

TRUE PRAYER—TRUE POWER!

NO. 328

A SERMON
DELIVERED OF SABBATH MORNING, AUGUST 12, 1860
BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON
AT EXETER HALL, STRAND

*“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire,
when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”
Mark 11:24*

THIS verse has something to do with the faith of miracles, but I think it has far more reference to the miracle of faith. We shall at any rate, this morning, consider it in that light. I believe that this text is the inheritance not only of the apostles, but of all those who walk in the faith of the apostles, believing in the promises of the Lord Jesus Christ. The advice which Christ gave to the twelve and to His immediate followers is repeated to us in God’s Word this morning. May we have grace constantly to obey it.

“What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” How many persons there are who complain that they do not enjoy prayer. They do not neglect it, for they dare not, but they would neglect it if they dared, so far are they from finding any pleasure therein.

And have we not to lament that sometimes the chariot wheels are taken off, and we drive right heavily when we are in supplication? We spend the time allotted, but we rise from our knees unrefreshed, like a man who has lain upon his bed, but has not slept so as to really recover his strength. When the time comes round again conscience drives us to our knees, but there is no sweet fellowship with God. There is no telling out of our wants to Him in the firm conviction that He will supply them.

After having gone again through a certain round of customary utterances, we rise from our knees perhaps more troubled in conscience and more distressed in mind than we were before. There are many Christians, I think, who have to complain of this—that they pray not so much because it is a blessed thing to be allowed to draw near to God, as because they must pray, because it is their duty, because they feel that if they did not, they would lose one of the sure evidences of their being Christians.

Brethren, I do not condemn you, but at the same time, if I may be the means of lifting you up this morning from so low a state of grace into a higher and more healthy atmosphere, my soul shall be exceeding glad. If I can show you a more excellent way, if from this time forth you may come to look at prayer as your element, as one of the most delightful exercises of your life, if you shall come to esteem it more than your necessary food, and to value it as one of heaven’s best luxuries, surely I shall have answered a great end, and you shall have to thank God for a great blessing.

Give me then your attention while I beg you first, *to look at the text*, secondly, *to look about you*, and then, *to look above you*.

I. First, LOOK AT THE TEXT.

If you look at it carefully, I think you will perceive the essential qualities which are necessary to any great success and prevalence in prayer. According to our Savior’s description of prayer, there should always be some *definite objects* for which we should plead. He speaks of *things*—“What things soever ye desire.” It seems then that He did not put it that God’s children would go to Him to pray when they have nothing to pray for.

Another essential qualification of prayer is *earnest desire*, for the Master supposes here that when we pray we have desires. Indeed it is not prayer, it may be something like prayer, the outward form or the bare skeleton, but it is not the living thing, the all-prevailing, almighty thing called prayer, unless there be a fullness and overflowing of desires. Observe too, that *faith* is an essential quality of successful

prayer—“Believe that ye receive them.” You cannot pray so as to be heard in heaven and answered to your soul’s satisfaction, unless you believe that God really hears and will answer you.

One other qualification appears here upon the very surface, namely, that *a realizing expectation* should always go with a firm faith—“Believe that ye receive them.” Not merely believe that “ye shall,” but believe that “ye do” receive them—count them as if they were received, reckon them as if you had them already, and act as if you had them—act as if you were sure you should have them—“believe that ye receive them, and you shall have them.” Let us review these four qualities, one by one.

To make prayer of any value, there should be definite objects for which to plead. My brethren, we often ramble in our prayers after this, that, and the other, and we get nothing because in each we do not really desire anything. We chatter about many subjects, but the soul does not concentrate itself upon any one object.

Do you not sometimes fall on your knees without thinking beforehand what you mean to ask God for? You do so as a matter of habit, without any motion of your heart. You are like a man who should go to a shop and does not know what articles he would procure. He may perhaps make a happy purchase when he is there, but certainly it is not a wise plan to adopt.

And so the Christian in prayer may afterwards attain to a real desire, and get his end, but how much better would he speed if having prepared his soul by consideration and self-examination, he came to God for an object at which he was about to aim with a real request. Did we ask for an audience at Her Majesty’s court, we should be expected to reply to the question, “What do you wish to see her for?” We should not be expected to go into the presence of Royalty, and then to think of some petition after we came there.

