

“*Let Us Pray*”

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by

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“But it is good for me to draw near to God.

—Psalm 73:23.

There are many ways by which the true believer draws near to God. The gates of the king’s palace are many; and through the love of Jesus, and the rich grace of his Spirit, it is our delight to enter and approach our heavenly Father. First and foremost among these is communion, that sweet converse which man holds with God, that state of nearness to God, in which our mutual secrets are revealed—*our* hearts being open unto him, *his* heart being manifested to us. Here it is we see the invisible, and hear the unutterable. The outward symbol of fellowship is the sacred Supper of the Lord at which, by means of simple emblems, we are divinely enabled to feed, after a spiritual sort, upon the flesh and blood of the Redeemer. This is a pearly gate of fellowship, a royal road which our feet delight to tread. Moreover, we draw near to God even in our sighs and tears, when our desolate spirits long for his sacred presence, crying, “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee!”¹ And as often as we read the promise written in the Word, and are enabled to receive it and rest

upon it as the very words of a Covenant God, we do ready “Draw near to him.”

Nevertheless, *prayer* is the best used means of drawing near to God. You will excuse me, then, if in considering my text this morning, I confine myself entirely to the subject of prayer. It is in prayer mainly, that we draw near to God, and certainly it can be said emphatically of prayer, it is good for every man who knoweth how to practice that heavenly art, in it to draw near unto God. To assist your memories, that the sermon may abide with you in after days, I shall divide my discourse this morning in a somewhat singular manner; first, I shall look upon my text as being *a touchstone*,² by which we may try our prayers, ay, and try ourselves too. Then I shall take the text as *a whetstone*³ to sharpen our desires, to make us more earnest, and more diligent in supplication, because “it is good to draw near to God” and then, I shall have the solemn task in the last place of using it as *a tombstone*,⁴ with a direful epitaph upon it for those who do not know what it is to draw near to God; for “A prayerless soul is a Christless soul.”

I. First, then, regard my text as A TOUCHSTONE by which you may test your prayers, and thus try ourselves.

That is not prayer of which it cannot be said that there was in it a drawing near unto God. Come hither then with your supplications. I see one coming forward who says, “I am in the daily habit of using a form of

prayer⁵ both at morning and at evening. I could not be happy if I went abroad before I had first repeated my morning prayer, nor could I rest at night without again going over the holy sentence appointed for use at eventide. Sir, my form is the very best that could possibly be written; it was compiled by a famous bishop, one who was glorified in martyrdom, and ascended to his God in a fiery chariot of flame.” My friend, I am glad to hear, if you use a form, that you use the best. If we must have forms at all, let them be of the most excellent kind. So far so good. But let me ask you a question, I am not about to condemn you for any form you may have used, but tell me now, and tell me honestly from your inmost soul, have you drawn near to God while you have been repeating those words? for if not, O solemn thought! all the prayers you have ever uttered have been an idle mockery. You have *said* prayers, but you have never prayed in your life. Imagine not that there is any enchantment in any particular set of words. You might as well repeat the alphabet backwards, or the “Abracadabra” of a wizard, as go over the best form in the world, unless there is something more than form in it. Have you drawn near to God? Suppose that one of us should be desirous of presenting a petition to the House of Commons. We wisely ask in what manner the petition should be worded: we procure the exact phrases; and suppose that in the morning we rise and read this form, or repeat it to ourselves, and conclude

with, “And your petitioners will ever pray,” and the like. We do the same again at night, the same the next day, and for months we continue the practice. One day meeting some member of the House, we accost him and astonish him by saying, “Sir, I wonder I have never had an answer from the House, I have been petitioning these last six months, and the form that I used was the most accurate that could be procured.” “But,” says he, “how was your petition presented?” “*Presented!* I had not thought of that, I have repeated it.” “Ay,” he would say, “and you may repeat it many a long day before any good comes from it! it is not the repeating it, but the presenting of the petition, and having it pleaded by some able friend that will get you the boon you desire.” And so it may be, my friend, that you have been repeating collects and prayers; and have you ignorantly imagined that you have prayed? Why, your prayer has never been presented. You have not laid it before the bleeding Lamb of God, and have not asked him to take it for you into the sacred place where God abideth, and there to present the petition with his own merits before his Father’s throne. I will not bid thee cease from thy form; but I do beseech thee by the living God, either cease from it, or else beg the Holy Spirit to enable thee to draw near to God in it. Oh, I beseech you, take not what I may say for any censoriousness; I speak now as God’s own messenger in this matter. Thy prayer has not been heard, and it neither can nor will be answered unless

there be in it a true and real desire to draw near to God.

