HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

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A SERMON
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"That your prayers be not hindered."
1 Peter 3:7

TO many persons this discourse will have but little reference because they do not pray. I fear also there are some others whose prayers are so worthless that if they were hindered it would be of no very material consequence. It is even possible that their being forced to omit them might arouse them out of a self-righteous lethargy. Merely to bow the knee in formality, to go through a form of devotion in a careless or half-hearted manner is rather to mock God than to worship Him.

It would be a terrible theme for contemplation to consider how much of vain repetition and heartless pray-saying the Lord is wearied with from day to day. I would, however, most solemnly remind those who do not truly pray that the wrath of God abideth on them. He who never seeks for mercy has certainly never found it.

Conscience acknowledges it to be a righteous thing with God that He should not give to those who will not ask. It is the smallest thing that can be expected of us that we should humbly ask for the favors we need, and if we refuse to do so, it is but right that the door of grace should be closed so long as men refuse to knock.

Prayer is no hard requirement, it is the natural duty of a creature to its Creator, the simplest homage which human want can pay to divine liberality, and those who refuse to render it may well expect that one of these days when in dire extremity, they begin to bemoan their folly, they will hear a voice from their insulted God, saying, "I called and ye refused; I stretched out my hands and no man regarded; therefore I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh."

The old story tells of a monarch who gave to a favorite courtier a ring which he might send to her in case he should be under her displeasure, promising that at the sight thereof he should be restored to favor. That ring was never shown, though long waited for, and it was little wonder that concluding the offender to be stubbornly rebellious, the sentence of execution was carried out.

If a sinner will not plead the name of Jesus to which the promise of forgiveness is appended, if he will not bend his knee in penitential prayer and ask for pardon at the hand of God, none will wonder that he perishes for his folly. None will be able to accuse the Lord of too great a severity when He casts away forever all prayerless souls. O you who never pray, I tremble for you! Would to God you would tremble for yourselves, for there is cause enough for it.

To those who do pray, prayer is a most precious thing, for it is the channel by which priceless blessings come to them, the window through which their needs are supplied by a gracious God. To believers prayer is the great means of soul enrichment—it is the vessel which trades with heaven, and comes home from the celestial country laden with treasures of far greater worth than ever Spanish galleon brought from the land of gold.

Indeed, to true believers prayer is so invaluable that the danger of hindering it is used by Peter as a motive why, in their marriage relationships and household concerns, they should behave themselves with great wisdom. He bids the husband "dwell" with his wife "according to knowledge," and render loving honor to her, lest their united prayers should be hindered. Anything which hinders prayer must be wrong. If any management of the family, or want of management, is injuring our power in prayer, there

is an urgent demand for an alteration. Husband and wife should pray together, as joint heirs of grace, and any temper or habit which hinders this is evil.

The text would be most appropriately used to stimulate Christians to diligence in family prayer, and though I shall not so use it on this occasion, it is not because I undervalue the institution, for I esteem it so highly that no language of mine can adequately express my sense of its value. The house in which there is no family altar can scarcely expect a divine blessing. If the Lord does not cover our habitation with His wings, our family is like a house without a roof. If we do not seek the Lord's guidance our household is a ship without a pilot. And unless guarded by devotion, our family will be a field without a hedge.

The mournful behavior of many of the children of professing parents is mainly due to the neglect or the coldness of family worship. And many a judgment has, I doubt not, fallen upon households because the Lord is not duly honored therein. Eli's sin still brings with it the visitations of a jealous God. That word of Jeremiah bears hard upon prayerless families, "Pour out thy fury upon the households that call not upon thy name." His mercy visits every house where night and morning vows are paid, but where these are neglected sin is incurred.

In the good old Puritan times it was said that if you had walked down Cheapside you would have heard in every house the voice of a psalm at a certain hour of the morning and evening, for there was no house then of professed Christians without family prayer.

I believe that the bulwark of Protestantism against Popery is family worship. Take that away and give over the instruction of children in the fear of God, and you lay this country open again to the theory that prayer is most acceptable in the parish church, and so you get into the sacredness of places. Then taking away the priesthood from the father of the family, who ought to be the priest in his own house, you make an opening for a superstitious priesthood, and leaving the teaching with these pretenders, mischiefs innumerable are introduced.

