

Prayer—the Forerunner of Mercy

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that prayer is the essential forerunner and cause of God's mercies, urging believers to persistently seek blessings through earnest enquiry and faith.

Scripture: Ezekiel 36:37, Exodus 14:30, Luke 2:25-38, James 5:16

Topics: "Prayer", "God's Mercy", "Faith"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon emphasizes the vital role of prayer as the forerunner and cause of God's mercies. He illustrates through biblical history and personal experience how prayer precedes every divine blessing and revival. Spurgeon exhorts believers to view prayer as earnest enquiry and to persistently seek God's promises with faith, assuring them that God hears and answers the cries of His people.

Transcript

“Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.”—Ezekiel 36:37.

IN reading the chapter we have seen the great and exceeding precious promises which God had made to the favored nation of Israel. God in this verse declares, that though the promise was made, and though he would fulfill it, yet he would not fulfill it until his people asked him so to do. He would give them a spirit of prayer, by which they should cry earnestly for the blessing, and then when they should have cried aloud unto the living God, he would be pleased to answer them from heaven, his dwelling-place. The word used here to express the idea of prayer is a suggestive one. “I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel.” Prayer, then, is an enquiry. No man can pray aright, unless he views prayer in that light. First, I enquire what the promise is. I turn to my Bible and I seek to find the promise whereby the thing which I desire to seek is certified to me as being a thing which God is willing to give. Having enquired so far as that, I take that promise, and on my bended knees I enquire of God whether he will fulfill his own promise. I take to him his own word of covenant, and I say to him, “O Lord, wilt thou not fulfill it, and wilt thou not fulfill it now?” So that there, again, prayer is enquiry. After prayer I look out for the answer; I expect to be heard, and if I am not answered I pray again, and my repeated prayers are but fresh enquiries. I expect the blessing to arrive; I go and enquire whether there is any tidings of its coming. I ask; and thus I say “Wilt thou answer me, O Lord? Wilt thou keep thy promise? Or wilt thou shut up thine ear, because I misunderstand my own wants and mistake thy promise.” Brethren, we must use enquiry in prayer, and

regard prayer as being, first, an enquiry for the promise, and then on the strength of that promise an enquiry for the fulfillment. We expect something to come as a present from a friend: we first have the note, whereby we are informed it is upon the road. We enquire as to what the present is by the reading of the note, and then, if it arrive not, we call at the accustomed place where the parcel ought to have been left, and we ask or enquire for such and such a thing. We have enquired about the promise, and then we go and enquire again, until we get an answer that the promised gift has arrived and is ours. So with prayer. We get the promise by enquiry, and we get the fulfillment of it by again enquiring at God's hands.

Now, this morning I shall try, as God shall help me, first to speak of prayer as the prelude of blessing: next I shall try to show why prayer is thus constituted by God the forerunner of his mercies, and then I shall close by an exhortation, as earnest as I can make it, exhorting you to pray, if you would obtain blessings.

I. Prayer is the FORERUNNER OF MERCIES. Many despise prayer: they despise it, because they do not understand it. He who knoweth how to use that sacred art of prayer will obtain so much thereby, that from its very profitableness he will be led to speak of it with the highest reverence.

