

Paul's First Prayer

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon reveals how God transforms even the fiercest persecutors into fervent pray-ers, highlighting the divine joy and heavenly attention given to genuine prayer.

Scripture: Acts 9:11, Luke 15:7, Isaiah 65:24, Luke 19:41, Romans 8:15

Topics: "Prayer", "Conversion", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon expounds on the transformative power of prayer as demonstrated in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He emphasizes how God attentively hears the prayers of even the vilest sinners and rejoices in their repentance. Spurgeon also highlights the joy in heaven and among ministers when a soul turns to God in true faith. This message encourages believers to pray sincerely and trust in God's sovereign grace to change hearts.

Transcript

"For behold he prayeth"—Acts 9:11.

GOD has many methods of quenching persecution. He will not suffer his church to be injured by its enemies, or overwhelmed by its foes; and he is not short of means for turning aside the way of the wicked, or of turning it upside down. In two ways he usually accomplishes his end; sometimes by the confusion of the persecutor, and at others in a more blessed manner, by his conversion. Sometimes, he confuses and confounds his enemies; he makes the diviner mad; he lets the man who comes against him be utterly destroyed, suffers him to drive on to his own destruction, and then at last turns round in triumphant derision upon the man who hoped to have said *aha! aha!* To the church of God. But at other times, as in this case, he converts the persecutor. Thus, he transforms the foe into a friend; he makes the man who was a warrior against the gospel a soldier for it. Out of darkness he bringeth forth light; out of the eater he getteth honey; yea, out of stony hearts he raiseth up children unto Abraham. Such was the case with Saul. A more furious bigot it is impossible to conceive. He had been bespattered with the blood of Stephen, when they stoned him to death; so officious was he in his cruelty, that the men left their clothes in the charge of a young man named Saul. Living at Jerusalem, in the college of Gamaliel, he constantly came in contact with the disciples of the Man of Nazareth; he laughed at them, he reviled them as they passed along the street; he procured enactments against them, and put them to death; and now, as a crowning point, this were-wolf, having tasted blood, becomes exceeding mad, determines to go to Damascus, that he may glut himself with the gore of men and women; that he may bind the Christians, and bring them to

Jerusalem, there to suffer what he considered to be a just punishment for their heresy, and departure from their ancient religion. But oh, how marvelous was the power of God! Jesus stays this man in his mad career; just as with his lance in rest he was dashing against Christ. Christ met him, unhorsed him, threw him on the ground, and questioned him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He then graciously removed his rebellious heart—gave him a new heart and a right spirit—turned his aim and object—led him to Damascus—laid him prostrate for three days and nights—spoke to him—made mystic sounds go murmuring through his ears—set his whole soul on fire; and when at last he started up from that three days' trance, and began to pray, then it was that Jesus from heaven descended, came in a vision to Ananias, and said, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth."

First, our text was an announcement; "Behold, he prayeth." Secondly, it was an argument; "For, behold, he prayeth." Then, to conclude, we will try to make an application of our text to your hearts. Though application is the work of God alone, we will trust that he will be pleased to make that application while the word is preached this morning.

I. First, here was AN ANNOUNCEMENT; "Go to the house of Saul of Tarsus; for behold, he prayeth." Without any preface, let me say, that this was the announcement of a fact which was noticed in heaven; which was joyous to the angels; which was astonishing to Ananias, and which was a novelty to Saul himself.

It was the announcement of a fact which was noticed in heaven. Poor Saul had been led to cry for mercy, and the moment he began to pray, God began to hear. Do you not notice, in reading the chapter, what attention God paid to Saul? He knew the street where he lived; "Go to the street that is called Straight." He knew the house where he resided; "inquire at the house of Judas." He knew his name; it was Saul. He knew the place where he came from; "Inquire for Saul of Tarsus." And he knew that he had prayed. "Behold, he prayeth." Oh! It is a glorious fact, that prayers are noticed in heaven. The poor broken-hearted sinner, climbing up to his chamber, bends his knee, but can only utter his wailing in the language of sighs and tears. Lo! That groan has made all the harps of heaven thrill with music; that tear has been caught by God, and put into the lachrymatory of heaven, to be perpetually preserved. The suppliant, whose fears prevent his words, will be well understood by the Most High. He may only shed one hasty tear; but "prayer is the falling of a tear." Tears are the diamonds of heaven; sighs are a part of the music of Jehovah's throne; for though prayers be

"The simplest form of speech

That infant lips can try;"

so are they likewise the

"Sublimest strains that reach The majesty on high."