If neglect of family prayer should become general throughout our churches it will be a dark day for England. Children who observe that their parents are practically prayerless in the household will grow up indifferent to religion, and in many cases will be utter worldlings, if not altogether atheists. This is a matter about which the church cannot make any inquisitorial inquiry. It must be left to the good sense and the Christian spirit of the heads of households, and I therefore speak all the more strongly and pray you so to order things at home that family prayer is not hindered.

At this time, however, I shall use the text for another purpose, and apply it to the hindrances which beset private prayer.

Our prayers may be hindered thus—first, we may be hindered *from* prayer. Secondly, we may be hindered *in* prayer. And thirdly, we may be hindered *from our prayers speeding with God*.

I. First, there *is* such a thing as being HINDERED FROM PRAYER, and that may be done *by falling into a generally lax, lukewarm condition in reference to the things of God.*

When a man becomes cold, indifferent, and careless, one of the first things that will suffer will be his devotion. When a sick man is in a decline his lungs suffer and his voice, and so when a Christian is in a spiritual decline, the breath of prayer is affected, and the cry of supplication becomes weak. Prayer is the true gauge of spiritual power. To restrain prayer is dangerous and of deadly tendency. You may depend upon it that, take it for all in all, what you are upon your knees you are really before your God.

What the Pharisee and the Publican were in prayer was the true criterion of their spiritual state. You may maintain a decent repute among men, but it is a small matter to be judged of man's judgment, for men see only the surface, while the Lord's eyes pry into the recesses of the soul. If He sees that you are prayerless He makes small account of your attendance at religious meetings, or your loud professions of conversion.

If you are a man of earnest prayer and especially if the spirit of prayer be in you, so that in addition to certain seasons of supplication your heart habitually talks with God, things are right with you. But if this be not the case and your prayers be "hindered," there is something in your spiritual system which

needs to be ejected, or something lacking which ought at once to be supplied. "Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," and living prayers are among those issues.

Prayers may be hindered, next, *by having too much to do*. In this age this is a very common occurrence. We may have too much business for ourselves. The quiet days of our contented forefathers are gone, and men allot to themselves an increasing drudgery. Not content to earn as much as is necessary for themselves and families, they must have much more than they can possibly enjoy for themselves, or profitably use for others.

Wisdom seems to say that one staff is enough for a man to walk with, but ambition cannot be contented unless it carries a load of staves upon its back. "Enough is as good as a feast," said the old proverb, but nowadays neither enough nor a feast will satisfy men. They must accumulate more than would feast thousands of families before they can be content—ay, they are not content then.

Many a man who might have been of great service to the church of God becomes useless because he must branch out in some new direction in business, which takes up all his spare time. Instead of feeling that his first care should be, "How can I best glorify God?" his all-absorbing object is to "stretch his arms like seas and grasp in all the shore."

Thousands, hundreds of thousands, and even millions of pounds cannot silence the greedy horseleech which men have swallowed, which continually cries, "Give, give." Many add house to house, and field to field, as though they meant to be left alone in the land. Alas, that Christians should be infected with the same fever.

The rich man in the parable had no time for prayer, for he was busy in planning new barns wherein to bestow his goods, but he had to find time for dying when the Lord said, "This night shall thy soul be required of thee." Beware, I pray you, of "the desire of other things," the canker of riches, the greed insatiable which drives men into the snare of the devil. For if it works you no other ill, it will do you mischief enough if your prayers are hindered.

We may even have too much to do in God's house and so hinder our prayers, by being like Martha, cumbered with much serving. I never heard of anyone who was cumbered with much praying. The more we do the more we should pray, and prayer should balance our service, or rather, it should be the lifeblood of every action, and saturate our entire life as the dew of heaven filled Gideon's fleece.

We cannot labor too much if prayer be proportionate, but I fear that some of us would do far more if we attempted less and prayed more about it. I even fear that some allow public religious engagements to override private communion with God. They attend too many sermons, too many conferences, too many Bible readings, too many committees, aye, and too many prayer meetings—all good in their way, but all acting injuriously when they cramp our secret prayer.