Prayer, we assert, is the prelude of all mercies. We bid you turn back to sacred history, and you will find that never did a great mercy come to this world, unheralded by prayer. The promise comes alone, with no preventing merit to precede it, but the blessing promised always follows its herald, prayer. You shall note that all the wonders that God did in the old times were first of all sought at his hands by the earnest prayers of his believing people. But the other Sabbath we beheld Pharaoh cast into the depths of the Red Sea, and all his hosts "still as a stone" in the depths of the waters. Was there a prayer that preceded that magnificent overthrow of the Lord's enemies? Turn ye to the Book of Exodus, and ye will read, "The children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage." And mark ye not, that just before the sea parted and made a highway for the Lord's people through its bosom, Moses had prayed unto the Lord, and cried earnestly unto him, so that Jehovah said, "Why criest thou unto me?" A few Sabbaths ago, when we preached on the subject of the rain which came down from heaven in the days of Elijah, you will remember how we pictured the land of Judea as an arid wilderness, a mass of dust, destitute of all vegetation. Rain had not fallen for three years; the pastures were dried up; the brooks had ceased to flow; poverty and distress stared the nation in the face. At an appointed season a sound was heard of abundance of rain, and the torrents poured from the skies, until the earth was deluged with the happy floods. Do you ask me, whether prayer was the prelude to that? I point you to the top of Carmel. Behold a man kneeling before his God, crying, "O my God! send the rain;" lo! the majesty of his faith—he sends his servant Gehazi to look seven times for the clouds, because he believes that they will come, in answer to his prayer. And mark the fact, the torrents of rain were the offspring of Elijah's faith and prayer. Wherever in Holy Writ you shall find the blessing you shall find the prayer that went before it. Our Lord Jesus Christ was the greatest blessing that men ever had. He was God's best boon to a sorrowing world. And did prayer precede Christ's advent? Was there any prayer which went before the coming of the Lord, when he appeared in the temple? Oh yes, the prayers of saints for many ages had followed each other. Abraham saw his day, and when he died Isaac took up the note, and when Isaac slept with his fathers, Jacob and the patriarchs still continued to pray; yea, and in the very days of Christ, prayer was still made for him continually: Anna the prophetess, and the venerable Simeon, still looked for the coming of Christ; and day by day they prayed and interceded with God, that he would suddenly come to his temple.

Ay, and mark you, as it has been in Sacred Writ, so it shall be with regard to greater things that are yet to happen in the fulfillment of promise. I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will one day come in the clouds of

heaven. It is my firm belief, in common with all who read the Sacred Scriptures aright, that the day is approaching when the Lord Jesus shall stand a second time upon the earth, when he shall reign with illimitable sway over all the habitable parts of the globe, when kings shall bow before him, and queens shall be nursing mothers of his Church, But when shall that time come? We shall know its coming by its prelude when prayer shall become more loud and strong, when supplication shall become more universal and more incessant, then even as when the tree putteth forth her first green leaves we expect that the spring approacheth, even so when prayer shall become more hearty and earnest, we may open our eyes, for the day of our redemption draweth nigh. Great prayer is the preface of great mercy, and in proportion to our prayer is the blessing that we may expect.

It has been so in the history of the modern Church. Whenever she has been roused to pray, it is then that God has awaked to her help. Jerusalem, when thou hast shaken thyself from the dust, thy Lord hath taken his sword from the scabbard. When thou hast suffered thy hands to hang down, and thy knees to become feeble, he has left thee to become scattered by thine enemies; thou hast become barren and thy children have been cut off, but when thou hast learned to cry, when thou hast begun to pray, God hath restored unto thee the joy of his salvation, he hath gladdened thine heart, and multiplied thy children. The history of the Church up to this age has been a series of waves, a succession of ebbs and flows. A strong wave of religious prosperity has washed over the sands of sin, again it has receded, and immorality has reigned. Ye shall read in English history: it has been the same. Did the righteous prosper in the days of Edward VI? They shall again be tormented under a bloody Mary. Did Puritanism become omnipotent over the land, did the glorious Cromwell reign, and did the saints triumph? Charles the second's debaucheries and wickedness became the black receding wave. Again, Whitfield and Wesley poured throughout the nation a mighty wave of religion, which like a torrent drove everything before it. Again it receded, and there came the days of Payne, and of men full of infidelity and wickedness. Again there came a strong impulse, and again God glorified himself. And up to this date, again, there has been a decline. Religion, though more fashionable than it once was, has lost much of its vitality and power, much of the zeal and earnestness of the ancient preachers has departed, and the wave has receded again. But, blessed be God, flood tide has again set in: once more God hath aroused his Church. We have seen in these days what our fathers never hoped to see: we have seen the great men of a Church, not too noted for its activity, at last coming forth—and God be with them in their coming forth! They have come forth to preach unto the people the unsearchable riches of God. I do hope we may have another great wave of religion rolling in upon us. Shall I tell you what I conceive to be the moon that influences these waves? My brethren, even as the moon influences the tides of the sea, even so doth prayer, (which is the reflection of the sunlight of heaven, and is God's moon in the sky,) influence the tides of godliness; for when our prayers become like the crescent moon, and when we stand not in conjunction with the sun, then there is but a shallow tide of godliness, but when the full orb shines upon the earth, and when God Almighty makes the prayers of his people full of joy and gladness, it is then that the sea of grace returneth to its strength. In proportion to the prayerfulness of the Church shall be its present success, though its ultimate success is beyond the reach of hazard.

