

Conditions of Effectual Prayer

by Catherine Booth

To have our prayers answered, we must be in fellowship with Jesus, obey His commands, and be led by the Holy Spirit, and exercise faith in His promises.

Scripture: Mark 11:24

Topics: "Effective Prayer", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the importance of effective and prevailing prayer, emphasizing the conditions for receiving answers to prayers. She highlights the need for believers to abide in Jesus, have His words in them, ask in faith, and not waver. Catherine also stresses the significance of fellowship with God, obedience to His commands, the intercession of the Holy Spirit, and the exercise of faith in prayer. She warns against selfish prayers and encourages believers to pray with a heart burdened by the Holy Spirit for the salvation of souls.

Transcript

JOHN 15:7.--"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." MARK 11:24.--"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." JAMES 1:5-7.--"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." ROMANS 8:26, 27.--"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

I HAVE not taken the texts in the order in which they stand, but in the order in which they logically follow one another, and in which they elucidate the subject.

And now, in the few remarks I wish to make, I shall try to embody answers to the letters I have received on this subject. There is no experience, perhaps, more common in these days than this, nothing more constantly said to me by professing Christians: 'Well, I have prayed a long time for certain things, but I don't seem to get any answers to my prayers.' I often wonder such people don't give up praying altogether. I think I should if I never got answers.

Now, I say, this is a very God-dishonouring experience, and there must be something wrong somewhere when this is the case. There must be something wrong either with the suppliants or the Giver. Oh! I feel often what a deeply God-dishonouring thing it is when Christians meet, as they frequently do, up and down the country, to pray for a revival, to pray for a specific thing in their Churches and in their families, and it never comes.

Some years ago, when the wave of revival was sweeping over Ireland and America, you know the Churches in this country held united prayer-meetings to pray that it might come to England; but it did not come, and the infidels wagged their heads, and wrote in their newspapers: 'See the Christians?' God is either deaf or gone a-hunting, for they have had prayer-meetings all over the land for a revival, and it has not come.' Oh! how my cheeks burned with shame as I thought of it; how I mourned over it. I knew it was not because our God was asleep: not because His arm was shortened: not because His bowels of compassion did not yearn over sinners: not because He could not have poured out His Spirit and have given us the same glorious times of refreshing they had in other places. THAT WAS NOT THE REASON. There was only one reason, and that was, that His people asked amiss.

They did not understand the conditions of prevailing prayer. They did not fulfil them. If they had prayed till now, and maintained the same attitude, they would not have got the answer, because there are conditions to these promises, as to all other promises; and we may pray ourselves black in the face, if we do not comply with the conditions; God will never move an inch to meet us, and never fulfil the promises in our experience. Oh! may you--the few here, who are awake to perceive your responsibilities and obligations in respect to the perishing world--take heed of my words tonight, and take home what I say--think about it, pray over it, try to realise it as the Lord's message to you. These are only a tithe of the glorious promises with respect to prayer. There are plenty of them in the Book, in which God has bound Himself to answer the faithful prayers of His people. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Now, why is it that the great mass of professing Christian do not get answers to their prayers? Well, in the first place, they are not the CHARACTERS to whom God has made the promises. These promises are made to God's saints--to those who keep His commandments, who walk in the light and have fellowship with Him through the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, the Spirit can make intercession for them. How can the Spirit make intercession for a man, when He is not in him? Those who are walking in the light can see what sort of requests to put up, when to put them up, and how to put them up; they see it all, because they are IN THE LIGHT. Such people ask, and do receive. But, alas! it is because there are so few of these that God's character is traduced every day, and that infidels laugh at us and at our God, too.

Now, do not go round about, and try to put this off you. Who are these promises made to? I challenge anybody to find me promises in this Book, taken with the context, (except in the case of repenting sinners, who are a special class, and met with special promises), save to saints; there are no promises of answers to prayers, except to persons of this character. These promises are not made to everybody, are they? The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to God, except it be his prayer when he is forsaking his wickedness. Then that prayer is not an abomination; but all other prayers of the wicked are. These promises are made to righteous people--to people who are:

Firstly, IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD. "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you." Having been brought into living fellowship by a living faith, the promises are made to those people who MAINTAIN that union, who walk in it, who live in it, and who avail themselves of the opportunities and privileges which Jesus has bestowed upon them by virtue of that union.

