

PRAYING AND WAITING

NO. 596

A SERMON
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“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, He heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”
1 John 5:13-15

THE beloved apostle John here addresses himself to those who have believed in the Son of God. And having himself ascended the high hill of fellowship with Jesus, he labors to conduct his fellow believers up three glorious ascents of the mount of God. I think I see before me now, three shining ladders, and John with the glory of God reflected from his brow, like an angel of God conducting the Lord's Jacobs up the glittering rounds.

The *first* ascent he would have them take is from faith to the full assurance of faith. He writes to them as believers, and he says, “These things have I written to you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life.” As believers, *they had* eternal life, for “He that believeth in the Son of God, hath everlasting life,” and shall never come into condemnation. Yea, “He that liveth and believeth in Christ, though he were dead, yet should he live.”

But it is one thing *to have* eternal life, and another thing *to know that we have* eternal life. In the third verse of the second chapter of this very epistle, this apostle draws a distinction between knowing Christ, and knowing that we know Him, for he writes, “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.”

A man may know Christ in his heart, and yet at certain seasons, through weakness of judgment, or stress of temptations, he may be cast into doubts as to whether he has any saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus at all. But he alone is happy, who, building upon the sure foundation of God's promise, gives all diligence to make his calling and election sure, and enjoys an assured confidence of his interest in Christ.

I know there are some who do not like us to draw any distinction between faith and assurance, but the more I think upon the subject, the more I am compelled to do it—not for the encouragement of unbelief, but for the consolation of those weaklings of the flock, who, upon another ground, must be rejected altogether, since their trembling faith has never, as yet, ripened into assurance.

Believers who have at all observed their own experience must have noticed that even when they can cast themselves in all simplicity upon Christ Jesus, and consequently have a right to be confident of their own safety, yet even then they cannot at all times enjoy the comfortable persuasion of security, because their minds are distracted and Satan has gained an advantage over them.

They trust their God, but it is with something of the spirit of Job when he said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” The shadow of the dark thought that peradventure you may prove an apostate, darkens your path, and you cling to the Lord, not with a joyful assurance which can say, “He is mine,” but with that desperate faith which cries, “I must believe, for otherwise there is nought before me but destruction. ‘To whom shall I go but unto thee, for thou hast the words of eternal life.’”

Even the strongest of saints must be led, I think, in their experience to observe that while always believing, they are not always assured. This must certainly be the case with the weaker ones and the

beginners. I know faith is a sureness concerning the truth of God. I cheerfully accept the definition, but must bid you observe that there is a difference between being sure of the truth of God, and being sure that I am a partaker of divine life. I come to Christ not knowing whether He died especially for me or no, but I trust in Him as the Savior of sinners, this is *faith*.

But having trusted in Him, I discover that I have a particular and special interest in the merit of His blood, and in the love of His heart, this is rather *assurance* than faith. Although assurance will grow out of faith and that is scarcely faith which does not lead to assurance, yet the two are not identical.

You may believe in Christ and have eternal life, and still be in doubt about it. You ought not to be, but still you may fall into such a state. The apostle desires that if you believe, you may come to a still higher state, and may infallibly and joyfully know that you have eternal life.

O brethren, do not fear to mount this ladder, the steps are very easy. Do but continue to believe as you have believed, receive the Word of God as it stands, you want no other ground of assurance but that which is written there, and the Spirit shall enable you to see therein your own title sealed and sure. Continue to rest in Jesus, and you shall find that in Him, as you have attained faith, so in Him you shall also obtain an assurance of faith. Here is the first heavenly staircase.

The apostle desires to lead the disciples up a *second* ascent. Observe it. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." From the assurance of our interest in Christ, the next step is to a firm belief in the power of prayer, in the fact that God does hear your prayer. And this you can hardly get unless you have attained to an assurance of your own interest in Him. For my belief in the prevalence of my prayer to a great extent must depend upon my conviction of my interest in Christ.

For instance, here is Paul's argument—"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" I must therefore be sure that God has given me Christ, and if He has given Christ to me, then I know that He will give me all things. But if I have any doubt about Christ's being mine, and about my being the receiver of God's unspeakable gift in Christ, I cannot reason as the apostle did, and I cannot therefore have that confidence that my prayer is heard.

