CONCERNING PRAYER
NO. 2053

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1888,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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"Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon You: for You will answer me."
Psalm 86:6, 7.

WHEN I was reading this eighty-sixth Psalm, I reminded you that the title of it is "A prayer of David." It is rightly named *"A prayer,"* for it is very especially filled with supplication. There are four other psalms each called by the name *Tephillah*, or "prayer," but this deserves to be distinguished from the rest and known as "the prayer *of David,"* even as the ninetieth Psalm is known as "the prayer of Moses." It savors of David. The man of sincerity, of ardor, of trials, of faults, and of great heart, pleads, sobs, and trusts through all the verses of this psalm.

Note one thing about this remarkable prayer of David—it is almost entirely devoid of poetry. Men use grand, studied, rapturous, and poetical expressions in their praises, and they do well. Let God be praised with the noblest thoughts, as well as the most charming music. But when a man comes to prayer, and that prayer is out of the depths of sorrow, he has no time or thought for poetry. He goes straight at the matter in hand, and pleads with God in downright plainness of speech. You shall notice that in happy prayers, in times of joy, men use similes, and metaphors, and tropes, and symbols, and the like, but when it comes to wrestling with God in times of agony, there is no beauty of speech; parable and prose are laid aside. The man's language is in sackcloth and ashes, or, better still, it stands stripped for wrestling, every superfluous word being laid aside. Then the cry is heard, "I will not let You go, except You bless me." That is not poetry, but it is a great deal better. Throughout this psalm David is a plain-dealer, speaking with God in downright earnest. He has got his grip of the covenant angel, and he will not let him go. Men cannot study where to put their feet prettily when they are wrestling; they have to do the best they can to hold their ground, and fling their antagonist. In such a prayer-psalm as this, there is no studying of language; it is the pouring out of the heart as the heart boils over, the utterance of the desires as they bubble up from the soul's deeps, with an entire carelessness as to the fashion of the expression.

This ought to be a hint to you when you pray. Do not study how to arrange your words when you come before the Lord. Leave the expression to the occasion; it shall be given you in the selfsame hour what you shall speak. When your heart is like a boiling geyser, let it steam aloft in pillars of prayer. The overflowing of the soul is the best praying in the world. Prayers that are indistinct, inharmonious, broken, made up of sighs and cries, and damped with tears—these are the prayers which win with heaven. Prayers that you cannot pray, pleadings too big for utterance, prayers that stagger the words, and break their backs, and crush them down—these are the very best prayers that God ever hears.

So you say, dear friends that you cannot pray; you are so troubled that you cannot speak. Well, then, copy the beggars in the street. They must not beg, for that is contrary to law. But a man sits down, and writes on a spade, "I am starving," and he looks as white as a sheet. What a picture of misery! He is not begging; not he, but the money comes dropping into the old hat. So, when you cannot pray, I believe that your silent display of utter inability is the best sort of praying. The blessing comes when we sit down before the Lord, and in sheer desperation expose our spiritual need.

I am not going to dwell longer upon that matter, but will simply show you what was the nature of David's prayer. There are two things which David must have when he prays—two great things after which he strains with his whole heart. The first is *personal communion with God*. Read that sixth verse, "Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer, and attend to the voice of my supplications." And, in the second place, he must have *personal answers from God*. He is not content to pray without prayer having some

practical result. So, the seventh verse is, "In the day of my trouble I will call upon You: for You will answer."

I. First, then, David in his prayer sought, beyond all things, to have PERSONAL COMMUNION WITH GOD. To my mind that is just the distinction between prayer before conversion, and prayer after it. I often bring that out when I am seeing inquirers who have been religiously brought up. This is the sort of dialogue we hold, "You used to pray, did you?" "Yes, sir; I could not have gone to sleep if I had not said my prayers." "Was there any difference between that kind of praying and what you now practice?" The reply usually is, "Well, sir, I do not now call the first praying at all. I used to say some good words that I had been taught, but I did not say them *to anybody*. Now I speak to God, and I have the feeling that He is hearing what I say, and that He is present with me in my room." It is the realization of that second person as really present, the consciousness of the divine presence, which makes prayer real. What can be the good of going through a form of prayer? Can there be any charm in a set of sentences? If you are not speaking to God, what are you doing? I should say that a prayer would do as much good repeated backwards as forwards, if it is not spoken to God. We have heard of instances of grown persons keeping on saying the prayer which their mother taught them, and asking that God would bless their father and mother, after they had been dead twenty years. All sorts of absurdities, I do not doubt, have come from the long-continued and thoughtless repetition of mere words. I am not now speaking against the use of a form of prayer, if you feel that you can pray with it, but the point is, that you must be speaking *to God*, and you must have personal communion with the invisible One, or else there is nothing whatever in your prayer, whether it be composed on the spot, or repeated from memory.