“Ah,” saith another, “I am pleased to hear these remarks, for I am in the habit of offering extempore prayer⁶ every morning and evening, and at other times; besides, I like to hear you speak against the form, sir.” Mark, I did not speak against the form, that is not my business upon this occasion. One class of sinners is always pleased to hear another class of sinners found fault with. You say you offer an extempore supplication. I bring your prayer to the same touchstone as the former. What is there in the form that you can extemporize, that it should be so much better than that which was composed by some holy man of God? Possibly your extempore form is not worth a farthing, and if it could be written, might be a disgrace to prayer-makers. I bring you at once to the test—have you in your prayer drawn near to God? When you have been on your knees in the morning, have you thought that you were talking to the King of heaven and earth? Have you breathed your desires, not to the empty winds, but into the ear of the Eternal? Have you desired to come to him and tell to him your wants, and have you sought at his hands the answer to your requests? Remember, you have not prayed successfully or acceptably unless you have in prayer endeavored to draw near to God. Suppose now, (to take a case) that I should desire some favor of a friend. I shut myself up alone, and I commence delivering an oration, pleading earnestly

for the boon I need. I repeat this at night, and so on month after month. At last I meet my friend and I tell him that I have been asking a favor of him, and that he has never heard my prayer. "Nay," saith he "I have never seen you, you never spoke to me." "Ah, but you should have heard what I said; if you had but heard it surely it would have moved your heart." "Ah," saith he, "but then you did not address it to me. You wrote a letter, you tell me, in moving strains, but did you post the letter? Did you see it was delivered to me?" "No, no," you say, "I kept the letter after I had written it. I never sent it to you." Now mark, it is just the same with extempore prayer. You plead; but if you are not pleading with God, to what effect is your pleading? You talk, but if you are not talking to a manifestly present God, to what effect is all your talking? If you do not seek to come near to him, what have you done? You have offered sacrifice, mayhap, but it has been upon your own high places, and the sacrifice has been an abomination. You have not brought it up to God's *one* altar; you have not come up to the mercy-seat, where is his own visible presence! You have not drawn near to God, and consequently your prayers, though they be multiplied by tens of thousands, are utterly valueless to your soul's benefit. Drawing near to God is an indispensable requisite in accepted prayer.

But, now, lest I should be misunderstood as to this drawing near to God, let me attempt to describe it in

degrees, for all men cannot draw near to God with the same nearness of access. When first the life of grace begins in the soul you will draw near to God, but it will be with great fear and trembling. The soul conscious of guilt, and humbled thereby, is overawed with the solemnity of its position; it is cast to the earth with the grandeur of that God in whose presence it stands. I remember the first time I ever sincerely prayed in my life; but the words I used I remember not. Surely there were few enough words in that petition. I had often repeated a form. I had been in the habit of continually repeating it. At last I came really to pray; and then I saw myself standing before God, in the immediate presence of the heart-searching Jehovah, and I said within myself. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."⁷ I felt like Esther when she stood before the King, faint and overcome with dread. I was full of penitence of heart, because of his majesty and my sinfulness. I think the only words I could utter were something like these: "Oh!—Ah!" And the only complete sentence was, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" The overwhelming splendor of his majesty, the greatness of his power, the severity of his justice, the immaculate character of his holiness, and all his dreadful grandeur—these things overpowered my soul, and I fell down in utter prostration of spirit. But there was in that a true and real drawing near to God.

Oh, if some of you when you are in your churches and chapels, did but realize that you are in God's presence, surely you might expect to see scenes more marvellous than any of the convulsions of the Irish revival. If you knew that God was there, that you were speaking to him, that in his ear you were uttering that oft repeated confession, "We have done the things that we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done."—ah, my friends, there would be then a deep humility and a solemn abasement of spirit. May God grant to us all, as often as we offer prayer of any sort, that we may truly and really draw near to him, even if it be only in this sense.