And now again, to come nearer home: this truth is true of each of you my dearly beloved in the Lord in your own personal experience. God has given you many an unsolicited favor, but still great prayer has always been the great prelude of great mercy with you. When you first found peace through the blood of the cross you had been praying much beforehand, and earnestly interceding with God that he would remove your doubts, and deliver you from your distresses. Your assurance was the result of prayer. And when at any time you have had high and rapturous joys, you have been obliged to look upon them as

answers to your prayers, when you have had great deliverances out of sore troubles, and mighty helps in great dangers, you have been able to say, "I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me out of all my fears." Prayer, we say, in your case, as well as in the case of the Church at large, is always the preface to blessing.

And now some will say to me, "In what way do you regard prayer, then, as affecting the blessing? God, the Holy Ghost vouchsafes prayer before the blessing; but in what way is prayer connected with the blessing?" I reply, prayer goes before the blessing in several senses. It goes before the blessing, as the blessing's shadow. When the sunlight of God's mercy rises upon our necessities, it casts the shadow of prayer far down upon the plain, or, to use another illustration, when God piles up a hill of mercies, he himself shines behind them, and he casts on our spirits the shadow of prayer, so that we may rest certain, if we are in prayer, our prayers are the shadows of mercy. Prayer is the rustling of the wings of the angels that are on their way bringing us the boons of heaven. Have you heard prayer in your heart? You shall see the angel in your house. When the chariots that bring us blessings do rumble, their wheels do sound with prayer. We hear the prayer in our own spirits, and that prayer becomes the token of the coming blessings. Even as the cloud foreshadoweth rain, so prayer foreshadoweth the blessing; even as the green blade is the beginning of the harvest, so is prayer the prophecy of the blessing that is about to come.

Again: prayer goes before mercy, as the representative of it. Often times the king, in his progress through his realms, sends one before him, who blows a trumpet; and when the people see him they know that the king cometh, because the trumpeter is there. But, perhaps, there is before him a more important personage, who says, "I am sent before the king to prepare for his reception, and I am this day to receive aught that you have to send the king, for I am his representative." So prayer is the representative of the blessing before the blessing comes. The prayer comes, and when I see the prayer, I say, "Prayer, thou art the vice-regent of the blessing, if the blessing be the king, thou art the regent. I know and look upon thee as being the representative of the blessing I am about to receive."

But I do think also that sometimes, and generally, prayer goes before the blessing, even as the cause goes before the effect. Some people say, when they get anything, that they get it because they prayed for it, but if they are people who are not spiritually minded, and who have no faith, let them know, that whatever they may get it is not in answer to prayer, for we know that God heareth not sinners, and the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." "Well," says one, "I asked God for such-and-such a thing the other day. I know I am no Christian, but I got it. Don't you consider that I had it through my prayers?" No, sir, no more than I believe the reasoning of the old man who affirmed that the Goodwin Sands had been caused by the building of Tenterden steeple, for the sands had not been there before, and the sea did not come up till it was built, and therefore, said he, the steeple must have caused the flood. Now, your prayers have no more connection with your blessing than the sea with the steeple, in the Christian's case it is far different. Oft-times the blessing is actually brought down from heaven by the prayer. An objector may reply, "I believe that prayer may have much influence on yourself, sir, but I do not believe that it has any effect on the Divine Being." Well, sir, I shall not try to convince you; because it is useless for me to try to convince you of that, unless you believe the testimonies I bring, as it would be to convince you of any historical fact by simply reasoning about it. I could bring out of this congregation not one, nor twenty, but many hundreds, who are rational, intelligent persons, and who would, each of them, most positively declare, that some hundreds of times in their lives they have been led to seek most earnestly deliverance out of trouble, or help in adversity, and they have received the answers to their prayers in so marvellous a manner that they themselves did no more doubt their being answers to their