Mrs. Row said that if the apostles were preaching at her time for private communion with God she would not forsake her closet to go and hear them. It must be better to be with God than with Peter or Paul. Praying is the end of preaching, and woe to the man who, prizing the means more than the end, allows any other form of service to push his prayers into a corner.

There can be no doubt also that prayer is hindered *by having too little to do*. If you want a thing well done, you must go to the man who has a great deal to do, for he is the man to do it for you. People who have nothing to do generally do it with a great deal of fuss. From morning to night they waste other people's time—they are the callers, the interviewers, the people who write catching paragraphs about public men, very frequently invented in their own silly brains. These are the propagators of slander, who in very wantonness spit upon good men's characters. Having nothing to do they are hired by Satan to hinder and injure others. If such people ever do pray, I am sure their indolence must hinder them much.

The man who has to teach in the ragged school finds he must cry for help to master those wild young natures. The young lady who has around her a dozen girls whom she longs to bring to the Savior, feels it imperative upon her to pray for Jane and Ellen, that they may be converted to God. The minister, whose hands are full of holy toil and whose eyes fail with sacred watching, finds he cannot do without drawing

nigh unto his God. If these servants of Jesus had less to do they would pray less, but holy industry is the nurse of devotion.

I said we might do too much, and I could not balance that truth unless I added that a very large proportion of Christians do too little. God has given them enough wealth to be able to retire from business. They have time upon their hands, and they have even to invent ways of spending that time and yet the ignorant require instructing, the sick want visiting, the poor need helping, should they not lay out their abundant leisure in the service of God? Would they not then be quickened in prayer?

I wish that all could say with one of the Lord's saints, "Prayer is my business and praise is my pleasure," but I am sure they never will till the zeal of the Lord's house shall more fully consume them.

Some people hinder their prayers, again, *by a want of order*. They get up a little too late, and they have to chase their work all the day and never overtake it, but are always in a flurry, one duty tripping up the heels of another. They have no appointed time for retirement, so little space hedged about for communion with God. And consequently, something or other happens and prayer is forgotten—nay, I hope not quite forgotten, but so slurred and hurried over that it amounts to little and brings them no blessing.

I wish you would each keep a diary of how you pray next week, and see how much, or rather how little time you spend with God out of the twenty-four hours. Much time goes at the table, how much at the mercy seat? Many hours are spent with men, how many with your Maker? You are somewhat with your friends on earth, how many minutes are you with your Friend in heaven? You allow yourself space for recreation, what do you set apart for those exercises which in very truth re-create the soul?

"A place for everything, and everything in its place," is a good rule for schools and houses of business, and it will be equally useful in spirituals. Other duties should be done, but prayer must not be left undone, it must have its own place and sufficient of it. Care must be taken that our "prayers be not hindered," so that we omit or abridge them. But time compels me to leave this wide subject and proceed.

II. Secondly, we must watch that we are not HINDERED IN PRAYER, when we are really engaged in that holy work.

Here I might go over the same ground as before and remark that some are hindered while *in* their prayers by being lax and lukewarm—a great hindrance. Others by having too much or too little to do, and another class by being in that flurried condition of heart, which results from a want of order. But I need not repeat myself when you are so eagerly drinking in my words.

Let us note that some are hindered in prayer *by selecting an unfit time and place*. There are times when you may expect a knock at your own door, do not just then knock at God's door. There are hours when your letters arrive, when customers call in, when trades people need attention, when workmen want orders, it would be foolish to be going into your closet just then.

If you are employed by others, you must not present to God those hours which belong to your employer. You will be honoring the Lord better by diligence in your calling. There are times that are demanded of you by the necessities of the household and your lawful calling. These are already the Lord's in another way, let them be used for their own purpose. Never defile one duty with the blood of another.

Give to God and prayer those suitable times in which you can reasonably expect to be alone. Of course you can pray at your work in spontaneity and silent groans, and you ought to be in the spirit of supplication all day long, but I am alluding now to times specially devoted to supplication, and I say choose a season and a place where you can be free from interruption.