Note well, that David, while he thus sought to have dealings with God, to come to close grips with the Lord in the act of prayer, was not presumptuously bold. *He perceives the condescension of such fellowship on God's part.* This may be seen in the psalm. If you have the psalm open before you, kindly begin with the first line, "Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me." As if he said, "You are so high that, unless You shall stoop, and stoop very low, You cannot commune with me. But, Lord, do thus stoop. Bow down Your ear. From Your lofty throne, higher than an angel's wing can reach, stoop You down and listen to me—poor, feeble me." This is what we must have in order to true prayer. Our prayer must climb to that great ear which hears the symphonies of the perfected, and the hallelujahs of cherubim and seraphim. Is there not something very wonderful about this, that we, who are both insignificant and unworthy, should be able to speak to Him who made the stars, and upholds all things by the word of His power? Yet this is the essence of prayer; to rise, in human feebleness to talk with divine omnipotence; in nothingness to deal with all-sufficiency. You cannot venture upon this without the Mediator, Christ, but with the Mediator, what a wonderful fellowship a worm of the dust is permitted to enjoy with the infinite God! What condescension there is in a sinner communing with the thrice-holy Jehovah! Seek after this communion; nothing can excel it.

As you further read in this psalm, you will notice that David, in order to obtain this high privilege, *pleads his need of it*. He cries, "I am poor and needy"; as much as to say, "Lord, do come to me, do let me have personal communion with You, for nothing else will serve my turn. I am so poor that You alone can enrich me; I am so feeble, that You alone can sustain me. You have made me; Lord, forsake not the work of Your own hands! I, Your child, am full of wants, which You only can supply. Oh, deal with me in great compassion!" Virtually his plea is—

"Do not turn away Your face,
Mine's an urgent, pressing case."

Now, is not this very encouraging, that your claim upon God should lie in your need? You cannot say to God, "Lord, look at me, and commune with me, for I am somebody," but you may say, "Lord, commune with me, for I am nobody." You may not cry, "Lord, help me, for I can do much," but you may cry, "Lord help me, for I can do nothing." Your need is your most prevalent plea with God. When you are desiring to pray such a prayer as consists in communion with God, it is great condescension on His part to draw near to you, but He will condescend to your needs, and come near, because your misery needs His presence. God will not condescend to your pride, but He will bow His ear to your grief. If you set up a claim to merit, He will turn His back upon you, but if you come to Him with a claim of necessity, which is merely a beggar's claim when he asks for alms—an appeal to the charity of God's sovereign

love, then He will turn about and hear your prayer. Come, my heart, are you not encouraged to come near to God, seeing He has respect to your low estate, and pities your sorrows?

Read on, and you will find that David, in order to come into communion with God, next *pleads his personal consecration*, "Preserve my soul; for I am holy." By this I understand him to mean, that he belongs to God; that he is consecrated and dedicated to the divine service. Should not the priest handle the golden bowl? Should not the priest enter into the holy place? And should not God therefore come and deal with the man who is dedicated to His use, and set apart to His service? My dear brothers and sisters, can you say tonight that you live for God? Do you recognize that you are not your own, but bought with a price? Well, there dwells an argument in that fact—a reason why the Lord God should come and take hold of you, and link Himself with you. You are the vessels of His sanctuary, you are the instruments of His divine service, you are consecrated to His honor, and you may expect Him therefore to touch you with His hand, to employ you in His work, and to identify Himself with you in your circumstances and necessities.

