surely, can we know the will of God, and learn to pray according to it. In the heart the Word and the Spirit must meet. It is only by their indwelling that we can experience their teaching. The Word must dwell, must abide in us. Our heart and life must day by day be under its influence. Not from without, but from within, comes the quickening of the Word by the Spirit. It is only he who yields his whole life entirely to the supremacy of the Word and the will of

God, who can expect to discern what that Word and will permit him boldly to ask in specific cases. And even as with the Word, just so with the Spirit. If I want to have the leading of the Spirit in prayer to assure me what God's will is, my whole life must be yielded to that leading. Only in this way can mind and heart become spiritual and capable of knowing God's holy will. It is he who, through Word and Spirit, lives in the will of God by doing it, who will know how to pray according to that will in the confidence that He hears us.

If only Christians might see what immeasurable harm they do themselves by the thought that because their prayer is possibly not according to God's will, they must be content without an answer. God's Word tells us that the great reason of unanswered prayer is that we do not pray correct: *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."* (James 4:3, ESV). In not granting an answer, the Father tells us that there is something wrong in our praying. He wants to teach us to find it out and confess it, and so to educate us to true believing and prevailing prayer. He can only attain His goal when He brings us to see that we are to blame for the withholding of the answer; our aim, or our faith, or our life is not what it should be. But this purpose of God is frustrated as long as we are content to say: "It is perhaps because my prayer is not according to His will that He does not hear me." O let us no longer throw the blame of our unanswered prayers on the secret will of God, but on our praying wrongly. Let that word, *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly,"* (James 4:3, ESV), be like the lantern of the Lord, searching heart and life to prove that we are indeed those to whom Christ gave His promises of assured answers. Let us believe that we can know if our prayer is according to God's will. Let us yield our hearts to have the Word of the Father dwell richly there, to have Christ's Word abiding in us.

Let us live day by day with the anointing which teaches us all things. Let us yield ourselves unreservedly to the Holy Spirit as He teaches us to abide in Christ, to dwell in the Father's presence, and we shall soon understand how the Father's love longs that the child should know His will. We shall soon discover, the confidence that that will includes all that the Father's power and love have promised to do, and also to know that He hears the petitions which we ask of Him. *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* (1 John 5:14).

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Blessed Master! With my whole heart I thank You for this blessed lesson, that the path to a life full of answers to prayer is through the will of God. Lord! Teach me to know your blessed will by living it, loving it, and always doing it. Then I shall learn to offer prayers according to that will, and to find my prayers are in harmony with God's blessed will. Then my boldness in prayer and my confidence in accepting the answer will increase.

Father! It is Your will that Your child should enjoy Your presence and blessing. It is Your will that everything in the life of Your child should be in accordance with Your will, and that the Holy Spirit should work this in Him. It is Your will that Your child should live in the daily experience of distinct

answers to prayer, and to enjoy living and direct fellowship with Yourself. It is Your will that Your Name should be glorified in and through Your children, and that You will be glorified in those who trust You. O my Father! Let Your will be my confidence in all I ask.

Blessed Saviour! Teach me to believe in the glory of this will. Your will is the eternal love, which with divine power works out its purpose in each human will that yields itself to it. Lord! Teach me this. You can make me see how every promise and every command of the Word is indeed the will of God, and that its fulfilment is guaranteed to me by God Himself. Let the will of God, in this way, become to me the sure rock on which my prayer and my assurance of an answer ever rest. Amen.

NOTE

There is often great confusion as to the will of God. People think that what God wills must inevitably take place. This is by no means the case. God wills a great deal of blessing to His people, which never comes to them. He wills it most earnestly, but they do not will it, and it cannot come to them. This is the great mystery of man's creation with a free will, and also of the renewal of his will in redemption, that God has made the execution of His will, in many things, dependent on the will of man. As much as our faith accepts of God's will revealed in His promises, so much will be fulfilled. Prayer is the power by which things come to pass which otherwise would not take place. And faith is the power by which it is decided how much of God's will shall be done in us. When once God reveals to a soul what He is willing to do for it, the responsibility for the execution of that will rests with us.

Some are afraid that this is putting too much power into the hands of man. But all power is put into the hands of man in Christ Jesus. The key of all prayer and all power is His, and when we learn to understand that He is just as much with us as with the Father, and that we are also just as much one with Him as He with the Father, we shall see how natural and right and safe it is that to those who abide in Him as He in the Father, such power should be given. It is Christ the Son who has the right to ask what He will. It is through the abiding in Him and His abiding in us (in a divine reality of which we have too little understanding) that His Spirit breathes in us what He wants to ask and obtain through us. We pray in His Name: the prayers are really ours and really His.

Others again fear that to believe that prayer has such power is limiting the liberty and the love of God. O, if we only knew how we are limiting His liberty and His love by not allowing Him to act in the only way in which He chooses to act, now that He has taken us up into fellowship with Himself: through our prayers and our faith. A brother in the ministry once asked, as we were speaking on this subject, whether there was not a danger of our thinking that our love to souls and our willingness to see them blessed were to move God's love and God's willingness to bless them. We were just passing some large water-pipes, by which water was being carried over hill and valley, from a large mountain stream to a town at some distance. Just look at these pipes, was the answer; they did not make the water willing to flow downwards from the hills, nor did they give it its power of blessing and refreshment: this is its very nature. All that they could do is to decide its direction, by it the inhabitants of the town said they want the blessing there. And just so, it is the

very nature of God to love and to bless. Downward and ever downward His love longs to come with its quickening and refreshing streams. But He has left it to prayer to say where the blessing is to come. He has committed it to His believing people to bring the living water to the desert places. The will of God to bless is dependent upon the will of man to say where the blessing must descend. *"This honour have all His saints."* (Psalm 149:9). *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."* (1 John 5:14-15). – (See this illustrated in the extracts from George Muller at the end of this book.)

LESSON THIRTY

A holy priesthood Or, THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

"A holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."
(1 Peter 2:5)

"But you shall be named the priests of the LORD." (Isaiah 61:6)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me..." (Luke 4:18). These are the words of Jesus quoted from Isaiah. As the fruit of His work all redeemed ones are priests, fellow-partakers with Him of His anointing with the Spirit; as High Priest. *"It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments."* (Psalms 133:2). As every son of Aaron had, so every member of Jesus' body has a right to the priesthood. But not everyone exercises it. Many are still entirely ignorant of it. And yet it is the highest privilege of a child of God, the mark of greatest nearness and likeness to Him, *"who always lives to make intercession for them."* (Hebrews 7:25). Do you doubt if this is really true? Think of what constitutes priesthood.