Even so with the child of God. He should be able to answer the great question, “What is your petition and what is your request, and it shall be done unto you.” Imagine an archer shooting with his bow, and not knowing where the mark is! Would he be likely to have success? Conceive a ship on a voyage of discovery, putting to sea without the captain having any idea of what he was looking for! Would you expect that he would come back heavily laden either with the discoveries of science or with treasures of gold?

In everything else you have a plan. You do not go to work without knowing that there is something that you designed to make, how is it that you go to God without knowing what you design to have? If you had some object you would never find prayer to be a dull and heavy work, I am persuaded that you would long for it. You would say, “I have something that I want. Oh that I could draw near my God and ask Him for it, I have a need, I want to have it satisfied, and I long till I can get alone, that I may pour out my heart before Him, and ask Him for this great thing after which my soul so earnestly pants.”

You will find it more helpful to your prayers, if you have some objects at which you aim, and I think also if you have some persons whom you will mention. Do not merely plead with God for sinners in general, but always mention some in particular. If you are a Sunday school teacher, don’t simply ask that your class may be blessed, but pray for your children definitely by name before the Most High. And if there be a mercy in your household that you crave, don’t go in a round-about way, but be simple and direct in your pleadings with God.

When you pray to Him, tell Him what you want. If you have not money enough, if you are in poverty, if you are in straits, state the case. Use no mock modesty with God. Come at once to the point, speak honestly with Him. He needs no beautiful periphrasis such as men will constantly use when they don’t like to say right out what they mean. If you need either a temporal or spiritual mercy, say so. Don’t ransack the Bible to find out words in which to express it. Express your wants in the words which naturally suggest themselves to you. They will be the best words, depend upon it.

Abraham’s words were the best for Abraham, and yours will be the best for you. You need not study all the texts in Scripture to pray just as Jacob and Elias did, using their expressions. If you do you will not imitate them. You may imitate them literally and servilely, but you lack the soul that suggested and animated their words. Pray in your own words. Speak plainly to God, ask at once for what you want.

Name persons, name things, and make a straight aim at the object of your supplications, and I am sure you will soon find that the weariness and dullness of which you often complain in your intercessions, will no more fall upon you, or at least not so habitually as it has heretofore done.

“But,” saith one, “I do not feel that I have any special objects for which to pray.” Ah! my dear brother, I know not who you are, or where you live, to be without special objects for prayer, for I find that every day brings either its need or its trouble, and that I have every day something to tell my God.

But if we had not a trouble, my dear brethren, if we had attained to such a height in grace that we had nothing to ask for, do we love Christ so much that we have no need to pray that we may love Him more? Have we so much faith that we have ceased to cry, “Lord, increase it”? You will always, I am sure, by a little self-examination, soon discover that there is some legitimate object for which you may knock at mercy’s door and cry, “Give me, LORD, the desire of my heart.”

And if you have not any desire, you have but to ask the first tried Christian that you meet, and he will tell you of one. “Oh,” he will reply to you, “if you have nothing to ask for yourself, pray for me. Ask that a sick wife may be recovered. Pray that the Lord would lift up the light of His countenance upon a desponding heart, ask that the Lord would send help to some minister who has been laboring in vain, and spending his strength for nought.”

When you have done for yourself, plead for others, and if you cannot meet with one who can suggest a theme, look on this huge Sodom, this city like another Gomorrah lying before you, carry it constantly in your prayers before God and cry, “Oh, that London may live before You, that its sin may be stayed, that its righteousness may be exalted, that the God of the earth may get unto Himself much people out of this city.”

Equally necessary is it with a definite object for prayer that there should be an earnest desire for its attainment. “Cold prayers,” says an old divine, “ask for a denial.” When we ask the Lord coolly and not fervently, we do as it were, stop His hand and restrain Him from giving us the very blessing we pretend that we are seeking. When you have your object in your eye, your soul must become so possessed with the value of that object, with your own excessive need for it, with the danger which you will be in unless that object should be granted, that you will be compelled to plead for it as a man pleads for his life.