cries than they could doubt the existence of a God. They felt sure that he heard them; they were certain of it. Oh! the testimonies to the power of prayer are so numberless, that the man who rejects them flies in the face of good testimonies. We are not all enthusiasts; some of us are cool blooded enough, we are not all fanatics; we are not all quite wild in our piety, some of us in other things, we reckon, act in a tolerably common sense way. But yet we all agree in this, that our prayers have been heard; and we could tell many stories of our prayers, still fresh upon our memories, where we have cried unto God, and he has heard us. But the man, who says he does not believe God hears prayer, knows he does. I have no respect to his scepticism, any more than I have any respect to a man's doubt about the existence of a God. The man does not doubt it; he has to choke his own conscience before he dares to say he does. It is complimenting him too much to argue with him. Will you argue with a liar? He affirms a lie, and knows it is so. Will you condescend to argue with him, to prove that he is untrue! The man is incapable of reasoning; he is beyond the pale of those who ought to be treated as respectable persons. If a man rejects the existence of a God, he does it desperately against his own conscience, and if he is bad enough to stifle his own conscience so much as to believe that, or pretend that he believes it, we think we shall demean ourselves if we argue with so loose a character. He must be solemnly warned, for reason is thrown away upon deliberate liars. But you know, sir, God hears prayer; because if you do not, either way you must be a fool. You are a fool for not believing so, and a worse fool for praying yourself; when you do not believe he hears you. "But I do not pray sir." Do not pray? Did I not hear a whisper from your nurse when you were sick? She said you were a wonderful saint when you had the fever. You do not pray! No, but when things do not go quite well in business you would to God that they would go better, and you do sometimes cry out to him a kind of prayer which he cannot accept, but which is still enough to show that there is an instinct in man that teaches him to pray, I believe that even as birds build their nests without any teaching, so men use prayer in the form of it (I do not mean spiritual prayer): I say, men use prayer from the very instinct of nature. There is something in man which makes him a praying animal. He cannot help it; he is obliged to do it. He laughs at himself when he is on the dry land; but he prays when he is on the sea and in a storm, he seeks at prayer when he is well, but when he is sick he prays as fast as anybody. He—he would not pray when he is rich; but when he is poor, he prays then strongly enough. He knows God hears prayer, and he knows that men should pray. There is no disputing with him. If he dares to deny his own conscience he is incapable of reasoning, he is beyond the pale of morality, and therefore we dare not try to influence him by reasoning. Other means we may and hope we shall use with him, but not that which compliments him by allowing him to answer. O saints of God! whatever ye can give up, ye can never give up this truth, that God heareth prayer; for if ye did disbelieve it to-day, ye would have to believe it again to-morrow; for ye would have such another proof of it through some other trouble that would roll over your head that ye would be obliged to feel, if ye were not obliged to say, "Verily, God heareth and answereth prayer."

Prayer, then, is the prelude of mercy, for very often it is the cause of the blessing; that is to say, it is a part cause; the mercy of God being the great first cause, prayer is often the secondary agency whereby the blessing is brought down.

II. And now I am going to try to show you, in the second place, WHY IT IS THAT GOD IS PLEASED TO MAKE PRAYER THE TRUMPETER OF MERCY, OR THE FORERUNNER OF IT.

