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TO PRAY

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TEACH US TO PRAY

A STUDY BOOK FOR CLASSES AND GROUPS

BY
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THE FACT OF PRAYER

And it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place one of his disciples said unto him, "Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples."

EACH IN HIS OWN TONGUE

A fire mist and a planet,
A crystal and a cell,
A jelly-fish and a saurian
And caves where the cave-men dwell;
Then a sense of law and beauty
And a face turned from the clod,
Some call it evolution
And others call it God.

A haze on a far horizon,
The infinite, tender sky,
The ripe, rich tint of the cornfields
And wild geese sailing high;
And all over upland and lowland
The charm of the golden-rod,
Some of us call it autumn
And others call it God.

Like tides on a crescent sea-beach
When the moon is new and thin
Into our hearts high yearnings
Come welling and surging in,
Come from the mystic ocean
Whose rim no foot has trod,
Some of us call it longing
And others call it God.

A picket frozen on duty,
A mother starved for her brood,
Socrates drinking the hemlock,
And Jesus on the rood;
And millions who humble and nameless
The straight, hard pathway plod,
Some call it consecration
And others call it God.

LESSON I

THE FACT OF PRAYER

Everybody does it.

We are born into a praying world. No careful and candid student of human life can ignore the fact of prayer. It is something that everybody does. If an occasional individual be found who has always lived a prayerless life, he is as abnormal as one born blind. He is simply an exception to the universal rule. Nature seems to produce them once in a while, probably because some of her sacred laws have been violated.

Most of us cannot remember when we prayed our first prayer, just as we cannot remember when we first took physical nourishment into our bodies. Some time away back where the earth and sky of childhood meet we uttered a cry of hunger. It brought a satisfactory response or we would not be here today. So, some time in the past our souls became hungry and we prayed. Of course, we recognize the fact that, theoretically at least, some people have left off praying. But they are liable to start in again at any moment. A great danger or a great need makes them bend their knees and cry out from their souls.

In considering, therefore, the subject of prayer we are not trying to get first a theoretical pattern on some mount of meditation and then hoping to work it out in life. Speaking in terms of philosophy our method is not deductive but inductive. We have on our hands and in our hearts the fact of prayer. Our theory must simply explain and illuminate this bit of fact.

Man is a praying animal.

Among the many and various definitions of the human race is this one, *Man is a praying animal*. Of course, no one would claim that it is the only characteristic that distinguishes man from his fellow creatures. Somebody has also remarked that "man is a laughing animal." And there are many other human peculiarities that might be enumerated. All this simply serves to illustrate the fact that prayer, like laughter and love, is a native human characteristic.

It is not something that is attached to the life by religious teachers. When the disciples came to Jesus with the request, "Lord, teach us to pray," they did not mean that they had never done it. They wanted to know how to "pray aright," as old-fashioned folks used to say in prayer meeting. The task of Jesus that day is the task of His church for every day.

The heathen world is a praying world. If there is a race or tribe anywhere that does not pray, like the individuals we have mentioned, they are not normal human beings. They belong in the circus with other strange and "outlandish" species. The whole human family is at it, "each in his own tongue."

Prayer and civilization.

If on the one hand prayer is not something that is grafted on to the life by civilization, on the other hand it is not an instinct that is left behind by civilization. Men do not outgrow prayer as they become more enlightened.

The nations that stand for the highest ideals are the nations that still practice the time-honored custom of prayer. Of course, as Americans we believe our own

nation to be at the top in the development of the finest qualities of personal and national life. It is significant that our legislative assemblies and judicial courts open with reverent prayer. And whenever we have faced a great national crisis our chief executive has called our nation to its knees. This was the case in '61-'64, when a chastened and heart-torn people, in obedience to the call of President Lincoln, observed a day of prayer. In the terrible days of the world war through which we have just passed our President followed this wise example.

We thus see that prayer not only finds intuitive expression in the lives of primitive people but that it is also recognized in the customs and laws of the most enlightened nations. Indeed, a study of history well vindicates the statement that it is the nations who *pray* most, and not the nations that *prey* most, who persist and achieve.

Prayer and biography.

Of course, nations are but collections of individuals and the history of the race is an enlarged human biography. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that as individuals become greater intellectually, morally and spiritually they are greater pray-ers.

There is no doubt that Lincoln prayed when he was a backwoods lad. When he saw the shadows creep down over the forest and the stars peer through the purple canopy spread over the tree tops, who can doubt that he prayed? His "angel mother" taught him to pray and he doubtless kept up the reverent custom. But his greatest praying was done when at the summit of his intellectual strength and moral manhood he bore the nation's load on his stooping

shoulders. Then the White House became a Gethsemane and sometimes, as he himself testified, a mount of vision and transfiguration.

We cannot too much emphasize the fact that prayer, which is a marked characteristic of untutored and primitive peoples, becomes not less apparent but more so as they climb out of their caves. We cannot too often remember that prayer, which is as natural as breathing in the little child "new to earth and sky," grows with his growth and develops with his development, provided that growth and development be wholesome, and human, and normal.

Sometimes, it is true, a man gets that "little knowledge that tendeth to atheism" and starves his soul by failing to pray. And sometimes a man, changing his view of geography and astronomy, no longer believing that the "fir trees dark and high" are "close against the sky," imagines that his conception of prayer must remain dwarfed and kindergartenish and so it has no place in his growing life. Such a man needs to come to the Christ as did the early disciples with the request, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Summary and conclusion.

I have tried in this first chapter to simply call attention to the fact of prayer. My readers will readily think of many illustrations to emphasize the fact. We have tried to forget for a little all the blessed bias in favor of prayer that comes from our Christian training, the teaching of the Christian Bible, and the song of the Christian heart, and face the fact in a frank, fair, and, perhaps, rather cool and scientific fashion.

It is well for us to realize that we pray not because

of marvelous answers we receive. It may be that many of us pray in spite of receiving so few marvelous answers. We pray because God has made us with shrines in our hearts. We pray in obedience to a human instinct, just as we toil and hunger and sing and laugh and love. It is certainly reasonable to believe what Christian faith affirms, that this particular human tendency has back of it, in the mind of Him who says, "The whole I planned," a purpose. It is given us for the enrichment of life. Indeed, it was given us that by it we might come into fellowship with Our Father God. That is why,

Something draws me upward there
As morning draws the lark.
It is as though my home were there
To which my heart keeps turning,
A home unseen but mighty proved
By this mysterious yearning.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you recall some of the prayers of your childhood?
2. Did you ever know a man who never prayed?
3. What is the earliest prayer on record?
4. Who wrote "Now I lay me down to sleep?"
5. What is Gene Stratton Porter's revised version of it given in her book "Michael O'Halloran"?
6. Does a written prayer memorized help or hinder you in your devotional life?
7. Who wrote the Episcopal prayer book? Is there a Methodist prayer book?
8. Find some prayers other than Christian, such as Mohammedan and Hindu.
9. How many assemblies in the United States, legislative and judicial, open with prayer?
10. How many presidents of the United States since the Civil War have been confessedly praying men?