First there is the **work of the priesthood**. This has two sides, one Godward, the other manward. *"For every high priest is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God."* (Hebrews 5:1) or, as it is said by Moses (Deut.10:8, see also 21:5, 33:10; Mal.2:6). *"At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi... to stand before the LORD to serve Him and to bless in His name until this day."* (Deuteronomy 10:8). On the one hand, the priest had the power to draw near to God, to dwell with Him in His house, and to present before Him the blood of the sacrifice or the burning incense. This work he did not do, however, on his own behalf, but for the sake of the people whose representative he was. This is the other side of his work. He received from the people their sacrifices, presented them before God, and then came out to bless in His Name, to give the assurance of His favour and to teach them His law.

A priest is a man who does not at all live for himself. He lives with God and for God. His work as God's servant is to care for His house, His honour, and His worship, to make known to men His love and His will. He also lives with men and for men (Heb.5:2). His work is to find out their sin and need, and to bring it before God, to offer sacrifice and incense in their name, to obtain forgiveness and blessing for them, and then to come out and bless them in His Name. This is the high calling of every believer. *"This honour have all His saints."* (Psalms 149:9). They, God's priests, have been redeemed with the one purpose to be in the midst of the perishing millions around them. They, in conformity to Jesus, the Great High Priest, are to be the ministers and stewards of the grace of God to all around them.

And then there is the **walk of the priesthood**, in harmony with its work. As God is holy, so the priest was to be especially holy. This means not only separated from everything unclean, but **holy**

unto God, being set apart and given up to God for His disposal. The separation from the world and setting apart unto God was indicated in many ways. It was seen in the clothing: the holy garments, made after God's own order, marked them as His (Ex.28). It was seen in the command as to their special purity and avoidance from all contact from death and defilement (Lev.21:1). Much that was allowed to an ordinary Israelite was forbidden to them. It was seen in the injunction that the priest must have no bodily defect or blemish; bodily perfection was to be the type of wholeness and holiness in God's service. And it was seen in the arrangement by which the priestly tribes were to have no inheritance with the other tribes; God was to be their inheritance. Their life was to be one of faith: set apart unto God, they were to live through Him as well as for Him. All this is the symbol of what the character of the New Testament priest must be. Our priestly power with God depends on our personal life and walk. We must be of those about whose walk on earth Jesus says, "*They have not defiled their garments.*" (Revelation 3:4)

In the surrender of what may appear lawful to others in our separation from the world, we must prove that **our consecration to be holy to the Lord is whole-hearted and entire**. The bodily perfection of the priest must have its counterpart in our too being "*holy and without blemish.*" (Ephesians 5:27, see also Num.19:2), "*that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work,*" (2 Timothy 3:17), "*perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*" (James 1:4). And above all, we consent to **give up all inheritance on earth; to forsake all**, and like Christ to **have only God as our portion**, to possess as not possessing, and hold all for God alone. This marks the true priest, the man who only lives for God and his fellow-men.

And now **the way to the priesthood**. When God chose Aaron, He had chosen all his sons to be priests. Each of them was a priest by birth. And yet they could not enter upon their work without a special act of ordinance, their consecration. Every child of God is priest in light of his birth, his blood relationship to the Great High Priest; but this is not enough. He will exercise his power only as he accepts and acknowledges his consecration. With Aaron and his sons it took place like this (Ex. 29): After being washed and clothed, they were anointed with the holy oil. Sacrifices were then offered, and the right ear, the right hand, and the right foot were touched by the blood. And then they and their garments were once again sprinkled with the blood and the oil together. And so it is as the child of God enters more fully into what **the Blood** and **the Spirit** already are to him, that the power of the Holy Priesthood will work in him. The blood will take away all sense of unworthiness; the Spirit, all sense of inability.

Notice that there was something new in the application of the blood to the priest. If ever he had brought a sacrifice for his own sin, seeking forgiveness, the blood was sprinkled on the altar, but not on his person. But now, for priestly consecration, there was to be closer contact with the blood; ear and hand and foot were by a special act brought under its power, and the whole person was taken possession of and sanctified for God. And so, when the believer, who had been content to think chiefly of the blood sprinkled on the mercy-seat as what he needs for pardon, is led to seek full priestly access to God, he feels the need of a fuller and more abiding experience of the power of the blood, as really **sprinkling and cleansing the heart from an evil conscience**, so that he "*would have no more consciousness of sins,*" (Hebrews 10:2) as all sins are taken away by the

blood of Jesus (Heb.10:4,14). And it is as he gets to enjoy this, that the consciousness is awakened of his wonderful right of most intimate access to God, and of the full assurance that his intercessions are acceptable.

And as the blood gives the right, the Spirit gives the power, and fits a person for believing intercession. He breathes into us the priestly spirit, burning love for God's honour and the salvation of souls. He makes us so one with Jesus that prayer in His Name is a reality. He strengthens us to believing, persistent prayer. The more the Christian is truly filled with the Spirit of Christ, the more spontaneous will be his giving himself up to the life of priestly intercession. Beloved fellow-Christians! God strongly requires priests who can draw near to Him, who live in His presence, and by their intercession draw down the blessings of His grace on others. And the world needs, greatly needs, priests who will bear the burden of the perishing ones, and intercede on their behalf.