Let me dilate on this thought a moment. Prayers are noticed in heaven. Oh! I know what is the case with many of you. You think, "If I turn to God, if I seek him, surely I am so inconsiderable a being, so guilty and vile, that it cannot be imagined he would take any notice of me." My friends, harbor no such heathenish ideas. Our God is no god who sits in one perpetual dream; nor doth he clothe himself in such thick darkness that he cannot see; he is not like Baal who heareth not. True, he may not regard battles; he cares not for the pomp and pageantry of kings; he listens not to the swell of martial music; he regards not

the triumph and the pride of man; but wherever there is a heart big with sorrow, wherever there is an eye suffused with tears, wherever there is a lip quivering with agony, wherever there is a deep groan, or a penitential sigh, the ear of Jehovah is wide open; he marks it down in the registry of his memory; he puts our prayers, like rose leaves, between the pages of his book of remembrance, and when the volume is opened at last there shall be a precious fragrance springing up therefrom. Oh! Poor sinner, of the blackest and vilest character, thy prayers are heard, and even now God hath said of thee, "Behold, he prayeth." Where was it—in a barn? Where was it—in the closet? Was it at thy bedside this morning, or in this hall? Art thou now glancing thine eye to heaven? Speak, poor heart; did I hear thy lips just now mutter out, "God have mercy upon me, a sinner?" I tell thee, sinner, there is one thing which doth outstrip the telegraph. You know we can now send a message and receive an answer in a few moments; but I read of something in the Bible more swift than the electric fluid. "Before they call I will answer, and while they are speaking I will hear." So, then, poor sinner, thou art noticed; yea, thou art heard by him that sitteth on the throne.

Again; this was the announcement of a fact joyous to heaven. Our text is prefaced with "Behold," for doubtless, our Saviour himself regarded it with joy. Once only do we read of a smile resting upon the countenance of Jesus, when, lifting up his eye to heaven, he exclaimed, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." The shepherd of our souls rejoices in the vision of his sheep securely folded, he triumphs in spirit when he brings a wanderer home. I conceive that when he spoke these words to Ananias, one of the smiles of Paradise must have shone from his eyes. "Behold," I have won the heart of my enemy, I have saved my persecutor, even now he is bending the knee at my footstool, "behold, he prayeth." Jesus himself led the song, rejoicing over the new convert with singing. Jesus Christ was glad, and rejoiced more over that lost sheep than over ninety and nine that went not astray. And angels rejoiced too. Why, when one of God's elect is born, angels stand around his cradle. He grows up, and runs into sin: angels follow him, tracking him all his way; they gaze with sorrow upon his many wanderings; the fair Peri drops a tear whene'er that loved one sins. Presently the man is brought under the sound of the gospel. The angel says, "Behold, he begins to hear." He waits a little while, the word sinks into his heart, a tear runs down his cheek, and at last he cries from his inmost soul, "God have mercy upon me!" See! The angel claps his wings, up he flies to heaven, and says, "Brethren angels, list to me, 'Behold, he prayeth.'" Then they set heaven's bells ringing; they have a jubilee in glory; again they shout with gladsome voices, for verily I tell you, "there is joy in heaven among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." They watch us till we pray, and when we pray, they say, "Behold, he prayeth."

