

UNANSWERED PRAYER

NO. 3344

A SERMON
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“O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You hear not; and in the night season, and am not silent.”
Psalm 22:2.

IT is very clear to everyone who reads this Psalm that these are not so much the words of David as they are the words of David's Son and David's Lord, our blessed Master. He prayed with strong crying and tears. He came before His Father's throne with supplications and for a long time it seemed as if He would have no answer. It did appear as if God had utterly forsaken Him and that His enemies might persecute and take Him.

Now, why was the Savior permitted to pass through so sad an experience? How was it that He whose lightest word is prevailing with heaven, that He who pleads with divine authority this day in His continual intercession, was permitted, when here below, to cry, and cry, and cry again and yet to receive no comforting answer? Was it not mainly for this reason—that *He was making an atonement for us*—and He was not heard because *we, as sinners, did not deserve to be heard*? He was not heard, that we might be heard! The ears of God were closed against Him for a season, that they might never be closed against us—that the mourner's cry might forever find a way to the heart of God—because the cry of Jesus was shut for a while out from mercy's gate. He stood the surety for our sins, and was numbered with the transgressors! Upon Him the Lord laid the iniquity of all His people and, therefore, being the sinner's representative, He could not, for a while be heard.

There was also, no doubt, another reason, namely, *that He might be a faithful High Priest having sympathy with His people in all their woes*. As this not being heard in prayer, or being unanswered for a while, is one of the greatest troubles which can fall upon the Christian, and fall it does, the Savior had to pass through that trouble, too, that so it might be said of Him—

*“In every pang that rends the heart,
 The Man of Sorrows bore His part.”*

When I fear that I have not been heard in prayer, I can now look upon my Savior and say—

*“He takes me through no darker rooms
 Than He went through before.”*

He can now have a tender, touching sympathy with us because He has been tempted in all points like as we are.

Was it not, also, once more in our Savior's case, *with a view to display the wondrous faith, fidelity and trustfulness of the obedient Son of God*? Having been found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to His Father's will. Now, obedience is not perceived until it is tried, and faith is not known to be firm and strong until it is put to the test and exercised. Through what an ordeal did this pure gold pass! It was put into the crucible and thrust into the hottest coals—all glowing with a white heat, they were heaped upon Him and yet no dross was found in Him! His faith never staggered! His confidence in His God never degenerated into suspicion and never turned aside into unbelief. It is, *“My God! My God!”* even when He is forsaken. It is, *“My God and My strength”* even when He is poured out like water and all His bones are out of joint! In this thing He not only sympathizes with us, you see, but *He sets us an example*. We must overcome, as He did, through faith. *“This is the victory which overcomes the world, even your faith.”* And if we can copy this great High Priest of our profession who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself—if we can copy Him so as to be neither faint in our minds, or turn from our Master's work—we shall triumph even as He overcame!

But my chief objective in considering this theme is not so much to speak of the Savior's trial as to address myself to those of our number who may even now be passing through the same experience as our Lord. It will already comfort you to know that *Christ has been where you are*. It will already guide you to

know that He has set you an example and that He bids you follow in His steps. Let us now draw near to His sorrow and think on it for a while for our instruction and comfort.

In the first place, the text—without any inquiry into the cause of unanswered prayer, seems to give—

I. A GENERAL GUIDE FOR OUR CONDUCT.

Suppose that we have been seeking some blessing from God for many months and have not obtained it? Whether it is a personal blessing, or on behalf of others, what ought to be our conduct under such a trial as that, the trial of a long delay, or an apparent refusal?