LEARNING HOW TO PRAY

And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father
which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Luke xi, 2.

Yet in the maddening maze of things,
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed trust my spirit clings;
I know that God is good.

The wrong that pains my soul below
I dare not throne above;
I know not of His hate,—I know
His goodness and His love.

I dimly guess from blessings known
Of greater out of sight,
And, with the chastened Psalmist, own
His judgments too are right.

I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies.

No offering of my own I have,
Nor works my faith to prove;
I can but give the gifts He gave,
And plead His love for love.

I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.

O brothers! if my faith is vain,
If hopes like these betray,
Pray for me that my feet may gain
The sure and safer way

And thou, O Lord! by whom are seen
Thy creatures as they be,
Forgive me if too close I lean
My human heart on Thee!

—From "*The Eternal Goodness*," by John Greenleaf Whittier.

LESSON II

LEARNING HOW TO PRAY

The model prayer.

Probably Jesus never did a finer piece of constructive kingdom building than when he taught his disciples how to pray. Trained in the austere but narrow righteousness of Judaism, with a conception of God majestic but frigid, they came to the God-man for illumination.

I wonder if He took time to think out that prayer He gave them for a model, or whether He simply let it overflow at that moment from His mind and heart. Such wonderings are no reflection against His deity. From the latest information we can secure, God spent vast periods of time planning the universe. It is just as much a divine production as if He had thrown it together in a few days, according to the modern calendar. It may be that when Jesus sat up all night just before He selected His disciples He got that prayer ready. At any rate, it was ready.

How to pray.

One of the supreme needs of the human race is to be taught how to pray. Oliver Wendell Holmes says, "Alas for the people who die with all their music in them." He is thinking of those who somehow can never sing out their hidden song. There are many whose prayers are like that. They never quite get into the clear expression of words. The superficial classifier would include them among those who never pray.

There are others whose prayers are as crude and irreverent as the demand of a saucy child for a piece of gingerbread from an indulgent mother. Still others pray with heathen hearts as if they were approaching some grim monster of the deep.

To all of them, as to His disciples of old, and to all of us, Jesus gives the A B C of prayer. "When you pray, say, Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name." We find in this statement a definition of prayer. It is this: *Prayer* is talking to our Heavenly Father.

Our Father.

That there are difficulties in the Christian doctrine of prayer all who are candid will admit. It is difficult sometimes to believe that in a universe so vast and complex as ours the heart-cry of a solitary individual will make any difference. But that particular difficulty is quickly answered if we believe God is *our Father*. Of course, as Dr. Fosdick suggests, the answer to the dazed dizziness caused by the telescope is a look through the microscope. The same mighty Force that hurls the planets into space takes exquisite pains in painting the wings of a butterfly and never makes a false stroke. Indeed, the biggest thing about what we call Nature is not its brawny strength but its infinite attention to minute details. Name that Force, as Jesus dares to, "Our Father" and all who are thoughtful will pray.

Human fatherhood would be infinite and omnipresent if it could. When we speak of God in terms of fatherhood, of course, we are thinking of fatherhood at its best. There are some poor, wistful children that could be scared away from God by being

told that he is a father. There is a paternal, maternal love that is lighted in the human heart by God Himself; a solicitous, holy, intensely ethical and sacrificial, brooding love. That is what makes real human fathers and mothers. The dominant teaching of Jesus is that God is like that.

This teaching He illustrated by His own life and words. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," was the message of His life. By His atoning death, by His glorious resurrection, by His Spirit which He puts into our hearts whereby we say "Abba, Father." He taught us to everlastingly think of God in terms of fatherhood.

This revelation of Jesus is absolutely necessary if we are to learn how to pray, for while, as Fosdick shows us, the microscope talks back to the telescope, yet the microscope itself raises questions. Nature is too red-handed an individual to pray to, unless we know more about it than we can see. The answer of Jesus to these questions is that God is our Father. We may say with Whittier:

Amid the maddening maze of things
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed trust my spirit clings
I know that God is good.

If, as Bishop Quayle puts it, "God is everybody's Father," that is the first principle of the doctrine of prayer. If He is everybody's Father, of course, He cares for everybody and will hear everybody's prayer.

The claim that some are so insistent about, that God is simply the Father of the regenerate who are adopted into His family, has no special bearing on this subject. If everybody *may* be a child of God,

if God is eager to father everybody, for the purposes of this discussion that is all we need.

This, then, is the first lesson in prayer, "When you pray, say, Our Father."

Hallowed be thy name.

It was characteristic of Our Master's wonderful knowledge of human nature that He immediately added these impressive words, "Hallowed be thy name." There are people who are so constituted that if you tell them God is their Father they will go rushing into His presence without taking off their hats. We all need to be reminded that God is our *holy* Father. Irreverence is not a necessary accomplishment of democracy. The reason we no longer bow the knee to kings is not that it has been proved that "one person is as good as another." That is emphatically not so. Our unrest is caused by the realization that we have been burning incense at the shrines of too many tin gods. Inherited titles or wealth or position have to go to the foot, in the great spelling match of the present, if they cannot spell and pronounce properly such words as *honor*, *character* and *service*.

If we should cease to reverence goodness and greatness of mind and heart, that crude and unhealthy mood would spell disaster everywhere. Therefore, there is still a place for God in our age of democracy, for a real God whose greatness is moral and spiritual. And we still need to pray, "Hallowed be thy name."

Our first lesson.

Our first lesson in prayer consists in learning to approach God in the affectionate confidence which is

based on a belief in His Fatherhood, and that humble reverence which is based on a realization of His greatness and goodness. This is what Jesus taught His disciples. We need to have Him teach it to us still.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION.

1. Do you find any prayers in the Old Testament that address God as Father?
2. How many times in the Gospel does Jesus speak of God as Father?
3. Do Methodists believe in the universal Fatherhood of God?
4. Is irreverence a danger of an age of democracy? How may it be avoided?
5. Does the oft-repetition of the Lord's prayer have a tendency to make us forget its real meaning?
6. Give the additions to the Lord's prayer used by the Christian Scientists.
7. In what sense is the statement Our Father-Mother God true?
8. Do the discoveries of modern science make it harder or easier to believe in the Fatherhood of God?

PRAYING FOR THE KINGDOM

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so in earth. Luke xi, 2.

THE NEW AGE

When navies are forgotten
And fleets are useless things,
When the dove shall warm her bosom
Beneath the eagle's wings;

When memory of battles
At last is strange and old,
When nations have one banner
And creeds have found one fold;

When the Hand that sprinkles midnight
With its powdered drift of suns
Has hushed this tiny tumult
Of sects, and swords, and guns,

Then Hate's last note of discord
In all God's worlds shall cease
In the conquest which is service,
In the victory which is peace.

—From *"Love Triumphant,"* by Frederick Lawrence Knowles.

LESSON III

PRAYING FOR THE KINGDOM

The first petition is social.