Moreover, my dear friends, there may be other spirits in heaven that rejoice, besides the angels. Those persons are our friends who have gone before us. I have not many relations in heaven, but I have one whom I dearly love, who, I doubt not, often prayed for me, for she nursed me when I was a child and brought me up during part of my infancy, and now she sits before the throne in glory—suddenly snatched away. I fancy she looked upon her darling grandson, and as she saw him in the ways of sin, and vice, and folly, she could not look with sorrow, for there are no tears in the eyes of glorified ones; she could not look with regret, because they cannot know such a feeling before the throne of God; but ah! That moment when, by sovereign grace, I was constrained to pray, when all alone I bent my knee and wrestled, methinks I see her as she said, "Behold, he prayeth; behold, he prayeth." Oh! I can picture her countenance. She seemed to have two heavens for a moment, a double bliss, a heaven in me as well as in herself—when she could say, "Behold, he prayeth." Ah! young man, there is your mother walking the golden streets. She is looking down upon you this hour. She nursed you; on her breast you lay when but a child, and she consecrated you to Jesus Christ. From heaven, she has been watching you with that

intense anxiety which is compatible with happiness; this morning she is looking upon you. What sayest thou, young man? Does Christ by his Spirit say in thine heart, "Come unto me?" Dost thou drop the tear of repentance? Methinks I see thy mother as she cries, "Behold, he prayeth." Once more she bends before the throne of God and says, "I thank thee, O thou ever gracious One, that he who was my child on earth, has now become thy child in light."

But, if there is one in heaven who has more joy than another over the conversion of a sinner, it is a minister, one of God's true ministers. O, my hearers, ye little think how God's true ministers do love your souls. Perhaps ye think it is easy work to stand here and preach to you. God knows, if that were all, it were easy work; but when we think that when we speak to you, your salvation or damnation, in some measure, depends upon what we say—when we reflect that if we are unfaithful watchmen, your blood will God require at our hands—O, good God! When I reflect that I have preached to thousands in my lifetime, many thousands and have perhaps said many things I ought not to have said, it startles me, it makes me shake and tremble. Luther said he could face his enemies, but could not go up his pulpit stairs without his knees knocking together. Preaching is not child's play; it is not a thing to be done without labor and anxiety; it is solemn work; it is awful work, if you view it in its relation to eternity. Ah! How God's minister prays for you! If you might have listened under the eaves of his chamber window, you would have heard him groaning every Sunday night over his sermons because he had not spoken with more effect; you would have heard him pleading with God, "Who hath believed our report? To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Ah, when he observes you from his rest in heaven—when he sees you praying, how will he clap his hands and say, "Behold the child thou hast given me! Behold, he prays." I am sure when we see one brought to know the Lord, we feel very much like one who has saved a fellow-creature from being drowned. There is a poor man in the flood; he is going down, he is sinking, he must be drowned; but I spring in, grasp him firmly, lift him on the shore, and lay him on the ground; the physician comes; he looks at him, he puts his hand upon him, and says, "I am afraid he is dead." We apply all the means in our power, we do what we can to restore life. I feel that I have been that man's deliverer, and oh, how I stoop down and put my ear beside his mouth! At last I say, "He breathes! He breathes!" What pleasure there is in that thought! He breathes; there is life still. So when we find a man praying, we shout—he breathes; he is not dead, he is alive; for while a man prays he is not dead in trespasses and sins, but is brought to life, is quickened by the power of the Spirit. "Behold, he prayeth." This was joyful news in heaven, as well as being noticed by God.

Then, in the next place, this was an event most astonishing to men. Ananias lifted up both his hands in amazement. "O my Lord, I should have thought anybody would pray but that man! Is it possible?" I do not know how it is with other ministers, but sometimes I look upon such-and-such individuals in the congregation, and I say, "Well, they are very hopeful; I think I shall have them. I trust there is a work going on, and hope soon to hear them tell what the Lord has done for their souls." Soon, perhaps, I see nothing of them, and miss them altogether; but instead thereof, my good Master sends me one of whom I had no hope—an outcast, a drunkard, a reprobate, to the praise of the glory of his grace. Then I lift up my hands in astonishment, thinking "I should have thought of anybody rather than you." I remember a circumstance which occurred a little while ago. There was a poor man about sixty years old; he had been a rough sailor, one of the worst men in the village; it was his custom to drink, and he seemed to be delighted when he was cursing and swearing. He came into the chapel, however, one Sabbath day, when one nearly related to me was preaching from the text concerning Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. And the poor man thought, "What! did Jesus Christ ever weep over such a wretch as I am?" He thought he was too bad for Christ to care for him. At last he came to the minister, and said, "Sir, sixty years have I been sailing under the standard of the devil; it is time I should have a new owner; I want to scuttle the old ship and sink her

altogether! then I shall have a new one, and I shall sail under the colors of Prince Immanuel." Ever since that moment that man has been a praying character, walking before God in all sincerity. Yet, he was the very last man you would have thought of. Somehow God does choose the last men; he does not care for the diamond, but he picks up the pebble-stones, for he is able, out of "stones, to raise up children unto Abraham." God is more wise than the chemist: he not only refines gold, but he transmutes base metal into precious jewels; he takes the filthiest and the vilest, and fashions them into glorious beings, makes them saints, whereas they have been sinners, and sanctifies them, whereas they have been unholy.