Are you willing to offer yourself for this holy work? You know the surrender it demands, nothing less than the Christ-like **giving up of all**, that the saving purposes of God's love may be accomplished among men. O, be no longer of those who are content only to have salvation, and to work just enough to keep themselves warm and lively. O, let nothing keep you back from giving yourselves to be wholly and only priests, nothing else, nothing less than the priests of the Most High God. The thought of unworthiness, of inability, do not need to keep you back. In **the Blood**, the objective power of the perfect redemption works in you. In **the Spirit** its full subjective personal experience as a divine life is secured. **The Blood** provides an infinite worthiness to make your prayers most acceptable. **The Spirit** provides a Divine ability, teaching you to pray entirely according to the will of God. Every priest knew that when he presented a sacrifice according to the law of the sanctuary, it was accepted. Under the covering of **the Blood** and **Spirit** you have the assurance that all the wonderful promises to prayer in the Name of Jesus will be fulfilled in you. Abiding in union with the Great High Priest, "*you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*" (John 15:7). You will have power to pray the effective prayer of the righteous man that avails much. You will not only join in the general prayer of the church for the world, but be able in your own sphere to take up your special work in prayer, as priests, to transact with God, to receive and know the answer, and so to bless in His Name. Come, brother, come, and be a priest, only priest, all priest. Seek now to walk before the Lord in the full consciousness that you have been **set apart** for the holy Ministry of Intercession. This is the true blessedness of conformity to the image of God's Son.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O You, my blessed High Priest, accept the consecration in which my soul now would respond to Your message.

- I believe in the **Holy Priesthood of Your Saints**, and that I too am a priest, with power to appear before the Father, and in the prayer that avails much, bring down blessing on those around me who are perishing.

- I believe in the **Power of Your Precious Blood** to cleanse from all sin, to give me perfect confidence toward God, and bring me near in the full assurance of faith that my intercession will be heard.
- I believe in the **Anointing of the Spirit**, coming down daily from You, my Great High Priest, to sanctify me, to fill me with the consciousness of my priestly calling, and with love to souls, to teach me what is according to God's will, and how to pray the prayer of faith.
- I believe that, as You, my Lord Jesus, are everything to me, so You, too, are **the Guarantee for my Prayer-Life**, and You, Yourself, will draw me up into the fellowship of Your wondrous work of intercession.

In this faith I yield myself today to my God, as one of His anointed priests, to stand before His face to intercede on behalf of sinners, and to come out and bless in His Name.

Holy Lord Jesus! Accept and seal my consecration. Lord, lay Your hands on me, and consecrate me to this - Your holy work. And let me walk among people with the consciousness and the character of a priest of the Most High God. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins **in his own blood, and has made us** kings and priests unto God and His Father; **to Him** be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

LESSON THIRTY-ONE

Pray without ceasing
Or,
A LIFE OF PRAYER

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks;" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Our Lord told the parable of the widow and the unjust judge to teach us that we ought to pray always and not give up. As the widow persevered in seeking one definite thing, the parable appears to refer to persevering prayer for a particular blessing, when God delays or appears to refuse. The words in Thessalonians, which speak of persistent continual prayer, giving thanks and staying watchful, appear more to refer more to one's whole life being a life of prayer rather than about one prayer request. As the soul is filling with the longing for the manifestation of God's glory to us and in us, through us and around us, and with the confidence that He hears the prayers of His children; the inmost life of the soul is continually rising upward in dependence and faith, in longing desire and trustful expectation.

At the close of our meditations it will not be difficult to say what is needed to live such a life of prayer. The first thing is undoubtedly the entire sacrifice of the life to God's kingdom and glory. He who seeks to pray without ceasing because he wants to be very pious and good, will never attain to it. It is the forgetting of self and yielding ourselves to live for God and His honour that enlarges the heart, that teaches us to regard everything in the light of God and His will, and that instinctively recognises in everything around us the need of God's help and blessing, an opportunity for Him to be glorified. Because everything is weighed and tested by the one thing that fills the heart – the glory of God, and because the soul has learnt that only what is of God can really be to Him and His glory, the whole life becomes a looking up, a crying from the inmost heart, for God to prove His power and love and so show forth His glory. The believer becomes conscious that he is one of the watchmen on Zion's walls, one who reminds the Lord of his promises, whose call does really touch and move the King in heaven to do what would otherwise not be done. He understands how real Paul's exhortation was, *"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me"* (Ephesians 6:18-19a), and continue in prayer, *"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us,"* (Colossians 4:2-3). To forget oneself, to live for God and His kingdom among men, is the way to learn to pray without ceasing.

This life devoted to God must be accompanied by the deep confidence that our prayer is effective. We have seen how our Blessed Lord insisted upon faith, more than anything else in His prayer-lessons, in the Father as a God, who most certainly does what we ask. *"For everyone who asks receives."* (Matthew 7:8). Counting confidently on an answer, is with Him the beginning and the end of His teaching (John 16:24). In the same proportion that this assurance masters us, and it becomes a settled thing that our prayers do count, and that God does what we ask; in that same

proportion we will not dare to neglect the use of this wonderful power, the soul turns wholly to God and our life becomes prayer. We see that the Lord needs and takes time, because we and all around us are creatures of time, under the law of growth. But knowing that sometimes there is need for the storing up and accumulating of prayer, that not one single prayer of faith can possibly be lost, that persevering prayer is irresistible, prayer becomes the quiet, persistent living of our life of desire and faith in the presence of our God. O, do not let us any longer by our reasonings limit and weaken the open ended and certain promises of the living God, robbing them of their power, and ourselves of the wonderful confidence they are meant to inspire. The hindrance is not in God, not in His secret will, not in the limitations of His promises, but it is in us. The hindrance is in ourselves. We are not what we should be to obtain the promise. Let us open our whole heart to God's words of promise in all their simplicity and truth: they will search us and humble us; they will lift us up and make us glad and strong. And to the faith that knows it gets what it asks, prayer is not a work or a burden, but a joy and a triumph; it becomes a necessity and a second nature.

This union of strong desire and firm confidence is nothing else but the life of the Holy Spirit within us. The Holy Spirit dwells in us, hides Himself in the depths of our being, and stirs the desire after the Unseen and the Divine, after God Himself. Now in groanings that cannot be uttered, then in clear and conscious assurance; now in special distinct petitions for the deeper revelation of Christ to ourselves, then in pleadings for a soul, a work, the Church or the world. It is always and only the Holy Spirit who draws out the heart to thirst for God, to long for His being made known and glorified. Where the child of God really lives and walks in the Spirit, where he is not content to remain carnal, but seeks to be spiritual, in everything a fit instrument for the Divine Spirit to reveal the life of Christ and Christ Himself, there the never-ceasing intercession-life of the Blessed Son cannot but reveal and repeat itself in our experience. Because it is the Spirit of Christ who prays in us, our prayer must be heard; because it is we who pray in the Spirit, there is need of time, and patience, and continual renewing of the prayer, until every obstacle is conquered, and the harmony between God's Spirit and ours is perfect.