It is significant that the very first petition in the prayer our Great Teacher taught His disciples is for the coming of the kingdom. We are apt to think of that as something to "work up to," a climax of prayer life. Jesus begins with it. The first request He tells us to make of Our Father in Heaven is not for help for our personal needs, material or moral, but for the coming of a general good. Our prayers are to be first of all social. Thus He brings us at once to the very heart of His gospel. It is true that Jesus came to discover the individual. He taught those patriotic Jews to think of their relation to God, not in national but in personal terms. He eagerly told them that "God is everybody's Father." He set them singing, if not in the same words, at least in the same sentiment that finds expression in our Gospel song:

His eye is on the sparrow
And I know He watches me.

But this sense of individual worth and individual responsibility must never degenerate into selfishness. A hermit cannot be a New Testament saint. The very doctrine of the Universal Fatherhood of God carries with it a tremendous social consequence. No man can really sense the fact that God is Father of all

without feeling a tug at his heart string, a feeling of concern for his brothers, for the whole human brotherhood. He cannot consistently pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven," without wanting to say next, "Thy kingdom come."

What is the kingdom?

Many and various attempts have been made to define the kingdom of God, that oft recurring New Testament expression. It would seem as if Jesus Himself were defining it in the words of this prayer, for "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven" contains not two petitions but one, the latter explaining and defining the first.

The kingdom of God is a state of society in which the will of God is done. Of course, as such it has to do first of all with the moral condition and relations of men, but it by no means stays there. The Bible certainly teaches that God's first concern is holiness, but that holiness is something more than mere empty faultlessness. It carries with it a richness of life which is the life more abundant. The kingdom of God is not a state where people are simply doing as well as they know. It is also one in which they are doing their best to *know more*. They are not simply living the best life they can under the conditions. They are bravely battling to transform the conditions. Every movement to make our social life, our business life, our industrial life cleaner and fairer and gladder, every attempt to improve the conditions of city or country, of childhood, or womanhood, or manhood, every effort to lift life to higher levels, materially, intellectually and spiritually is bound up in that blessed phrase, the coming of the kingdom of God.

Of course, always at the heart of it all must be that spiritual inspiration which flows from the heart of Him whose will we seek to do.

The fact that there is a concrete ideal set before us, "as it is done in heaven," not only reminds us that the attainment is possible, that, as Browning says, we shall "arrive," but it also makes a practical suggestion as to method. The reason why the will of God is done in heaven is not that everybody was finally persuaded to do it. Those who refused to do it were expelled. Jesus said, "I beheld Satan fall as lightning." The bringing in of the kingdom has to do, not merely with the healing of the sick, but with the casting out of devils. Those who block the progress of the kingdom must go down and out. The slave holders had to. The saloon keepers have to. Others must take notice. The progress of the kingdom is no mere peaceful dream. It is a battle. "Thy will be done" is not the prayer of resignation but of conquest.

The back action of expression.

The question naturally arises: Why should we pray for the coming of the kingdom? What is the particular point in asking God to do what He already wants to do?

The first answer is that Christ was thinking, doubtless, of the *back action of expression*. He knew how much good it would do us to say those words. Sometimes people say regarding certain statements that tumble rather impetuously from their lips, "I had to say that to get it out of my system." As a matter of fact the reverse of this is true. Saying things does not get them out of our system. It *drives them in*.

The law of expression is the law of life, and what we think, or dream, or hope, or purpose is strengthened by utterance. That is the philosophy of the prayer meeting testimony and of the spoken prayer. Jesus knew that our own passion for the coming of His kingdom would become warmer and more real if He taught us to pray from our hearts, "Thy kingdom come."

Prayer is co-operation.

But this is not the whole nor the chief reason for this petition. We are not praying merely for our own benefit. The fact is that prayer, as taught in the New Testament, is something more than petition; it is co-operation. We cannot explain all its working any more than we can the mystery of electricity, but somehow, when a man with a hot and eager heart prays with the prayer of faith for the coming of the kingdom, he helps God bring in that kingdom.

The contagion of mental ideas and moral ideals seems a fact, although it is not yet wholly explained. Mark Twain one time remarked that nothing is wholly original. He implied that ideas are floating around in the air from brain to brain like carrier pigeons. The successful author, like Noah, only puts out his hand and draws some particular dove into his own ark, writing down the message it carries. That is, of course, an exaggerated conception, but the reader of the history of literature will find many evidences of the community of thought. Why at the same time should a trained young collegian and a rural Quaker lad feel the blowing of the breath of poetry? It was so that, each unknown to the other, Longfellow and Whittier advanced together to the throne of the

American heart. The solidarity of humanity, sometimes crudely taught, is nevertheless a fact. Somehow we are each part of the great human whole.

We may think of the human race as a tree. In one branch there stirs the sap and life of a heart-deep prayer for the coming of the kingdom. Immediately the whole tree feels the throb and the thrill of it. Professor Coe says, "No man can truly pray and leave the universe as it was before." These explanations are, of course, far from exhaustive and satisfactory. The fact remains, however, that all students of the progress of the kingdom of God recognize prayer as an important factor in its development.

Dr. Olin A. Curtis indicates that the Holy Spirit will do something for every human heart, He will do more where the gospel of Christ is clearly preached and consistently lived, He will do His most and His best in an atmosphere electric with intercessory prayer. It necessarily follows since, as Dr. E. A. Dunham says, "Prayer is one of the most effective forms of Christian service," that one of the finest contributions we can make to the coming of the kingdom is to *spread the area electric* with intercessory prayer.

More than words.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to add that this conception of prayer makes it more than saying words. On the one hand the spirit of prayer finds the very depths of our own heart life and baptizes our lives with something of the yearning of Gethsemane. On the other hand it drives us to eager action. No man, unless affliction necessitates it, can make prayer a substitute for service without suffering the decay of his prayer life as a penalty.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does our present industrial system help or hinder the coming of the kingdom of God?
2. To bring in the kingdom of God what institutions or individuals must be cast out?
3. Does the fact that we are a much more silent people in personal testimony than the earlier generation strengthen or weaken our Christian convictions? Are we finding other ways to express our religious ideals?
4. As illustrating the contagion of ideas, find the circumstances of the occasion when Helen Keller was accused of plagiarism.
5. What was the relation between prayer and the revivals of religion you have known?
6. Is the modern tabernacle evangelistic campaign usually born of prayer?
7. Are we apt to pray over our Sunday school and regular church activities as we do for special evangelistic efforts?
8. What is the bearing of intercessory prayer on the cause of missions?

PRAYING FOR MATERIAL THINGS

Give us this day our daily bread. Luke xi, 3.

THE WISHING BRIDGE

Among the legends sung or said
Along our rocky shore
The Wishing Bridge of Marblehead
May well be sung once more.

An hundred years ago (so ran
The old-time story) all
Good wishes said above its span
Would, soon or late, befall.

If pure and earnest, never failed
The prayer of man or maid
For him who on the deep sea sailed,
For her at home who stayed.

Once thither came two girls from school,
And wished in childish glee:
And one would be a queen and rule,
And one the world would see.