Moreover, David, anxious to use every argument, *pleads his trust*, "Save Your servant that trusts in You." This is a conquering plea, "Lord, my sole reliance is on You; come to me, then, and justify the confidence which You Yourself have inspired." "Without faith it is impossible to please God," but when God has given us faith, then we may be quite sure that we do please Him, and if we please Him, then, like Enoch, who pleased Him, we shall walk with Him. You may expect, in prayer, to find God drawing near to you, if in very deed you are holding to Him as the one ground of your confidence. Brethren are you sure that you trust in God? You answer, "Yes." Ah! Then let me say to you, that you shall have a reward, and that reward will probably be that you will be taught to trust Him more. That you may rise to a larger faith you will probably suffer greater troubles than you have up to now known. The reward of service is more service. A good soldier, who has fought through many battles, and won many victories, shall be sent out to the wars next time his master's forces want a captain. You, having already trusted, shall have your faith further tried, in order that you may glorify God, and so arrive at a greater faith. Do you not see that faith largely lies in the realization that God is, and that God is near? And if you so realize God when you bow the knee in prayer, you may expect to have sweet communion with Him. Many years ago I trusted God about many things, and I found Him true, but of late I have had to take a step in advance, and trust God wholly and alone, in the teeth of all appearances. I have been called almost literally to stand alone in contending against error, and in this I have distinctly taken a nearer place in prayer with the God whom I serve in my spirit. It is very well to rest on God when you have other props, but it is best of all to rest on Him when every prop is knocked away. To hang onto the bare arm of God is glorious dependence, and he that has once done it, cannot think of ever going back to trust in men again. "No," says he, "I tried you once, and he failed me. I had you with me, and I trusted God in you, but now that you have turned from me, I will trust God alone without you, even though you now come back to the man you deserted." Dependence upon the Lord creates a glorious independence of man. Verily, it is true, "Cursed is the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm"; but verily, verily, it is true, "Blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Part of that blessedness will be found in the communion which such a man enjoys with God whenever he approaches Him in prayer.

Still, following the same line, notice that David *pleads for God's presence because he is God's servant.* He says here, "Save Your servant." A servant has liberty to inquire as to his master's will, and he is justified in asking to see his Lord. If he is employed upon his master's business, he says, "I want orders. I wish to tell my master my difficulties, and to seek from him a supply for those necessities which his service will bring upon me." You feel that he has a good and sufficient plea when he urges this request. Even so, if you can honestly feel that you are spending your strength in the Lord's service, you, also, may lawfully expect that, when you draw near to Him in prayer, your Master will speak to you as His servant, and He that has sent you will commune with you.

David urges yet another reason why just now he should see God, namely, that *he is always in prayer*, "I cry unto you daily." The Lord will hear your prayer, my dear hearer, tonight, if you never prayed before, I am quite sure of it. But I am still surer that, if you have been long in the habit of prayer, it is not possible that the Father of mercies should cease to hear you. Oh, the sweet delights of constancy in prayer! The habit of prayer is charming, but the spirit of prayer is heavenly. Be always praying. Is that

possible? Some have realized it, till the whole of the engagements of the day have been ablaze with prayer. God bring us each one into that condition! Then we need not barely hope that He will have communion with us, for we shall be already enjoying His presence and His fellowship. Blessed are we when prayer surrounds us like an atmosphere. Then we are living in the presence of God; we are continually conversing with Him. May such be our lot! May we climb to the top of the mount of communion, and may we never come down from it!

David also tells the Lord that, when he could not attain to the nearness he desired, *yet he struggled after it, and strained after it.* Is not this the meaning of the expression, "Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for unto You, O Lord, do I lift up my soul"? As much as if he said, "Lord, when I cannot climb the hill of fellowship, I labor to do so. If I cannot enter into Your presence, I groan until I do so." We ought either to be rejoicing in the Lord, or pining after Him! Ask God to make you miserable, unless His conscious presence makes you happy. Unless His love is shed abroad in your heart, to be the beginning of heaven, may you mourn His absence as a very hell to your soul! Often I pray—

"Oh, make my heart rejoice, or ache;
Resolve each doubt for me:
Lord, if it be not broken, break;
And heal it if it be."

We want one of the two—either to commune with God, or else to sigh and cry till we do so. We must hunger and thirst after righteousness if we are not filled. To be in a state of content without fellowship with God would be a terrible condition, indeed.

