

Christian Retirement

Part 43

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

There cannot be a greater blessing imparted to us, than a spirit of prayer. It is the pledge of all other blessings. When it pleases God to bestow a spirit of prayer, every other spiritual blessing is, as it were, waiting to descend upon the seeking soul. The spirit of grace and supplication is closely connected with believing contrition. "I will pour upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and mourn."

A spirit of prayer implies faith in the promises of God, and an earnest desire for the promised blessings. It includes waiting and hoping. "I waited for the Lord," says David, "yes, I waited patiently for him." And what was the happy result? "He inclined his ear unto me, and heard me." Oh! it is a blessed state of heart, thus to wait upon God continually in the spirit of humble, fervent, believing prayer. Satan well knows the value of such a spirit, and therefore tries hard to prevent its exercise. He labors to extinguish this sacred fire, kindled in the soul by the Holy Spirit. He endeavors to disturb the mind; to ride upon the wings of the imagination; and to fill the soul with an almost endless succession of fleeting images.

This daily interruption of the enemy constitutes no small part of the Christian warfare. The believer feels greatly distressed, when his foolish heart thus wanders from its divine center. At such seasons his language is, Oh that I were "near, and like my God!" But alas! I groan, being burdened. My heart is pained within me. I am almost tempted to conclude that my experience of joy and peace is delusion.

If I am a child of God, why am I thus? And yet, I cannot but feel some encouragement from the thought, that if I were under the absolute control of natural corruption, I could not thus lament and mourn over its workings and deceits. Why do I groan, being burdened, if I feel no burden? And if I feel my burden, who has given me this spiritual sensibility? I know that in a natural state, man can neither mourn over, nor feel the weight of spiritual evils; it being one of the marks of unregeneracy to grow in love with, rather than groan under, sin.

If I am daily anxious to possess the spirit of prayer, to be inwardly renewed in the spirit of my mind, to be more under the influence of filial love and filial fear, may I not hope that a God of grace has indeed drawn me by his loving-kindness, and loved me with an everlasting love? Delightful thought! Is it too much to draw this happy conclusion? There is no merit in any creature, saint, or angel. The voice of sovereign grace is, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Oh! that I may be enabled by humble faith to lie at the foot of the cross; and there to view, with growing delight, the never-ending wonders of redeeming love! Such are the feelings of every true believer.

"Lord, bestow upon me this blessed spirit of prayer. Preserve me from the incursions of the enemy, from the wanderings of my wayward heart. Take the world out of my affections. Let not its image be painted upon my imagination. But let your own image be deeply engraven on my soul."

As we cannot live naturally without air, neither can we live spiritually without prayer. The latter is as necessary to the soul, as the former is to the body. A prayerless person is a Christless person. Living without God in the world, he must die without hope. The natural heart dislikes prayer, because it requires a frame of mind quite opposed to its corrupt views and feelings. If we feel an inward dislike to secret prayer; or if, when we pray, our hearts are habitually cold, and distracted by worldly cares and sinful imaginations; we cannot have a clearer proof of our being carnally minded, which is death.

To pray aright, we must see our wretchedness, we must feel our misery, we must acknowledge our guilt, pollution, and helplessness, we must lie at the foot of the cross, plead in faith the merits of a crucified Savior, renounce our own righteousness, supplicate forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, implore the gift of the Holy Spirit, hunger and thirst after righteousness, and pour out our souls in grateful acknowledgments for redeeming grace. Now all this is contrary to the natural man. It was, therefore, no small mark of the conversion of Saul, when Jesus said to Ananias, "Behold, he prays."

What an exalted privilege is prayer! How precious is the throne of grace! And yet, "What various hindrances we meet, In coming to a mercy-seat!" There is even in the believer at times, a painful backwardness to approach that throne, on which his Father sits in the mild radiance of covenant love. Yes, even in his happiest moments, when with filial confidence he draws near the mercy-seat, the artful enemy will labor hard to impede him in his work, and tempt him to give up the duty; well knowing that every relaxation in duty is a weakening of principle.

When such assaults are violent, the heart is grieved, and the believer is greatly discouraged. But if he really loves the exercise of prayer, and seeks opportunities for holding communion with God, although much hindered by foolish, wandering,

hated thoughts, let him not be induced to abandon the sacred work, which would only give the tempter an advantage over him.

When Satan casts his fiery darts, then must the soldier of Jesus Christ hold up the "shield of faith," and wield the weapon of "all prayer;" being assured that, in spite, of every opposition, victory shall be the glorious result. The divine command is, "Go forward." So did the Israelites when the Red Sea was before them, and the Egyptians behind them. Through the power of Jehovah, the mighty waters divided; a way was made for his ransomed to pass over; and they sang the high praises of their Redeemer, while their enemies lay dead upon the sea shore.