Time passed; with change of hopes and fears,
And in the self-same place,
Two women, gray with middle years,
Stood, wondering, face to face.

With wakened memories, as they met,
They queried what had been:
"A poor man's wife am I, and yet,"
Said one, "I am a queen.

"My realm a little homestead is,
Where, lacking crown and throne,
I rule by loving services
And patient toil alone."

The other said: "The great world lies
Beyond me as it laid;
O'er love's and duty's boundaries
My feet have never strayed.

"I see but common sights of home,
Its common sound I hear,
My widowed mother's sick-bed room
Sufficeth for my sphere.

"I read to her some pleasant page
Of travel far and wide,
And in a dreamy pilgrimage
We wander side by side.

"And when, at last, she falls asleep,
My book becomes to me
A magic glass: my watch I keep,
But all the world I see.

"A farm-wife queen your place you fill,
While fancy's privilege
Is mine to walk the earth at will,
Thanks to the Wishing Bridge."

"Nay, leave the legend for the truth,"
The other cried, "and say
God gives the wishes of our youth
But in His own best way!"

—*John Greenleaf Whittier.*

LESSON IV

PRAYING FOR MATERIAL THINGS

Jesus was practical.

A negro preacher once reminded his people of their duty and his needs by the expressive statement, "See here, brethren, do you think I can preach on earth and board in heaven?" One characteristic of the teaching of Jesus was that it was intensely practical. He met people where they were living. He never ignored the material surroundings of the lives of the people and their material needs. He did not expect them to board in heaven.

Many of His miracles were performed with the evident purpose of making people more comfortable in a perfectly human and material fashion.

Occasionally very pious people have questioned whether it is right to pray for material benefits. They have tried to spiritualize this petition for daily bread by making it refer to spiritual grace. I do not believe they have correctly understood Jesus. He was not at all the kind of religious leader who would give hungry children "daily food" books for Christmas. It would be much more like Him to serve a turkey dinner. Some would have insisted on closing that camp meeting in the desert where He preached with an altar service. Instead Jesus furnished refreshments and sent the people home. Jesus was intensely practical, and the thoughtful student of His life and teaching will readily conclude that this petition for daily bread is a praying for material benefits.

God is liberal.

Because the expression "daily bread" is used, some have thought that this refers to the bare necessities of life, that it may be all right to pray for what we actually need but not for what we desire. Those who say so have forgotten two important truths. One is that God is no sparing economist. If He had been, He would have left out of His world the superfluous flowers "that waste their sweetness on the desert air" and the birds too small for game, whose only use is to sing. He would not have wasted so many stars in the "infinite meadows of heaven." You cannot study the book of Nature as the book of Grace without realizing that God is liberal and generous. The other truth to remember is that this prayer begins "Our Father." The joy of a father is to give his children not merely bread, but butter and cake and a little candy, too. I think it is right and proper to pray not only for what we barely need but for what we really desire. Our Father is not poor. "He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands."

Because He is our Father.

I knew an old man who said he did not pray for things; he felt that God was his Father and knew what he needed before he asked; and that he did not intend to bother Him by begging. But if God is our Father, is not that fact one reason why He will not give things to us indiscriminately with no thought of whether or not they are good for us? If He is our Father He is first of all responsible for our moral and spiritual development. And may it not be true that the eager, filial faith of humble prayer helps to get us ready to receive the blessing He is glad to give?

Answering prayer.

Accepting the truths we have already considered, some have leaped to the conclusion that the correct doctrine of prayer is that we will receive at once everything we ask and that if we have faith and fervor enough we can coerce God to give us anything we want when we want it. In a subsequent chapter we shall consider the fact that the Bible does not teach that all prayers or any prayers are answered unconditionally "whether or no." We can readily see that the fatherhood of God must be the determining factor in the granting of petitions for material benefits. If God is a true Father He must always consider what is best for His children.

A mother was languidly resting in a hammock reading a novel. Her baby in the carriage began to cry vociferously. Without looking up from her book the mother said to the nurse girl, "Mary, give that child what he wants." "But, ma'am," the nurse maid protested. "There are no 'buts' about it," said the mother crossly. "Give that child what he wants." Thereupon the cries of the child became shrieks and the nurse maid replied grimly, "He has it, ma'am. It is a hornet." Who of us has not sometimes prayed for what we afterwards saw was a hornet? Should we not be grateful that God is a true Father who gives us only what is best for us?

God's responsibility as a Father also determines something of the method He uses in answering our prayers. When I was a freshman in the high school, on account of absence because of illness I got behind in the Latin class. I found myself with several chapters to make up. It happened that I had discovered that the teacher possessed a special teacher's edition

of the book we were studying that printed the translation directly under the text, a sort of a proper pedagogical pony. It occurred to me that with the assistance of that book and my ready memory I could soon catch up with the class. I went to her and, explaining my difficulty, asked to borrow the book. She refused to lend it, blushing a little because I had discovered that she had it, and showed me instead a much slower way of making up my Latin. I did not know it at the time, but she was a wise teacher! She knew that the only benefit that comes from studying *Latin* comes from *studying* Latin, and that the slow road was the only safe one.

Many times, to be true to His ethical concern, our Father God must answer our prayers by a similar method. The important thing is not only giving to us our daily bread but also giving it to us in such a way that our lives shall be made better and stronger. Great characters have been produced, great souls have been grown by the slow answer to unwearied prayer.

The prayer for daily bread is often answered by the opportunity for daily toil. Henry Ward Beecher says, "Industry reaps what prayer sows." The prayer for patience is sometimes answered by the verification of an old rule, "Tribulation worketh patience."

The great conclusion we may draw from the truth of His divine Fatherhood is that God is never indifferent to a praying heart. Even when we pray for the "hornet," while He does not carelessly say to the angels, "Give that child what he wants," on the other hand, He does not ignore our eager petition. He finds the real need behind the desire and answers more intelligently than we ask. The worst mistake

we can make regarding prayer for any particular thing we desire is not to pray at all.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Give incidents in the life of Jesus of His care for the material comfort of His followers. Do you find anything in His teaching about the unreality of matter?

2. Give proofs from nature and scripture showing that God cares for the gratification of our æsthetic desires as well as our actual necessities. Harriet Beecher Stowe tells of an old New England dame who divided all flowers into two classes, those whose "blows" when dried would be good for medicine and those that would not. How many flowers would be eliminated by such a classification and what would become of the artists and poets?

3. Was Hezekiah praying for a "hornet" when he asked that his life might be spared? Read his biography and give your answer.

4. What do you think of the statement of the Scripture that God gave to the children of Israel what they asked for on a certain occasion but gave them *leanness of soul*?

5. Were the conscientious Southerners who prayed for the triumph of the Confederacy praying for a hornet?

6. If in answer to the prayer of Methodism God had miraculously given our missionary leaders one hundred seventy-five million dollars, do you think that would have been as good for the church as the campaign of intercession, education and stewardship?

7. If your church should pray for money to pay its expenses, would it be a good thing for the answer to come from an "unknown friend" through the next mail?