Again, God's fatherhood is another ground of our confidence in prayer. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" But if I am not clear that God is my Father, if I have not the spirit of adoption, then I cannot come to God with this confidence that He will give me my desire. My sonship being assured, I am confident that my Father knows what I have need of and will hear me. But my sonship being in dispute, my power in prayer vanishes, I cannot hope to prevail.

Besides, the man who has faith in Christ, and knows himself to be saved, has already received answers to prayer, and answers to prayer are some of the best supports to our faith as to the future success of our petitions. "Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." But if I have no reason to conclude that God has heard my prayer for forgiveness, if I am in doubt as to whether my first cries have ever reached His ear and obtained an answer, how can I come with confidence?

No, brothers and sisters, seek in the first place, since you have believed in Jesus, to get the witness within you that you are born of God, and then go from this gracious ascent to the next, knowing and being assured that He hears us always because we do the things which are pleasing in His sight, and plead the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who is all in all to us.

If you have climbed this second ascent, and I hope there are many here who have, the *third* is not difficult. It is to go from your belief that God hears prayer, to a conviction that when you have prayed you have the petitions that you have desired of Him. That is, to ascend from a solemn conviction of the usefulness of prayer, to a particular and special belief that in your own case, when you have desired anything of God in prayer through Jesus Christ, you have obtained the answer. Not that you have had the

particular mercy at once given into your hands, for there is much that is really ours which, nevertheless, is not at present in our sensible possession, and yet is truly ours.

We have *heaven*, but we have it not in enjoyment as of yet, and so we may have answers to our prayers, and yet as far as our sense is concerned we may not have received anything. We have it, but we see it not. It is ours, but our God sees fit to reserve it for a season for a further trial of our faith. If a man had nothing more than he could see, there are many of you here who have possessions across the sea, or ships far off upon the water, and if you had only what you can see just now, your estates would be sorely diminished.

So we may have the answers to many of our prayers—really have the answers, and yet for the present to us that answer, like a ship upon a long voyage, may not yet have returned, yet we have the answer as the merchant has the ship which is as much his upon the Atlantic as when it shall lie alongside his wharf. May we, dear friends, obtain the gracious position of knowing that having sought the Lord in prayer through Jesus Christ, we have the petitions which we desired of Him.

I want, this morning, as God may help me, to strengthen our dear brethren to look for answers to prayer. Seeing that you have the promise of an answer to prayer, and that the answer must come to you, *look for it*. Unless you believe that you have the answer in reality, you are not likely to watch for its appearance. But if you have come so far as to believe that you have the answer, I do now earnestly urge you to look for it and rejoice.

First, let me explain *explanation*. Secondly, let us say something in the praise of this believing in our answer to prayer, *commendation*. Thirdly, let us rebuke some who do not like to have their prayers answered, here we have *rebuke*. And then fourthly, let us stir you up to exercise this gracious privilege which is your undoubted right as the children of God, this is *exhortation*.

I. EXPLANATION, and let the explanation be taken from instances in Holy Writ.

Elijah bowed his knee on the top of Carmel, and prayed to God for rain. For three years there had not been a single drop descending upon Israel. He pleads, and having finished his intercession, he says to his servant, “Go and look from the top of Carmel towards the sea.” He did not think it sufficient to have prayed. He believed that he had the petition which he desired of God, and therefore he sent his servant to see. The answer which was brought back was not encouraging, but he said to his servant, “Go again seven times,” and seven times that servant went.

Elijah does not appear to have staggered in his faith. He believed he had the petition, and therefore expected soon to see it, since seeing is often a blessed reward of believing. He sent his servant till at last he brought back the news, “There is a little cloud the size of a man’s hand.” Quite enough for Elijah’s faith. He acts upon the belief that he has the petition, though not a drop of rain has fallen, goes down to tell Ahab to make ready his chariot that the rain stop him not, in the full and firm conviction that as certainly as he had asked, so surely would the rain descend.