In the first place, brothers and sisters, it is clear the text teaches us that *we must not cease to trust God*. “O My God.” Oh, that appropriating word! It is not, perhaps, “My Father.” The spirit of adoption is not here so much as the spirit of reverent trustfulness, but still there is the hold-fast word—“O My God.” Christian, never be tempted to give up your hold upon your only strength, upon your solitary hope! Under no conceivable circumstances, ever give place for an instant to the dark thought that God is not true and faithful to His promises! Though you should have seven years of unanswered prayer, yet suggest any other reason to your mind than one which would dishonor Him. Say with the Savior in this Psalm, “But You are holy.” Settle that in your mind. Oh, never allow the faintest breath of suspicion to come upon the fair fame of the Most High, for He does not deserve it! He *is* true. He *is* faithful. In this apparently worst of all cases, He did deliver His Son and come to the rescue in due time. In all other cases He has done the same—and I pray you never to distrust your God until you have some good and valid occasion for it. Never cast a slur upon His integrity till He really does forsake you—till He absolutely gives you up to perish! Then, but not till then, shall you doubt Him. Oh, believe Him to be good and true! You may not know why it is that He deals so strangely with you, but oh, never think that He is unfaithful for an instant, or that He has broken His word. Continue to trust Him! You shall be rewarded if you do—and the longer your faith is tried, it shall be with you as when the ship is longest out at sea—it goes to the richest climes and comes home with the heaviest and most precious freight. So shall your faith come back to you with joy!

Your faith may lie among the pots for many a day, but the time of her deliverance shall come and, like a dove, shall she mount with wings covered with silver and her feathers tipped with yellow gold! “Trust in the Lord at all times you people, and pour out your hearts before Him.”

Once again, as we are never to cease to trust, so we are *never to cease to pray*. The text is very expressive upon this point. “I cry in the daytime, but You hear not: and in the night seasons I am not silent.” Never cease your prayers! No time is a bad time for prayer. The glare of daylight should not tempt you to cease—and the gloom of midnight should not make you stop your cries. I know it is one of Satan’s chief objectives to make the Christian cease praying, for if he could but once make us put up the weapon of all-prayer, he would easily vanquish us and take us for his prey. But so long as we continue to cry to the Most High, Satan knows he cannot devour the very weakest lamb of the flock! Prayer, mighty prayer, will yet prevail if it has but time!

Oh, if this is the dark suggestion of the evil one, “Forsake the closet! Give up private devotion. Never draw near to God, for prayer is all a fancy”—I pray you, spurn the thought with all your might and still cry, both in the daytime and at night, for the Lord will still hear your prayer!

And while you never cease from your trust, or from your prayer, *grow more earnest in both*. Let your faith be still more resolved to give up all dependence anywhere but upon God, and let your cry grow more and more vehement. It is not every knock at mercy’s gate that will open it—he who would prevail must handle the knocker well and dash it down again, and again, and again! As the old Puritan says, “Cold prayers ask for a denial, but it is red-hot prayers which prevail.” Bring your prayers as some ancient battering ram against the gate of heaven and force it open with a sacred violence, “for the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by storm.” He that would prevail with God must take care that all his strength be thrust into his prayers! The Lord will not hear you if you only bring up a rank or line of the display of your desires. There must be no reserves—the whole army of your soul must come into the conflict and you must besiege the mercy seat, determined to win the day, and then shall you prevail! If there are delays, take them as good and sound advice to be more firm in your faith and more fervent in your cry!

And yet again, *cease not to hope*. The New Zealander has a word for hope which means, “The swimming thought,” because when all other thoughts are drowned, hope still swims. She lifts her head out of the foamy waves with her tresses all trailing and sees the blue sky above her and hopes, as it is there. So if you have prayed ever so long, yet hope on! “Hope you in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the