PRAYING FOR HELP TO BE GOOD

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Luke xi, 4.

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men, we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed by thought, word, and deed, against thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, to the honor and glory of thy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify thy holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

LESSON V

PRAYING FOR HELP TO BE GOOD

The prayer-book and the Christ.

The quotations at the beginning of this chapter from the ritual for the sacramental service came to us like some old musical masterpiece, played upon the organ of a cathedral. And they express in language that each succeeding generation finds appropriate to the everlasting heart-hunger of humanity. The consciousness of need for forgiveness and the longing for personal purity find a large place in the prayer life of all who are morally awake.

As we read them over thoughtfully, however, and then read again the simple petition our Master taught us, we are impressed with the fact that, while both are helpful, He knew best how to say it. He knew best how to teach us to pray. There is a certain ornateness, an exaggerated wordiness to the prayer from the ritual that does not sound exactly like a child talking to a Father, even a penitent child talking to the Holy Father. I mention this, not to criticise the ritual nor to suggest any change. It is good for us even as the music to which I have compared it is good for us, but if we want to learn how to pray for help to be good we can learn more directly from Jesus than we can from this noble ritual service.

The intensely practical character of the teaching of Jesus about prayer is brought out clearly in this contrast. He does not tell us to prefix our plea for

forgiveness with a eulogy addressed to the Deity nor with a highly colored statement of our own sorrow and contrition. He simply asks us when we come for forgiveness to have the forgiving spirit ourselves, to be able to say honestly, "Forgive us as we forgive others."

Forgiveness and action.

The difficulty of pushing away from our hearts hatred and resentment is clearly understood. Nor can we ever fully do it without "the grace of God assisting us." I do not think that even this prayer means that we must be perfectly sure that all the emotional dust connected with resentment is brushed out of the corners of our heart before we dare to pray. It simply means that we do the best we can at it. In other words we must regulate the part of it that can be regulated by our own *action* or *volition*. A study of the New Testament teaching about loving our neighbors and loving our enemies will, I think, convince one that primarily it is always action that is referred to. We are not to try by penance and prayer to pound ourselves into an affectionate mood. We are rather to *do* the kind and helpful deed, and the emotional reaction will follow. We are to love with our wills and our service first, and then naturally we will love with our hearts. We are to forgive with our wills and our service, and then we will forgive with our hearts. "Do good to those that hate you." And if, as frequently happens, there is no direct opportunity for service, we are to set the switch of our will and pray for them. "Pray for those that spitefully use you." A moment's thought will convince us that this is different from praying that resent-

ment be taken out of our own heart. It is sending our prayers not inward but outward.

Working with God.

The underlying principle of this whole passage is that our prayer for moral help is not, as some would think, merely a channel that connects us with a transforming power which we passively receive. It implies an active co-operation on our part. No matter how fervid our petition, God will not make us any better than we really desire and purpose to be.

Social responsibility.

And what is perhaps more surprising, praying for individual moral help cannot be a mere individual thing. We cannot, even when we are on our knees pleading for pardon and purity, escape our social responsibilities. We say to God, "Grant me Thy forgiveness," and God says to us, "Have you forgiven your brother? What have you done about it?" We say to God, "Love me, O my Father," and God says to us, "Do you love your brother? What have you done about it?"

Not into temptation.

The second part of the petition we are considering has caused much questioning. Why should we ask God not to lead us into temptation? I do not pretend to give a satisfactory exposition of this particular passage, but I think the couplet should be considered together, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Moreover commas or parentheses setting off the puzzling part might help us to get the

full sweep of the prayer, "Lead us (not into temptation) but deliver us from evil." The prayer is that instead of leading us into temptation, on the contrary God will give us deliverance from that which would drag us down to sin. The negative parenthesis is but to emphasize the positive prayer. At any rate, I am convinced that the passage as a whole is a prayer for help to be good. It is the same that is more elaborately expressed in the collect, "Cleanse thou the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit."

We cannot be good alone.

The very heart of the evangelical faith is that we cannot *be good* alone. We need help direct and real from our Father God "through Jesus Christ our Lord." Sometimes it is well for us to reverently remind ourselves of the cost of God to this help. While perhaps He could make a million worlds without getting tired, it cost of His own heart-blood to bring to us the help that will "deliver us from evil." And without this help we ourselves are weak and inefficient in our efforts to live lives of moral victory.

The climax of the prayer.

In this prayer for forgiveness and deliverance from evil we are very close to the heart of the Gospel of Christ and our greatest human needs. While we can hardly claim that this prayer of our Lord is arranged with the thought of approaching a climax, yet I believe this last petition is the most important of all. The coming of the kingdom for which we pray in the first petition is very important, but after all that kingdom must be composed of individuals, and the

glory of that kingdom must be spiritual and moral. Therefore, the individuals that compose it must be moral and spiritual. But we are not naturally of that kind. Our record is all against us. "We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God." We need forgiveness.

And we need more than that or else after having been forgiven we will sin again. We need to be led in the paths of righteousness. We need to be delivered from evil by having our hearts cleansed by the inspiration of the Spirit Divine. We need moral help from God.

The prayer for daily bread is also important, but our daily bread will be bitter unless we have moral victory in our lives. The material blessings we ask from our Father require for their enjoyment the contented spirit and the glad heart which come only from an answer to this last petition.

This also should be said regarding prayer for help to be good. The answer to such prayer, according to a cloud of witnesses, is swift, certain and direct. As we have already seen, for our own moral good the answer to prayer for material things is sometimes a slow process. Not the "pony translation" is given us but strength for hours of study. And even in the working out of the prayer for the coming of the kingdom, "the mills of God grind slowly." But the faintest prayer for grace to overcome a temptation, for forgiveness, and for daily moral victory brings a swift, glad answer. It is in our moral life, in our sincere struggle to be good that the good God comes to call without ringing the bell and from the conscious and certain answers to such prayers we gain faith to trust for all the rest.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do the confessions of Augustine represent a true Christian attitude in prayer?
2. Should the Allied Nations forgive Germany before seeking pardon for their own national sins?
3. Could a man be a Christian if he had nothing to do with anybody else? Is an individual Christian experience of pardon and purity possible without social service?
4. Does God ever lead us into temptation?
5. What is His way of leading us out of temptation—taking the allurements out of sin or taking sin out of us?
6. If you could pray but one of these petitions in the Lord's prayer which would you choose. Why?

CONDITIONS OF PREVAILING PRAYER

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.
Psalms lxvi, 18.

Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss that ye may
consume it upon your lusts. James vi, 3.

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believ-
ing, ye shall receive. Matt. xxi, 22.

If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall
ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you. John xv, 7.

Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name He will
give it you. John xvi, 23.

I said, "Let me walk in the fields."

He said, "Nay, walk in the town."

I said, "There are no flowers there."

He said, "No flowers, but a crown!"

I said, "But the air is thick

And fogs are veiling the sun."

He answered, "Souls are sick,

There are souls in the dark, undone."