David is another case in point. Let me quote but this one expression, “In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.” As men take an arrow from the quiver, so David takes his prayer. He fits it to the string, and bends the bow by vehemence of desire and then he takes aim, he directs his prayer to God.

He is not shooting to the right hand or to the left, but upwards to his God he points his polished shaft. Not to those who will afterwards read the psalm, not to those who are listening to his voice, but he directs it to heaven. And having done so, draws the bow with all his strength, and away flies the arrow. Anxious to know how it speeds, he looks up to see whether the Lord accepts his desires, and continues to look up to see whether a gracious answer is returned. This is what I mean by the Christian’s knowing he has an answer to his petition, and waiting and watching till it comes.

Take the case of Samson, poor, strong, yet weak Samson, as strong in faith as he was in body. After his hair had grown again, he is brought forth to make sport for the Philistines, and he prays to God to strengthen him but this once. Mark how he believed he had the petition, for he said to the man who conducted him blindfolded into the Philistine’s temple, “Put me near the two pillars whereon the house

does lean,” and why does he seek to stand there? Because he believes he has his petition. Having taken up his position, he grasps the two pillars, and bows himself with all his might. Why? Why does he strain himself so? Is it possible that he hopes to start those mighty columns from their bases? Yes, it is not only possible, but certain that he will work wonders, for he believes that he has his petition from his God.

See how in the strength of his belief he pulls down the temple of Dagon about the heads of the worshippers, and proves the power of believing supplication! Something of that kind of spirit I want believers to catch, to know that their prayer is heard, and then to act upon the conviction that it is so.

Take again, the case of Hannah, a woman of a sorrowful spirit. She prayed without an audible voice, only her lips moved. As soon as Eli told her that God had heard the prayer, observe the change which was wrought in her, “Then was her countenance no more sad.” Why, Hannah, why do you smile? You have not yet seen your husband. You have no signs that God has visited you and granted the desire of your heart! No, but the man of God has said it, and that is enough for her. The wrinkles disappear from her brow and the tears from her eye. You ask her why and she says, “I have the petition that I desired of God: I asked in faith, and the Lord has been pleased to hear my prayer.”

A yet more wonderful instance is that of Jacob, who not only believes in the utility of prayer, but he will not let the angel depart till he wins His blessing. This was going farther. Not only believing that there was a blessing, and that prayer could get it, but a determination not to cease prayer till he had some visible token that he had obtained it. Here was strong faith.

The case may be exceptional, and especially when we pray for temporal mercies. I do not think we have any right to give the Lord such a time, and to say we will not rise from our knees till the favor is bestowed, that might be presumption rather than faith. But there are times when mercies are so necessary, and when we are so clear that our prayer is according to God’s will, and when the prayer is so evidently written upon our heart by the Holy Spirit, that we may even say unto the covenant angel, “I will not leave this closet till You give me Your answer. I will never cease to pray till You deign to smile—I will not let Thee go except Thee bless me.”

I have to complain of myself, and I suppose you have to complain in the same manner that so much of our prayer is lacking here. We do not send the servant to look to the sea. We do not let our countenance grow glad when we have poured out our hearts before God—

“At His feet we groan, yet bring our wants away.”

This is base and wicked of us. O that we had true faith, the real faith which would honor God, and comfort ourselves by believing that we have the petition which we have desired of Him. So much by way of explanation.

II. We come now to COMMENDATION.

Let me commend the habit of expecting an answer to prayer, and looking for it, for many reasons. I will but give you an outline of them.

By this means *you put an honor upon God’s ordinance of prayer*. He who prays without expecting to receive a return, mocks at the mercy seat of God. That mercy seat was made of gold, of pure gold, as if to show its preciousness to all true believers. And you do, by not expecting to receive anything of God, in effect despise the throne of grace. For, let me ask you, of what use the mercy seat can be if God has said, “Seek ye my face” in vain? If no answers come to supplication, then supplication is a vain waste of time. You play with prayer when you do not expect an answer. You are not treating it in an earnest, solemn, and devout manner. You are trifling with it.

Little children get their bows and shoot their arrows, they care not where, up into the air, to the east, or to the west, it is nothing to them. But men in sober fight take their aim and watch their arrows. You are but playing with God’s ordinances of prayer, if when you pray you are careless about results.