1. I think it is, in the first place, because God loves that man should have some reason for having a connexion with him. Saith God, "My creatures will shun me, even my own people will too little seek me—they will flee from me, instead of coming to me. What shall I do? I intend to bless them: shall I lay the blessings at their doors so that when they open them in the morning they may find them there, unasked

and unsought?" "Yes," saith God, "many mercies I will so do with; I will give them much that they need, without their seeking for it, but in order that they may not wholly forget me, there are some mercies that I will not put at their doors but I will make them come to my house after them. I love my children to visit me," says the heavenly Father; "I love to see them in my courts, I delight to hear their voices and to see their faces; they will not come to see me if I give them all they want; I will keep them sometimes without, and then they will come to me and ask, and I shall have the pleasure of seeing them, and they will have the profit of entering into fellowship with me." It is as if some father should say to his son who is entirely dependent upon him, "I might give you a fortune at once, so that you might never have to come upon me again; but, my son, it delights me, it affords me pleasure to supply your wants. I like to know what it is you require, that I may oftentimes have to give you, and so may frequently see your face. Now I shall give you only enough to serve you for such a time, and if you want to have anything you must come to my house for it. O, my son, I do this because I desire to see thee often; I desire often to have opportunities of showing how much I love thee." So doth God say to his children, "I do not give you all at once; I give all to you in the promise, but if you want to have it in the detail, you must come to me to ask me for it: so shall you see my face, and so shall you have a reason for often coming to my feet."

2. But there is another reason. God would make prayer the preface to mercy, because often prayer itself gives the mercy. You are full of fear and sorrow, you want comfort, God says, pray, and you shall get it; and the reason is because prayer is of itself a comforting exercise. We are all aware, that when we have any heavy news upon our minds, it often relieves us if we can tell a friend about it. Now there are some troubles we would not tell to others, for perhaps many minds could not sympathize with us: God has therefore provided prayer, as a channel for the flow of grief. "Come," saith he, "thy troubles may find vent here; come, put them into my ear; pour out thine heart before me, and so wilt thou prevent its bursting. If thou must weep, come and weep at my mercy-seat; if thou must cry come and cry in the closet, and I will hear thee." And how often have you and I tried that! We have been on our knees overwhelmed with sorrow, and we have risen up, and said, "Ah! I can meet it all now!"

"Now I can say my God is mine

Now I can all my joys resign,

Can tread the world beneath my feet,

And all that earth calls good or great."

Prayer itself sometimes gives the mercy.

Take another case. You are in difficulty, you don't know which way to go, nor how to act. God has said that he will direct his people. You go forth in prayer and pray to God to direct you. Are you aware that your very prayer will frequently of itself furnish you with the answer? For while the mind is absorbed in thinking over the matter, and in praying concerning the matter, it is just in the likeliest state to suggest to itself the course which is proper, for whilst in prayer I am spreading all the circumstances before God, I am like a warrior surveying the battle-field, and when I rise I know the state of affairs, and know how to act. Often, thus, you see, prayer gives the very thing we ask for in itself. Often when I have had a passage of Scripture that I cannot understand, am I in the habit of spreading the Bible before me, and if I have looked at all the commentators, and they do not seem to agree, I have spread the Bible on my chair, kneeled down, put my finger upon the passage, and sought of God instruction. I have thought that when I have risen from my knees I understood it far better than before; I believe that the very exercise of prayer did of

itself bring the answer, to a great degree, for the mind being occupied upon it, and the heart being exercised with it, the whole man was in the most excellent position for truly understanding it. John Bunyan says, "The truths that I know best I have learned on my knees;" and says he again, "I never know a thing well till it is burned into my heart by prayer." Now that is in a great measure through the agency of God's Holy Spirit; but I think that it may in some measure also be accounted for by the fact that prayer exercises the mind upon the thing, and then the mind is led by an insensible process to lay hold upon the right result. Prayer, then is a suitable prelude to the blessing, because often it carrieth the blessing in itself.

3. But again it seemeth but right, and just, and appropriate, that prayer should go before the blessing, because in prayer there is a sense of need. I cannot as a man distribute assistance to those who do not represent their case to me as being destitute and sick. I cannot suppose that the physician will trouble himself to leave his own house to go into the house of one that is ill, unless the need has been specified to him, and unless he has been informed that the case requires his assistance; nor can we expect of God, that he will wait upon his own people, unless his own people should first state their need to him, shall feel their need, and come before him crying for a blessing. A sense of need is a divine gift; prayer fosters it, and is therefore highly beneficial.