I pleaded for time to be given.

He said, "Is it hard to decide?"

It will not seem hard in heaven

To have followed the steps of your guide."

Then into His Hand went mine

And into my heart came He.

And I walk in the light divine

The path I had feared to see.

—George MacDonald.

LESSON VI

CONDITIONS OF PREVAILING PRAYER

Superficial folks talk as if answers to prayer were given as freely and unconditionally as baking powder samples, as if God were a good natured old grandfather who indulgently gave his children everything they asked. As a matter of fact, a study of the Bible must convince us of what is indicated by a study of life, that there is no law of God more carefully guarded than the law of answered prayer.

The moral condition.

In the first place, a prayer to claim any consideration at all must have the backing of a sincere righteous purpose. The psalmist sensed the situation when he said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." The writer of these lessons remembers that once, as a child, in spite of the noble example of Washington, he strayed a bit from the road of veracity. Following the impulse of his heart, he prayed that he might not be found out. *It didn't work.* The Lord did not do a thing to "shoo" his parents off his trail. But not only is it true that prayer regarding the lie would be useless, but prayers for any other purpose would not be heard while that lie lodged there. So terribly insistent is the God of answered prayer on the ways of righteousness. It paralyzes our glibness and drives us to our knees.

This explains why God could not answer the pray-

ers of America for peace while the viper of slavery was warming himself in our midst. And God could not answer the prayers of the world for peace while Prussian militarism was met merely by selfish indifference. The same principle applies to institutions and to individuals. Can we pray for the kingdom of God in America if our commercial life or industrial life is shot through with purposeful and selfish greed?

Unselfish prayer.

Moreover, prayer to be answered must have an unselfish motive and aim. The apostle James said, "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it on your lusts." I do not think this means that we should never ask for comforts and blessings for ourselves. The conception of God as a Father who loves His children makes impossible such a conclusion. It means rather that unless we have caught the vision of stewardship, unless we have learned how to share, we are not in a position to have our prayers answered.

The prayer of faith.

The important and oft-repeated condition for answered prayer is *faith*. Indeed, one cannot escape the conviction that the New Testament teaches the absolute omnipotence of the prayer of faith. All things are possible to him that believeth.

We are apt, I think, to fall into a slipshod, easy idea of faith and to think of it as a presumption into which we can pound ourselves. There is a vast difference between learning to believe and learning to "make believe." Faith is not only a cause but it is

first of all an effect. I have faith in my friend because I have had dealings with him. I know him and, therefore, I trust him. So faith in God, faith in Christ comes from a spiritual fellowship with Him. Of course, at the time of the preliminary act of faith at conversion one has not much knowledge based on experience, but even so God gives light enough so that when a man takes the first step he knows he is taking sides with what is best in life.

Faith in days of Christian maturity comes from a knowledge and fellowship which is the fruit of obedience and experience. Such a faith will never degenerate into presumption, for, while the possessor thereof knows God can remove mountains, he knows God so well that he is willing to trust Him with the mountains without interference, unless there should be borne in upon him the spiritual conviction that it is God's will for him to co-operate with his prayers. But the power of miracles, we need to remember, is their unusualness. Too many moving mountains would make them common and unnoticed.

But while we should avoid an easy and wordy presumption, the message of the Scripture is that we are perhaps even more apt to have an un-Christian timidity. We have so great a God! His promises are so wonderful, "There's a plenty in Father's bank above." History has been made by men of faith, faith in some inward conviction that God put into the heart of a Columbus, a Fulton, a Morse, or an Edison. We need holy daring in our prayer life. Our fellowship with God will always make us say naturally, "If it be thy will," but there are so many splendid things that are revealed to be His will in our own lives and the development of His kingdom. We are so prone to hug

the shore and shiver. We need to hear that divine Master of fishermen say to us as He said of old, "Launch out into the deep."

And my words abide in you.

One condition of answered prayer was mentioned by our Lord in his farewell sermon that is very important. It is this, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." Not only is the first conditional clause important, and it is very important, but so is the second. Somehow the words of Jesus are spirit and life. And so are the words of the inspired apostles. A life saturated with the teachings of the Bible develops a faith that brings answers to prayer. We cannot then separate our life of prayer from our life of Bible study. We must, if we would talk effectively with God, let God talk with us. A prayerful and thoughtful study of the Bible is a condition of answered prayer.

In His name.

The last condition we need to remember is stated in the words of the Master, "in my name." Our prayers must be the kind that He would endorse. This should save us from wild and unintelligent praying. The mere closing of a petition with the perfunctory postscript, "In the name of Jesus," does not at all get at the heart of this condition. We must pray the kind of a prayer to which we can put His name. This implies a thoughtful and careful study of His teaching and His life. To our shame, we must confess that most of us give little study to our prayer life. We

simply ask for things like fussy children. To pray the prayer to which we can sign the name of Jesus without being guilty of forgery is a high attainment, possible to the simple but not possible to the superficial and intellectually lazy.

And with the study of His life and teachings there must be also through the Spirit a daily fellowship with Him. Only so can we know His will. A complete knowledge of what the Bible contains cannot be obtained by a study that is merely intellectual. A critic once said to Turner: "I never saw such sunsets as you paint." "Don't you wish you could?" was the reply; and his answer might be truly given by many a devout Bible student to some cold critic. It is really true that the Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. Such an experience, mystical but practical, is necessary if we would learn what the Master meant when He said we were to pray, "In His name."

As fellowship with a great scholar cures us of our intellectual pride, so the more real our fellowship is with the Christ, the more we feel our inability to dictate to the Infinite, the more spontaneously we find ourselves saying nevertheless, "Not my will, but thine be done."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What changes do you think we ought to make in our industrial system in America before we pray for peace and prosperity?

2. Is it right for a church to pray for an endowment?

3. Would you recommend that all our philanthropic and educational institutions be financed on the "faith plan" of George Muller? Why or why not?

4. What is your personal plan for devotional study of the Bible?

5. What is the difference in meaning of the two expressions, "In Jesus' name," and "For Jesus' sake," with which we close our prayers? Which is more Scriptural and which carries the most practical meaning?

UNGRANTED PRAYERS

And he went a little further and fell on his face and prayed saying, O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will but as thou wilt. He went again the second time and prayed, saying, O, my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done. Matt. xxvi, 39 and 42.

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me, and He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I take pleasure in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.—2 Cor. xii, 7-9.

A BALLAD OF TREES AND THE MASTER

Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forspent, forspent.
Into the woods my Master came,
Forspent with love and shame.
But the olives they were not blind to Him,
The little gray leaves were kind to Him:
The thorn-tree had a mind to Him
When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,
And He was well content.
Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with death and shame.
When Death and Shame would woo Him last,
From under the trees they drew Him last:
'Twas on a tree they slew Him—last
When out of the woods He came.

—*Sidney Lanier.*

LESSON VII

UNGRANTED PRAYERS

The easy explanation.

It is said by people who want to hold to their theory that God always answers prayer, that He sometimes answers "No." As we have seen in the previous lesson that particular theory is incorrect. A God who was never silent would not be a good Father.