The truly prayerful man is resolved in his own soul that he must have the answer. He feels his need of it. He sees God’s promise. His heart is stirred to earnestness, and he cannot be satisfied to go away

without some token for good. You would not treat the mercy seat as though it were a place for boys to play. You would honor it, would you not? You would not be among those of whom the prophet said, "Ye have snuffed at it," and said, "What a weariness it is." No, but you would make the place where God meets with His people glorious. You would take your shoes from off your feet because it is holy ground. But you cannot do this except you believe that prayer has power in it, and know that you have the petitions which you ask of Him.

Such a spirit, in the next place, having honored prayer, *also honors God's Attributes*. To believe that the Lord will hear my prayer is honor to His truthfulness. He has said that He will, and I believe that He will keep His word. It is honorable to His power. I believe that He can make the word of His mouth stand fast and steadfast. It is honorable to His love. The larger things I ask the more do I honor the liberality, grace, and love of God in asking such great things. It is honorable to His wisdom, for if I ask what He has told me to ask, and expect Him to answer me, I believe that His word is wise and may safely be kept.

If you would dishonor every attribute of God, pray with unbelief. But if, on the contrary, you would put a crown on the head of Him who has saved you, and who is the God of your salvation, believe that if you ask He will give, and if you knock He will open unto you.

Again, to believe that God hears prayer, and to look for an answer is truly *to revere God Himself*. If I stand side by side with a friend, and I ask him a favor, and when he is about to reply to me I turn away and open the door and go to my business, why what an insult is this! It is not always considered courteous if you do not answer a person. But it is always discourteous if, after having asked a question, you do not wait for the answer.

If I send a petition to a man's door, and then having earnestly asked, or pretended to ask earnestly, I am utterly careless about the answer, I have not treated the man respectfully. If that person should send me a letter in return to my request, and I should not even take the trouble to open it, how could I provoke him more?

So you first ask God to grant you a favor, and then you do not stop to get it, and when He sends it, you receive it as a matter of course and do not praise it as a gracious answer to your supplication. Christian brother, let me commend to you the gracious art of believing in the success of your prayer, because in this way you will help to insure your own success.

A beggar knocks at your door. He wants charity. He has a firm belief that you will give it to him. The door does not open to him the first time. He knows you have seen him, and that you understand his wants, he therefore knocks again. He is so confident of your generosity that he continues waiting at your doorstep. You, at first, take little notice of him, you are busy with other matters. You come again to the window and you say, "What, is he still there?" Perhaps even then you are called away by urgent business, and you attend to it rather than to him, but coming once more to the door, there he stands. Why, then, you say, you shall have your desire, and your hand is in your pocket to give him the relief he wants.

It is even so with our God; when He sees us wait upon Him. He will not permit us to wait without receiving the reward. "He will strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the LORD." Merely to knock at mercy's door without waiting a reply, is but like the runaway knocks of idle boys in the street, you cannot expect an answer to such prayers! Stand upon your watchtower and "hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.

Furthermore, thus to believe in the result of prayer *tries and manifests faith*. Perhaps nine prayers out of ten which we offer, might have been as well un-offered, for any good which they have done to us. Am I too severe? I mean our hurried morning prayer, when business is calling us away. I mean our sleepy evening prayers, when we are scarcely half awake. I mean those formal petitions, (I am not speaking of those who use a book, for you can be quite as formal without a book as with), those formal petitions in which you have only expressed godly opinions without feeling godly emotions, passed over holy words without their really coming from your hearts.

But brethren, when we pray and expect the answer, this is a sure token that our prayer has not been a mere formality. Then faith lays hold upon God, and she waits. Patience stands by her side, knowing that the windows of heaven, however fast they may be closed, will open soon, and God's right hand will scatter His liberality upon waiting souls.

So faith waits and watches, and waits and watches again. This is the reason why the glorious doctrine of the second advent has such a blessed effect on some of God's people. It exercises their faith and brings hope into the field, and so answers to faith, exercises our watching faith, and trains our hope to look up.