A pious lad who had no place at home to pray in, went to the stable and climbed up into the hayloft. But very soon someone came up the ladder and interrupted him. The next time he took care to pull the ladder up after him, a very useful hint for us. It would be well indeed if we could so completely pull the ladder up that neither the devil nor the world could invade our sacred privacy. "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and

thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Select, then, the fittest time and place that your prayers be not hindered.

Worldly cares are frequent and most mischievous hindrances to prayer. A Christian man should be the most careful man in the world, and yet without carefulness. Understand you that paradox? He should be careful not to sin, but as for other matters, he should cast his care on "him who careth for him." To take everything from God's hands, and to trust everything in God's hands, is a happy way of living and very helpful to prayer.

Has not your Master told you of the ravens and the lilies? Your heavenly Father feedeth and clotheth them, and will He not clothe you? "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Faith gives peace, and peace leaves the soul clear for prayer. But when care comes in, it confuses the mind and puts the heart away from pleading. A heart clogged with care is like a man trying to swim with heavy clothes upon him, he must get them off if he hopes to swim to shore. Many a sailor has cut his clothes to pieces because he felt he should sink if he did not get clear them.

I could wish that many Christians would tear themselves away from their excessive worldly engagements, for they have such a mass of care upon them that they scarcely keep their heads above water. Oh, for more grace and less worry! More praying and less hoarding! More intercession and less speculating! As it is, prayers are sadly hindered.

*Earthly pleasure*s, especially of a dubious kind, are the worst of hindrances. Some professors indulge in amusements which I am sure are not consistent with prayer. They resemble flies which plunge into the honey, until the sweet sticks to their wings and legs and they cannot fly. I once remember reading, "A prayer to be said by a Christian man after coming home from a theater," "A collect for a saint on returning from the races," and "A prayer for a Christian lady on returning from a ball." Of course they were written sarcastically and were indeed a broad farce.

How can you come home from frivolity and sin and then look into the face of Jesus? How can the fashions of the world be followed, and communion with God be maintained? You cannot roll in the mire and then approach with clean garments to the mercy seat. How can you come before the throne of God with petitions when you have just been dishonoring the name of the Most High? O Christians! keep yourselves from everything about which you have any doubt as to its rightness or even its expediency, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin and will hinder your prayers.

Further, prayers may be hindered equally much by *worldly sorrow*. Some give way to sorrow so extremely that they cannot pray. The tears of rebellious repining dampen the powder of prayer so that a Christian man cannot send his desires heavenward as he should. The sorrow which prevents a man's praying is flat rebellion against the will of God. Our Lord was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," but then He prayed, nay, "therefore He prayed."

It is right to be sorrowful, for God intends that affliction should be grievous and not joyous. But when sorrow is right it will drive us *to* prayer not drive us *from* it. And when we find our grief at the loss of some dear child, or at the decay of our property, hinders our prayers, I think we should say to ourselves, "Now I must pray, for it must be wrong for me to be so rebellious against my Father as to refuse to ask anything at His hands."

You would think your child in a very sullen temper if because he could not have his own way, he would refuse to ask anything of you whatever, and went about the house pouting at you. Yet many mourners act in this fashion. We would deeply sympathize with their sorrow, but we may not excuse their repining, for the "sorrow of the world worketh death" and is unfitting in a child of God. With all your grief, bowed into the very dust by affliction, still like your Lord and Master, cry, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt," and then your prayers will be helped and not hindered.

There are cases in which prayer is very greatly hindered by *bad temper*. I do not know where this may apply, but wherever it does, I trust that it will go home. You cannot speak sharp habitually to servants and children, you cannot put yourself into pets, you cannot join in a grand row or in small

squabbles, and then go and pray with power. I cannot speed in prayer if I feel anger in my heart, and I do not believe that you can.