But the chief thing we need for such a life of unceasing prayer is, to know that Jesus teaches us to pray. We have begun to understand a little what His teaching is. Not the communication of new thoughts or views, not the discovery of failure or error, not the stirring up of desire and faith, of however much importance all this are, but the taking up of us into the fellowship of His own prayer-life before the Father. This it is what Jesus really teaches. It was the sight of the praying Jesus that made the disciples long and ask to be taught to pray. It is the faith of the ever-praying Jesus, whose alone is the power to pray, that teaches us truly to pray. We know why: He who prays is our Head and our Life. All He has is ours and is given to us when we give ourselves all to Him. By His blood He leads us into the immediate presence of God. The inner sanctuary is our home, we dwell there. And He that lives so near God, and knows that He has been brought near to bless those who are far, cannot but pray. Christ makes us partakers with Himself of His prayer-power and prayer-life. We understand then that our true aim must not be to work much and have enough prayer to keep the work going, but to pray much and then to work enough for the power and blessing obtained in prayer, to find its way through us to men. It is Christ who always lives to pray, who saves and reigns. He communicates His prayer-life to us. He maintains it in us if we trust

Him. He is the guarantee that we can pray without ceasing. Yes, Christ teaches to pray by showing how He does it, by doing it in us, by leading us to do it in Him and like Him. Christ is all, the life and the strength too for a never-ceasing prayer-life.

It is the sight of this, the sight of the always-praying Christ as our life, that enables us to pray without ceasing. Because His priesthood is the power of an endless life, that resurrection-life that never fades and never fails, and because His life is our life, praying without ceasing can become to us nothing less than the life-joy of heaven. So the Apostle says: "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Carried by the never-ceasing joy and the never-ceasing praise, never-ceasing prayer is the manifestation of the power of the eternal life, where Jesus always prays. The union between the Vine and the branch is in a true and real a prayer-union. The highest conformity to Christ, the most blessed participation in the glory of His heavenly life, is that we take part in His work of intercession. He and we live always to pray. In the experience of our union with Him, praying without ceasing becomes a possibility, a reality, the holiest and most blessed part of our holy and blessed fellowship with God. We have our abode within the veil, in the presence of the Father. What the Father says, we do; what the Son says, the Father does. Praying without ceasing is the earthly manifestation of heaven come down to us, the foretaste of the life where they do not rest day or night in the song of worship and adoration.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

O my Father, with my whole heart I praise You for this wonderful life of never-ceasing prayer, never-ceasing fellowship, never-ceasing answers, and never-ceasing experience of my oneness with Him who always lives to pray. O my God! Keep me always dwelling and walking in the presence of Your glory, so that prayer may be the spontaneous expression of my life with You.

Blessed Saviour! With my whole heart I praise You that You came from heaven to share with me in my needs and cries, so that I might share with You in Your all-prevailing intercession. And I thank You that You have taken me into the school of prayer, to teach the blessedness and the power of a life that is all prayer. And most of all, that You have taken me up into the fellowship of Your life of intercession, that through me too Your blessings may be dispensed to those around me.

Holy Spirit! With deep reverence I thank You for Your work in me. It is through You I am lifted up into a share in the interaction between the Son and the Father, and in such a way to enter into the fellowship of the life and love of the Holy Trinity Spirit of God! Perfect Your work in me; bring me into perfect union with Christ my Intercessor. Let Your unceasing indwelling make my life one of unceasing intercession. And let my life in this way become one that is unceasingly to the glory of the Father and to the blessing of those around me. Amen.

GEORGE MULLER, AND THE SECRET OF HIS POWER IN PRAYER

When God wishes anew to teach His Church a truth that is not being understood or practised, He mostly does so by raising some man or woman to be in word and deed a living witness to its blessedness. And so God has raised up in the nineteenth century, among others, George Muller to be His witness that He is indeed the Hearer of prayer. I know of no way in which the main truths of God's word in regard to prayer can be more effectively illustrated and established than a short review of his life and of what he tells of his prayer-experiences.

He was born in Prussia on 25 September 1805. His early life, even after having entered the University of Halle as a theological student, was wicked in the extreme. Led by a friend one evening, when just twenty years of age, to a prayer meeting, he was deeply convicted, and soon after brought to know the Saviour. Not long after that he began reading missionary papers, and in course of time offered himself to the London Society for promoting Christianity to the Jews. He was accepted as a student, but soon found that he could not in all things submit to the rules of the Society, especially the freedom to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. The connection was dissolved in 1830 by mutual consent, and he became the pastor of a small congregation at Teignmouth. In 1832 he was led to Bristol, and it was as pastor of Bethesda Chapel that he was led to the Orphan Home and other work, in connection with which God has so remarkably led him to trust His word and to experience how God fulfils that word.

A few extracts in regard to his spiritual life will prepare the way for what we specifically wish to quote of his experiences in reference to prayer. Muller wrote: In connection with this I would mention, that the Lord very graciously gave me, from the very commencement of my spiritual life, a measure of simplicity and of childlike disposition in spiritual things, so that while I was exceedingly ignorant of the Scriptures, and was still from time to time overcome even by outward sins, yet I was enabled to carry the smallest matters to the Lord in prayer. And I have found *"godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come."* (1 Timothy 4:8). Though very weak and ignorant, yet I had now, by the grace of God, some desire to benefit others, and he who so faithfully had once served Satan, sought now to win souls for Christ.

It was at Teignmouth that he was led to know how to use God's word, and to trust the Holy Spirit as the Teacher given by God to make that word clear. He wrote: God then began to show me that the word of God alone is our standard of judgment in spiritual things; that it can be explained only by the Holy Spirit; both in our day, as well as in former times. He is the Teacher of His people. I did not understand the office of the Holy Spirit experimentally before that time. I was only beginning to understand this point in particular and it had a great effect on me; for the Lord enabled me to put it to the test of experience, by laying aside commentaries, and almost every other book and simply reading the word of God and studying it.