There was a beautiful illustration of true prayer addressed to man in the conduct of two noble ladies, whose husbands were condemned to die and were about to be executed, when they came before King George and supplicated for their pardon. The king rudely and cruelly repulsed them. George the First! it was like his very nature. And when they pleaded yet again, and again, and again, they could not be gotten to rise from their knees, they had actually to be dragged out of court, for they would not retire until the king had smiled upon them, and told them that their husbands should live. Alas! they failed, but they were noble women for their perseverance in thus pleading for their husbands’ lives.

That is the way for us to pray to God. We must have such a desire for the thing we want, that we will not rise until we have it—but in submission to His divine will, nevertheless. Feeling that the thing we ask for cannot be wrong, and that He Himself hath promised it, we have resolved it must be given, and if not given, we will plead the promise again, and again, till heaven’s gates shall shake before our pleas shall cease.

No wonder that God has not blessed us much of late, because we are not fervent in prayer as we should be. Oh, those cold-hearted prayers that die upon the lips—those frozen supplications, they do not move men’s hearts, how should they move God’s heart? they do not come from our own souls, they do not well up from the deep secret springs of our inmost heart, and therefore they cannot rise up to Him who only hears the cry of the soul, before whom hypocrisy can weave no veil, or formality practice any disguise. We must be earnest, otherwise we have no right to hope that the Lord will hear our prayer.

And surely, my brethren, it were enough to restrain all lightness and constrain an unceasing earnestness, did we apprehend the greatness of the Being before whom we plead. Shall I come into Your presence, O my God, and mock You with cold-hearted words? Do the angels veil their faces before You, and shall I be content to prattle through a form with no soul and no heart? Ah, my brethren! we little

know how many of our prayers are an abomination unto the Lord. It would be an abomination to you and to me to hear men ask us in the streets, as if they did not want what they asked for. But have we not done the same to God? Has not that which is heaven's greatest boon to man become to us a dry dead duty?

It was said of John Bradford that he had a peculiar art in prayer, and when asked for his secret, he said, "When I know what I want I always stay on that prayer until I feel that I have pleaded it with God, and until God and I have had dealings with each other upon it. I never go on to another petition till I have gone through the first."

Alas! for some men who begin "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," and before they have realized the adoring thought—"hallowed be thy name"—they have begun to repeat the next words, "Thy kingdom come," then perhaps something strikes their mind, "Do I really wish His kingdom to come? If it were to come now where should I be?" And while they are thinking of that, their voice is going on with, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," so they jumble up their prayers and run the sentences together.

Oh! stop at each one till you have really prayed it. Do not try to put two arrows on the string at once, they will both miss. He that would load his gun with two charges cannot expect to be successful. Discharge one shot first, and then load again. Plead once with God and prevail, and then plead again. Get the first mercy, and then go again for the second. Do not be satisfied with running the colors of your prayers into one another till there is no picture to look at but just a huge daub, a smear of colors badly laid on.

Look at the Lord's Prayer itself. What clear, sharp outlines there are in it. There are certain definite mercies, and they do not run into one another. There it stands, and as you look at the whole it is a magnificent picture, not confusion, but beautiful order. Be it so with your prayers. Stay on one till you have prevailed with that, and then go on to the next. With definite objects and with fervent desires mixed together, there is the dawning of hope that ye shall prevail with God.

But again, these two things would not avail if they were not mixed with a still more essential and divine quality, namely, a firm faith in God. Brethren, do you believe in prayer? I know you pray because you are God's people, but do you believe in the power of prayer? There are a great many Christians who do not, they think it is a good thing, and they believe that sometimes it does wonders, but they do not think that prayer, real prayer, is always successful. They think that its effect depends upon many other things, but that it has not any essential quality or power in itself.

Now, my own soul's conviction is that prayer is the grandest power in the entire universe, that it has a more omnipotent force than electricity, attraction, gravitation, or any other of those secret forces which men have called by names, but which they do not understand.