The devil says, "Surely God will never hear your prayer." You answer, "I have the petition, and am waiting till He puts it into my hand. It is up there, labeled for me and set aside in the treasury for me, and I shall have it. I am waiting till the time comes when I may safely receive that which is mine even now."

So the flesh whispers, "It is in vain," but faith says, "No, prayer is blessed, prayer is God's Spirit returning whence it came, and it will never fail." "But how can such a sinner as you are hope to succeed with God," whispers unbelief? But faith, like Abraham, considers not its own body, though dead, neither the deadness of Sarah's womb, but staggers not at the promise through unbelief. It keeps on waiting till it gets its reward.

Such a habit, moreover, helps to *bring out our gratitude to God*. None sing so sweetly as those who get answers to prayer. Oh! some of you would give my Master sweet songs if you did but notice when He hears you. But perhaps the Lord may drop an answer to your prayer, and you merely cry, "It is a fortunate circumstance," and God gets no praise for it. But if, instead, you had been watching for it, and seen it come, you would fall on your knees in holy gratitude and say—

*"I love the Lord: He heard my cries,
And pitied every groan:
Long as I live, when troubles arise,
I'll hasten to His throne."*

Let me add, this would *make your faith grow*, how it would make your love burn, how every grace would be put in active exercise if, believing in the power of prayer, you watched for the answer, and when the answer came went with a song of praise to the Savior's feet.

I will not say more, lest by multiplying commendations I rather weaken the force of what I say. I could not praise this habit too much. The man whom God has taught to pray believingly, has all God's treasures at his command.

You have the privy key of JEHOVAH's secret cabinet. You are rich to all the extents of bliss. You have about you the omnipotence of God, for you have power to move the arm that moves the world. He who lacks this mercy is but weak and poverty-stricken, but he who has gained it is one of the mightiest in God's Israel, and will do great exploits.

III. Having thus spoken by way of commendation, we pause awhile, and turn to speak by way of REBUKE, but it shall be such a gentle rebuke as shall not break the head.

I am not just now speaking to those who never pray at all. Let me, however, solemnly remind them that prayerless souls are Christless souls, and will be lost souls ere long. Nor am I speaking to those of you who merely prattle through a form of prayer. I give you but this one word, remember that God will not forever be mocked by you, and that your prayers are numbered with your sins. You do but insult the majesty of heaven while you pretend to worship it.

I am communing this morning with those persons to whom John wrote, you who believe on the name of the Son of God, you who believe in the efficacy of prayer. How is it that you do not expect an answer? I think I hear you say, "One reason is my own unworthiness. How can I think that God will hear such prayers as mine? I am fickle as the wind that blows, and full of infirmities. I am one of the meanest of His sheep. If I were one of His ministers, I would believe that my prayer was heard, but I am the least in Israel, and my father's house is all unknown. I do sometimes serve God a little, but oh! how little!

And that little is marred with selfishness! I am the very worst in the whole family, how can I think that my prayer will be heard?"

Brother, let me remind you that it is not the person who prays that commends the prayer to God, but the fervency of the prayer, and in the virtue of the great Intercessor. Why think you, did the apostle write these words, "Elias was a man of like passions with us"? Why was that statement made? Why, precisely to meet the case of those who say, "My prayer is not heard because I have such and such faults."

Here is a case in point with yours. "Elias was a man of like passions with us," and yet he prays earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not, so that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is not prevented in its acceptance before high heaven by the infirmity of the person who offers it. "Yes," say you, "but sir, you do not know the particular state of mind I have been in when I have prayed. I am so fluttered, and worried, and vexed, and troubled, that I cannot expect my prayer, offered in such a state of mind, to prevail with God."

Did you ever read the thirty-fourth psalm, and carefully consider where David was when his prayer had such good speed with God? He says, "O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears...This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

Now where do you think David prayed that prayer which God thus heard? Read the heading of the psalm, "A psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech; who drove him away and he departed." You recollect what he did. He played the madman, and let his spittle run down his beard, acted the fool, and was never more a fool except once, than he was then. And yet even then in his fool's play God heard his prayer.