In after life as the Christian grows in grace, although he will never forget the solemnity of his position, and never will lose that holy awe which must overshadow a gracious man, when he is in the presence of a God, who can create or can destroy, yet that fear has all its terror taken out of it; it becomes a holy reverence, and no more a slavish abject dread. Then the man of God, walking amid the splendours of deity, and veiling his face like the glorious cherubim, with those twin wings, the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, will, reverent and bowed in spirit, approach the throne, and seeing there a God of love, of goodness, and of mercy, he will realize rather the covenant character of God than his absolute Deity. He will see in God rather his goodness than his greatness, and more of his love than of his majesty. Then will the

soul, bowing again as reverently as before, enjoy a sacred liberty of intercession; for while humbled in the presence of the Infinite God, it is yet sustained by the divine consciousness of being in the presence of mercy and of love in infinite degree. This is a state to which men reach after they have had their sins forgiven, after they have passed from death unto life; then they come to rejoice in God, and draw near to him with confidence.

There is yet a third and higher stage, which I fear, too few among us ever arrive at; when the child of God, awed by the splendor, and delighting in the goodness of God, sees something which is more enchanting to him than either of these, namely, the fact of his relationship to God. He sees on the throne, not simply goodness, but his Father's goodness, not merely love, but love which has from all eternity been set upon *him*; love which has made *him* its darling, which has written his name upon its breast, love which for his sake did even deign to die. Then the child of God comes near to the throne, then he taketh hold of his Father's knees, and though conscious of the greatness of the God, yet is he still more alive to the loveliness of the Father, and he cries, "My Father, hear my prayer and grant me my request, for Jesu's sake." In this position it sometimes happens that the child of God may pray in such a way that others cannot understand him at all. If you had heard Martin Luther pray, some of you would have been shocked, and

perhaps it would have been presumption if you had prayed as he did, because Martin Luther was God's own son, and you, alas, are destitute of sonship. He had a liberty to talk to God as another man had not. If you are not the son of God, if you have no realization of your adoption, the utmost you can do is to come into the King's court as a humble beggar. May God give you grace to get further; may you come there, not simply as a petitioner, but as a follower of the Son of God—a servant. But happy is the man who has received his full adoption, and knows himself to be a son. It were rudeness for any one to do that to a king which a king's son may do. A king's own child may talk familiarly to his own parent, and there are love-doings and words of high and hallowed familiarity, and of close and sacred communing, between God and his own adopted child, that I could not tell you—things that are something like what Paul heard in Paradise, it is scarce lawful for a man to utter them in public, though in private he knows their sweetness.⁸ Ah I my dear hearers, some of you, I doubt not, know more about this than I do, but this I know, it is the happiest moment in one's life when we can go up to our Father and our God in Christ Jesus, and can know and feel of a surety that his infinite love is set on us, and that our love is gone forth to him. There is a sweet embrace that is not to be excelled. No chariots of Aminadib⁹ the heavenly rapture can describe—even Solomon's Song itself, glowing though its figures be,

can scarcely reach the mystery—the length, the breadth, the height of the embracing of God by the creature, and the embracing of the creature by its God. Now, I repeat, it is not essential to the success of your prayers that you should come up to this last point. Possibly you never may attain to this eminence of grace. Nor even do I think that it is absolutely necessary that your prayer should come to the second point to be prayer. It should be so, and it will, as you grow in grace. But, mark, you must draw near to God in some one of these three grades either in a lowly sense of his majesty, or in a delightful consciousness of his goodness, or in a ravishing sense of your own relationship to him, or else your prayer is as worthless as the chaff, it is but as whispering to the wind, or the uttering of a cry to the desert air, where no ear can hear nor hand can help. Bring your prayers, then, to this touchstones and God help you to examine them, and be honest with yourselves, for your own soul's sake.

II. I have thus concluded the touchstone. I now come to the second head of the discourse, which was THE WHETSTONE, to whet your desires, to make you more anxious to be much in prayer, and to be more earnest in it. “It is good for me to draw near to God.”

Now, first and foremost, let us remark that the goodness of prayer does not lie in any merit that there is in prayer itself. There is no merit whatever in prayer; and wherever the idea of the merit of prayer could

come from one is at a loss to know, except that it must have come from a near relative of the Father of Lies, who resides somewhere in Italy. There is no doubt that old Rome was the birthplace of the idea, it is too absurd and wicked to have come from any less abominable place. If a beggar should be always on your door-step, or should be always meeting you in the street, or stopping you on your journeys, and asking you to give him help, I suppose the last thing you would understand would be the merit of his prayers. You would say, "I can understand their impudence, I can allow their earnestness, I can comprehend their importunity, but as for *merit*, what merit can there be in a beggar's cry?" Remember, your prayers at the best are nothing but a beggar's cry. You still stand as beggars at the gate of mercy, asking for the dole of God's charity, for the love of Jesus. And he gives freely. But he gives, not because of your prayers, but because of Christ's blood and Christ's merit. Your prayers may be the sacred vessel in which he puts the alms of his mercy; but the merit by which the mercy comes is in the veins of Christ, and nowhere else. Remember that there can be no merit in a beggar's cry.