Prayer has as palpable, as true, as sure, as invariable an influence over the entire universe as any of the laws of matter. When a man really prays, it is not a question whether God will hear him or not, He must hear him, not because there is any compulsion in the prayer, but there is a sweet and blessed compulsion in the promise. God has promised to hear prayer and He will perform His promise. As He is the most high and true God, He cannot deny Himself.

Oh! to think of this, that you a puny man may stand here and speak to God, and through God may move all the worlds. Yet when your prayer is heard, creation will not be disturbed, though the grandest ends be answered, providence will not be disarranged for a single moment. Not a leaf will fall earlier from the tree, not a star will stray in its course, nor one drop of water trickle more slowly from its fount, all will go on the same, and yet your prayer will have effected everything.

It will speak to the decrees and purposes of God, as they are being daily fulfilled, and they will all shout to your prayer and cry, "You are our brother, we are decrees and you a prayer, but you are yourself a decree, as old, as sure, as ancient as we are." Our prayers are God's decrees in another shape. The prayers of God's people are but God's promises breathed out of living hearts, and those promises are the decrees, only put into another form and fashion.

Do not say, “How can my prayers affect the decrees?” They cannot, except in so much that your prayers are decrees, and that as they come out, every prayer that is inspired of the Holy Ghost unto your soul is as omnipotent and as eternal as that decree which said, “Let there be light, and there was light,” or as that decree which chose His people, and ordained their redemption by the precious blood of Christ.

You have power in prayer, and you stand today among the most potent ministers in the universe that God has made. You have power over angels, they will fly at your will. You have power over fire, and water, and the elements of earth. You have power to make your voice heard beyond the stars, where the thunders die out in silence, your voice shall wake the echoes of eternity. The ear of God Himself shall listen, and the hand of God shall yield to your will. He bids you cry, “Thy will be done,” and your will shall be done. When you can plead His promise then your will is His will.

Seems it not, my dear friends, an awful thing to have such a power in one’s hands as to be able to pray? You have heard sometimes of men who pretended to have a weird and mystic might by which they could call up spirits from the vast deep, by which they could make showers of rain or stop the sun. It was all a figment of the fancy, but were it true, the Christian is a greater magician still.

If he has but faith in God, there is nothing impossible to him. He shall be delivered out of the deepest waters—he shall be rescued out of the sorest troubles—in famine he shall be fed—in pestilence he shall go unscathed—amidst calamity he shall walk firm and strong—in war he shall be ever shielded—and in the day of battle he shall lift up his head, if he can but believe the promise and hold it up before God’s eyes and plead it with the spell of unfaltering reliance.

There is nothing, I repeat it, there is no force so tremendous, no energy so marvelous, as the energy with which God has endowed every man, who like Jacob can wrestle, like Israel can prevail with Him in prayer. But we must have faith in this, we must believe prayer to be what it is or else it is not what it should be. Unless I believe my prayer to be effectual it will not be, for on my faith will it to a great extent depend. God may give me the mercy even when I have not faith, that will be His own sovereign grace, but He has not promised to do it.

But when I have faith and can plead the promise with earnest desire, it is no longer a probability as to whether I shall get the blessing, or whether my will shall be done. Unless the Eternal will swerve from His Word, unless the oath which He has given shall be revoked, and He Himself shall cease to be what He is, “We know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”

And now to mount one step higher, together with definite objects, fervent desires, and strong faith in the efficacy of prayer, there should be—and oh, may divine grace make it so with us!—there should be mingled a realizing expectation. We should be able to count over the mercies before we have got them, believing that they are on the road.

Reading the other day in a sweet little book, which I would commend the attention of you all, written by an American author who seems to know the power of prayer thoroughly, and to whom I am indebted for many good things—a little book called *The Still Hour*, I met with a reference to a passage in the Book of Daniel, the tenth chapter I think, where, as he says, the whole machinery of prayer seems to be laid bare.

Daniel is on his knees in prayer, and Michael the archangel comes to him. He talks with him and tells him that as soon as ever Daniel began to set his heart to understand, and to chasten himself before God, his words were heard, and the Lord had dispatched the angel. Then he tells him in the most business-like manner in the world, “I should have been here before, but the Prince of Persia withstood me; nevertheless the prince of thy nation helped me, and I am come to comfort and instruct thee.”