Now, you see, friends, it is not enough that you were once in union with Jesus, in order to get answers to your prayers. I am afraid there are thousands in a backslidden state. They have let go the grasp of faith; they are not abiding in Christ; they are abiding out of Him, and, yet, they are constantly praying and wondering why God does not answer their prayers. Don't you see, the first condition is wanting? There is no possible way of approach to the Father but through the Son. All prayers are an abomination to God which do not go up to Him through His Son and in His Son, except such as those of Cornelius, who never heard of Christ; but, to people who have ever had the light and known His Son, no prayers, while out of living union with His Son, are accepted. And that does not mean saying, "For the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ." It does not matter much what people SAY. God never pays any attention to people's words; it is what they mean and feel He pays attention to; and He knows when people really offer their prayers in union with His Son. They are not in union, and, therefore, their prayers never rise any higher than the room in which they offer them. They hardly get out of their mouths; God never hears them. They are drowned and buried in their own throats.

Oh! you young converts, never drop out of living union with Jesus. Keep in it--hold it fast--walk in it, and you will get answers to your prayers every day. You will be as sure of it as if you saw God doing what you ask, and heard Him speaking to you. You will be able to say, "I know that Thou hearest me always." Bless His name! Those who abide in Him can say that in their measure.

The next condition of prevailing prayer, is obedience to the light. Now, what does it mean to walk in obedience? Well, it does not mean searching this New Testament to find out how little of God's grace will get you into Heaven! It does not mean running round to see what this person says, and the other person says, about such and such a text, in order that you may escape from the real, practical meaning of the text! Such people are hypocrites at heart, whoever they are--insincere. They don't want to know God's will; they would much rather not know it. They want to get away from the plain, practical, common-sense meaning of the text, and then they, say, 'It doesn't mean exactly what it says,' and 'It should be interpreted so-and-so;' and they stroke themselves down, and try to make themselves feel comfortable, when they are traitors at heart. THAT IS NOT WALKING IN THE LIGHT.

Walking in the light is like walking in the sun--not running behind a pillar there, and a tree yonder, to get away from the light. It is coming right out, and saying, 'Now, Lord Jesus, I want to know Thy will. Lord, pour Thy light upon me. I am prepared to follow it, even though it is to the block and to the stake:

First, desire to have the light. Oh! it makes my heart ache--I was going to say boil--with righteous indignation, in jealousy for God's honour, to think that He should be so traduced and blasphemed by those who profess to love Him--who try to make out that they get wrong for want of light. Nothing of the kind. Here is plenty of light; but you must say, 'Yes, Lord, I am willing to have it, even if it condemns me. If it condemns my heart, my head, Lord, pour it on me. If it condemns my life, pour it on me. If it condemns those companions, those indulgences, pour it on me: I will give them up. If it condemns my business, pour it on me: I will abandon such a business, and sooner die in the workhouse than continue in it. If it condemns my family relations, I will come out from them, and follow Thee.' The Lord will always answer such a soul as that. He will put His finger down on this sore spot and the other, and He will tell you what to do, and you will be as sure of it as if you heard His audible voice. What does it mean to walk in the light? Obey His voice. Don't stop to confer with flesh and blood, but, as Paul did, get up, and set off to commence the career which your Master commands. Paul did not stop to confer with flesh and blood. He did not stop to reckon what it would cost him, but on he went, and never stops, until he reaches the block. That is walking in the light--obeying--not standing, quibbling with the Lord about it; not saying, "Oh!

but,"--but doing it.

Oh! friends, no matter who preaches another Gospel to you; no matter who comes with the doctrine that you can be accepted of God--be a saint on any other conditions. For Christ's sake, and your soul's sake, don't believe them. As the Apostle John says: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." Beware! You say, "But then it is such a costly sacrifice." It is, in one sense; but, when you have paid the price, when you have made the sacrifice, when you have entered upon the road, the joy, the light, the power, and the glory, are worth a hundred times as much. Did any man that ever got the Pearl of Great Price feel that he had given too much for it, even if he had given all that he had? Never! Martyrs and confessors have gloried in the possession of it while they have writhed on the rack and in the flames, and you never heard one solitary testimony that any man or woman of God ever thought that they had paid too highly for it. Never! Do you want to have your prayers answered? That is the way. Walk so that your own heart condemns you not. The obedient child that lives in complacent affection with its parent has no fear in coming up to ask for favours. It knows it will get them. Its own heart does not condemn it. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." I defy any man to separate confidence from obedience. If you will not be obedient, you cannot have confidence. I challenge any Christian in this hall to tell me that he can go up to the throne of God in faith for any blessing when his own heart condemns him. He knows he cannot. HE HAS FIRST TO GET THAT STATE OF CONDEMNATION TAKEN AWAY before he can exercise faith for any blessing. Walk in the light, and then you shall have fellowship with Him, and His blood will cleanse you from all sin, and the Spirit, will teach you how to pray, and what to pray for, which the great mass of professors know nothing about.