Get up and go and settle the matter before you try to talk with God, for the prayer of angry men makes God angry. You cannot wrestle with the angel while you are under the power of the devil. I appeal to your own consciences—you yourselves shall be judges—is it not so? That was good advice on our Lord's part. "Leave there thy gift before the altar, and first go and be reconciled to thy brother." If that be not done, the sacrifice cannot be accepted, nor do I see how you can dare offer it.

I have heard of two good men who had a sharp difference with each other in business. I do not know which was to blame—perhaps neither of them. They might have misunderstood each other, and one of them as he walked home very much ruffled, saw the sun going down and the passage occurred to him, "Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath." He thought, "I will go back and offer an apology, for I believe I have spoken much too strongly." He went back towards his friend's office and half way there he met the other coming to him on the same errand. Happy Christians to be both so mindful of the Holy Spirit's teaching and so like the Lord Jesus!

It must needs be that offenses come, but blessed are those who are foremost in removing them. Alas, men of a certain mold cannot do this, but will keep a grudge till it rots, and fills their whole nature with its vile odors. Surely they cannot expect to be heard in prayer while their unburied enmities pollute their souls. Do endeavor, dear Christian friends, as much as you can, whenever you are angry, not to sin. It is possible, for it is written, "Be ye angry and sin not."

A man who has no anger in him is scarcely a man, and certainly not a good man, for he who is not angry at sin is not in love with virtue. They say of some that they are as easy as an old shoe, and they are generally worth no more than that article. Anger against injustice is right, but that anger against the person which degenerates into wishing him hurt is sinful, and effectually blows out the fires of prayer. We cannot pray for forgiveness unless we forgive the trespasses of others against us.

Prayer can be hindered—very terribly hindered—in three ways. If we dishonor the Father *to* whom we pray, or the Son *through* whom we pray, or the Holy Ghost *by* whom we pray.

I say we can dishonor *the Father*. This can be done by inconsistency of life. If children of God are not obedient to the Father's will they must not wonder if they find it hard to pray. Something will rise in their throat that will choke their pleading. You cannot pour out your heart acceptably unless you believe in your heavenly Father. If you have hard thoughts of God, if you have a cold heart towards Him, and a want of reverence for His name, if you do not believe in that great willing heart which is waiting to bless you, your want of love, faith, and reverence will strangle your prayers.

Oh! when a man is fully at one with the great Father, when "Abba, Father," is the very spirit of his soul, when he speaks to God as one in whom he places implicit trust and to whose will he yields himself up perfectly, and whose glory is his soul's delight—then he is on a vantage ground in prayer, he will win what he wills of God. If he be not so with God, his prayers will limp most painfully.

So brethren, if we be wrong with *Jesus* through whom we pray, if we are in any measure self-righteous, if we delight in self and forget our Beloved, if we fancy that we can do without the Savior, if therefore, we pray like complacent Pharisees, our prayers will be hindered.

If we are not like the Savior, if we do not make Him our example, if we have none of His loving spirit, above all, if we crucify Him afresh and put Him to an open shame, and if we are ungrateful for the boons we have already received, our prayers will be hindered. You cannot plead in the court if you have quarreled with your Advocate. If your prayer be not taken in hand by the great Intercessor and offered by Him on your behalf, you will have no heart for the sacred exercise.

So again with the *Holy Ghost*. There is never a prayer that God accepts but the Spirit first writes it in our hearts. True prayer is not so much our intercession as the Spirit of God making intercession in us. Now, if we grieve the Spirit, He will not help us to pray. And if we attempt to pray for something that is contrary to the Spirit's holy, gracious, loving nature, we cannot expect Him to enable us to pray in contradiction to the mind of God.

Take care that you vex not the Spirit of God in any way, especially by shutting your ears to His gentle warnings, His loving calls, His earnest entreaties, His tender monitions, for if you be deaf to the divine Comforter, He will be speechless to you. He will not help you to pray if you will not yield to Him in other matters.

So then, dear friends, I have stated to you in a hurried manner some of the ways in which prayer may be hindered. May God grant that none of us may be overcome by them, but we may be delivered from everything which could mar our petitions!

III. I shall now want your earnest attention to the most important part of all, upon which I shall endeavor to be brief. We may be HINDERED IN THE SPEEDING OF OUR PRAYERS.