Now, when a man's daily cries and inward strivings are after God, he may certainly expect that God in prayer will have communion with him. But again, I ask, does it not seem extraordinary that you and I, insignificant persons, who can have no claim upon the great Maker of the universe, should yet be permitted to come to His courts—yes, even to come to Himself through Christ Jesus, and speak with Him as a man speaks with his friend? Do not think that Abraham, when he stood before the Lord, and pleaded with Him, as one man does with another, was singularly favored above the rest of the elect family. It was a high favor, I cannot tell you how great, but such honor has all the saints. There are occasions with all His people when the Lord brings them very near, and speaks with them, and they with Him, when His presence is to them as real as the all-pervading air, and they are as much rejoiced in it as in the presence of father, or wife, or child, or friend.

Still, David, conscious of the great privilege which he sought, was not content without pleading the master argument of all; *he pleads the great goodness of the Lord*. Read it in verse five, "For You, Lord, are good." As much as to say—If You were not good You would never listen to me. I am, as it were, a noxious insect which a man might far sooner crush than speak with, and yet You are so good, my God, that instead of setting Your foot on me, You lift me up and talk with me. Who thinks of an angel talking with an ant? That would be nothing; here is Jehovah speaking with a creature which is crushed before the moth. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." He lets an unworthy creature tell out its heart to Him, and He bows his ear, and listens as earnestly as if there were no other voice in heaven to command His thought. He gives His whole attention to the feeble cry of an unworthy one. Such an amazing fact could not happen unless it were written, "For You, Lord, are good."

Ah! But besides that, there is sin in us. I can understand the great God forgetting our littleness, and bowing down to it, but for the holy God not to be held off by our sinfulness, this is a greater wonder still. But then the verse says He is "ready to forgive." Ah, yes! When some of us think of what we were, we must be drowned in amazement that ever we should be permitted to commune with God. Yonder is a man who could once swear at an awful rate and now God listens to his voice in prayer. Another was a Sabbath-breaker, a neglecter of the Word of God, a despiser of every holy and pure thing, and yet he is now permitted to come into intimate friendship with the Most High. It is very marvelous, is it not?

Remember, none ever washed Christ's feet except a woman that was a sinner. Our Lord selects those that have been the greatest sinners to come into the nearest communion with Himself. It may be He has raised up some sister here, who was once a tempter of others, to become a mighty intercessor in prayer for the salvation of others. It may be that some brother here, who once was—ah! But he is ashamed to

remember what he was—has now become mighty in supplication, and, like Elijah, can open or shut the windows of heaven. Oh, the strangeness of Almighty grace! Let God's name be magnified forever and ever.

Thus I have enlarged on the first thought that, in prayer, it is vital to us really to speak with God. Before I leave it, I want to pass a question round the place. Do you, my dear hearers, all pray so as to speak with God? If not, what does it mean? If you merely repeat good words, what is the use of it? You might as well stand on a hill and talk to the moon, as kneel down and hurry through the Lord's Prayer, and then think that you have prayed. I tell you, you might better do the first than the second, for you would not insult God in that case; whereas you do insult Him in every one of those holy words which you use without thought, heart, and faith. Think how you would like your own child every morning to come to you, and repeat a certain set of words without meaning anything thereby. You would say, "There, child, there, I have heard that often enough. Come to me no more with your empty noise." You would not care for vain repetitions. But when your boy or girl says, "Father, I need such a thing, please give it me," you hearken to the child's words. It may be that you have not enough of this world's goods to be very anxious that your children should come with large petitions, but if you were sufficiently rich, you would say, "That is right, dear child. Is there anything else you want? Tell me what it is. I will right gladly give you all things that are needful for you." You would wish your child's request to be an intelligent one, and then you would gladly attend to it. If your prayer does not come from your heart it will not go to God's heart, and if it does not bring you near to God, so that you are speaking to Him, you have simply wasted your breath. You have done worse than nothing, for in all likelihood you have daubed your conscience over with the notion that you have prayed, and so you have even done yourself serious harm by a flattering deceit. Oh, that God would save you from being so foolish!

II. And now I come to the second point, and I pray God to give me strength to speak upon it, and give you grace to hear it. Not at any great length, but with much earnestness, I have to remind you that David, in his prayer, desired PERSONAL ANSWERS FROM GOD. When we pray, we expect God to hear us, even as David says, "In the day of my trouble I will call upon You: for You will answer me."