The result of this was, that the first evening that I shut myself into my room, to give myself to prayer and meditation over the Scriptures, I learned more in a few hours than I had done during a

period of several months previously. But the particular difference was that I received real strength for my soul in doing so. I now began to try to test the things I had learned and seen in the Scriptures, and found that only those principles which stood the test were of real value.

Of obedience to the word of God, he writes as follows, in connection with his being baptized: It had pleased God, in His abundant mercy, to bring my mind into such a state, that I was willing to do whatever I should find in the Scriptures. I could say, "I will do His will," and this was the reason, I believe, that I saw which "doctrine was of God." And I would observe here, by the way, that the passage to which I have just alluded (John 7:17) has been a most remarkable commentary to me on many doctrines and precepts of our most holy faith. For instance: *"But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. 'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,"* (Matthew 5:39-44). *"Sell what you have and give alms;"* (Luke 12:33). *"Owe no one anything,"* (Romans 13:8). It may be said, "Surely these passages cannot be taken literally, for how then would the people of God be able to pass through the world?" The state of mind commanded in John 7:17 will cause such objections to vanish. **Whoever is willing to apply** these commandments of the Lord **literally**, will, I believe, be led with me to see that to take them **literally**, is the will of God. Those who do take them literally will doubtless often be brought into difficulties, hard to the flesh to bear, it will have a tendency to make them constantly feel that they are strangers and pilgrims here, that this world is not their home, and thus to throw them more upon God, who will assuredly help us through any difficulty into which we may be brought by seeking to act in obedience to His word.

This implicit surrender to God's word led him to certain views and conduct in regard to money, which mightily influenced his future life. They had their root in the conviction that money was a Divine stewardship, and that all money had therefore to be received and dispensed in direct fellowship with God Himself. This led him to the adoption of the following four great rules:

1. Not to receive any fixed salary, both because in the collecting of it there was often much that was conflicting with the freewill offering with which God's service is to be maintained, and in the receiving of it a danger of placing more dependence on human sources of income than in the living God Himself.
2. Never to ask any human being for help, however great the need might be, but to make his needs known to the God who has promised to care for His servants and to hear their prayer.
3. To take this command *"Sell what you have and give alms"* (Luke 12:33) literally and never to save up money, but to spend all God entrusted to him on God's poor, on the work of His kingdom.
4. Also to take *"Owe no one anything,"* (Romans 13:8) literally, and never to buy on credit, or be in debt for anything, but to trust God to provide.

This mode of living was not easy at first. But Muller testified it was most blessed in bringing the soul to rest in God, and drawing it into closer union with Himself, when you are inclined to backslide. For it will not do, it is not possible, to live in sin, and at the same time, by communion with God, to draw down from heaven everything one needs for living now.

Not long after his settlement at Bristol, The Scriptural Knowledge Institution For Home And Abroad, was established for aiding in Day, Sunday School, Mission and Bible work. Of this Institution the work of the Orphan Home, by which Mr. Muller was best known, became a branch. It was in 1834 that his heart was touched by the case of an orphan brought to Christ in one of the schools, but who had to go to a poorhouse (charity that cares for the homeless) where his spiritual needs would not be cared for. Shortly thereafter he wrote (Nov, 20, 1835): Today I have had it very much laid on my heart no longer merely to think about the establishment of an Orphan Home, but actually to set about it, and I have been very much in prayer regarding it, in order to determine what was on the Lord's mind.

May God make it plain. He wrote again, Nov. 25: I have been again much in prayer yesterday and today about the Orphan Home, and am more and more convinced that it is of God. May He in mercy guide me. The three main reasons are—

1. That God may be glorified, should He be pleased to supply me with the means, because to trust Him is not a vain thing; and that in this way the faith of His children may be strengthened.
2. The spiritual welfare of fatherless and motherless children.
3. Their earthly welfare.

After some months of prayer and waiting on God, a house was rented, with room for thirty children, and in course of time three more, containing altogether 120 children. The work was carried on in this way for ten years, the supplies for the needs of the orphans being asked and received of God alone. There were often times of serious needs and much prayer, but a trial of faith more precious than of gold was found leading to praise and honour and glory of God. The Lord was preparing His servant for greater things. By His providence and His Holy Spirit, Mr. Muller was led to desire, and to wait upon God until he received from Him, the certain promise of £15,000 for a Home to contain 300 children. This first Home was opened in 1849. In 1858, a second and third Home, for 950 more orphans, was opened, costing £35,000. And in 1869 and 1870, a fourth and a fifth Home, for 850 more, at an expense of £50,000, making the total number of the orphans 2100.

In addition to this work, God has given him almost as much as for the building of the Orphan Homes, and the maintenance of the orphans, for other work, the support of schools and missions, Bible and tract circulation. In all he has received from God, to be spent in His work, during these fifty years, more than one million pounds sterling. How little he knew, let us carefully notice, that when he gave up his little salary of £35 a year in obedience to the leading of God's word and the Holy Spirit, what God was preparing to give him as the reward of obedience and faith; and how wonderfully the word was to be fulfilled to him: "done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things." (Matthew 25:21).

And these things happened as an example to us. God calls us to be followers of Christ even as George Muller was. His God is our God; the same promises are for us; the same service of love and faith in which he laboured is calling for us on every side. Let us in connection with our lessons in the school of prayer study the way in which God gave George Muller such power as a man of prayer: we shall find in it the most remarkable illustration of some of the lessons which we have been studying with the blessed Master in the word. We shall especially have impressed upon us His first great lesson, that if we will come to Him in the way He has pointed out, with definite petitions, made known to us by the Spirit through the word as being according to the will of God, we may most confidently believe that whatever we ask it shall be done.

PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD.