There is something very teaching here. You child of God, though you may have gone ever so far astray and played the fool, let not this keep you back from the mercy seat, it was built on purpose for unworthy sinners to come to. You are such. If God did not hear you except in your good times, why then you would perish. The gates of His grace are open at night as well as at day, and black-handed saints may come and find mercy, as well as those who have kept their garments white. Do not, I pray you, get into the ill habit of judging that your prayers are not heard because of your failings in spirit.

"Yes," says a third, "it is not merely that I do not so much doubt the efficacy of prayer on account of myself, but my prayers themselves are such poor things. I cannot get the fervency I want. I cannot groan out of my heart before God. I would not ask to pray a happy prayer, if I could but pray an utterly wretched prayer, if my heart would but ache I would be content, but I cannot get to God. I do not know how to lay hold upon Him and wrestle with Him, and therefore I cannot expect to prevail."

Dear brother, this is your sin as well as your infirmity. Be humbled and pray God to make you like the importunate widow, for so only will you prevail. But at the same time let me remind you that if your prayers be sincere it shall often happen that even their weakness shall not destroy them.

When Christ was asleep in the ship, His disciples came to Him and said, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" And He rebuked them, "O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt?" But He did not refuse to hear their cry for all that, for He rebuked the winds and the waves, and there was a great calm.

He may rebuke the unbelief of your prayer, and yet in infinite mercy He may exceed His promise. There is no promise that He will hear unbelieving prayers, and he who wavers must not expect to receive anything. But the Lord may go beyond His Word and give us mercies notwithstanding that fault, but all other failings He graciously overlooks and receives our prayers through Jesus Christ.

Let your sense of the poverty of your prayers lead you to abhor your faults, but not to abhor praying. Let it make you long to pray better, but never cause you to doubt that if you can with true fervency come to God through Jesus Christ your Lord, your prevailing is not a matter of hope but a matter of certainty, your success is as absolutely sure as the laws of nature.

Further, I have no doubt many of God's people cannot think their prayers will be heard, because they have had as yet such very few manifest replies. I saw the other day a greyhound coursing a hare. The

moment the hare ran through the hedge out of the greyhound's sight, the race was over, for he could not follow where he could not see. The true hound hunts by scent, but the greyhound only by sight.

Now there are some Christians too much like the greyhound. They only follow the Lord as far as they can see His manifest mercy. But the true child of God hunts by faith, and when he cannot see the mercy, he scents it and still pursues it, till at last he lays hold upon it. Why, man, you say you have had no answers! How do you know? God may have answered you though you have not seen the answer. "I am heard," says good Ralph Erskine—

*"I'm heard when answered soon or late,
Yea, heard when I no answer get;
Yea, kindly answered when refused,
And treated well when harshly used."*

This is a riddle, but it is a fact. God has not promised to give you the particular mercy in kind, but He will give it to you somehow or other. If I pay my debts in gold, no man can blame me because I do not pay them in silver, and if God gives you spiritual mercies in abundance instead of temporal, He has heard your prayer.

You may pray, like Paul, thrice, that the thorn in the flesh may be taken away from you. God's answer is given, and it is, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Christ prayed that God might hear Him. He was heard in that He feared, but He had not the cup taken from Him. No, but He had an angel to comfort and strengthen Him, and this was in truth an answer, though not such as the prayer seemed to require. You have had an answer, and if God has heard you but once, pluck up courage and go again.

Many do not pray expecting an answer because they pray in such a sluggish spirit. Begging is a hard trade. A man that succeeds in it must throw his heart into it, and so is praying, if you want to win, you must pray hard. They called some of the early Christians on the Continent, "Beg-hards," because they did pray hard to God, and none can prevail but those who pray *hard*. Slothful souls may not expect an answer.

Then there are so many, again, who pray *in a legal spirit*. Why do you pray? Because it is my *duty*? Children of God know it is their duty to pray, but they pray because they believe in the efficacy of prayer. I should not expect God to hear me because the clock struck such, and I began to pray from a sense of duty. No, I must go, not because the clock strikes, but because my heart desires to pray. A child does not cry because the time to cry has come, nor does a sick man groan because it is the hour of groaning, but they cry and groan because they cannot help it. When the newborn nature says, "Let us draw nigh unto God," then is the time and the place. A legal spirit prevents our expecting answers to prayer.