4. And yet again, prayer before the blessing serves to show us the value of it. If we had the blessings without asking for them, we should think them common things; but prayer makes the common pebbles of God's temporal bounties more precious than diamonds; and in spiritual prayer, cuts the diamond, and makes it glisten more. The thing was precious, but I did not know its preciousness till I had sought for it, and sought it long. After a long chase the hunter prizes the animal because he has set his heart upon it and is determined to have it; and yet more truly, after a long hunger he that eateth findeth more relish in his food. So prayer doth sweeten the mercy. Prayer teaches us its preciousness. It is the reading over of the bill, the schedule, the account, before the estate and the properties are themselves transferred. We know the value of the purchase by reading over the will of it in prayer, and when we have groaned out our own expression of its peerless price, then it is that God bestows the benediction upon us. Prayer, therefore, goes before the blessing, because it shows us the value of it.

But doubtless even reason itself suggests that it is but natural that God, the all-good, should give his favors to those that ask. It seemeth but right that he should expect of us, that we should first ask at his hands, and then he will bestow. It is goodness great enough that his hand is ready to open: surely it is but little that he should say to his people, "For this thing will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."

III. Let me close BY STIRRING YOU UP TO USE THE HOLY ART OF PRAYER AS A MEANS OF OBTAINING THE BLESSING. Do you demand of me, and for what shall we pray? The answer is upon my tongue. Pray for yourselves, pray for your families, pray for the Churches, pray for the one great kingdom of our Lord on earth.

Pray for yourselves. Sure you will never lack some subject for intercession. So broad are your wants, so deep are your necessities, that until you are in heaven you will always find room for prayer. Dost thou need nothing? Then I fear thou dost not know thyself. Hast thou no mercy to ask of God? Then I fear thou hast never had mercies of him, and art yet "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." If thou be a child of God, thy wants will be as numerous as thy moments and thou wilt need to have as many prayers as there are hours. Pray that thou mayest be holy, humble, zealous, and patient; pray that thou mayest have communion with Christ, and enter into the banqueting-house of his love. Pray for thyself, that thou

mayest be an example unto others, that thou mayest honor God here, and inherit his kingdom hereafter.

And then pray for the Church. Let the minister have a place in your heart. Mention his name at your family altar, and in your closet. You expect him to come before you day after day, to teach you the things of the kingdom, and exhort and stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. If he be a true minister, there will be work to be done in this matter. He cannot write his sermon and read it to you; he does not believe Christ said, "Go and read the gospel to every creature." Dost thou know the cares of a minister? Dost thou know the trouble he has with his own church—how the erring ones do grieve him, how even the right ones do vex his spirit by their infirmities—how, when the church is large, there will always be some great trouble in the hearts of some of his people? And he is the reservoir of all: they come to him with all their grief; he is to "weep with them that weep." And in the pulpit what is his work? God is my witness, I scarcely ever prepare for my pulpit with pleasure: study for the pulpit is to me the most irksome work in the world I have never come into this house that I know of with a smile upon mine heart; I may have sometimes gone out with one; but never have I had one when I entered. Preach, preach, twice a day I can and will do, but still there is a travelling in preparation for it, and even the utterance is not always accompanied with joy and gladness, and God knoweth that if it were not for the good that we trust is to be accomplished by the preaching of the Word, it is no happiness to a man's life to be well known. It robs him of all comfort to be from morning to night heated for labor, to have no rest for the sole of his foot or for his brain—to be a great religious hack—to bear every burden—to have people asking, as they do in the country, when they want to get into a cart, "Will it hold it?"—never thinking whether the horse can drag it; to have them asking, "Will you preach at such a place? you are preaching twice, couldn't you manage to get to such a place, and preach again?" Every one else has a constitution; the minister has none, until he kills himself and is condemned as imprudent. If you are determined to do your duty in that place to which God has called you, you need the prayers of your people, that you may be able to do the work, and you will need their abundant prayers that you may be sustained in it. I bless God that I have a valiant corps of men, who day without night besiege God's throne on my behalf. I would speak to you, my brethren and sisters, again, and beseech you, by our loving days that are past, by all the hard fighting that we have had side by side with each other, not to cease to pray now. The time was when in hours of trouble, you and I have bended our knees together in God's house and we have prayed to God that he would give us a blessing. You remember how great and sore troubles did roll over our head—how men did ride over us. We went through fire and through water, and now God has brought us into a large place, and so multiplied us, let us not cease to pray. Let us still cry out unto the living God, that he may give us a blessing. Oh! may God help me, if you cease to pray for me! Let me know the day, and I must cease to preach. Let me know when you intend to cease your prayers, and I shall cry, "O my God, give me this day my tomb, and let me slumber in the dust."