See now, God breathes the desire into our hearts, and as soon as the desire is there, before we call, He begins to answer. Before the words have got half way up to heaven, while they are yet trembling on our lip—knowing the words we mean to speak—He begins to answer them, sends the angel, the angel comes and brings down the needed blessing. Why the thing is a revelation if you could see it with your eyes.

Some people think that spiritual things are dreams, and that we are talking fancies. Nay, I do believe there is as much reality in a Christian's prayer as in a lightning flash, and the utility and excellency of the prayer of a Christian may be just as sensibly known as the power of the lightning flash when it rends the tree, breaks off its branches, and splits it to the very root.

Prayer is not a fancy or fiction, it is a real actual thing, coercing the universe, binding the laws of God themselves in fetters, and constraining the High and Holy One to listen to the will of His poor but favored creature-man. But we need always to believe this. We need a realizing assurance in prayer. To count over the mercies before they are come! To be sure that they are coming! To act as if we had them!

When you have asked for your daily bread, no more to be disturbed with care, but to believe that God has heard you, and will give it to you. When you have taken the case of your sick child before God to believe that the child will recover, or if it should not, that it will be a greater blessing to you and more glory to God, and so to leave it to Him. To be able to say, "I know He has heard me now, I will stand on my watchtower, I will look for my God and hear what He will say to my soul."

Were you ever disappointed yet, Christian, when you prayed in faith and expected the answer? I bear my own testimony here this morning, that I have never yet trusted Him and found Him to fail me. I have trusted man and have been deceived, but my God has never once denied the request I have made to Him when I have backed up the request with belief in His willingness to hear, and in the assurance of His promise.

But I hear someone say, "May we pray for temporals?" Ay, that you may. In everything make known your wants to God. It is not merely for spiritual, but for everyday concerns. Take your smallest trials before Him. He is a God that heareth prayer, He is your household God as well as the God of the sanctuary. Be ever taking all that you have before God. As one good man, who is about to be united with this church, told me of his departed wife, "Oh," said he, "she was a woman that I could never get to do anything till she had made a matter of prayer of it. Be it what it might, she used to say, 'I must make it a matter of prayer.'"

Oh, for more of this sweet habit of spreading everything before the Lord, just as Hezekiah did Rabshakeh's letter, and there leaving it, saying, "Thy will be done, I resign it to Thee"! Men say Mr. Muller of Bristol is enthusiastic, because he will gather seven hundred children and believe that God will provide for them, though there is nothing in the purse oftentimes, yet he believes it will come.

My dear brethren, he is not an enthusiast, he is only doing what ought to be the commonplace action of every Christian. He is acting upon a rule at which the worldling always must scoff, because he does not understand it, a system which must always appear to the weak judgment of sense, visionary and romantic, but which will never appear so to the child of God. He acts not upon common sense, but upon something higher than common sense—upon uncommon faith. Oh, that we had that uncommon faith to take God at His Word! He cannot and He will not permit the man that trusteth Him to be ashamed or confounded.

I have thus now, as best I could, set forth before you what I conceive to be four essentials of prevailing prayer—"Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them."

II. Having thus asked you to look at the text, I want you now to LOOK ABOUT YOU.

Look about you at our meetings for prayer, and look about you at your private intercessions, and judge them both by the tenor of this text.

First, look about you at the meetings for prayer, I cannot speak very pointedly in this matter, because I do honestly believe that the prayer meetings which are usually held among us, have far less of the faults which I am about to indicate, than any others I have ever attended. But still, they have some of the faults, and I hope that what we shall say will be taken personally home by every brother who is in the habit of engaging publicly in supplication at prayer meetings.

Is it not a fact, that as soon as you enter the meeting, you feel that if you are called upon to pray, you have to exercise a gift? And that gift, in the case of many praying men (to speak hardly perhaps, but I

think honestly) lies in having a good memory to recollect a great many texts which always have been quoted since the days of our grandfather's grandfather, and to be able to repeat them in good regular order. The gift lies also in some churches, especially in village churches, in having strong lungs, so as to be able to hold out, without taking breath for five and twenty minutes when you are brief, and three quarters of an hour when you are rather drawn out.