strength of my life and my portion forever.” As long as there is a place of prayer and a promise of an answer, no believer ought to give way to despair. “Go again,” said Elijah to his servant seven times! It must have been weary work to the prophet to have to wait so long. He did not stand up once and pray to God as on Carmel—and then instantly came down the fire to continue the sacrifice—but again and again and, getting more humble in posture, with his face between his knees, he beseeches the Lord, not for fire, which was an unusual thing, but for *water*, which is the common gift of the skies! And though he pleads for that which the Lord, Himself, had promised, yet it did not at once come! And when his servant came back, four, five, six times, the answer was still the same—there was no sign of rain, but the brazen heavens looked down on an earth which was parched as if in an oven! “Go again!” said the prophet, and at the seventh time, lo, there appeared the cloud like unto a man’s hand—and this cloud was the sure forerunner of the deluge and storm! Christian, go again seven times! No, I will venture to say 70 times seven, for God *must* keep His promise! Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle of Jehovah’s Word can fail. “The grass withers, the flower thereof fades away, but the word of our God endures forever.” Do you plead that enduring word of God? Let no dark thoughts drive you to despair. Continue to trust! Continue to pray! Increase in your fervency and in the hope that the blessing will yet come! It did come to the Savior. The morning broke upon His midnight after all. Never tide ebbed out so far as in the Savior’s case, when the great stretches of misery and sorrow were visible where once God’s love had rolled in mighty floods. But when the time came, it began to turn, and see how it has turned now in mighty floods of matchless joy! The love of God has come back to our once suffering Savior and there, upon the eternal throne He sits, the man, the crucified, who bowed His head under mountains of almighty wrath, which broke in huge billows and covered His soul. Be of good courage, Christian! Hope on, poor soul, and hope on forever!

Thus much by way of general direction; but we now go on to a second point and shall inquire into—

II. THE CAUSES OF UNANSWERED PRAYER.

We shall, perhaps, on this theme, get a few special directions which may be available in particular cases. Dear friends, there are some of us who are not often troubled about unanswered prayer—on the contrary, our own experience is such that the existence of a God who hears His people’s cry is reduced to an absolute, mathematical certainty!

I have no more doubt about this than about my own existence, not because I can see it clearly and understand it perfectly, or because with a blind credulity I submit myself to the Bible as being the infallible revelation of God, but because I have had real dealings with God, have tried and proved His promises to be true and have found out that according to my faith, it has been done unto me in a thousand instances! This is truth that those who have learned to live in the spirit world, and to talk with God, understand and know as plainly as they understand, and know that when a child speaks to its father, its father grants its request. It has become to many believers not at all a matter to be argued or talked of by way of dispute—they *know* that they have fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and their prayers are answered. But occasionally, to all believers, I suppose, there will come staggering moments when they scarcely know how to reply to their doubts because certain of their prayers have not been answered.

It may possibly happen that the cause of unanswered prayer may many times lie *in something connected with sin*. Do you not think that unanswered prayers are often a Fatherly chastisement for our offenses? The Savior, in that wonderful chapter where He tells out His love to us, says, “If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love,” and then He notes, as a special favor, if a man abide in His love and keep His commandments, he, “shall ask what he wills and it shall be done unto him.” Now it seems to me to be only reasonable that if I will not do what God wills, God will refuse to do what I will—that if He asks of me a certain duty and I refuse it—when I ask Him for a certain privilege or favor, it is not unkind, but, on the other hand, most wise and kind that He should say, “No, My child, no. If you will not listen to My tender command, it is kind to refuse you your desire until you repent and obey.”

Perhaps this is the way in which, too, are visited upon God’s people *some neglects of ordinances*. “He that knows his Master’s will and does it not, the same shall be beaten with many stripes.” And one of these stripes may surely be our failure in prayer! It may also be temporal affliction, but probably this is one of the main ways in which the Master inflicts the stripes upon His children. They are negligent of His commands and He says, “Then you shall tarry awhile. I will not yet grant you what you seek. But when

you come to a better mind and are more scrupulous and tender in the fulfilling of My commands, then your longings shall be satisfied.”