We may pray, but yet the prayer may not be heard. And here let me interpose a remark. The Lord will hear any man's prayer who asks for mercy through the mediation of the Lord Jesus. He never despises the cry of the contrite, He is a God ready to hear all those who seek reconciliation. But concerning other matters it is true that God heareth not sinners—that is, while they remain sinners He will not grant them their wishes—indeed, to do so would encourage them in their sins. If they will repent and cry for mercy through Jesus Christ He will hear their cry, and will save them, but if they are not first reconciled to Him their prayers are empty wind.

A man will grant his child's request, but he does not listen to strangers. He will listen to his friends, but not to enemies. It is not meet that the golden key which opens the caskets of heaven should be hung at a rebel's girdle.

Yet more, God does not hear all His children alike, or alike at all times. It is not every believer who is mighty in prayer. Read the ninety-sixth psalm, and if I remember rightly, you will find words like these, "Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them…they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them." Yes, he answered *them*—Moses, Aaron, Samuel—He answered them, for they kept His testimonies. When children of God find that their prayers do not succeed they should search, and they would soon discover a reason why their prayers are hindered.

First, there must be *holy living* in a believer if his prayers are greatly to succeed with God. Listen, "The effectual fervent prayer of *a righteous man* avails much." Note that point—*of a righteous man*. Listen to our Savior (John 15:7), "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." There is an *if* there. If you do not do Christ's will, He will not do your will.

This is not legal, it has nothing to do with the law, but is the Gospel rule of Christ's house that obedience should have for its reward power in prayer. Just as you do with your children. You have a discipline over them, you do not turn them out of doors or give them over to the policeman because they do amiss, but you have ways of chastening the willful and rewarding the obedient. You are in no hurry to grant the requests of yonder fractious boy, in fact you deny him his request. But that other dear, gentle, loving child has only to ask and have.

This is correct discipline and such as God exercises among us. He does not cast off His children for sin, and utterly disown them, but He chastens them in love, and one of His chastenings lies in shutting out their prayers.

If we compare prayer to shooting with a bow, you must have clean hands or you cannot shoot, for this bow refuses to bend to hands polluted with unrepented sin. If a sinner prays for mercy for Jesus' sake he shall be heard, but for general blessings it is written, "The desire *of the righteous* shall be granted," but not the desire of the wicked. First wash in the fountain of atoning grace and have your heart cleansed by the Holy Spirit, for else you cannot succeed in prayer.

If anyone should tell me of a man whom God greatly answered in prayer and then inform me that he lived in gross sin, I would not believe it. It is impossible for God to patronize a guilty professor of religion by giving him success in prayer. The blind man whom Jesus healed most truly said, "If any man doeth his will, him he heareth."

In addition to obedience there must be *faith*. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed: let not that man expect that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Faith "obtains promises, unbelief goes empty-handed."

The Lord may give a blessing to a doubter, but that is more than the promise, and he has no right to expect it. The prayer which avails most with God is the prayer of one who believes that God will hear him, and who therefore asks with confidence. In a word, faith is the bow of prayer. You must lay hold on the bow or you cannot shoot, and the stronger that bow the further you can send the arrow, and the more execution you can do with it. Without faith it is impossible to please God in prayer or in anything else, it is the very backbone, sinew, and muscle of intercession.

Thirdly, there must be *holy desires*, or else prayer will be a failure, and those desires must be founded on a promise. If you cannot find that God has promised a blessing, you have no right to ask for it, and no reason to expect it.

There is no use in asking money of a banker without a check. At the counter they do not know you, they know the promise to pay, and if you present that you will get the amount, but not else. You must bring God's own promises to the mercy seat, which is the counter of the divine exchequer, and you will obtain what you need, but only in that way.

Observe, then, that faith is the bow and strong desire fits to the string the arrow which is to be sent upward. No arrow may be shot towards heaven but that which came down from heaven. Christians take their arrows from God's quiver, and when they shoot them they shoot them with this on their lips, "Do as Thou hast said. Remember Thy word unto Thy servant upon which Thou hast caused me to hope."