We have more than once seen that God's listening to our voice depends upon our listening to His voice. (See Lessons 22 and 23.) We must not only have a special promise to plead, when we make a special request, but our whole life must be under the supremacy of the word: the word must be dwelling in us. The testimony of George Muller on this point is most instructive. He tells us how the discovery of the true place of the word of God, and the teaching of the Spirit with it, was the commencement of a new era in his spiritual life. Of it he wrote: Now the scriptural way of reasoning would have been: God Himself has condescended to become an author, and I am ignorant about that precious book which His Holy Spirit has caused to be written through the instrumentality of His servants, and it contains that which I ought to know, and the knowledge of which will lead me to true happiness. Therefore I ought to read this most precious book, this book of books again and again, most earnestly, most prayerfully, and with much meditation; and in this practice I ought to continue all the days of my life. For I was aware, though I read it but little, that I knew scarcely anything of it. But instead of acting this and being led by my ignorance of the word of God to study it more, my difficulty in understanding it, and the little enjoyment I had in it, made me careless of reading it (for much prayerful reading of the word gives not merely more knowledge, but increases the delight we have in reading it). Thus, like many believers, I practically preferred, for the first four years of my spiritual life, the works of uninspired men to the words of the living God. The consequence was that I remained a baby, both in knowledge and in grace. In knowledge, I say; for all true knowledge must be derived, by the Spirit, from the word. And as I neglected the word, I was for nearly four years so ignorant, that I did not clearly know even the fundamental points of our holy faith. And this lack of knowledge most sadly kept me back from walking steadily in the ways of God. For when it pleased the Lord in August 1829 to bring me really to the Scriptures, my life and walk became very different.

And though ever since that time I have fallen short of what I might and ought to be, yet by the grace of God I have been enabled to live much nearer to Him than before. If any believers read this who practically prefer other books to the Holy Scriptures, and who enjoy the writings of men much more than the word of God, may they be warned by my loss. I shall consider this book to have been the means of doing much good, should it please the Lord, through its instrumentality,

to lead some of His people no longer to neglect the Holy Scriptures, but to give them that preference which they have previously bestowed on the writings of men.

Before I leave this subject, I would only add: If the reader understands very little of the word of God, he *ought to read it very much*; for the Spirit explains the word by the word. And if he enjoys the reading of the word little, that is just the reason why he should read it much; for the frequent reading of the Scriptures creates a delight in them, so that the more we read them, the more we desire to do so.

Above all, he should seek to have it *settled in his own mind* that God alone by His Spirit can teach him, and that therefore, as God will be inquired of for blessings, it is necessary for him to seek God's blessing previous to reading, and also while reading. He should have it, moreover, *settled in his mind* that although the Holy Spirit is the best and sufficient Teacher, yet that this Teacher does not always teach immediately when we desire it, and that therefore we may have to entreat Him again and again for the explanation of certain passages; but that He will surely teach us eventually, if indeed we are seeking for light prayerfully, patiently, and with a view to the glory of God.

We find in George Muller's journal frequent mention made of his spending two and three hours in prayer over the word for the feeding of his spiritual life. As the fruit of this, when he had need of strength and encouragement in prayer, the individual promises were to him not so many arguments from a book to be used with God, but living words in which he had heard the Father's living voice speak to him, and which he could now bring to the Father in living faith.

PRAYER AND THE WILL OF GOD.

One of the greatest difficulties with young believers is to know how they can find out whether what they desire is according to God's will. I count it one of the most precious lessons God wants to teach through the experience of George Muller, that He is willing to make known, of things of which His word says nothing directly, that they are His will for us, and that we may ask them. The teaching of the Spirit, not without or against the word, but as something above and beyond it, in addition to it, without which we cannot see God's will, is the heritage of every believer. It is through **the Word, and the Word alone**, that the Spirit teaches, applying the general principles or promises to our special need. And it is **the Spirit, and the Spirit alone**, who can really make the word a light on our path, whether the path of duty in our daily walk, or the path of faith in our approach to God. Let us try and notice in what childlike simplicity and teachableness it was that the discovery of God's will was so surely and so clearly made known to His servant.

With regard to the building of the first Home and the assurance he had of its being God's will, George Muller wrote in May 1850, just after it had been opened, speaking of the great difficulties there were, and how little likely it appeared to nature that they would be removed: But while the prospect before me would have been overwhelming had I looked at it naturally, I was never even for once permitted to question how it would end. For as from the beginning I was sure it was the

will of God that I should go to the work of building for Him this large Orphan Home, so also from the beginning I was as certain that the whole would be finished as if the Home had been already filled.

The way in which he found out what God's will was, comes out with special clarity in his account of the building of the second Home. I ask the reader to study with care the lesson the narrative conveys: Dec. 5, 1850 – Under these circumstances I can only pray that the Lord in His tender mercy would not allow Satan to gain an advantage over me. By the grace of God my heart says: Lord, if I could be sure that it is Your will that I should go forward in this matter, I would do so cheerfully; and, on the other hand, if I could be sure that these are vain, foolish, proud thoughts, that they are not from You, I would, by Your grace, hate them, and entirely put them aside. My hope is in God: He will help and teach me. Judging, however, from His former dealings with me, it would not be a strange thing to me, nor surprising, if He called me to labour yet still more largely in this way.

The thoughts about enlarging the Orphan work have not yet arisen on account of an abundance of money having lately come in; for I have had of late to wait for about seven weeks upon God, while little, very little comparatively, came in, i.e. about four times as much was going out as came in; and, had not the Lord previously sent me large sums, we should have been distressed indeed.

Lord! How can Your servant know Your will in this matter? Will You be pleased to teach him! December 11: During the last six days, since writing the above, I have been, day after day, waiting upon God concerning this matter. It has generally been more or less all the day on my heart. When I have been awake at night, it has not been far from my thoughts. Yet all this without the least excitement. I am perfectly calm and quiet respecting it. My soul would be rejoiced to go forward in this service, could I be sure that the Lord would have me to do so; for then, notwithstanding the numberless difficulties, all would be well; and His Name would be magnified.

On the other hand, were I assured that the Lord would have me to be satisfied with my present sphere of service, and that I should not pray about enlarging the work, by His grace I could, without an effort, cheerfully yield to it; for He has brought me into such a state of heart, that I only desire to please Him in this matter. Moreover, I have not spoken about this thing previously even to my beloved wife, the sharer of my joys, sorrows, and labours for more than twenty years; nor is it likely that I shall do so for some time to come: for I prefer quietly to wait on the Lord, without conversing on this subject, in order that in this way I may be kept the more easily, by His blessing, from being influenced by things from without. The burden of my prayer concerning this matter is, that the Lord would not allow me to make a mistake, and that He would teach me to do His will.