The conversion of Saul was a strange thing; but, beloved, was it stranger than that you and I should have been Christians? Let me ask you if anybody had told you, a few years ago, that you would belong to a church and be numbered with the children of God what would you have said? "Stuff and nonsense! I am not one of your canting Methodists; I am not going to have any religion; I love to think and do as I like." Did not you and I say so? And how on earth did we get here? When we look at the change that has passed over us, it appears like a dream. God has left many in our families who were better than we were, and why has he chosen us? Oh! Is it not strange? Might we not lift up our hands in astonishment, as Ananias did, and say, "Behold, behold, behold: it is a miracle on earth, a wonder in heaven?"

The last thing I have to say here, is this—this fact was a novelty to Saul himself. "Behold he prayeth." What is there novel in that? Saul used to go up to the temple twice a day, at the hour of prayer. If you could have accompanied him, you would have heard him speak beautifully, in words like these: "Lord, I thank thee I am not as other men are; I am not an extortioner, nor a publican; I fast twice in the week, and give tithes of all I possess;" and so on. Oh! You might have found him pouring out a fine oration before the throne of God. And yet it saith, "Behold, he prayeth." What! Had he never prayed before? No, never. All he had ever done before went for nothing; it was not prayer. I have heard of an old gentleman, who was taught when a child to pray, "Pray God bless my father and mother," and he kept on praying the same thing for seventy years, when his parents were both dead. After that it pleased God, in his infinite mercy, to touch his heart, and he was led to see that notwithstanding his constancy to his forms, he had not been praying at all; he often said his prayers, but never prayed. So it was with Saul. He had pronounced his magniloquent orations, but they were all good-for-nothing. He had prayed his long prayers for a pretense; it had all been a failure. Now comes a true petition, and it is said, "Behold, he prayeth." Do you see that man trying to obtain a hearing from his Maker? How he stands! He speaks Latin and blank verse before the Almighty's throne; but God sits in calm indifference, paying no attention. Then the man tries a different style; procures a book, and bending his knee again, prays in a delightful form the best old prayer that could ever be put together; but the Most High disregards his empty formalities. At last the poor creature throws the book away, forgets his blank verse, and says, "O Lord, hear, for Christ's sake." "Hear him," says God, "I have heard him." There is the mercy thou hast sought. One hearty prayer is better than ten thousand forms. One prayer coming from the soul is better than a myriad cold readings. As for prayers that spring from the mouth and head only, God abhors them; he loves those that come deep from the heart. Perhaps I should be impudent if I were to say that there are hundreds here this morning who never prayed once in their lives. There are some of you who never did. There is one young man over there, who told his parents when he left them, that he should always go through his form of prayer every morning and night. But he is ashamed, and he has left it off. Well, young man, what will you do when you come to die? Will you have "the watchword at the gates of death?" Will you "enter heaven by prayer?" No, you will not; you will be driven from his presence, and be cast away.