I must not speak for all Christians in this matter, but I may speak for myself and for many dear brethren in the faith, and I must boldly say that we expect the Lord to hear our prayers; no, we are sure that He does so. We hear our fellow Christians say, when we tell them of instances in which God has heard our prayers, "How very extraordinary!" And we look at them and say, "Extraordinary!" Has it become an extraordinary thing for God to be true to His own promise? I like better the remark of the good old lady, who, when her prayer was answered, was asked, "Does it not surprise you?" She said, "No, it does not surprise me; it is just like Him." If anyone of you had a promise from a friend that, upon your sending in a note, he would give you such and such a thing; if you sent the request, and he fulfilled his promise, would you say, "I am greatly surprised at his action"? No, no; you believe that your friend means what he says, and you look for him to keep his word. O child of God, deal with God on those terms. The wonder was that He should make the promise at all, but when He has made the promise, it is not wonderful that He should keep it. He expects you to ask, and He waits to give.

A promise is like a check. If I have a check, what do I do with it? Suppose I carried it about in my pocket, and said, "I do not see the use of this bit of paper, I cannot buy anything with it," a person would say, "Have you been to the bank with it?" "No, I did not think of that." "But it is payable to your order. Have you written your name on the back of it?" "No, I have not done that." "And yet you are blaming the person who gave you the check? The whole blame lies with yourself. Put your name on the back of the check, go with it to the bank, and you will get what is promised to you." A prayer should be the presentation of God's promise endorsed by your personal faith. I hear of people praying for an hour together. I am very pleased that they can, but it is seldom that I can do so, and I see no need for it. It is like a person going into a bank with a check, and stopping an hour. The clerks would wonder. The common sense way is to go to the counter and show your check, and take your money, and go about your business. There is a style of prayer which is of this fine practical character. You so believe in God that you present the promise, obtain the blessing, and go about your Master's business. Sometimes a flood of words only means excusing unbelief. The prayers of the Bible are nearly all short ones; they are short and strong. The exceptions are found in places of peculiar difficulty, like that of Jacob, when he cried—

"With you all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day."

As a general rule, faith presents its prayer, gets its answer, and goes on its way rejoicing.

We expect our God to answer our prayer all the more surely when we are in trouble. David so expected; "In the day of my trouble I will call upon You: for You will answer me." Trouble is sent to make us pray. When we pray, the prayer becomes the solace of our trouble, and when the prayer is heard, it becomes the salvation out of our trouble. Many of you would be out of trouble quickly if you prayed. "Sir, I have been doing my best." And what is your best? A better thing than your best is to wait upon the Lord. Often and often trial has to rap our fingers to make us let go our harmful confidences, and turn to the Lord. With our vain-confidence we are like a madman with a razor; the more we grasp it, the more it cuts us. Drop the deadly self-trust; trust in God, and look to Him, and your deliverance will speedily come to you. If you should have no answer at any other time, you will assuredly be heard in the time of trouble if you trust in the Lord.

Now, if we expect God to answer us, we do so on very good grounds. There are certain natural reasons. I was turning over in my mind the question, "Why do I pray? Why have I any reason to believe that God hears me?" And I thought to myself," Well, on natural grounds I have a right to believe that God will hear prayer, or *otherwise why is prayer commanded?"* The Scripture is full of prayer. It is an institution of the old covenant, as well as of the new, and yet it is a piece of folly if God does not hear it.

"Oh," says somebody, "but it does you good to pray, even though there may be no such a thing as God's hearing prayer." It might do an idiot good to pray when he knew there was no hearing of prayer on God's part, but not being an idiot myself, I could not perform such a stupid exercise. I would as soon sit on a five-barred gate, and whistle to the hills as offer prayer if I did not hope to be heard. If there is no God that hears prayer, I shall not pray, nor will any other rational being. Show prayer to be unheard of God, and you have shown it to be a folly. Show prayer to be a folly, and who will pursue it? Does God invite us to pray? Does He command us to pray? Are there many injunctions of this kind—"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint"; "Pray without ceasing"; and so on? Then prayer must be heard of God. How would it be with you if you said to a number of poor people, "Come round to my gate tomorrow, and I will relieve your distresses"? Would you not intend to relieve their distresses when you said so? I cannot imagine that you would be so diabolical as to keep on saying, "Come to my house. Whenever you are hungry, come to my table. Whenever you need clothes, come to my door, and ask"; all the while saying to yourself, "But I do not intend to give you anything. You may come, and ring the bell as long as you like; it will be fine exercise for you, but I shall take no notice of your appeals." It would be a most shocking and disgraceful mockery of misery. God will not serve us in that fashion. The very institution of prayer gives us the assurance that God intends to hear and to answer.