December 26: Fifteen days have elapsed since I wrote the preceding paragraph. Every day since then I have continued to pray about this matter, and that with a goodly measure of earnestness, by the help of God. There has passed scarcely an hour during these days, in which, while awake, this matter has not been more or less before me. But all without even a shadow of excitement. I converse with no one about it. Until now have I not even done spoken with my dear wife. For this I

refrain still, and deal with God alone about the matter, in order that no outward influence and no outward excitement may keep me from attaining a clear revelation of His will. I have the fullest and most peaceful assurance that He will clearly show me His will. This evening I have had again an especially solemn season for prayer, to seek to know the will of God. But while I continue to entreat and beseech the Lord, that He would not allow me to be deceived in this endeavour, I may say I have scarcely any doubt remaining on my mind as to what will be the issue, even that I should go forward in this matter. As this, however, is one of the most momentous steps that I have ever taken, I judge that I cannot go about this matter with too much caution, prayerfulness, and deliberation. I am in no hurry about it. I could wait for years, by God's grace, were this His will, before even taking one single step toward this thing, or even speaking to anyone about it; and, on the other hand, I would set to work tomorrow, were the Lord to tell me to do so. This calmness of mind, this having no will of my own in the matter, this only wishing to please my Heavenly Father in it, this only seeking His and not my honour in it; this state of heart, I say, is the fullest assurance to me that my heart is not under a fleshly excitement, and that, if I am helped to go on like this, I shall know the will of God to the full. But, while I write this, I cannot but add at the same time, that I do crave the honour and the glorious privilege to be more and more used by the Lord.

I desire to be allowed to provide scriptural instruction for a thousand orphans, instead of doing so for 300. I desire to expound the Holy Scriptures regularly to a thousand orphans, instead of doing so to 300. I desire that it may be yet more abundantly manifest that God is still the Hearer and Answerer of prayer, and that He is the living God now as He ever was and ever will be, when He shall simply, in answer to prayer, have condescended to provide me with a house for 700 orphans and with means to support them. This last consideration is the most important point in my mind. The Lord's honour is the principal point with me in this whole matter; and just because this is the case, if He would be more glorified by not going forward in this business, I should by His grace be perfectly content to give up all thoughts about another Orphan House. Surely in such a state of mind, obtained by the Holy Spirit, You, O my Heavenly Father, will not suffer Your child to be mistaken, much less deceived. By the help of God I shall continue further day by day to wait upon Him in prayer, concerning this thing, until He shall tell me to act.

Jan. 2, 1851: A week ago I wrote the preceding paragraph. During this week I have still been helped day by day, and more than once every day, to seek the guidance of the Lord about another Orphan House. The burden of my prayer has still been, that He in His great mercy would keep me from making a mistake. During the last week the book of Proverbs has come in the course of my Scripture reading, and my heart has been refreshed in reference to this subject by the following passages: " *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*" (Proverbs 3:5-6. By the grace of God I do acknowledge the Lord in all my ways, and in this thing in particular; I have therefore the comfortable assurance that He will direct my paths concerning this part of my service, as to whether I shall be occupied in it or not. Further: "*The integrity of the upright will guide them.*" (Proverbs 11:3). By the grace of God I am upright in this business. My honest purpose is to get glory to God. Therefore I expect to be guided aright. Further: "*Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established.*" (Proverbs 16:3). I do commit my works unto the Lord, and

therefore expect that my thoughts will be established. My heart is more and more coming to a calm, quiet, and settled assurance, that the Lord will condescend to use me still further in the orphan work. Here Lord is Your servant.

When later he decided to build two additional houses, Nos. 4 and 5, he wrote thus again: Twelve days have passed away since I wrote the last paragraph. I have still day by day been enabled to wait upon the Lord with reference to enlarging the Orphan work, and have been during the whole of this period also in perfect peace, which is the result of seeking in this thing only the Lord's honour and the temporal and spiritual benefit of my fellow-men. Without an effort could I by His grace put aside all thoughts about this whole affair, if only assured that it is the will of God that I should do so; and, on the other hand, would at once go forward, if He would have it be so. I have still kept this matter entirely to myself. Though it be now about seven weeks, since day by day, more or less, my mind has been exercised about it, and since I have been daily praying about it, yet not one human being knows of it. As yet I have not even mentioned it to my dear wife in order that thus, by quietly waiting upon God, I might not be influenced by what might be said to me on the subject. This evening has been particularly set apart for prayer, beseeching the Lord once more not to allow me to be mistaken in this thing, and much less to be deceived by the devil. I have also sought to let all the reasons against building another Orphan House, and all the reasons for doing so pass before my mind: and now for the clearness and definiteness, write them down.

Much, however, as the nine previous reasons weigh with me, yet they would not persuade me were there not one more. It is this. After having for months pondered the matter, and having looked at it in all its bearings and with all its difficulties, and then having been finally led, after much prayer, to decide on this enlargement, my mind is at peace. The child who has again and again besought His Heavenly Father not to allow him to be deceived, nor even to make a mistake, is at peace, perfectly at peace concerning this decision; and has thus the assurance that the decision come to, after much prayer during weeks and months, is the leading of the Holy Spirit; and therefore purposes to go forward, assuredly believing that he will not be mistaken, for he trusts in God. Many and great may be his difficulties; thousands and ten thousands of prayers may have ascended to God, before the full answer may be obtained; much exercise of faith and patience may be required; but in the end it will again be seen, that His servant, who trusts in Him, has not been mistaken.

PRAYER AND THE GLORY OF GOD.

We have sought more than once to enforce the truth, that while we ordinarily seek the reasons of our prayers not being heard in the thing we ask not being according to the will of God, Scripture warns us to find the cause in ourselves, in our not being in the right state or not asking in the right spirit. The thing may be in full accordance with His will, but the asking, the spirit of the suppliant, not; then we are not heard. As the great root of all sin is self and self-seeking, so there is nothing that even in our more spiritual desires so effectively hinders God in answering as this: we pray for our own pleasure or glory. Prayer to have power and prevail must ask for the glory of God; and he can only do this as he is living for God's glory.