II. Secondly, we have here AN ARGUMENT. "For, behold he prayeth." It was an argument, first of all, for Ananias' safety. Poor Ananias was afraid to go to Saul; he thought it was very much like stepping into a lion's den. "If I go to his house," he thought, "the moment he sees me, he will take me to Jerusalem at once, for I am one of Christ's disciples; I dare not go." God says, "Behold, he prayeth." "Well," says Ananias, "that is enough for me. If he is a praying man, he will not hurt me; if he is a man of real devotion, I am safe." Be sure you may always trust a praying man. I do not know how it is, but even ungodly men always pay a reverence to a sincere Christian. A master likes to have a praying servant after all; if he does not regard religion himself, he likes to have a pious servant, and he will trust him rather than any other. True, there are some of your professedly praying people that have not a bit of prayer in them. But whenever you find a really praying man, trust him with untold gold; for if he really prays, you need not be afraid of him. He who communes with God in secret, may be trusted in public. I always feel safe with a man who is a visitor at the mercy-seat. I have heard an anecdote of two gentlemen traveling together, somewhere in Switzerland. Presently they came into the midst of the forests; and you know the gloomy tales the people tell about the inns there, how dangerous it is to lodge in them. One of them, an infidel, said to the other, who was a Christian, "I don't like stopping here at all; it is very dangerous indeed." "Well," said the other, "let us try." So they went into a house; but it looked so suspicious that neither of them liked it; and they thought they would prefer being at home in England. Presently the landlord said, "Gentlemen, I always read and pray with my family before going to bed; will you allow me to do so to-night?" "Yes," they said, "with the greatest pleasure." When they went up-stairs, the infidel said, "I am not at all afraid now." "Why?" said the Christian. "Because our host has prayed." "Oh!" said the other, "then it seems, after all, you think something of religion; because a man prays, you can go to sleep in his house." And it was marvelous how both of them did sleep. Sweet dreams they had, for they felt that where the house had been roofed by prayer, and walled with devotion, there could not be found a man living that would commit an injury to them. This, then, was an argument to Ananias, that he might go with safety to Saul's house.

But more than this. Here was an argument for Paul's sincerity. Secret prayer is one of the best tests of sincere religion. If Jesus had said to Ananias, "Behold, he preacheth," Ananias would have said, "that he may do, and yet be a deceiver." If he had said, "He has gone to a meeting of the church," Ananias would have said, "He may enter there as a wolf in sheep's clothing." But when he said, "Behold, he prays," that was argument enough. A young person comes and tells me about what he has felt and what he has been doing. At last I say, "kneel down and pray." "I would much rather not." "Never mind, you shall." Down he falls on his knees, he has hardly a word to say; he begins groaning and crying, and there he stays on his knees till at last he stammers out, "Lord, have mercy upon me a sinner; I am the greatest of sinners; have mercy upon me!" Then I am a little more satisfied, and I say, "I did not mind all your talk, I wanted your prayers." But oh! If I could trace him home; if I could see him go and pray alone, then I should feel sure; for he who prays in private is a real Christian. The mere reading of a book of daily devotion will not prove you a child of God; if you pray in private, then you have a sincere religion; a little religion, if sincere, is better than mountains of pretense. Home piety is the best piety. Praying will make you leave off sinning, or sinning will make you leave off praying. Prayer in the heart proves the reality of conversion. A man may be sincere, but sincerely wrong. Paul was sincerely right. "Behold, he prayeth," was the best argument that his religion was right. If any one should ask me for an epitome of the Christian religion, I should say it is in that one word—"prayer." If I should be asked, "What will take in the whole Christian experience?" I should answer, "prayer." A man must have been convinced of sin before he could pray; he must have had some hope that there was mercy for him before he could pray. In fact, all the Christian virtues are locked up in that word, prayer. Do but tell me you are a man of prayer, and I will reply at once, "Sir, I have no doubt of the reality, as well as the sincerity, of your religion."

But one more thought, and I will leave this subject. It was a proof of this man's election, for you read directly afterwards, "Behold, he is a chosen vessel." I often find people troubling themselves about the doctrine of election. Every now and then I get a letter from somebody or other taking me to task for preaching election. All the answer I can give is, "There it is in the Bible; go and ask my Master why he put it there. I cannot help it. I am only a serving man, and I tell you the message from above. If I were a footman, I should not alter my master's message at the door. I happen to be an ambassador of heaven, and I dare not alter the message I have received. If it is wrong, send up to head-quarters. There it is, and I cannot alter it." This much let me say in explanation. Some say, "How can I discover whether I am God's elect? I am afraid I am not God's elect." Do you pray? If it can be said, "Behold, he prayeth," it can also be said, Behold, he is a chosen vessel." Have you faith? If so, you are elect. Those are the marks of election. If you have none of these, you have no grounds for concluding that you belong to the peculiar people of God. Have you a desire to believe? Have you a wish to love Christ? Have you the millionth part of a desire to come to Christ? And is it a practical desire? Does it lead you to offer earnest, tearful supplication? If so, never be afraid of non-election; for whoever prays with sincerity, is ordained of God before the foundation of the world, that he should be holy and without blame before Christ in love.

