

The Course of Faith, or The Practical Believer Delineated

By John Angell James, 1852

FAITH IN PRAYER

"*The Prayer of Faith.*" How simple an expression; yet how impressive! How beautiful the words; how mighty the thing! What has not the prayer of faith done? How great the wonders it has wrought, how numerous and how splendid the victories it has won! "It has subdued kingdoms; wrought righteousness; obtained promises; stopped the mouths of lions; quenched the violence of fire; escaped the edge of the sword; out of weakness was made strong; waxed valiant in fight; turned to flight the armies of the aliens." These are only part, and a small part of its achievements, for it has stopped the sun in his course; opened and shut heaven; performed miracles without number; and raised to heaven countless millions of immortal souls, once sunk in sin, under the power of Satan. **Nothing seems too hard or too difficult for prayer to do. It has a kind of omnipotence; for it moves the hand which moves all things!**

All Scripture is full of injunctions, directions, examples, encouragements, and promises, in reference to this exercise of faith. The Bible is "The Book of Common Prayer" for the universal church; the Liturgy for "the communion of all saints." How interesting a theme! And how important that we should thoroughly understand it!

We bring into this subject two distinct things, faith and prayer; we unite them together, and consider faith in prayer. Though distinct, they are inseparable—there can be no true prayer without faith—there can be no true faith without prayer. **Faith and prayer are the two arms by which the soul hangs upon the neck of infinite Love, and grasps the hand of omnipotent Power!** Or to adopt another figure—they are in the new creature, what the *organ* of speech, and its utterance, are in the human body. Faith is the spiritual organism of the soul's power of language in prayer; and prayer is the emission of its spiritual articulate sounds. There is no speechless faith—no dead prayer.

It is not necessary to dwell on prayer, either as an incumbent **duty**—or a precious **privilege**. It is felt by the true Christian to be both. All the children of God, in whatever else they differ, are alike in this respect. From the moment there is any life in religion they pray. Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world, is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women, when they are born again, is praying. And it is as much a part of their new nature to pray—as it is of a child to cry. **God has no speechless children!** And to carry on this homely figure, as diseased lungs in the human frame, bring on decay, consumption, and death; so in the soul's economy, neglect of prayer is a spiritual decline.

The **PURPOSES** of prayer are various. Prayer is the homage of a dependent creature paid to the author of its being, and the source of its happiness. Prayer has a moral reflex influence on the soul of him that presents it, making him the holier by his own devotions. Prayer is a relief and comfort to the troubled soul. Prayer is the communion of the regenerated soul with its Divine Parent. Prayer is God's own instituted means of obtaining blessings from him the Fountain of life. *All* these ends and purposes should be contemplated by the Christian, and not merely the latter one. It is an exercise of wonderful comprehension.

The **CONDITIONS** of prevailing prayer are numerous and impressive. Prayer must be **sincere**—we must really be desirous to obtain the blessings we ask. Prayer must be **holy**—for if we "regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us." Prayer must be **pious**—seeking to obtain blessings, not for our own gratification merely—but for God's glory. Prayer must be **importunate**—for it is the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man, that prevails. Prayer must be **submissive**—asking only for what it is God's will to bestow. Prayer must be in **love**—for if our brother has anything against us, we must first go and be reconciled to our brother. Prayer must be **reverent**—for our God is a consuming fire. Prayer must be **humble**—for we are base, and sinful, and unworthy to lift up our eyes to heaven. Prayer must be **persevering**—for men ought always to pray, and not to faint. Prayer must be **particular**—for generalities mean little or nothing. Prayer must be **universal**—entering into everything, all the concerns of life, all the means of grace. Prayer must be of **all kinds**—social, domestic, private, spontaneous. Prayer must be **grateful**—abounding in thanksgiving. Prayer must be **expectant**—waiting and watching for answers. Prayer must be **believing**—we must ask in faith.

The most superficial reader of his Bible cannot fail to observe how these two, faith and prayer, are associated in the Word of God. When the blind, the lame, and the diseased, came to Christ for healing, he constantly reminded them their requests could not be complied with unless they believed. "Do you believe on the Son of God?" was his question. "Only believe," was his direction. So, in speaking of prayer— "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." Matt. 21:21, 22. True, this refers to the work of miracles—but the *principle* that this state of mind is necessary to prevailing prayer, is as true and as applicable to ordinary matters, as to these displays of Divine power. These two, then, must ever be united in our requests to God. They are born together. When a sinner is brought by grace to believe, he is at the same time brought to pray—the first acting of the new life of grace is believing prayer. They grow together. Belief

strengthens prayer—prayer reacts upon believing, and strengthens it. They die together. The last act of the believer is the last act of prayer; when faith is turned into sight, and prayer ends in uninterrupted eternal praise.

But what is the precise influence of faith in prayer?

Perhaps the best way of entering upon this subject, is to explain the words of the apostle James in reference to this matter— "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord." James 1:5-7. By wisdom in this passage, we are to understand that of which the apostle speaks in chap. 3; "The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy," that is, Divine grace to enable the tried believers to endure afflictions, and to conduct themselves aright as professing Christians, in the afflictive situations in which they were placed. This they all needed, and for this they were to pray to God, who was ever most ready to give in any measure they needed, without reproving them for their spiritual poverty, or rebuking them for the frequency or fervency of their petitions, as men are apt to do.