In George Muller we have one of the most remarkable instances on record of God's Holy Spirit leading a man deliberately and systematically, at the outset of a course of prayer, to make the glorifying of God his first and only object. Let us ponder well what he says, and learn the lesson God would teach us through him: I had constantly cases brought before me, which proved that one of the specific things which the children of God needed in our day, was to have their faith strengthened. I longed, therefore, to have something to point my brethren to, as a visible proof that our God and Father is the same faithful God as ever He was; as willing as ever to **prove** Himself to be the **Living God** in our day as formerly, to all who put their trust in Him. My spirit longed to be instrumental in strengthening their faith, by giving them not only instances from the word of God, of His willingness and ability to help all who rely upon Him, but to show them by proofs that He is the same in our day. I knew that the word of God ought to be enough, and it was by grace enough for me; but still I considered I ought to lend a helping hand to my brethren. I therefore judged myself bound to be the servant of the Church of Christ, in the particular point in which I had obtained mercy; namely, in being able to take God at His word and rely upon it. The first object of the work was, and is still: that God might be magnified by the fact that the orphans under my care are provided with all they need, only by prayer and faith, without any one being asked; thereby it may be seen that God is **still faithful, and still hears prayer**.

I have again these last days prayed much about the Orphan House, and have frequently examined my heart; that if it were at all my desire to establish it for the sake of gratifying myself, I might find it out. For as I desire only the Lord's glory, I shall be glad to be instructed by the instrumentality of my brother, if the matter be not of Him. When I began the Orphan work in 1835, my chief object was the glory of God, by giving a practical demonstration as to what could be accomplished simply through the instrumentality of prayer and faith, in order thus to benefit the Church at large, and to lead a careless world to see the reality of the things of God, by showing them in this work, that the living God is still, as 4000 years ago, the living God. This my aim has been abundantly honoured. Multitudes of sinners have been thus converted, multitudes of the children of God in all parts of the world have been benefited by this work, even as I had anticipated. But the larger the work as grown, the greater has been the blessing, bestowed in the very way in which I looked for blessing: for the attention of hundreds of thousands has been drawn to the work; and many tens of thousands have come to see it. All this leads me to desire further and further to labour on in this way, in order to bring yet greater glory to the Name of the Lord. That He may be looked at, magnified, admired, trusted in, relied on at all times, is my aim in this service; and so particularly in this intended enlargement. That it may be seen how much one poor man, simply by trusting in God, can bring about by prayer; and that thus other children of God may be led to carry on the work of God in dependence upon Him; and that children of God may be led increasingly to trust in Him in their individual positions and circumstances, therefore I am led to this further enlargement.

PRAYER AND TRUST IN GOD.

There are other points on which I would be glad to point out what is to be found in Mr. Muller's narrative, but one more must suffice. It is the lesson of *firm and unwavering trust* in God's promise

as the secret of persevering prayer. If once we have, in submission to the teaching of the Spirit in the word, taken hold of God's promise, and believed that the Father has heard us, we must not allow ourselves by any delay or unfavourable appearances be shaken in our faith. The full answer to my daily prayers was far from being realized; yet there was abundant encouragement granted by the Lord, to continue in prayer. But suppose, even, that far less had come in than was received, still, after having come to the conclusion, upon scriptural grounds, after much prayer and self-examination, I ought to have gone on without wavering, in the exercise of faith and patience concerning this object; and thus all the children of God, when once satisfied that anything which they bring before God in prayer, is according to His will, ought to continue in believing, expecting, persevering prayer until the blessing is granted. Thus am I myself now waiting upon God for certain blessings, for which I have daily pleaded with Him for ten years and six months without one day's intermission. Still the full answer is not yet given concerning the conversion of certain individuals, though in the meantime I have received many thousands of answers to prayer. I have also prayed daily without intermission for the conversion of other individuals about ten years, for others six or seven years, for others from three or two years; and still the answer is not yet granted concerning those persons, while in the meantime many thousands of my prayers have been answered, and also souls converted, for whom I had been praying. I lay particular stress on this for the benefit of those who may suppose that I need only to ask of God, and receive at once; or that I might pray concerning anything, and the answer would surely come. One can only expect to obtain answers to prayers which are according to the mind of God; and even then, patience and faith may be exercised for many years, even as mine are exercised, in the matter to which I have referred; and yet am I daily continuing in prayer, and expecting the answer, and so surely expecting the answer, that I have often thanked God that He will surely give it, though now for nineteen years faith and patience have thus been exercised. Be encouraged, dear Christians, with fresh earnestness to give yourselves to prayer, if you can only be sure that you ask things which are for the glory of God.

But the most remarkable point is this, that £6, 6s. 6d. from Scotland supplied me, as far as can be known now, with all the means necessary for fitting up and promoting the New Orphan Houses. Six years and eight months I have been day by day, and generally several times daily, asking the Lord to give me the needed means for this enlargement of the Orphan work, which, according to calculations made in the spring of 1861, appeared to be about fifty thousand pounds: the total of this amount I had now received. I praise and magnify the Lord for putting this enlargement of the work into my heart, and for giving me courage and faith for it; and above all, for sustaining my faith day by day without wavering. When the last portion of the money was received, I was no more assured concerning the whole, that I was at the time I had not received one single donation towards this large sum. I was at the beginning, after once having ascertained His mind, through most patient and heart-searching waiting upon God, as fully assured that He would bring it about, as if the two houses, with their hundreds of orphans occupying them, had been already before me. I make a few remarks here for the sake of young believers in connection with this subject:

1. **Be slow** to take new steps in the Lord's service, or in your business, or in your families: weigh everything well; weigh all in the light of the Holy Scriptures and in the fear of God.

2. Seek to have **no will of your own**, in order to ascertain the mind of God, regarding any steps you propose taking, so that you can honestly say you are willing to do the will of God, if He will only please to instruct you.
3. But **when you have found out what the will of God** is, seek for His help, and seek it earnestly, perseveringly, patiently, believingly, expectantly; and you will surely in His own time and way obtain it.

To suppose that we have difficulty about money only would be a mistake: there occur hundreds of other needs and of other difficulties. It is a rare thing that a day occurs without some difficulty or some need; but often there are many difficulties and many wants to be met and overcome the same day. All these are met by prayer and faith, our universal remedy; and we have never been confounded. Patient, persevering, believing prayer, offered up to God, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, has always, sooner or later, brought the blessing. I do not despair, by God's grace, of obtaining any blessing, provided I can be sure it would be for any real good, and for the glory of God.

The extracts are from a work in four volumes, *The Lord's Dealings with George Muller*. J. Nisbet & Co., London.