And lastly, let me bid you pray for the church at large. This is a happy time we live in. A certain race of croaking souls, who are never pleased with anything, are always crying out about the badness of the times. They cry, "Oh! for the good old times!" Why, these are the good old times, time never was so old as it is now. These are the best times. I do think that many an old puritan would jump out of his grave if he knew what was doing now. If they could have been told of the great movement at Exeter Hall, there is many a man among them who once fought against the Church of England, who would lift his hand to heaven, and cry, "My God, I bless thee that I see such a day as this!" In these times there is a breaking down of many of the barriers. The bigots are afraid; they are crying out most desperately, because they think God's people will soon love each other too well. They are afraid that the trade of persecution will soon be done with, if we begin to be more and more united. So they are making an outcry, and saying,

“These are not good times.” But true lovers of God will say they have not lived in better days than these; and they all hopefully look for greater things still. Unless you professors of religion are eminently in earnest in prayer, you will disgrace yourselves by neglecting the finest opportunity that ever men had. I do think that your fathers who lived in days when great men were upon earth, who preached with much power—I do think, if they had not prayed, they would have been as unfaithful as you will be. For now the good ship floats upon a flood tide: sleep now, and you will not cross the bar at the harbour’s mouth. Never did the sun of prosperity seem to shine much more fully on the church during the last hundred years than now. Now is your time, neglect now to sow your seed in this good time of seed-sowing; neglect now to reap your harvest in these good days when it is ripe, and darker days may come, and those of peril, when God shall say, “Because they would not cry to me, when I stretched out my hands to bless them, therefore will I put away my hand, and will no more bless them, until again they shall seek me.”

And now to close. I have a young man here who has been lately converted. His parents cannot bear him; they entertain the strongest opposition to him, and they threaten him that if he does not leave off praying they will turn him out of doors. Young man! I have a little story to tell you. There was once a young man in your position: he had begun to pray, and his father knew it. He said to him, “John, you know I am an enemy to religion, and prayer is a thing that never shall be offered in my house.” Still the young man continued earnest in supplication. “Well,” said the father one day, in a hot passion, “you must give up either God or me. I solemnly swear that you shall never darken the threshold of my door again, unless you decide that you will give up praying. I give you till to-morrow morning to choose. The night was spent in prayer by the young disciple. He rose in the morning, sad to be cast away by his friends, but resolute in spirit, that come what might he would serve his God. The father abruptly accosted him—“Well, what is the answer?” “Father,” he said, “I cannot violate my conscience, I cannot forsake my God.” “Leave immediately,” said he. And the mother stood there; the father’s hard spirit had made hers hard too and though she might have wept she concealed her tears. “Leave immediately” said he. Stepping outside the threshold the young man said, “I wish you would grant me one request before I go; and if you grant me that, I will never trouble you again.” “Well,” said the father, “you shall have anything you like, but mark me, you go after you have had that; you shall never have anything again.” “It is,” said the son, “that you and my mother would kneel down, and let me pray for you before I go.” Well, they could hardly object to it; the young man was on his knees in a moment, and began to pray with such unction and power, with such evident love to their souls, with such true and divine earnestness, that they both fell flat on the ground, and when the son rose there they were; and the father said, “You need not go, John; come and stop, come and stop;” and it was not long before not only he, but the whole of them began to pray and they were united to a Christian Church. So do not give way. Persevere kindly but firmly. It may be that God shall enable you not only to have your own souls saved, but to be the means of bringing your persecuting parents to the foot of the cross. That such may be the case is our earnest prayer.

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