It may occur, too, that this delay may be a sort of *disclosure* to us as to wherein our sin lies. Sin sometimes lies in a Christian unrepented of because he only dimly realizes that it is there. Hear what Job declares—“Are the consolations of God small with you? Is there any secret thing with you?” That is to say, if you love selfish ease and feeble comforting. If you do not prevail with God in prayer, is there some secret sin in you which keeps back the blessing? God does, as it were, say to us, “Search and look.” Unanswered prayer should be to every Christian a search warrant—he should begin to examine himself to see whether there is not something harbored within which is contrary to the will of God. Oh, believer, this is not a hard work for you to do, surely, but it is a very necessary one! Search yourself and breathe the prayer, “Search me, O God, and try me, and know my ways, and see if there is any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” I think this is one great reason for unanswered prayer, namely, that it is a chastisement for sin committed or an admonition against sin harbored.

Sometimes there may be great sin in the prayer, itself! Are not our greatest sins often connected with our holiest things? We must be aware of our prayers. There is such a thing as polluting the mercy seat. Remember what became of Nadab and Abihu, who offered strange fire before the Lord. Beware, Christian, beware—you may sin against God in the prayer chamber as well as you can in the market—and you may offend on your knees, as well as when you are in your business! Have a care, for how can you hope that a prayer thus stained with sin can ever succeed unless you bring it to the blood to have it purged and cleansed from all defiling before it mounts to the throne of grace?

And I sometimes fear, too, that our prayers do not speed because the thing asked for, though as we think good for us, is *asked for from a wrong motive*.

If, for instance, a Christian minister asks that he may win souls in order that he may gain reputation and fame as a useful and successful evangelist for his Master, he will probably not be heard, for he asks from an unworthy motive. If I seek to be useful merely that I may be known to be a useful man or woman, I am really seeking *my own honor*—can I expect God to minister to and pamper that?

I must take care, then, that even when I ask for a good thing, I ask it for the purest of reasons—for God’s glory. Oh, what washing even our prayers need! What cleansing, what purging! Can we wonder that they do not succeed when we so often make mistakes, both in the substance of the prayers and the motives from which we offer them?

Praying seems, to some persons, to be simply a child’s play or a formal habit. They will take a book, read a form of intercession, and perhaps offer a few extemporary words and that is all. But these are all nothing and naughty prayers unless God shall touch them and give them life!

Sometimes, then, failure in prayer may be caused by sin. In such a case, heart-searching, deep repentance and especially a speedy going to the cross to have renewed fellowship with the cleansing blood and to be brought once more in contact with the holy sufferings of the blessed substitute will make us speed.

But we go on to notice that failure in prayer *may sometimes be the result of ignorance*.

I think persons often offer *very ignorant prayers, indeed*. I am sure I have good evidence that some do. There is scarcely ever a week passes in which I do not receive intelligence from different persons who are on the verge of bankruptcy, or deeply in debt, that they have prayed to God about it—and that they have been guided by God to write to me to get them out of their difficulties and to pay their debts! Now, I am always perfectly willing to do so as soon as ever I am directed expressly by God, Himself! But I shall not receive the direction at secondhand! As soon as I receive it myself—and I think it is only fair that I should receive it, as well as they—I shall be quite willing to be obedient to His direction, provided, too, the funds are in hand, which does not often happen! But folks must be very foolish to suppose that because they ask God that such-and-such a debt may be paid by miraculous means, it will certainly be done! I have a right to ask for anything which God has promised me, but if I go beyond the range of the divine promises, I also go beyond the range of assured and confident expectation. The promises are very large and very wide, but when one gets a fancy in his head, he must not suppose that God is there in his fancy. I have known some fanatical persons who thought they could live by faith. They were going to preach the gospel, having no gifts whatever for preaching. They were going to be missionaries in a district having no more gift to be missionaries than horses in a plow. But they thought they were destined to do it and, therefore, they tried to live by faith. And when they had been nearly half-starved, then they complained against the goodness and abandoned the labor. Had God really inspired and sent them, He would have sustained and

kept them, but if they go about it willfully and stubbornly on their own account, they must be driven back to realize their own ignorance of the divine will. Now, we must not pray ignorantly—we must pray with the understanding and with the spirit, so that we may clearly know what we are praying about. Get the promise and then offer the prayer—and the prayer will be answered as sure as God is God! But get your own fancy into your head and you will only have to get it out again, for it will be of no service to you.