Observe, again, that *prayer has been universal among all the saints*. There have been saints of different molds and temperaments, but they have all prayed. Some of them have been, like Heman and Asaph, masters of song, and they have prayed; others could not sing, but they have all prayed. Today you may meet with all sorts of Christians, holding many kinds of doctrines, but they all pray, and what is most curious, they all pray alike, too. You can scarcely detect a difference when they pray—

"The saints in prayer appear as one,
In word, and deed, and mind."

A man may preach doctrine contrary to the grace of God, but get him on his knees, and he prays to God for grace, as heartily as John Calvin himself. We are one at the mercy seat. Whatever doctrinal views we may hold, when we plead with the living God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are poured into one mold. How is this? If, all the ages through, saints have prayed, have they all been fools? Have they all exercised themselves in a way that was utterly useless and absurd? Do not believe it!

Note again, that *the more godly and holy a man is, the more he prays*. You never heard yet that a man began to backslide, or that a sober man became a drunkard, through praying too much. Did you ever hear of a person becoming unkind to his wife, ungenerous to the poor, negligent of public worship, or guilty of grievous sin, through being too much in prayer? No; the case is the reverse. As the man loves God more, and becomes more like Christ, he takes greater delight in prayer. That cannot be an idle and useless exercise which the best of men have followed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If there is a

possibility of error, we err in the best of company, for yonder comes the Lord Jesus Himself from His lonely haunt, with the burrs of the heather from the mountainside sticking to His garments. He has spent all night in agonizing prayer. He will not open His mouth to preach to the multitude till first of all He has received a new anointing from His Father's hand in secret fellowship with heaven. Our Master and His best disciples have abounded in prayer.

Well, dear friends, these are natural reasons, and there are a great many more, if you will think them out.

But, if you turn to Scriptural reasons, why was there a mercy seat if there is nothing in prayer? Why does the throne of grace still remain as a permanent institution, of which Paul says, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace," unless there is a reality in it? Tell me, why is Christ the way to the mercy seat? Why is He Himself the great Intercessor and Mediator, if there is nothing in prayer? The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities in prayer; surely there must be something effectual where He lends His aid. What! Is He, after all, helping us to do a thing which produces no result?—helping us to present petitions which will never reach the ear of God? Tell that to the philosophers; we are not so credulous.

For, once more, we know that God hears prayer, because *we have met with multitudes of His people who can tell of answers to prayer*. What is more, we are ourselves among that number. Looking back on my diary, I find it studded with answers to prayer. Often when I have talked with friends of an evening, telling them a few cases in which God has heard my cries in time of need, they have said, "Have you written these down?" "Well, no, I cannot say that I have." "Oh," says one, "pray do not let such facts be lost." I have to reply that many cases of answered prayer are quite beyond the belief of average people. I know them to be true, but I do not expect others to believe my tale. When William Huntington wrote his "Bank of Faith," some people called it a "Bank of Nonsense." I could write twenty "Banks of Faith," and every word should be as sure as an honest man could write, but the only result would be, that people would say, "Oh, well, you know that is the result of the good man's fanaticism." The moment that the moderns do not like to believe a thing, they call it fanatical. If we were put into a witness-box tomorrow, our testimony would have weight with the court, but yet, the moment we talk about God's hearing prayer, oh, then we are romancing, and our witness is not to be received. But, brothers and sisters, we bear a true witness, whether men receive it or not. I solemnly declare that no fact is better proved by my experience than this, that the Lord hears the prayers of His believing people. You, each one, will know for himself, or herself, whether there is a God that hears prayer. Does He answer your petitions? Brethren, you are sure that He does, and at the asking of the question you bow your heads and say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." My dear brother, William Olney, sits here among us; have we not prayed him twice back from the gates of the grave? He lives as an instance of answered prayer. There is not a stone or a beam about this great Tabernacle but has been an answer to our prayers. In days when, as a congregation, we were few and feeble, we ventured on the serious enterprise of building this great house, and we prayed it up stone by stone, to the praise and glory of God. If we who worship beneath this dome did not believe in prayer, the stones out of the walls would cry out against us.