III. Now for the APPLICATION. A word or two with you, my dear friends, before I send you away this morning. I regret that I cannot better enter into the subject; but my glorious Master requires of each of us according to what we have, not according to what we have not. I am deeply conscious that I fail in urging home the truth so solemnly as I ought; Nevertheless, "my work is with God and my judgement with my God," and the last day shall reveal that my error lay in judgment, but not in sincere affection for souls.

First, allow me to address the children of God. Do you not see, my dear brethren, that the best mark of our being sons of God is to be found in our devotion? "Behold, he prayeth." Well, then, does it not follow, as a natural consequence, that the more we are found in prayer the brighter will our evidences be? Perhaps you have lost your evidence this morning; you do not know whether you are a child of God or not; I will tell you where you lost your confidence—you lost it in your closet. I speak what I have felt. I have often gone back from God—never so as to fall finally, I know, but I have often lost that sweet savor of his love which I once enjoyed. I have had to cry,

"Those peaceful hours I once enjoyed,

How sweet their memory still!

But they have left an aching void,

The world can never fill."

I have gone up to God's house to preach, without either fire or energy; I have read the Bible, and there has been no light upon it; I have tried to have communion with God, but all has been a failure. Shall I tell where that commenced! It commenced in my closet. I had ceased, in a measure, to pray. Here I stand, and do confess my faults; I do acknowledge that whenever I depart from God it is there it doth begin. O Christians, would you be happy? Be much in prayer. Would ye be victorious? Be much in prayer.

"Restraining prayer, we cease to fight,

Prayer makes the Christian's armor bright."

Mrs. Berry used to say, "I would not be hired out of my closet for a thousand worlds." Mr. Jay said, "If the twelve apostles were living near you, and you had access to them, if this intercourse drew you from the closet, they would prove a real injury to your souls." Prayer is the ship which bringeth home the richest freight. It is the soil which yields the most abundant harvest. Brother, when you rise in the morning your business so presses, that with a hurried word or two, down you go into the world, and at night, jaded and tired, you give God the fag end of the day. The consequence is, that you have no communion with him. The reason we have not more true religion now, is because we have not more prayer. Sirs, I have no opinion of the churches of the present day that do not pray. I go from chapel to chapel in this metropolis and I see pretty good congregations; but I go to their prayer-meetings on a week evening, and I see a dozen persons. Can God bless us, can he pour out his Spirit upon us, while such things as these exist? He could, but it would not be according to the order of his dispensations, for he says, "When Zion travaile she brings forth children." Go to your churches and chapels with this thought, that you want more prayer. Many of you have no business here this morning. You ought to be in your own places of worship. I do not want to steal away the people from other chapels; there are enough to hear me without them. But though you have sinned this morning, hear while you are here, as much to your profit as possible. Go home and say to your minister, "Sir, we must have more prayer." Urge the people to more prayer. Have a prayer-meeting, even if you have it all to yourself; and if you are asked how many were present, you can say, "Four." "Four! How so?" "Why, there was myself, and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and we have had a rich and real communion together." We must have an outpouring of real devotion, or else what is to become of many of our churches? O! May God awaken us all, and stir us up to pray, for when we pray we shall be victorious. I should like to take you this morning, as Samson did the foxes, tie the firebrands of prayer to you, and send you in among the shocks of corn till you burn the whole up. I should like to make a conflagration by my words, and to set all the churches on fire, till the whole has smoked like a sacrifice to God's throne. If you pray, you have a proof that you are a Christian; the less you pray, the less reason have you to believe your Christianity; and if you have neglected to pray altogether, then you have ceased to breathe, and you may be afraid that you never did breathe at all.