And then oftentimes we pray in a way *in which our prayers could not be heard consistent with the dignity of the Most High*. I love a holy familiarity with God and I believe it to be commendable, but still, man is but man, while God is God and, however familiar we may be with Him in our hearts, we must still remember the distance there is between the Most High and the most elevated and most beloved of His creatures—and we are not to speak as though it were in our power to do as we will and as we please. No, we are children, but we are to remember that children have a limit as to how they are to speak to their father. Their love may come as near as they please, but their impertinence may not—and we must mind that we do not mistake the familiarity of communion for the impudence of presumption! We must be careful to distinguish between the two, for he who is taught of God and waits upon Him according to His mind will find, as a general rule, that he will not be long without an answer to his prayer.

Now, if it is ignorance that thus prevents the answering of your prayers, you should get better instructed and search especially into such texts as bear upon the matter of prayer, that you may know how to use your private key of heaven and open the sacred portals, the gate of the divine mercy, for ignorance will often make you to fail.

Again, does it not often happen that there may be *reasons for delay lying in our own infirmity?*

Sometimes, if a mercy were to come to a believer immediately when he asked for it, it would come too soon. But God times it until it appears only at the right and best moment. When a gracious godly soul has been much exercised in his mind concerning a special mercy—has studied it, weighed it, arrived at a proper apprehension of it and arranged his plans for its proper use and benefit—then, just at the time that the barn was swept and all the lumber taken out—then God's harvest of bounty comes home and the man, being quite ready for the blessing, the blessing comes!

Perhaps you are not yet ready for the blessing. You have asked for strong meat, but you are but as yet a babe and, therefore, you are to be content with milk for a little while longer. You have asked for a man's trials, a man's privileges and a man's work, but you are as yet only a child growing up into manhood—and so your good Father will give you what you ask for, but He will give it to you in such a way as to make it not a burden to you, but a blessing. If it came now, it might involve responsibilities which you could not handle, but coming by-and-by, you shall be well prepared for it!

There are reasons, too, I doubt not, *which lie in our future*, why our prayers are not answered. Delays in prayer may turn out to be a sort of training school for us. Take the apostle's instance. The "thorn in the flesh" was very painful, and though he was a chosen apostle, yet he had no answer. Thrice he cried, but still the "thorn in the flesh" was not removed. It was well that it was not, for Paul needed to be taught tenderness in order that he might write those loving epistles of his and, therefore, he received an answer of another sort, "My grace is sufficient for you." Oh Christian! If you could get rid of the trouble in which you now are, you would not be able to comfort poor mourners as you shall yet do! You would not be a full grown, strong man if you had not these stern trials to develop your manly vigor! Men do not learn to be intrepid sailors by staying on dry land. You are to put out to sea in the midst of the storm, so that you may learn how to manage and guide the vessel of your soul! You are going through a rough drill, that you may be a valiant and stalwart, a good soldier of Jesus Christ, for battles are yet to come and grim foes yet to face—for you have many fights between now and the blessed active ease of heaven!

You have not yet won the crown, but you will have to cut your way, inch by inch and foot by foot, and the Master is making you an athlete that wrestling with your enemies you may overcome. He is strengthening your muscles and tendons, sinews and power by the arduous exercise of unanswered prayer that you may be finely useful in the future!

Still, yet again, perhaps the reason why prayer is not always quickly answered is this—a reason which no tongue can tell, but *which is inscrutable lying in the sovereign purposes and wisdom of God*.

Now, look! If I cannot tell why God does not hear me, what must I say? I had better say nothing but put my finger on my lips and wait. Who am I that I should question Him as to what He does? Who am I

that I should arraign my Maker before my bar and say to Him, “What are You doing?”? Almighty Potter, You have a right to do as You will with Your own clay! We have learned to submit to Your will, not because we must, but because we love that will, feeling that Your will is the highest good of Your creatures and the most sublime wisdom! Why should we be so anxious to know the depth of the sea which cannot be fathomed by our line? Why must we be toiling to heave the lead so often? Leave these things with God and go on with your praying and your believing—and all shall yet be well with you!