Further, the leading, teaching, and urging of the Holy Ghost is the next condition of effectual prayer. We might call these conditions a four-linked chain, connecting our souls with the very heart of God. First, fellowship with Jesus; second, obedience to His commands, walking in the light; third, the intercession of the indwelling Spirit; and fourth, the exercise of faith; and if you miss any one of these links, your prayers are done for. You may have all the other three, but if you miss one, you will not get answers. It will out communion, and there will be no response.

I am afraid a good many professors do not know what the Spirit of intercession means. They do not know anything about the Spirit making intercession for them with groanings that cannot be uttered. When we get more of this Spirit of intercessory prayer in parents, we shall see more spiritual children born. Now, the Holy Spirit says, here we know not what to pray for as we ought, unless the Spirit teaches; hence people are constantly, as James says, asking and not receiving, because they ask amiss. "Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts"--that means, your earthly desires, affections, purposes, bounded by the horizon of earth.

Now, I believe in my soul that this is the great reason why thousands of Christians pray and never get answers. They ARE SELFISH IN THEIR PRAYERS; they are earthly; they ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their earthly desires, affections and propensities. Oh! mothers tell me that they have prayed for their children for years, and not got one of them converted. I say 'More the pity; more the shame on you.' Why? Because they prayed merely selfish, instinctive prayers, because they were THEIR children, or because they wanted them to be religious, so that they would not go into sin or bring disgrace or misery upon the family, or it would be so nice to have them religious; but they don't want them to be righteous over much; they don't want them to be so given up to God as to cut off the vanities and fooleries of this world, and to give themselves up wholly to Christ--that is too much; but just religion enough to make

them a comfort to themselves. Should You answer such prayers IF You WERE God? Hundreds and thousands of prayers are put up every day that go no deeper and no higher than that, if the motives were analysed--and God DOES ANALYSE. HE "SEARCHETH THE HEARTS;"--people cannot cheat Him. I am afraid many wives pray for their husbands on the same tack. They are not troubled that their husbands are living in disobedience to God, squandering their time, talents, and money, and robbing the kingdom of Jesus Christ of what they might be doing for it; the agonising consideration is, that, if religious, they would spend so much more time at home; that they are wasting the money, instead of laying it up for the children; and that, if they were religious, all this would be put right. Now, I say, God will never answer that wife's prayer for her husband. You must think of what your husband could be for God--what he could do for God's kingdom--how Jesus Christ has shed His blood for him--how dishonouring a life of sin is to God; and you must dwell on this until your heart is ready to break, and you will soon get your husband converted, if you act wisely along with your prayers. God will not answer selfish prayers; He hates selfishness--selfishness is the Devil, the very, embodiment of him. You must get out of self; you must look at your child always as God's, as having a precious soul redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus, and having talents and capacities to GLORIFY and spread His kingdom; and you must ground your prayers on that, and say, 'I would rather lay them in the grave, a thousand times--rather they were poor and despised--than that they should grow up to DISHONOUR THEE.' Then you will get your prayers answered.

People pray about their businesses. God sees that the way to destroy that man is to let him get on. He does not want to get money in order to roll the old chariot along. God sees that prosperity would eat his soul like a canker, and so He won't let him get on. The Spirit of God never leads the soul to a selfish prayer. No; it leads the soul to weep because men keep not His law, to cry more about His interests than its own. It is willing for its own house to lie desolate, if that will promote the spread of God's kingdom. It is willing for the sparrow to find a nest on its own altar if by that it can replenish and glorify the altar of Jehovah.

Then comes the last link--faith. Here is another secret. No believer can exercise faith for anything that the Holy Ghost does not lead him up to. You may pray, and pray, but you will never exercise faith until you have the Spirit making intercession in you.

There is very little difficulty about believing with people who have taken the three preceding steps. Those who are in fellowship with Jesus, those who are walking in the light, those who have the Holy Ghost as an interceding Spirit--they know what to pray for; they know what the mind of the Spirit is; they know how the Spirit is leading them, and they can march up to the throne and "ask and receive." They know their request is according to the mind of God, and they can wrestle, if need be, like the Syrophenician woman, if He sees fit to try their faith.