The statement is straining a metaphor too far. Of course, what they mean is that when they do not get the things for which they prayed God has answered "No." That is an explanation too easy to be scientific and too superficial to be real. Any idol worshipper could account for the apparent helplessness of his gods by that method.

The deeper meaning.

There is, however, a more profound sense in which we may hold true the statement that God answers "No" and *yet really answers*. The case of Paul illustrates the point. He had a "thorn in the flesh" which became a messenger of Satan to buffet him.

Whatever that experience was—and we surely know Paul well enough to be sure it wasn't something that was merely uncomfortable—it drove Paul to persistent and almost heart breaking prayer. "For this I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me." But the thing he asked for he did not receive. The thorn evidently did not depart! Instead,

however, there came to his heart a mighty baptism of sufficient grace, for the Lord said: "My grace is sufficient for thee."

The case of Jesus we must handle very reverently. Just how the human and the divine blended in His wonderful life during "the days of His flesh" we cannot know. Certainly when He slept in the ship on the Sea of Galilee, although many of us believe that all knowledge was His, yet it did not at that moment fill His consciousness. He slept as tired Peter would sleep, ignorant of the raging storm. May this same reasoning not apply also to the night when He wept in the garden?

He prayed that the cup might be removed from Him and while many ingenious explanations have been offered to prove that the request was granted, the record does not so read. The very spirit of resignation with which He finally closed His pleading seems to me to prove it was not: "Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." He was "like unto his brethren" in this experience also—for who of us have not prayed to a silent sky?

But as in the case of the apostle, so with the Christ, there came the sufficient grace. Not the removal of the cup but strength to drink it! Not escape from the cross but ministering angels!

The great purpose.

In the case of Christ we can see that the answering "Yes" to His prayer would have meant infinite loss to the world. While we do not understand the mystery of the atoning death of Jesus, the Scriptures certainly teach its awful necessity. Jesus Himself said

it must be. ' If in the hour of His weakness, when His strength almost failed, God had weakly granted His petition, we do not dare to think of the result.

And as it was with the cup of the Master, so we may believe it was with the thorn of Paul—and the “cups” and “thorns” of countless others. There are some things in our lives, bitter and hard, that it would be a loss either to ourselves or to the world for prayer to eliminate. We shall thank God for them in the afterwhiles.

In the dark.

That we do not understand it all now should not surprise us. Even Paul, whose vision was so clear, could not understand the why of his thorn and prayed, submissively no doubt, but earnestly and ignorantly, for its removal. And there came a time when even the divine Christ was in the dark and tried to push from His lips the cup He came all the way to Gethsemane to drink. Faith is keeping hold of God's hand in the dark. Therefore, if the sun never went down it would be bad for our souls.

The finest answer of God.

And yet we need to emphasize the wonderful truth that although Paul and Jesus did not get what they cried for, their prayers did not fall unheard in the night air. God did not say “Yes,” *but He answered!* In each case what he gave was better than what was denied. It would be the height of absurdity to say that things were the same with them as if they had not prayed.

When Paul arose the next morning the thorn was still there and it hurt as much as ever. Outwardly

there was no difference. Not always, but often, our prayers make no outward difference. But in Paul's heart next morning there was so much difference that he started a song. "Therefore, I take pleasure in necessities, in persecution, in distresses for Christ's sake."

And after Jesus prayed in the garden the situation remained apparently unchanged. Not always, but often, after we pray the situation remains unchanged. The Jews were as angry as ever. The disciples were as sleepy as ever. The feet of the soldiers on the way to arrest Him were not stayed. They were still "swift to shed blood," but who can doubt that when Jesus came out of the garden He was indeed "full content with grief and shame," and that the vision of the joy that was set before Him enabled Him to endure the cross?

Some of the most wonderful answers to prayer do not come when miracles are wrought in the world of events, but when, so far as a direct answer to a particular petition is concerned, God answers "No."

We know not what to pray for.

It is, therefore, often true that even after the Spirit has helped our infirmities we do not know what to pray for. We are in the garden where God wants to grow the lovely flower of faith, and it takes dark, dewy nights as well as sunlit mornings to make it grow. Even when our vision is clearest "we see through a glass darkly." Even when our knowledge is greatest "we know in part." Even when our spirit is most willing "the flesh is weak." After we have done our best to pray intelligently, we may be asking for the wrong thing.

Be careful for nothing.

Shall we, therefore, stop praying for definite things? Shall we simply say "Thy will be done" and nothing more? The concrete examples before us are against such a conclusion.

Probably Paul would not have received that glad baptism of grace if he had not prayed definitely for the removal of the thorn. A mere passive submission is apt to degenerate into a melancholy meekness that is anæmic and un-Christian. The bold, humble, earnest prayer of a confident child of God for a definite thing gets the spiritual life in such a condition that God can give. Reverently we suggest that there was a very definite connection between the prayer in the garden and the victory on the cross.

That old text "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it"—sometimes used as an excuse for ministerial laziness—suggests a metaphor not elegant but beautifully expressive. Who has not seen the nest of little birds waiting in that expectant mood for the food from the mother provider? Prayer for definite things opens wide the mouth of the soul!

Daniel Steele, the Greek scholar, prayed that God would make him a great evangelist. To that particular prayer God answered "No"—but the fact that Daniel Steele prayed that prayer makes him different from all other Greek scholars. The Spirit of God that he hoped and desired would be in his public evangelistic message glimmers like sunlight through the trees in everything written by his scholarly pen.

"Therefore, be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God," conscious of the fact that

whether or not you get the very thing you ask, God will supply every need.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Were Stonewall Jackson's prayers for the victory of the Confederacy answered?
2. Can we be sure that it is always the will of God to heal the sick? Do we usually know? What, then, shall we do about it?
3. Make a list of those whose thorns with "sufficient grace" have been a blessing to the world, such as:
Milton with his blindness. Read his ode to his blindness.
Fannie Crosby.
Byron Palmer, the author of God's White Throne. Find the story of his life.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. Luke xxii, 31-32.

I pray for them . . . for them which thou hast given me . . . that they may be one, as we are. John xvii, 9-11.

For their cause I bow my knees unto the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge; that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Eph. iii, 14-19.

More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the frain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

—*Tennyson.*

LESSON VIII

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

The answer of life.

The life of Jesus in the concrete answers to many of our abstract questionings.

Whenever we have been inclined to debate the question as to whether a perfectly pure soul could be tempted to sin, the story of the Christ in the wilderness, in a hand-to-hand combat with the devil, calls off the debate.

And to the query as to whether, after all, it does any good to pray for others, the remembrance of Christ in the garden and the prayer He offered there is the best reply.

Personalizing our prayer.

In our Lesson "Praying for the Kingdom," we have considered somewhat the part of intercessory prayer. We have seen that prayer is a distinct spiritual force which God used in bringing in His kingdom.