But, now, let us note that it nevertheless is good, practically good for us to pray and draw near to God; and the first thing which would whet our desires in prayer is this:—*Prayer explains mysteries*. I utter that first because it is in the Psalm. Poor Asaph¹⁰ had been greatly troubled. He had been trying to untie that

Gordion knot¹¹ concerning the righteousness of a providence which permits the wicked to flourish and the godly to be tried, and because he could not untie that knot, he tried to cut it, and he cut his own fingers in the act, and became greatly troubled. He could not understand how it was that God could be just and yet give riches to the wicked while his own people were in poverty. At last Asaph understood it all, for he went into the house of his God, and there he understood their end. And he says—looking back upon his discovery of a clue to this great labyrinth—”It is good for me to draw near to God.” And now, my dear hearers, if you would understand the Word of God in its knotty points, if you would comprehend the mystery of the gospel of Christ, remember, Christ’s scholars must study upon their knees. Depend upon it, that the best commentator upon the Word of God is its author, the Holy Ghost, and if you would know the meaning, you must go to him in prayer. Often when a psalm has staggered me in reading it, and I have not understood it,—if I have knelt down and tried to read it over in that position, and see if I could realize the meaning in my own heart, some one word in the text has glistened, and that one word has been the key to the whole. John Bunyan says that he never forgot the divinity he taught, because it was burnt into him when he was on his knees. That is the way to learn the gospel. If you learn it upon your knees you will never unlearn it. That which men teach you, men can unteach you. If I am

merely convinced by reason, a better reasoner may deceive me. If I merely hold my doctrinal opinions because they seem to me to be correct, I may be led to think differently another day. But if God has taught them to me—he who is himself pure truth—I have not learned amiss, hut I have so learned that I shall never unlearn, nor shall I forget.

Behold, believer, thou art this day in a labyrinth; whenever thou comest to a turning place, where there is a road to the right or to the left, if thou wouldst know which way to go, fall on thy knees, then go on; and when thou comest to the next turning place, on thy knees again, and so proceed again. The one clue to the whole labyrinth of providence, and of doctrinal opinion, and of sacred thought, is to be found in that one hallowed exercise—prayer. Continue much in prayer, and neither Satan nor the world shall much deceive you. Behold before you the sacred ark of truth. But where is the key? It hangs upon the silver nail of prayer; go reach it down, unlock the casket and be rich.

A second whetstone for your prayers shall be this:—*Prayer brings deliverances*. In an old author I met with the following allegory; as I found it so I tell it to you. Once upon a time, the king of Jerusalem left his city in the custody of an eminent Captain, whose name was Zeal. He gave unto Zeal many choice warriors, to assist him in the protection of the city. Zeal was a right hearted man, one who never wearied

in the day of battle, but would fight all day, and all night, even though his sword did cleave to his hand as the blood ran down his arm. But it happened upon this time, that the king of Arabia, getting unto himself exceeding great hosts and armies, surrounded the city, and prevented any introduction of food for the soldiers, or of ammunition to support the war. Driven to the last extremity, Captain Zeal called a council of war, and asked of them what course they should take. Many things were proposed, but they all failed to effect the purpose, and they came to the sad conclusion that nothing was before them but the surrender of the city, although upon the hardest terms. Zeal took the resolution of the council of war, but when he read it, he could not bear it. His soul abhorred it. "Better," said he, "to be cut in pieces, than surrender. Better for us to be destroyed while we are faithful, than to give up the keys of this royal city." In his great distress, he met a friend of his, called Prayer; and Prayer said to him, "Oh! captain, I can deliver this city." Now, Prayer was not a soldier, at least he did not look as if he was a warrior, for he wore the garments of a priest. In fact he was the king's chaplain, and was the priest of the holy city of Jerusalem. But nevertheless this Prayer was a valiant man, and wore armor beneath his robes. "Oh, captain," said he, "give me three companions and I will deliver this city—their names must be Sincerity, Importunity,¹² and faith." Now these four brave men went out of the city at the dead of night