And now, my last word is to the ungodly. O, sirs! I could fain wish myself anywhere but here; for if it be solemn work to address the godly, how much more when I come to deal with you. We fear lest, on the one hand, we should so speak to you as to make you trust in your own strength; while, on the other hand, we tremble lest we should lull you into the sleep of sloth and security. I believe most of us feel some difficulty as to the most fit manner to preach to you—not that we doubt but that the gospel is to be preached—but our desire is so to do it, that we may win your souls. I feel like a watchman, who, while guarding a city, is oppressed with sleep; how earnestly does he strive to arouse himself, while infirmity would overcome him. The remembrance of his responsibility bestirs him. His is no lack of will, but of power; and so I hope all the watchmen of the Lord are anxious to be faithful, while, at the same time, they know their imperfection. Truly, the minister of Christ will feel like the old keeper of Eddystone lighthouse; life was failing fast, but, summoning all his strength, he crept round once more to trim the lights before he died. O may the Holy Spirit enable us to keep the beacon-fire blazing, to warn you of the rocks, shoals, and quicksands, which surround you, and may we ever guide you to Jesus, and not to free-will or creature merit. If my friends knew how anxiously I have sought divine direction in the important matter of preaching to sinners, they would not feel as some of them do, when they fancy I address them wrongly. I want to do as God bids me, and if he tells me to speak to the dry bones and they shall live, I must do it, even if it does not please others; otherwise I should be condemned in my own conscience, and condemned of God. Now, with all the solemnity that man can summon, let me say that a prayerless soul is a Christless soul. As the Lord liveth, you who never prayed are without God, without hope, and strangers from the commonwealth of

Israel. You who never know what a groan is, or a falling tear, are destitute of vital godliness. Let me ask you, sirs, whether you have ever thought in what an awful state you are? You are far from God, and therefore God is angry with you; for "God is angry with the wicked every day." O, sinner! Lift thine eyes and behold the frowning countenance of God, for he is angry with you. And I beseech you, as you love yourselves, just for one moment contemplate what will become of you, if living as you are, ye should at last die without prayer. Don't think that one prayer on your deathbed will save you. Deathbed prayer is a deathbed farce generally, and passes for nothing; it is a coin that will not ring in heaven, but is stamped by hypocrisy, and made of base metal. Take heed sirs. Let me ask you, if you have never prayed, what will you do? It were a good thing for you, if death were an eternal sleep; but it is not. If you find yourself in hell, oh, the racks and pains! But I will not harrow up your feelings by attempting to describe them. May God grant you never may feel the torments of the lost. Only conceive that poor wretch in the flames who is saying, "O for one drop of water, to cool my parched tongue!" See how his tongue hangs from between his blistered lips! How it excoriates and burns the roof of his mouth, as if it were a firebrand. Behold him crying for a drop of water. I will not picture the scene. Suffice it for me to close up by saying, that the hell of hells will be to thee, poor sinner, the thought that it is to be forever. Thou wilt look up there on the throne of God, and it shall be written "forever!" When the damned jingle the burning irons of their torments, they shall say "forever!" When they howl, echo cries "forever!"

"Forever" is written on their racks,

'Forever' on their chains;

'Forever' burneth in the fire,

'Forever' ever reigns."

Doleful thought! "If I could but get out, then I should be happy. If there were a hope of deliverance, then I might be peaceful; but I am here forever!" Sirs, if ye would escape eternal torments, if ye would be found amongst the numbers of the blessed, the road to heaven can only be found by prayer—by prayer to Jesus, by prayer for the Spirit, by supplication at his mercy seat. "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he should turn unto me and live." "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion." Let us go unto him and say, "He shall heal our backslidings, he shall love us freely and forgive us graciously, for his Son's name's sake." Oh! If I may but win one soul to-day, I will go home contented. If I may but gain twenty, then I will rejoice. The more I have, the more crowns I shall wear. Wear! No, I will take them all at once, and cast them at Jesus' feet, and say, "Not unto me, but unto thy name be all the glory, forever."

"Prayer was appointed to convey

The blessings God designs to give;

Long as they live, should Christians pray,

For only while they pray, they live.

"And wilt thou still in silence lie,

When Christ stands waiting for thy prayer?"

My soul, thou hast a friend on high,
Arise, and try thine interest there.
“Tis prayer supports the soul that's weak,
Though thought be broken, language lame;
Pray, if thou canst, or canst not speak,
And pray with faith in Jesus' name.”

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/pauls-first-prayer/>

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