He does not always answer at once. He lets them wrestle with groans that cannot be uttered; but they know they will get it, because they know the Spirit is making intercession for them, and they hold on sometimes amidst great discouragement and temptation, till the answer comes. They get the assurance of faith, which says, "Yes, it shall be done." People look at them with wonder. Christian friends know the thing they are praying for has not come, and say, "You look as glad as if you had it;" 'I have got the earnest: I know it is coming: I have the assurance that it shall be done.'

Now, every praying parent ought to wrestle till that is got for every child. You never ought to leave off till then, and then train as well as pray--co-work with God that is the law of the kingdom all the way through.

Believe that ye receive it, and ye SHALL have it. Oh! the confusion, the jumbilisation, there is in dealing with poor souls at that point. People say, 'Believe you are saved, and you are saved.' I have heard Christians give that advice to souls many a time. 'Believe you are saved, and you are saved.'

Believe a lie, and it will come true. Is that God's philosophy? What is the use of telling a person to believe he is saved before he is saved? That is telling him to believe a lie. People say, 'Believe you are sanctified, and you are sanctified.' Indeed! When were you sanctified? God never tells a person to believe a thing until it happens. He has made the bestowment of the gift to be simultaneous with the exercise of the faith. Believe that ye receive, and ye shall have--not that ye did receive an hour ago, for that would not be true; not that ye will receive an hour hence, for that would be presumption.

There is no such promise, but believe that ye do now receive, and ye shall have. 'I will never disappoint the man who dares trust me to that extent.' He shall have it. You say the age of miracles is past. Yes, because the age of that sort of faith is past. You will get miracles back when that sort of faith returns. God has bound Himself over to the faith of His real people, and He would sooner break all the laws of nature than He would break the laws of grace. He can easily set aside a law of nature; but He will never set aside a law of grace.

He has bound Himself to faith--the only power in the universe to which He has bound Himself--and nobody ever rose up in this world yet, and said, 'I trusted God, and He deceived me.' Faith means TRUST--faith means ABANDONMENT--as if you were dying, and you had nothing left but the naked promise of God. You say, 'I am dying: I must trust now,' and that man jumps on to the promise. He gives up experimenting, and really trusts; and you have seen the light come into his eyes; you have heard the song of praise burst from his lips because he believed he received, and he did receive.

Now, then, some of you who have written to me know you are living in fellowship with Jesus. Some of you have lately commenced to walk in the light. You have cut off and put away the idols; you have abandoned yourself to the will of God, and sworn, by His grace, that you will follow Him all the way. You do feel the Holy Ghost is in you. Oh! I entreat you to obey fully, to let the Spirit have His way. Do not restrain Him. Don't think it will hurt your bodies; don't think it is too much; don't think you are getting fanatical; don't think that, after all, God does not require this kind of thing--follow the Spirit. Let the Spirit lead you and groan through you; let the Spirit wrestle with God through you--follow Him. If we had more of this in these services we should have more fruit; and if the Church had more of this there would be more souls born into the kingdom.

It was one of the things in which I grieved the Spirit of God in my early days, that I would not let Him, to the extent He would have done, make me a woman of prayer; and yet, in comparison with many, perhaps, I was one. He used to lay particular people and subjects on my heart, so that I could not help praying; but, oh! how bitterly I have regretted and wept before the Lord that I did not let Him have all His way with me in this respect. Take warning! and you whom He is beginning to lead, let Him lead you. Pour out your souls for others and with others. I believe that more souls are convinced in real prayer than in speaking. I have noticed this many a time. I have seen at the bottom of a great hall or theatre, or in the gallery, a lot of the roughest men conceivable, behaving in the most unseemly manner, arrested by the influence of prayer. Perhaps, when the rowdyism has been ready to break into open tumult, a little woman has stretched out her hands over the congregation, and said, "Now, let us pray;" and I have seen the whole mass of men assume an attitude of quietness and reverence. I have watched the aspect of the congregation, and seen great, rough, black-faced fellows get their heads down, and sometimes wipe their eyes; and when we

have got up to sing, there has been no more disorderly conduct, but they have settled down with the solemnity of death to listen. Hundreds of them were convinced of sin while under that prayer. It was the Holy Ghost wrestling for those souls in the heart of that woman that struck them with conviction.

Prayer is agony of soul-wrestling of the spirit. You know how men and women deal with one another when they are in desperate earnestness for something to be done. That is prayer, whether it be to man or God; and when you get your heart influenced, and melted, and wrought up, and burdened by the Holy Ghost for souls, you will have power, and you will never pray but somebody will be convinced--some poor soul's dark eyes will be opened, and spiritual life will commence.

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