when the prospects of Jerusalem were the very blackest, they cut their way right through the hosts that surrounded the city. With many wounds and much smuggling they made their escape, and traveled all that night long as quickly as they could across the plain, to reach the camp of the king of Jerusalem. When they flagged a little, Importunity would hasten them on; and when at any time they grew faint, Faith would give them a drink from his bottle, and they would recover. They came at last to the palace of the great king, the door was shut, but Importunity knocked long, and, at last it was opened. Faith stepped in; Sincerity threw himself on his face before the throne of the great king; and then Prayer began to speak. He told the king of the great straits in which the beloved city was now placed, the dangers that surrounded it, and the almost certainty that all the brave warriors would be cut in pieces by the morrow. Importunity repeated again and again the wants of the city. Faith pleaded hard the royal promise and covenant. At last the king said to Captain Prayer, "Take with thee soldiers and go back, lo, I am with thee to deliver this city." At the morning light, just when the day broke—for they had returned more swiftly than could have been expected, for though the journey seemed long in going there, it was very short in coming back, in fact they seemed to have gained time on the road—they arrived early in the morning, fell upon the hosts of the king of Arabia, took him prisoner, slew his army, and divided the spoil, and then

entered the gates of the city of Jerusalem in triumph. Zeal put a crown of gold upon the head of Prayer, and decreed that henceforth whenever Zeal went forth to battle, Prayer should be the standard-bearer, and should lead the van. The allegory is full of truth; let him that heareth understand. If we would have deliverance in the hour, "Let us pray." Prayer shall soon bring sweet and merciful deliverances from the throne of our faithful God. This is the second sharpening of your desires upon the whetstone.

And now a third. It was said of Faith, in that mighty chapter of the Hebrews,¹³ that Faith stopped the mouth of lions and the like. But one singular thing that Faith did, which is as great a miracle as any of them, was this: Faith obtained promises. Now the like can be said of Prayer. *Prayer obtains promises*; therefore "it is good for thee to draw near to God." We read a story in the History of England, whether true or not we cannot tell, that Queen Elizabeth gave to the Earl of Essex a ring, as a token of her favor. "When thou art in disgrace," she said, "send this ring to me. When I see it I will forgive thee, and accept thee again to favor." You know the story of that ill-fated noble, how he sent the ring by a faithless messenger, and it was never delivered, and therefore he perished at the block. Ah! God has given to each one of his people the sacred ring of promise. And he saith, "As often as thou art in need, or in sorrow, show it to me, and I will deliver thee." Take heed then, believer, that thou hast a faithful

messenger. And what messenger canst thou employ so excellent as true, real, earnest prayer? But, take heed it be real prayer; for if thy messenger miscarry, and the promise be not brought to God's eye, who knoweth, thou mayest never obtain the blessing. Draw near to God with living, loving prayer; present the promise, and thou shalt obtain the fulfillment. Many things might I say of prayer; our old divines are full of encomiums¹⁴ concerning it. The early fathers speak of it as if they were writing sonnets. Chrysostom preached of it as if he saw it incarnate in some heavenly form. And the choicest metaphors were gathered together to describe in rapturous phrase the power, nay, the omnipotence of prayer. Would to God that we loved prayer as our fathers did of old. It is said of James the Less, that he was so much in prayer that his knees had become hard like those of a camel. It was doubtless but a legend, but legends often are based on truths. And certain it is that Hugh Latimer, that blessed saint and martyr of our God, was accustomed to pray so earnestly in his old age when he was in his cell, that he would often pray until he had no strength left to use, and the prison attendants had need to lift him from his knees. Where are the men like these? Oh angel of the covenant, where canst thou find them? When the Son of Man cometh shall he find prayer on the earth? Ours are not worthy of the name of supplication. Oh that we had learned that saved art, that we could draw near to God, and plead his promise.

Watts hath put several things together in one verse.
Prayer clears the sky;—

“Prayer makes the darkened cloud withdraw.”
Prayer is a heaven climber;—
“Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw.”

Prayer makes even Satan quake,—
“For Satan trembles when he sees,
The weakest saint upon his knees.”