The purpose of this present lesson is that we may learn to concentrate and personalize our prayer "Thy kingdom come." I knew a minister who always said in his prayer on Sunday morning, "God bless the great world for which Christ died." While for educational purposes that particular petition was doubtless valuable its force as a prayer may be doubted. The average prayer of even the most pious if spread over all the world would be too thin to make much of an impression.

The example of Jesus and the apostles is that we should pray for *folks that we know*. Indeed, Jesus kept this beautifully in mind when in His greatest of intercessory prayers He very carefully stated, "I pray *not* for the world, but for *these*."

There is nothing that will transform the mere empty, good natured petition of words for the evangelization of the community or world into a living force like making it a definite prayer for definite persons.

Evangelistic praying.

One secret of the success of the average revival campaign is definite praying. Before we have prayed in a general, sincere and superficial fashion for the unconverted. In the intensive campaign we find ourselves praying for John Smith and Mary Jones. And what we do in revival seasons we ought to do "out of season" as well. The graded system in the Church School and the unit system in the parish give opportunity for this kind of praying. It is thus again that our prayer life is linked up with our social life—for if we are to pray for definite folks that we know we must certainly learn to know them.

Prayer for missions.

This also connects our prayer life very definitely with our missionary education. On the one hand to simply say glibly, "God bless the heathen world" is almost a mockery. On the other hand to pray merely for those who are our geographical neighbors is provincial. We must learn about definite sections of the great harvest field and about definite plans of missionary endeavors. We must take them into our hearts and wrap around them the warmth of intelli-

gent and definite prayer. Only so can we help God save the world.

It also links our prayer life with our stewardship and our service. We certainly could not be mean enough to ask God to help folks whom we ourselves are doing nothing to help. The old minister who refused to offer prayer at the missionary convention until he had put something in the collection box was gloriously consistent.

-A mysterious reality.

There is a truth taught in the Scriptures concerning the real intercessory prayer that is full of wholesome comfort. We are apt to think that unless a prayer is immediately fruitful it is in vain. Yet Jesus prayed for Peter before he fell, when Satan had not yet sifted him as wheat. When he had weakly yielded to temptation, fallen into sin, and, in the bitterness of his shame, wept bitterly, *then* he felt the power of his Master's prayer that his "faith fail not."

And Jesus in His great intercession, prayed not only for His disciples but for those who should believe on them through their words—many of whom were not yet born. And you and I feel today the mighty unspent, uplifting force of that prayer in which we were included.

This is one of the real mysteries, but the mysterious realities of intercessory prayer are definitely aimed. It is a timeless thing. It outlives the lips that utter it. Many can say in the words of the Gospel song, "Mother's prayers *have followed me.*"

The method of God.

A study of the intercessory prayers of the Bible

surprises us with the fact that so many of them are for Christian disciples. The great passion of the Master's prayer, as we have seen, was not for the world, but for "them thou hast given me." Paul's great prayer is not for the Ephesian sinners but for the Ephesian saints that they may be saints indeed!

I do not believe this means that our hearts should not be evangelistically eager for outside folds. This is rather a light on God's way of saving communities and His world. A real revival in a town is, humanly speaking, impossible unless the Church of Christ in the community be lifted to higher levels of Christlikeness and service. And there is still a challenge to us in the fact that when Jesus was about to die that the world might be redeemed, He prayed not for the world, but that His disciples, then and forevermore, might be one:—"That the world might believe."

We need to remember that Paul, who well knew God's way of working, knew that what Ephesus needed was a company of disciples in whom Christ dwelt by faith, and who were filled with the fulness of God—and that Jesus knew that what the world needed was a united Church. This has a vital bearing on our prayer life, our program of service and our personal spiritual life.

By way of remembrance.

In conclusion it is well for us to remind ourselves again that prayer is not mere words. A religion whose leaders utter the most words in prayer can be perniciously unethical and hopelessly formal. Prayer is not so much what our lips say as what our lives say to God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Should we pray for people in whom we are not particularly interested just because someone requested us to do so?
2. What do you think of the prayer, "Bless all for whom we should pray"?
3. Would a definite "prayer list" be helpful to our class?
4. Has our class a special missionary field in which it is interested and for which you are praying?
5. Make a list of great Christian leaders whose mothers prayed for them.
6. How may we deepen the spiritual life of our church?
7. Give some steps that would hasten the bringing about of a united Christendom. Is organic union necessary? Is it desirable?
8. What is the meaning of the command, "Pray without ceasing"?

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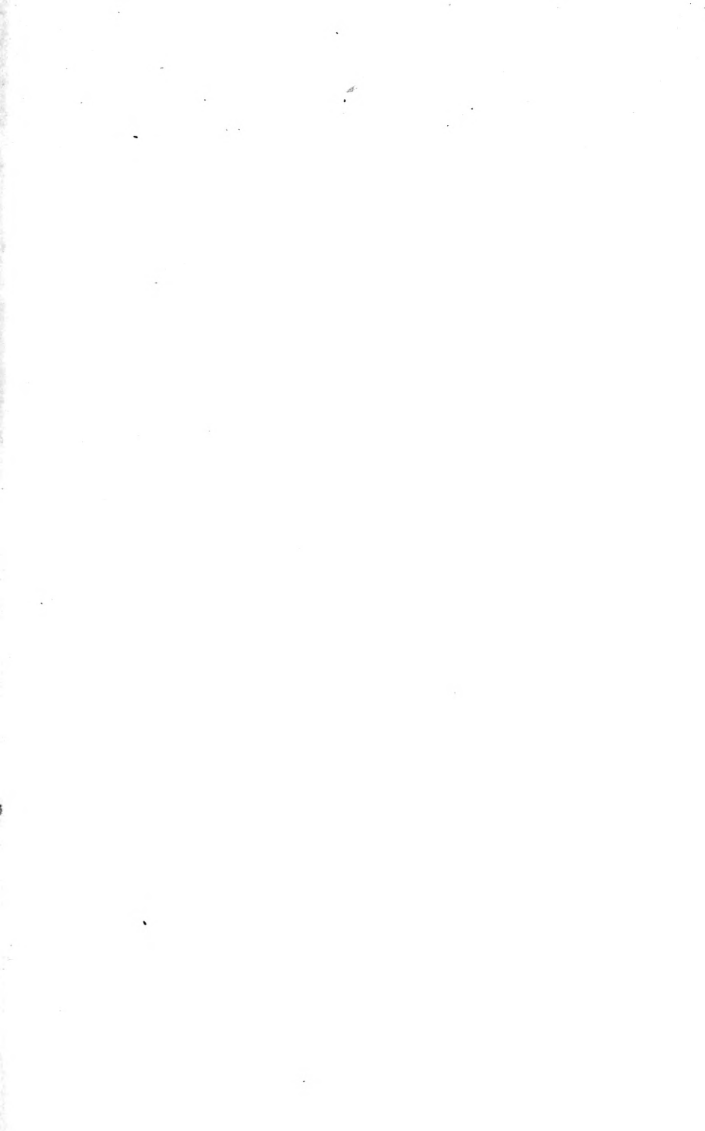
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