"So let all your enemies perish, Oh Lord: but let those who love you be as the sun when he goes forth in his might."

"How blessed you are, O Israel! Who else is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your protecting shield and your triumphant sword! Your enemies will bow low before you, and you will trample on their backs!" Deut. 33:29. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before you, and shall say, Destroy them."

Yes! all the spiritual enemies of the true Israel shall sink as lead in the mighty waters, in that day when Satan and his rebellious angels shall be cast into the lake of fire, never more to harass the glorified church of God, which shall shine as the sun forever and ever!

I desire, I long, I pray to be yours, Oh blessed Jesus,—a member of your mystical body—a sheep of your pasture.

Almighty Savior! grant unto me the spirit of prayer, that, with my whole heart, I may lift up my soul unto you. Open my understanding to understand the Scriptures. Incline my will to choose those things which are pleasing unto you. Fix my affections upon yourself, all—precious Redeemer. Sanctify my imagination; store my memory with spiritual treasures; sprinkle my conscience with your pardoning blood; cover me with your justifying righteousness.

Come and dwell, Oh divine Savior, in my heart by faith. Make my body the temple of the Holy Spirit; impress your divine image on my soul. Preserve me from the power and pollution of sin, the snares and wiles of Satan, the love and influence of the world; shed abroad your love in my heart; establish me in the faith of the Gospel. May I ever receive you in all your glorious offices and characters as my only, my complete salvation.

Give me grace, Oh blessed Jesus, to believe in the dignity and majesty of your person as the eternal Word, the everlasting Son of the Father, of equal power, glory, and eternity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. May I behold you with

admiring love and gratitude as the Virgin's Son, lying in the manger; taking upon you my nature; that so, being God and man in one Christ, you might satisfy eternal justice, and bring in everlasting righteousness.

Oh! may I contemplate, with mingled feelings of grief and joy, your agony and bloody sweat, your cross and passion; your precious death and burial;—with grief, when I reflect on sin, my own sin, which nailed you to the accursed tree;—with joy, when I meditate on your dying love; a love, which angels cannot fathom; a love, which fills the bright intelligences above with wonder and delight; a love, which fills each humble soul on earth with gratitude and praise!

Jesus! I would—Oh! that in the humble confidence of faith, I may say, I do receive you as my only, my beloved Savior!

Impart into my soul this spiritual, this practical, this experimental knowledge of yourself, who are the light of the world, and the wisdom of your people.

Oh! wash my guilty soul in your cleansing blood, you, who are the bleeding propitiatory sacrifice, the Lamb of God.

Now that you are ascended up on high, and have entered into the holiest of all, plead the cause of a poor wretched sinner, who looks unto you as the Lord my righteousness— my great Melchisedek. Exert your regal power in my soul, Oh king of saints, and destroy all your enemies and mine. Subdue every rebellious inclination of my heart, which opposes itself to your will. Bring all my powers into subjection to your divine authority; and sit upon the throne of my heart, the Lord of every motion there.

Oh! may I delight in the contemplation of those soul-reviving characters which you sustain in the covenant of grace! You are the Redeemer, Mediator, Justifier, Surety, Advocate, and Purifier of your people; their friend and counselor, their shepherd and guide, their husband and guardian.

And Oh! how beautiful are the images which the Holy Spirit employs to shadow forth your excellencies. You are "the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys;" "a plant of renown" You are "the true vine", which supplies each living branch with fruitfulness and verdure. You are "the fountain," in which all may wash and be clean—the rock on which your church is immovably fixed—the way in which your people journey to the heavenly Canaan—the door, by which they enter into the covenant of grace —the day-star, which illuminates their path and guides them safely to glory. You are the bread of life, the tree manna whose flesh is food indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed.

Oh I may I daily feed upon you by faith in my heart with thanksgiving, until I see you in the heavenly paradise, and taste through eternal ages the sweetness of redeeming love!

Oh! may I prize a throne of grace,
Accessible in every place;
Wherever I lift my soul in prayer,
On earth or sea, my God is there.

If in the hour of deep distress,
Its woes, my heart in sighs express;
A sweet return of love I find,
To sooth the sorrows of the mind.

Or when the grateful odors rise
Of praise—delightful sacrifice!
My soul expands with joys unknown
To every bosom, but its own.

Ah! where proceeds this sacred love,
Descending gently from above?
To you, Savior, and your blood,
I owe this precious gift of God.

Oh! may I daily love you more,
Of blessings, you, the bounteous store;
On me let every grace descend,
Oh, Source of bliss—you sinner's friend!

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