I have thus given you three reasons why we should be diligent in prayer. Let me add yet another, for we must not leave this part of the whetstone until we have thoroughly entered into the reasons why “it is good for us to draw near unto God. Let me remark, that *prayer has a mighty power to sustain the soul in every season of its distress and sorrow.* Whenever the soul becomes weak, use the heavenly strengthening plaster of prayer. It was in prayer the angel appeared unto the Lord and strengthened him.¹⁵ That angel has appeared to many of us, and we have not forgotten the strength we received when on our knees. You remember in the ancient mythology the story of him who as often as he was thrown down recovered strength because he touched his mother earth. It is so with the believer. As often as he is thrown down upon his knees he recovers himself, for he touches the great source of his strength—the mercy-seat. If thou hart a burden on thy

back, remember prayer, for thou shalt carry it well if thou canst pray. Once on a time Christian had upon his back a terrible burden that crushed him to the earth, so that he could not carry it; he crept along on his hands and knees. There appeared to him a fair and comely damsel, holding in her hand a wand, and she touched the burden. It was there, it was not removed, but strange to say the burden became weightless. It was there in all its outward shape and features, but without weight. That which had crushed him to the earth, had become now so light that he could leap and carry it. Beloved, do you understand this? Have you gone to God with mountains of troubles on your shoulders, unable to carry them, and have you seen them, not removed, but still remaining in the same shape, but of a different weight? They became blessings instead of curses, what you thought was an iron cross suddenly turned out to be a wooden one, and you carried it with joy, following your Master.

I will give but one other reason, lest I should weary you, and that certainly is not my desire, but to quicken you rather than to weary you. Beloved, there is one reason why we should pray, those of us who are engaged in the Lord's work in any way, because *it is prayer that will ensure success*. Two laborers in God's harvest met each other once upon a time, and they sat down to compare notes. One was a man of sorrowful spirit, and the other joyous, for God had given him the desire of his heart. The sad brother said, "Friend, I

cannot understand how it is that everything you do is sure to prosper: You scatter seed with both your hands very diligently, and it springs up, and so rapidly too, that the reaper treads upon the heels of the sower, and the sower himself again upon the heels of the next reaper. I have sown,” said he, “as you have done, and I think I can say I have been just as diligent; I think too the soil has been the same, for we have labored side by side in the same town. I hope the seed has been of the same quality, for I have found mine where you get yours—the common granary. But alas, my seed, friend, mine never springs up. I sow it. It is as if I sowed upon the waves, I never see a harvest. Here and there a sickly blade of wheat I have discovered with great and diligent search, but I can see but little reward for all my labors.” They talked long together, for the brother who was successful was one of a tender heart, and therefore he sought to comfort this mourning brother. They compared notes, they looked through all the rules of husbandry, and they could not solve the mystery, why one was successful and the other labored in vain. At last one said to the other, “I must retire.” “Wherefore?” said the other, “Why this is the time” said he “when I must go and steep¹⁶ my seed.” “Steep your seed?” said the other. “Yes, my brother, I always steep my seed before I sow it. I steep it till it begins to swell, and germinate, and I can almost see a green blade springing from it, and then you know it speedily grows after it is sown.” “Ah,” said the other,

“but I understand not what you mean. How do you steep your seed, and in what mysterious mixture?” “Brother,” said he, “it is a composition made of one part of the tears of agony for the souls of men, and the other part of the tears of a holy agony which wrestles with God in prayer:—this mixture if you drop your seed in it, hath a transcendent efficacy to make every grain full of life, so that it is not lost.” The other rose and went on his way, and forgot not what he had learned, but he began to steep his seed too; he spent less time in his study, more time in his closet; he was less abroad, more at home, less with man, and more with God. And he went abroad and scattered his seed, and he too, saw a harvest, and the Lord was glorified in them twain. Brethren, I do feel with regard to myself, and therefore, when I speak of others I speak not uncharitably, that the reason of the nonsuccess of the ministry in these years, (for compared with the days of Pentecost, I cannot call our success a success) lies in our want of prayer. If I were addressing students in the college, I think I should venture to say to them, set prayer first in your labors; let your subject be well prepared; think well of your discourse, but best of all, pray it over, study on your knees. And now in speaking to this assembly, containing Sabbath-school teachers, and others who in their way are laboring for Christ, let me beseech you whatever you do, go not about your work, except you have first entreated that the dew of heaven may drop on the seed you sow. Steep

your seed and it shall spring up. We are demanding in our days more laborers—it is a right prayer; we are seeking that the seed should be of the best sort, it is a right demand, but let us not forget another which is even more necessary than this, let us ask, let us plead with God, that the seed be steeped, that men may preach agonizing for souls. I like to preach with a burden on my heart—the burden of other men’s sins, the burden of other men’s hard-heartedness, the burden of their unbelief, the burden of their desperate estate, which must ere long end in perdition. There is no preaching, I am persuaded, like that: for then we preach as though—

“We ne’er might preach again,
As dying men to dying men.”