So the successful prayer is the desire of a holy heart, sanctioned by the promise. True prayers are like those carrier pigeons which find their way so well, they cannot fail to go to heaven, for it is from heaven that they came, they are only going home.

Furthermore, if prayer is to speed, there must be *fervor and importunity*. It is written, "The effectual *fervent* prayer of the righteous man availeth much." Not the dead-and-alive prayer of the mere professor—not the prayer of one who does not care whether he is answered or not. There must be eagerness, intensity, the pouring out of the heart before God. The arrow must be put on the bow string, and the bow must be drawn with all our might.

The best bow is of no use until you draw it, and if you draw the bow of faith and shoot at the target up there in heaven, you will get what you will, only you *must resolve to have it* with only this boundary—"the will of the Lord be done,"—and you will succeed.

There must be, next, a *desire for God's glory*—for that is the white of the target—and if we do not shoot towards that, the arrow will avail nothing. We must earnestly desire what we ask, because we believe it will glorify God to give it to us. If we are wholly living unto God, our prayers will run side by side with His purposes, and none of them will fall to the ground. "Delight thyself also in the LORD and he will give thee the desires of thine heart."

We must also have *holy expectancy* or we shall hinder prayer. The man who shoots must look to see where his arrow goes. We must direct our prayer unto God and look up. Eyeing the Lord Jesus in all, we must look to succeed through the merits of the Redeemer. "If we believe that he heareth us, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him."

Presumption in prayer shoots with the bow of self-confidence, not for God's glory, but for the gratification of itself, and therefore it fails. Some have the idea that, ask what they like of God, they are sure to have it. But I would ask them, first, "Who are you?" Secondly, "What is it you are going to ask?" And thirdly, "What right have you to expect it?" These inquiries must be clearly answered, otherwise prayer may be an insult to God. I wish some Christians who pray about temporals would be a little careful as to how they act. When they get into scrapes and messes by extravagance do they expect God to get them out?

I remember hearing of a remark of good Mr. Muller, of Bristol. At a prayer meeting he read a letter from a brother who thanked him for a gift of some twenty pounds, which had arrived very providentially, for he owed half a year's rent.

Mr. Muller remarked, "Yes, our brother should be very thankful, but I intend to write to him and tell him he ought not to owe half a year's rent without being prepared to pay. And he is acting unwisely and unjustly by not laying by in store to meet the claim. When I took a house I said, 'This is another person's house. I am bound to pay his rent,' and therefore week by week, as I used the house I put by a portion to pay what was due. I did not spend the money and at the end of the quarter expect the heavenly Father to send me more."

This was sound morality and common sense, and I pray you attend to it. Pray by all means, but "owe no man anything." Daily bread is to be prayed for, but speculations which may involve you in ruin, or make your fortune, are not to be mentioned. If you take to gambling, you may as well give up praying. Straightforward transactions you may pray about, but do not mix up the Lord with your financing.

I have been requested to pray for a young man who has lost his situation, through a defalcation, that he may get another place, but instead of doing so I have suggested that he should himself pray to be made honest. Another who is deeply in debt wants me to pray that he may obtain help, but I suggest that he should let his creditors have a dividend while there is anything left. I shall not ask of my God what I would not ask of man.

The approach to the mercy seat is holy ground and not to be trifled with, or made to minister to sin. "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." If we walk contrary to the Lord He will walk contrary to us. And I say to every man here who is in trouble and is a Christian, take the straight path out of it, and do the right thing, and if it brings you trouble bear it like a man, and then go to God, and say, "Lord, I have, by Thy grace, chosen a plain, honest path, now help me," and He will.

God grant us grace as Christians to walk with God in the power of His Spirit, resting alone on Jesus, and may He make each one of us mighty in prayer. A man, whom God has taught to pray mightily, is one with God's mind and is God's hand moving among the sons of men, when he acts, God acts in him. He must, however, be careful and watchful, for the Lord is a jealous God, and most jealous where He loves most. God grant you, brethren, to walk humbly with God, and to live near to Him, "that your prayers be not hindered." Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MALACHI 3

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84 (SONG III), 1001, 994

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