The gift lies also in being able not to ask for anything in particular, but in passing through a range of everything, making the prayer, not an arrow with a point, but rather like a nondescript machine that has no point whatever, and yet is meant to be all point, which is aimed at everything, and consequently strikes nothing.

These brethren are often the most frequently asked to pray, who have those peculiar, and perhaps, excellent gifts, although I certainly must say that I cannot obey the apostle's injunction in coveting very earnestly such gifts as these.

Now, if instead thereof, some man is asked to pray who has never prayed before in public, suppose he rises and says, "*Oh Lord, I feel myself such a sinner that I can scarcely speak to Thee, Lord, help me to pray! O Lord, save my poor soul! O that Thou wouldst save my old companions! Lord, bless our minister! be pleased to give us a revival. O Lord, I can say no more, hear me for Jesu's sake! Amen.*" Well then, you feel somehow as if you had begun to pray yourself. You feel an interest in that man, partly from fear lest he should stop, and also because you are sure that what he did say, he meant.

And if another should get up after that, and pray in the same spirit, you go out and say, "This is real prayer." I would sooner have three minutes prayer like that, than thirty minutes of the other sort, because the one is praying, and the other is preaching.

Allow me to quote what an old preacher said upon the subject of prayer, and give it to you as a little word of advice—"Remember, the Lord will not hear you because of the *arithmetic* of your prayers, He does not count their numbers. He will not hear you because of the *rhetoric* of your prayers, He does not care for the eloquent language in which they are conveyed. He will not listen to you because of the *geometry* of your prayers, He does not compute them by their length or by their breadth. He will not regard you because of the *music* of your prayers, He does not care for sweet voices, nor for harmonious periods. Neither will He look at you because of the *logic* of your prayers, because they are well arranged and excellently compartmented. But He will hear you, and He will measure the amount of the blessing He will give you according to the *divinity* of your prayers. If you can plead the person of Christ, and if the Holy Ghost inspires you with zeal and earnestness, the blessings which you shall ask shall surely come to you."

Brethren, I would like to burn the whole stock of old prayers that we have been using this fifty years. That "oil that goes from vessel to vessel"—that "horse that rushes into the battle"—that misquoted mangled text, "Where two or three are met together, thou wilt be in the midst of them, and that to bless them"—and all those other quotations which we have been manufacturing, and dislocating, and copying from man to man.

I would we came to speak to God, just out of our own hearts. It would be a grand thing for our prayer meetings, they would be better attended, and I am sure they would be more fruitful, if every man would shake off that habit of formality and talk to God as a child talks to his father, ask Him for what we want, and then sit down and have done.

I say this with all Christian earnestness. Often, because I have not chosen to pray in any conventional form, people have said, "That man is not reverent!" My dear sir, you are not a judge of my reverence. To my own Master, I stand or fall. I do not think that Job quoted anybody. I do not think that Jacob quoted the old saint in heaven—his father Abraham. I do not find Jesus Christ quoted Scripture in prayer. They did not pray in other people's words, but they prayed in their own.

God does not want you to go gathering up those excellent, but very musty spices of the old sanctuary. He wants the new oil just distilled from the fresh olive of your own soul. He wants spices and frankincense, not of the old chests, where they have been lying until they have lost their savor, but He wants fresh incense and fresh myrrh, brought from the Ophir of your own soul's experience. Look well to it that you really pray, do not learn the language of prayer, but seek the spirit of prayer, and God Almighty bless you and make you more mighty in your supplications.

I have said, “Look about you.” I want you to continue the work and look about at your own closets. Oh! brethren and sisters, there is no place that some of us need to be so much ashamed to look at as our closet door. I cannot say the hinges are rusty, they do open and shut at their appointed seasons. I cannot say that the door is locked and cobwebbed. We do not neglect prayer itself, but those walls, those beams out of the wall, what a tale might they tell!

“Oh!” the wall might cry out, “I have heard you when you have been in so vast a hurry that you could scarcely spend two minutes with your God, and I have heard you too, when you were neither asleep nor awake, and when you did not know what you were saying.”