And, oh, may each of you labor after the latter fashion in your own sphere, ever taking care to commit your work to God.

I will tell you here an incident of the revival. It is one I know to be correct, it is told by a good brother who would not add a word thereunto, I am sure. It happened, not long ago, that in a school which is sustained by the Corporation of the City of London, in the north of Ireland, one of the bigger boys had been converted to God; and one day, in the midst of school, a younger youth was greatly oppressed by a

sense of sin, and so overwhelmed did he become that the master plainly perceived that he could not work, and, therefore, he said to him, "You had better go home, and plead with God in prayer in private." He said, however, to the bigger boy, who was all rejoicing in hope, "Go with him; take him home and pray with him." They started together: on the road they saw an empty house; the two boys went in and there began to pray; the plaintive cry of the young one, after a little time changed into a note of joy, when, suddenly springing up, he said, "I have found rest in Jesus, I have never felt as I do now; my sins, which are many, are all forgiven." The proposal was to go home; but the younger lad forbade this. No, he must go and tell the master of the school that he had found Christ. So hurrying back, he rushed in and said, "Oh! I have found the Lord Jesus Christ." All the boys in the school, who had seen him sitting sad and dull upon the form, remarked the joy that flashed from his eye, when he cried "I have Christ!" The effect was electric. The boys suddenly and mysteriously disappeared; the master knew not where they were gone; but looking over into the playground, he saw by the wall were a number of boys, one by one, in prayer asking for mercy. He said to the elder youth, "Cannot you go and tell these boys the way of salvation—tell them what they must do to be saved?" He did so, and the silent prayer was suddenly changed into a loud piercing shriek, the boys in the school understood it, and, impelled by the Great

Spirit, they all fell on their knees, and began to cry aloud for mercy through the blood of Christ. But, this was not all. There was a girls' schoolroom in the same building over head. The ear had been well tutored to understand what that cry meant, and soon interpreted it, and the girls too, affected by the same Spirit, fell down and began to cry aloud for the forgiveness of their sins. Here was an interruption of the school! Was ever such a thing known before in a school-room? Classes are all put aside, books forgotten; everything cast to the winds, while poor sinners are kneeling at the foot of the cross seeking for pardon. The cry was heard throughout the various offices attached to this large school, and it was heard also across the street, and passers by were attracted—men of God, ministers and clergymen of the neighborhood were brought in—the whole day was spent in prayer, and they continued until almost midnight; but they separated with songs of joy, for that vast mass of girls and boys, men and women, who had crowded the two school-rooms, had all found the Saviour.

Our good brother, Dr. Arthur, says, that he met with a youth while travelling in Ireland, and he said to him, "Do you love the Saviour?" And he said, "I trust I do." "How did you come to love him?" "Oh," said he, "I was converted in the big school-room that night. My mother heard that there was a revival going on there, and she sent me to fetch my little brother away; she did not want him, she said, to get convinced; and

I went to fetch my brother, and he was on his knees crying, ‘Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner.’ I stopped, and I prayed too, and the Lord saved us both.” Now to what are we to attribute this? I know many of the brethren there—the Presbyterians and others—and I do not think there is any difference or any superiority in their ministry over anything we can see or hear in London, and I think they themselves would subscribe to the truth of what I assert. The difference is this: there has been prayer there; living, hearty prayer has been offered continually, perhaps by some who did not live in Ireland. God alone knows where that revival really began. Some woman on her bed may have been exorcised in her soul for that district, and may have been wrestling with God in prayer; and then the blessing has descended. And if God will help you and help me to lay near to heart the neighborhood in which we live, the family over which we preside, the congregation we have to address, the class we have to teach, the laborers we employ, or any of these, surely then by mighty prayer we shall bring down a great blessing from high; for prayer is never lost; preaching *may* be, but prayer *never* is. Praying breath can never be spent in vain. the Lord send to all the churches of Great Britain, first of all, the power of prayer, and then shall there come conversions of multitudes of souls through the outpoured energy of the Holy One of Israel!