Inconsistencies after prayer, and a failure to press our suit, will bring us to doubt the power of prayer. If we do not plead with God again, and again, and again, we shall not keep up our faith that God hears us. "Oh," says one, "we have no time to pray at that rate." What do you do with your time? It caused Domitian to be greatly despised when it was reported that he spent hours in killing flies. It was told, to the discredit of Artaxerxes, that he spent whole days in making handles for knives. What shall be thought of us, when we confess that we have no time to pray, but there is time for trifles!

Princes of the blood royal, and yet no time to be at court! Kings of a divine race, and yet no time to put on your crowns and wear your robes of state! Time to play with toys, and roll in the dust with the beggars of earth, but no time to sit upon the throne of glory, and to offer the sacrifice of praise unto the Most High! Shame on such Christians! May God give us true shame for this, and henceforth may we be much in prayer and expect gracious answers.

IV. Alas! this morning, time rebukes me, but eternity commends, and therefore I shall go on just a few minutes longer, and that by way of EXHORTATION.

Dear friends, let us believe in God's answering prayer, I mean those of us who have believed in Jesus, and that because *we have God's promise for it*. Hear what He says, "Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee." "Know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call upon him." "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him." "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." "It shall come to pass that before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." "Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." "And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

How is it possible after this that God should refuse to hear us? Is He a God and can He lie? Have we promise upon promise, and will He break them all? God forbid, Brethren, if there be a God, and if this Book be His Word, if God be true, prayer must be answered, and let us on our knees go to the sacred engagement as to a work of real efficacy.

Again, prayer must be answered because of *the character of God our Father*. Will He let His children cry, and not hear them? He hears the young ravens, and will He not hear His own people? He is a God of love. Would you let your sick child lie and pine, and not go in to answer its groanings? Will a God of love fast close His ears against His people's cries? Do you think He will let the tears stream down your cheeks when you are petitioning, and not put them into His bottle?

Oh! remember His lovingkindness, and you cannot, I think, doubt that He hears prayer. A God that hears prayer, this is His memorial throughout all generations. Do not rob Him of His character by distrusting Him.

Then think of *the efficacy of the blood of Jesus*. When you pray, it is the blood that speaks. Every drop of Jesus' blood cries, "Father, hear him! Father, hear him! Hear the sinner's cry!" That blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat that the mercy seat might be an efficacious mercy seat for you. Do not doubt the blood of Christ. What! can He die, and yet that blood have no more efficacy in it than the blood of bulls or of goats? You will not think this. Then do not doubt that prayer prevails.

Think, again, that *Jesus pleads*. He points to the wound upon His breast, and spreads His pierced hands. Shall the Father deny the Son? Shall prayers offered by Christ be cast out from heaven's register? Oh! these things must not—cannot be.

Besides, *the Holy Spirit* Himself is the author of your prayers. Will God indite the desire, and then not hear it? Shall there be a schism between the Father and the Holy Spirit? You will not dream of such a thing. Oh! believe me, when I review my own personal experience during the fifteen years that I have known something of the Savior, it leads me to feel that it is as certain that God hears prayer, as that twice two make four; as certain as that the rock, falling by the law of gravitation, seeks the earth.

We have not the time to give instances in proof, but I hope your own experience furnishes them. May I beseech you by the love you bear to Jesus, do Him the honor of believing in the prevalence of His plea. By the light and life you have received of the Holy Ghost, do not discredit Him by thinking He can teach you to pray a prayer that will not be accepted before God. Let us as a church pray more. O that the Spirit of prayer would come down upon us! Let us expect greater blessings.

I was led forth in prayer this morning beyond the usual limits. I do not know how the time fled, but I do know that we have the petitions.

Let us stand on our watchtower and look. Let us meet again and again at special meetings, and let us cry mightily unto the Most High, pouring out our hearts like water before Him and He will open the windows of heaven, and give us greater blessings than we have ever had before, great as those already received have been. This very afternoon let the season of prayer begin, and let it be well sustained. It is to believers that these words are spoken. May God lead you who are not believers to trust in Jesus. Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.