And now I conclude this point by saying that if the Christian, after looking into the matter, cannot find a reason why he should not be answered, let him still expect that he shall be, and *still wait upon God*, remembering, however, that he may never be answered after his own fashion, but that he shall be answered after God’s fashion.

I like that verse of old Erskine’s, for though rough and quaint, it is true—

“I’m heard when answered soon or late.

Yes, heard when I no answer get!

Yes, kindly answered when refused,

And treated well when hardly used.”

In heaven every believer will realize how great this truth was—and so here I leave it.

And now, to conclude, I thought I would say a few words upon a very special case which may occur, and which may be here represented this evening. I have no doubt that it is in more than one instance. It was once my case. It is not the case of a Christian asking a blessing for himself, but it is the case of a *sinner, conscious of his danger as a sinner, asking for mercy.*

Brothers and sisters, it was a very unhappy lot to have to seek the Lord with such earnestness as I could command as a child for four or five years—with sighs, and cries, and entreaties—but to have no comfortable answer whatever, to be as one that chooses strangling rather than life because of a sense of God’s anger in my soul. To desire reconciliation, to live in the midst of gospel light and to hear the truth of God preached every Sabbath day, indeed, every day in the week, after a fashion, and yet not to discover the way to heaven was a great affliction. Now, sometimes it is not good advice to say to such a person, Go on praying. It is good advice! I must correct myself, there, but it is *not the best advice* in such a case. Soul, if you have been seeking mercy and you cannot find it, go on praying by all means—never relax that, but it is not by praying that you will ever get peace. The business of your soul is to listen to Christ’s command—and His command is contained in the gospel, which gospel is *not*, “Go you into all the world and tell every creature to pray,” but it is, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” Now, your business is to pray, certainly, but your first business is to believe! Your prayers before you believe have but little weight in them. Unbelieving prayers! Shall I call them prayers? Prayers without faith? They are birds without wings, ships without sails and beasts without legs! Prayers that have no faith in Christ in them are prayers without the blood on them! They are deeds without the signature, without the seal, without the stamp—they are impotent, illegal documents! Oh, if you could but come as you are and look to Christ on the cross! It is not your prayers that can save you—it is Christ’s prayers, Christ’s tears, Christ’s sufferings, Christ’s blood and Christ’s death! If you trust to your prayers, you have gone back to the old beggarly elements of the law. You might as well trust to your good works as to your prayers, but to trust either will be to rest in “a refuge of lies.” Your hope, sinner, lies in the altogether gratuitous mercy of God—and that mercy only comes to those who rest in Jesus Christ, alone, waiting patiently for Him! Oh, that you could but come just as you are and lay yourself at mercy’s door with such a word as this on your lips—

“My hope is fixed on nothing else

Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness!”

There are no doings of yours needed to complete the work. No! I venture to say, not even any praying of yours. Your praying and your doings shall each occupy their proper place, afterwards, and then they shall be essential in their way, but now, as a sinner, your business is with the sinner’s Savior! If you are now enabled to look completely out of self and see all that your flesh can do as dead and buried forever in the grave of Christ—and as being nothing and worse than nothing! And if you can see Jesus, the mighty Savior, distributing the gifts which He has received for men, even distributing them to the rebellious—if you can thus trust Him, you are saved! What do you say, sinner? Are you enabled to do it now? Can you fall flat before His cross? Oh, the happy day when I learned that I was no longer to look to self, but found that the gospel was, “Look unto Me, and be you saved, all you ends of the earth.” Many of you have looked, brothers and sisters! Look again to that sacred head once wounded and filled with pain and grief,

but which now is crowned with glory! Look and renew your vow of dedication and He will lift you up to be above the angels and only second to God, Himself!