Then one beam might cry out, “I have heard you come and spend ten minutes and not ask for anything, at least your heart did not ask. The lips moved, but the heart was silent.” How might another beam cry out—“Oh! I have heard you groan out your soul, but I have seen you go away distrustful, not believing your prayer was heard, quoting the promise but not thinking God would fulfill it.”

Surely the four walls of the closet might come together and fall down upon us in their anger, because we have so often insulted God with our unbelief and with our hurry, and with all manner of sins. We have insulted Him even at His mercy seat, on the spot where His condescension is most fully manifested. Is it not so with you? Must we not each confess it in our turn? See to it then, Christian brethren, that an amendment be made, and may God make you more mighty and more successful in your prayers heretofore.

III. But not to detain you, the last point is, look upward, LOOK ABOVE.

Look above, Christian brethren and sisters, and let us weep. Oh God, You have given us a mighty weapon, and we have permitted it to rust. You have given us that which is mighty as Yourself, and we have let that power lie dormant. Would it not be a vile crime if a man had an eye given him which he would not open, or a hand that he would not lift up, or a foot that grew stiff because he would not use it. And what must we say of ourselves when God has given us power in prayer, matchless power, full of blessedness to ourselves, and of unnumbered mercies to others, and yet that power lies still.

Oh, if the universe were as still as we are, where should we be? Oh, God, You give light to the sun, and he shines with it. You give light even to the stars and they twinkle. To the winds You give force and they blow. And to the air You give life and it moves, and men breathe thereof. But to Your people You have given a gift that is better than force, and life, and light, and yet they permit it to lie still. Forgetful almost that they wield the power, seldom exercising it, though it would be blessed to countless myriads. Weep Christian man.

Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, saw that on the coins of the other Emperors, their images were in an erect posture—triumphing. Instead thereof he ordered that his image should be struck kneeling, for said he—“That is the way in which I have triumphed.” We shall never triumph till our image is struck kneeling. The reason why we have been defeated, and why our banners trail in the dust, is because we have not prayed.

Go—go you back to your God, with sorrow, confess before Him, you children of Ephraim, that you were armed, and carried bows, but turned your backs in the day of battle. Go to your God and tell Him that if souls are not saved, it is not because He has not power to save, but because you have never travailed as it were in birth for perishing sinners. Your bowels have not sounded like a harp for Kir-haresh, neither has your spirit been moved because of the defenses of the tribe of Reuben.

Wake up, wake up, you people of Israel, be astonished, you careless ones, you who have neglected prayer, you sinners that are Zion’s own self, and that have been at ease. Wake up yourselves, wrestle and strive with your God, and then the blessing shall come—the early and the latter rain of His mercy, and the earth shall bring forth plenteously, and all the nations shall call Him blessed. Look up then, and weep.

Once more look up and rejoice. Though you have sinned against Him He loves you still. You have not prayed unto Him nor sought His face, but behold He cries to you still—“Seek ye my face,” and He says not, “Seek ye me in vain.” You may not have gone to the fountain, but it flows as freely as before. You have shut your eye to that sun, but it still shines upon you with all its luster. You have not drawn near to God, but He waits to be gracious still, and is ready to hear all your petitions. Behold, He says unto you, “Inquire of me concerning things to come, and concerning my sons and daughters, command ye me.” What a blessed thing it is that the Master in heaven is always ready to hear!

Augustine has a very beautiful thought upon the parable of the man who knocked at his friend's door at midnight, saying, "Friend, give me three loaves." His paraphrase of it runs something like this—I knock at mercy's door, and it is the dead of night. "Will not some of the servants of the house come and answer me?" No, I knock, but they are asleep. Oh! ye apostles of God—ye glorified martyrs, ye are asleep, ye rest in your beds, ye cannot hear my prayer. But will not the children answer? Are there not children who are ready to come and open the door to their brother? No, they are asleep. My brethren that have departed—with whom I took sweet counsel, and who were the companions of my heart—ye cannot answer me for ye rest in Jesus, your works do follow you, but you cannot work for me. But while the servants are asleep, and while the children cannot answer, the Master is awake—awake at midnight too. It may be midnight with my soul, but He hears me, and when I am saying, "Give me three loaves," He comes to the door and gives me as much as I need.