But I hear a voice saying, "There are so many difficulties about prayer being heard." Are there? The farther I go in this life, the more difficulties I am informed of, though I should not have discovered them myself. I am assured that there are great difficulties about eating, breathing, and sleeping. As to the very air, I do not know what it is not full of; it teems with the seeds of disease, and the wonder is that we live at all. But we do live, do we not? And we shall eat our suppers tonight despite the difficulties in connection with food. As to the difficulties connected with prayer, they are altogether philosophical difficulties, and by no means practical ones. If you are philosophers, you may weary your heads about them, but if you are simple, practical people, you may pray, and receive the blessing.

"Yes but the power of prayer with God supposes that God may change." Well, our doing anything supposes *that*, but it is a mere supposition. Your even walking home tonight might raise a difficulty as to the decrees of God, but it is a non-existent difficulty. After you have entertained it as long as you like, you will find that you have entertained a shadow. Suppose that you leave off supposing, and just do as God tells you, and see whether it does not work. When you find that it does practically work, let other people enjoy the difficulties. I do not eat meat; but if I did, I should always feel quite satisfied to let my dogs have the bones; the meat would satisfy me. If there are any difficulties about prayer, the dogs may

have them—I mean the philosophers, but as for us, simple Christian people, we are satisfied with the meat of the precious fact that prayer brings every blessing from above. We pray, and God hears us, and that is enough for us. Our God does not change His will, and yet He wills a change in answer to prayer.

I have done when I have made this further remark. I cannot expect any man to believe that he can commune with God, or that God will in very deed hear his prayer, and grant him his desire, unless he has been led personally to try it. But if, by the Spirit of God, he has been led to seek after God, and to draw near to God, I shall have no need of further arguments with him. That man has now entered upon a new life, in which he will be capable of understanding new things. Until he does enter upon that life, he is spiritually deaf, and blind, and what can he know about spiritual realities? Our Lord has said to us, "You must be born again." When we are born again, the life within turns toward the life of God, and has fellowship with God and God answers to it, and the desire of the godly one is granted. Oh! The honor of communion with God! Happy beings who enjoy it! How unspeakable the privilege of pouring out your hearts before God! Delight yourselves therein before you fall asleep this night. Oh, the holy quietude which it brings! You have not an ounce of care to carry, because all your burden is, in prayer and supplication, laid on Him that cares for you! Oh, the love that dwells in the heart of the man who draws near to God in prayer! You cannot love God at a distance. You must draw nearer, and nearer, or love will not rest. As when one comes into the sunshine, he feels the warmth, so when we come nearer to God we have more joy in Him. Keep near to God; abound in prayer; let your supplications be instant and constant, and you will be sure that the Father Himself hears your cries!

Oh, that some here who never prayed would begin at once! Trust in Jesus, the Intercessor, and let that trust show itself by pleading the merit of His blood in earnest prayer. Oh, that you would now begin that holy life of prayer which shall lead up to the eternal life of praise at the right hand of God. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 86.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—34 (VERSION 1), 37 (SONG 2), 40.

On the wing, November 19, 1888.

DEAR FRIENDS—After reading this sermon carefully, I add these words. In all my sickness, weakness, conflict, and pain, the prayer-hearing God has been with me, and not one word of His promise has failed. Blessed be His name! And now I am sufficiently recovered to begin my journey to the place where I take rest and change, I go beneath a canopy of prayers. Will the reader join in asking that for the sake of my work I may soon recover strength, and return to my field of service? I have more confidence in prayer than in the balmy air and the rest; means are only good when the God of means makes them so. I leave my heart with dear ones at home, and with my congregation of hearers and readers. The Lord be with you!

Yours heartily,
C. H. SPURGEON.

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