Oh look now!

And as to you who have never looked before, I pray the Master to open your blind eyes and cause the scales to drop, so that you may look now and, while you look, may see everything you need laid up for you in Jesus! Everything a sinner needs can be richly supplied by Him—and then the sinner can go his way rejoicing and singing, “Christ is all, and happy am I that I have sought and found Him.” The Lord bless you all for His name’s sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 32.

This is a great Psalm of grace, a Psalm in which a sinner, cleansed by sovereign grace, adores and blesses the mercy of God.

Verse 1. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.* This is not a blessing for the man who says he has no sin—this is not a benediction for the innocent who talk about their own good works—but blessed is the man who, having sinned, is pardoned, whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! In a word, it is a gospel blessing—it is the blessing of free grace.

2. *Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.* He had a thousand iniquities. He transgressed in all sorts of ways. The Lord does not impute these things to him. He has set them down to the account of another who has ventured to stand in the sinner’s place and be made sin in the sinner’s place! But to this man, this blessed man, God does not impute iniquity—and in his spirit there is no guile—he confesses his sin with honesty, he is pardoned with certainty and in his spirit there is no cunning concealment.

3, 4. *When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was turned into the drought of summer. Selah.* This is the experience of those men whom God saves. Till they confess sin, that sin rankles in them like venom—it boils their blood, it eats into their bones, it makes life worse than death, it makes them dread the wrath to come—their days are nights, and their nights are hells! They cannot stand themselves. This was David’s experience and it has been the way by which God has led thousands of His redeemed ones that He might bring them to Himself. As long as we cloak our sin and conceal it and pretend that we are innocent, the fire burns within us—but when we just confess the sin, then it is that we are dealing with God aright—and God deals with us in grace!

5. *I acknowledged my sin unto You, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.* All gone, gone forever, and gone at a stroke! Oh, what a mercy this is, that when once we will take the place of sinners and plead guilty, then it is that we are absolved at once! We have but to acknowledge that we deserve the punishment and immediately that punishment is remitted! This is the way of grace, the plan of infinite condescending love!

6. *For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto You in a time when You may be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come near unto him.* The man that has so prayed as to find complete forgiveness, he is the man that will never leave off praying as long as he lives! The one gain which covers everything, the gain of conscious forgiveness, inspires a man to pray about anything and about everything as long as he lives! “For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto You.” “You are my hiding place.” You see God was his hiding place when he was in a storm of sin, and now he takes God to be his hiding place in every time of trouble, from all the afflictions of his life, all the sorrows of the way. “You are my hiding place. You shall preserve me from trouble.” Shall He not, since He has blotted out our sins? Oh, if God has preserved us from the wrath to come, what is there to be afraid of? “You shall preserve me from trouble. You shall compass me about with songs of deliverance.” I shall live in a ring of music! I shall march onward to heaven as in the center of song! Why, it may well be so, when once God has freely blotted out our sins—“You shall compass me about with songs of deliverance.” Yes, says God that I will, and I will do more!

8. *I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go: I will guide you with My eyes.* I have not blotted out your sins to leave you to wander back into them again—I will be your teacher, your folly shall not be your ruin, your ignorance shall not be your destruction. I will guide you—look at Me!—“I will guide you with My eyes.” “A glance, a look, shall be enough for you! I will give you such a heart that you shall understand the least motion of My finger. No, I will guide you with My eyes.”

9. *Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you.* A pardoning God may well ask this of us, that we would be tender. Oh, let us be very willing to do the Lord’s will, plastic in His hands like clay in the hand of the potter! It is a great pity, brothers and sisters, when we won’t be guided by the gentle leadings of God, and must be whipped and spurred, and tugged at, for God *will* govern us if we are His people. If one bit will not do it, He will get a tougher bit that shall cut us and hurt us, but He will rule us! And so He ought to do, blessed be His name!

10, 11. *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusts in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, you righteous: and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart.*

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