Christian, look up then and rejoice. There is always an open ear if you have an open mouth. There is always a ready hand if you have a ready heart. You have but to cry and the Lord hears, nay, before you call He will answer, and while you are speaking He will hear. Oh! be not backward then in prayer. Go to Him when you reach your home, nay, on the very way lift up your hearts silently, and whatever your petition or request may be, ask it in Jesu's name, and it shall be done unto you.

Yet again, look up, dear Christian brethren, and amend your prayers from this time forth. Look on prayer no longer as a romantic fiction or as an arduous duty, look at it as a real power, as a real pleasure. When philosophers discover some latent power, they seem to have a delight to put it in action.

I believe there have been many great engineers who have designed and constructed some of the most wonderful of human works, not because they would be remunerative, but simply from a love of showing their own power to accomplish wonders. To show the world what skill could do and what man could accomplish, they have tempted companies into speculations that could never remunerate apparently, so far as I could see, in order that they might have an opportunity of displaying their genius.

O Christian men, and shall a great engineer attempt great works and display his power, and will you who have a mightier power than ever was wielded by any man apart from his God—will you let that be still? Nay think of some great object, strain the sinews of your supplication for it. Let every vein of your heart be full to the brim with the rich blood of desire, and struggle, and wrestle, and tug and strive with God for it, using the promises and pleading the attributes, and see if God does not give you your heart's desire.

I challenge you this day to exceed in prayer my Master's bounty. I throw down the gauntlet to you. Believe Him to be more than He is, open your mouth so wide that He cannot fill it, go to Him now for more faith than the promise warrants, venture it, risk it, outdo the Eternal if it be possible, attempt it. Or as I would rather put it thus, take your petitions and wants and see if He does not honor you. Try whether if you believe Him He does not fulfill the promise, and richly bless you with the anointing oil of His Spirit by which you will be strong in prayer.

I cannot refrain from adding just these few syllables as you go away. I know there are some of you that never prayed in your lives. You have said a form of prayer perhaps many years, but have never prayed once. Ah! poor soul, you must be born again, and until you are born again you cannot pray as I have been directing the Christian to pray. But let me say this much to you. Does your heart long after salvation? Has the Spirit whispered, "Come to Jesus, sinner, He will hear you?"

Believe that whisper, for He will hear you. The prayer of the awakened sinner is acceptable to God. He hears the broken in heart and heals them too. Take your groans and your sighs to God and He will answer you. "Ah," but says one, "I have nothing to plead." Well, but plead as David did, "Pardon my iniquity, for it is great." You have that plea—your iniquity is very great. Then plead that precious blood—that all prevailing plea—say, "For His dear sake who shed His blood," and you shall prevail, sinner.

But do not go to God and ask for mercy with your sin in your hand. What would you think of the rebel who appeared before the face of his sovereign and asked for pardon with the dagger sticking in his belt, and with the declaration of his rebellion on his breast? Would he deserve to be pardoned? He could not deserve it in any case, and surely he would deserve double his doom for having thus mocked his master while he pretended to be seeking mercy.

If a wife had forsaken her husband do you think she would have the impudence, with brazen forehead, to come back and ask his pardon leaning on the arm of her paramour? No, she could not have such impudence, and yet it is so with you—perhaps asking for mercy and going on in sin—praying to be reconciled to God, and yet harboring and indulging your lust. Awake! Awake! and call upon your God, you sleeper. The boat is nearing the rock, perhaps tomorrow it may strike and be shivered, and you will be cast into the unfathomable depths of everlasting woe.

Call on your God, I say, and when you call upon Him, cast away your sin or He cannot hear you. If you lift up your unholy hands with a lie in your right hand, a prayer is worthless on your lip. Oh, come unto Him, say unto Him, “Take away all iniquity, receive us graciously, love us freely,” and He will hear you, and you shall yet pray as prevailing princes, and one day shall stand as more than conquerors before the starry throne of Him who ever reigns God over all, blessed for evermore.

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