III. I shall have little time to close up the third

point, further than to remark that while I have been preaching I do hope there have been some here who have heard for themselves. Ah, my hearers, religion is more solemn work than some men think of. I am often shocked with the brutality of what are called the lower classes of society, and with their coarse blasphemies; but there is one thing—and I speak honestly to you now, as fearing no man—there is one thing that is to me more shocking still, and that is the frivolous way in which the mass of our higher classes spend all their time. What are your morning calls but pretenses for wasting your time? What are your amusements but an attempt to kill the time that hangs laboriously on your hands? And what are many of your employments but an industrious idleness, spinning and knitting away of precious hours which God knows will be few enough when you come to look back upon them from a dying bed. Oh! if you did but know what you are made for, and your high destiny, you would not waste your time in the paltry things that occupy your hands and your souls. God Almighty forgive those wasted hours which if you be Christians ought to be employed for the good of others. God forgive those moments of frivolity which ought to have been occupied in prayer. If such a congregation as this could but be solemnly alive to the interests of this land and the poverty of it, to its miseries, to its wickedness: if but such a host as I have here could solemnly feel this matter, how much good would certainly come to

us! This would be the best missionary society; so many hearts of tenderness and affection, all beating high with an anxious desire to see sinners brought to Christ. Ah! we cannot approve of the doctrines of the Romish church, but still sometimes we have to be abashed at their zeal. Would God that we had sisters of mercy who were merciful indeed; not dressed in some fanciful garb, but going from house to house to comfort the sick and help the needy! Would that ye all were brothers of the heart of Jesus, and all of you sisters of him, whose mother's heart was pierced with agony, when he died that we might be saved. Oh, my dear hearers, this I speak with an earnest anxiety that the words may be prophetic of a better age.

But now, there are some of you here, perhaps, that never prayed in your lives, toying like glittering insects, wasting your little day. Ye know not that death is near ye; and oh, if ye have never sought and have never found the Saviour; however bright those eyes, if they have never seen the wounds of Christ, if they have never looked to Christ, they shall not simply be sealed in death, but they must behold sights of fearful woe eternally. Oh may God grant you grace to pray; may he lead you home to your houses, to fall on your knees, and for the first time to cry, "Lord have mercy upon me!" Remember you have sins to confess, and if you think you have not, you are in a sad state of heart, it proves that you are dead in trespasses and sins—dead in them. Go home and ask the Lord to give

you a new heart and a right spirit, and may he who dictates the prayer graciously hear; and may you, and I, and all of us, when this life has passed away and time is exchanged for eternity, stand before the throne of God at last. I have to preach continually to a congregation in which I know there are many drunkards, swearers, and the like—with these men I know how to deal, and God has given me success; but I sometimes tremble for you amiable, excellent, upright daughters, who make glad your father's house, and wives that train up your children well. Remember, if you have not the root of the matter in you—"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."¹⁷ And as we must be honest with the poor, so must we be with the rich; and as we must lay the axe to the root of the tree with the drunkard and the swearer, so must we with you. You are as much lost as they are, and shall as surely perish as they do, unless you be born again. There is but one road to heaven for you all alike. As a minister of the gospel, I know no rich men and no poor men; I know no working classes and no gentlemen; I know simply God's sinful creatures, bidden to come to Christ and find mercy through his atonement. He will not reject you. Put the black thought away. He is able to save; doubt him not. Come to him; come and welcome: God help you to come.

God Almighty bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

FOOTNOTES

1. Psalm 73:25
2. touchstone: a stone formerly used to test the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak these left on the stone; here the word is used in its general sense to evaluate the genuineness, or test the quality, of prayer as it relates to Psalm 73:23
3. whetstone: an abrasive stone for sharpening knives; here the word is used in a general sense to whet (stimulate or increase) desire for prayer as it is related to Psalm 73:23
4. tombstone: a stone marking a grave; here the word is employed to serve as a reminder that a prayerless life is a dead life and indicates one has not practiced Psalm 73:23
5. “forms of prayer” would designate, as was the common practice during Spurgeon’s time, the use of written or memorized prayers
6. “extempore prayer” designates prayer without the use of notes or a prepared text beforehand
7. Job 42:5,6
8. 2 Corinthians 12:4
9. Song of Solomon 6:4
10. Psalm 73
11. Gordian knot: an intricate knot tied by King Gordius of Phrygia and cut by Alexander the Great with his sword after hearing an oracle promise that whoever could undo it would be the next ruler of Asia; used here in a general sense to express an exceeding complicated and troubling problem
12. importunity: with persistence or repetition
13. Hebrews 11
14. encomiums: expressions of lofty praise
15. Luke 22:42,43
16. steep: to soak in liquid in order to cleanse, soften, or extract some property
17. John 3:3

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