But then, they were to ask in **faith**; that is, having a full persuasion that they not only needed this Divine help—but that they could most lawfully ask it as a thing very proper to be carried to God in prayer; that God would be pleased with their asking for it; would hear their prayers, and grant them their petition in reference to that very thing. There was to be no "*wavering*;" no doubt about their need of the blessing; nor about the propriety of praying for it; nor about the certainty of God's hearing their prayer; nor about their right to expect the blessing. There was to be nothing at all resembling the frame of mind of a man hesitating about going for a favor to a fellow-creature. "Shall I go—or shall I not? Will he hear me and grant me the thing I need—or will he not. Sometimes I think, I will go, and at another time I resolve *not* to go. At one time I am full of fear, and at another time, full of hope." Now this is "wavering," to which there must be nothing like in the frame of a believer's heart towards God in prayer. Such a man is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind now one way, now another, without stability. Such a man is not authorized to expect an answer to his prayers. He is a double-minded man, or, as the word signifies, a two-souled man; one soul of faith, another of unbelief. In opposition to this, there must be the one-mindedness of faith—a firm persuasion that we are warranted both to ask and to expect this very thing. The subject may be divided into two parts.

I. We may consider prayer in GENERAL.

1. We may advert to **the rule of prayer**. This is the Word of God, especially the promises. These are the rule, the ground, the warrant of prayer. We may ask for everything God has promised; for nothing he has not promised, either in a general or specific manner, to bestow. "Remember the word on which you have caused your servant to hope," must be our plea in approaching the throne of grace. These promises, which are the rule of prayer, are of course equally the rule of faith; and if we do not believe them, we cannot ask for their fulfillment; but if we do, we can. To ask God for a blessing, of which we do not believe the promise, is a mockery. "*May I ask for what I need?*" is the enquiry of the Christian in a time of necessity. "Is it promised?" he further asks. "It is," replies his faith— "believe in God's Word." "Then I will carry the matter to God," he continues— "and ask with an expectation that I shall receive it."

2. But we are not only to **believe in God as the object of prayer—but in CHRIST as the medium of prayer**. He is the way, and the only way, to the Father. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession," and "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Heb. 4:14, 16. "Having a High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." 10:21. This also is the meaning of that sublime and beautiful symbol in the opening of the eighth chapter of the Apocalypse, where the angel is seen standing with his golden censer at the altar, that with much incense he should offer the prayers of all saints. That magnificent personage is the Angel of the Covenant, even our Lord Jesus Christ; who by his intercession, of which the incense was the emblem, secures the acceptance of the prayers of his believing people. Prayer is acceptable only as offered in his name—and it is the office of faith to realize this glorious fact. While he opens his mouth in supplication, and pours out his petitions, the Christian keeps his mind steadily fixed on the Mediator of the New Covenant. He wishes for nothing, asks for nothing, expects nothing—but for Christ's sake—he desires that he should have the glory of presenting his prayers to God, and obtaining his blessings *from* God. The prayers of a whole congregation sent up by assembled multitudes, amid the most gorgeous rites, which are not offered through the mediation of Christ, would be shut out of heaven; while those of a poor peasant from his hut, or of a little child from his bedside, would gain a ready entrance, through Him.

3. But Christian belief leaves not out the work of the HOLY SPIRIT in prayer, for what says the Scripture— "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Romans 8:26-27. So also Jude says— "Praying in the Holy Spirit." The Spirit has much to do with acceptable prayer, and his work in prayer is too much neglected. The Spirit enlightens the mind to see its real needs—softens the heart to feel them—quickens our desires after suitable supplies—gives clear views of God's power, wisdom, and grace to relieve us, and stirs up that confidence in his truth which excludes all wavering. Prayer is, therefore, a wonderful thing. In every single acceptable prayer the whole Trinity is concerned.

It is thus the whole business of prayer is carried on. The Christian believes that there is a God who takes interest in the affairs of man, else there would be no ground to pray to him at all. "He who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." Heb. 11:6. He believes that God regards his people individually, else there would be no ground or encouragement for individual prayer. A mere general providence would be no motive to individual trust and prayer. He believes that God is able to hear and answer the prayers of all who call upon him, according to the declaration of the apostle—"Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Ephes. 3:20. Here is the pillar and prop of all prayer. "Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory."

The believer sees the arm of Omnipotence stretched out, and is moved to lay hold by prayer of God's strength. And while he recognizes God's omnipotent arm, he no less beholds God's omniscient eye. Were not God all knowing, he could not be the object of prayer. Of what use would it be to pray to one who sees us not? But his infinite intelligence is the ground of our confidence. God looks upon millions with as perfect a comprehension of their whole case, as he looks upon one. He searches the heart—as well as beholds the life. He knows our thoughts—as well as hears our words. The groaning which cannot be uttered he interprets, and hears the silent petition that is ejaculated from the praying heart. Whether the prayer be presented in the solitude of the vast desert, or amid the haunts of the crowded city, God's eye is upon the petitioner—and the Christian believes this.

The Christian believes that God has instituted prayer, and is therefore ever ready to hear and answer it. "O you who hear prayer, unto you shall all flesh come," is one of the encouraging views which are given of God in his Word. The Christian knows that every part of the Bible testifies this fact, that God has instituted prayer, that it is one of the most prominent duties of religion, as laid down in the Scriptures, and that therefore he is not only performing his duty in presenting it—but that it is one of the most striking proofs of rebelling against God to neglect it. Knowing all this, he is confident in the use of prayer; he steps firmly, and goes boldly, in approaching the throne of grace. He has neither difficulty, reticence—nor doubt in his mind, in drawing near to God. He feels that it is a part of the glory by which God will be known as the hearer of prayer, and says to himself— "Has he not these thousands of years been hearing and answering the addresses of his people; and can I doubt whether he will receive mine?"

The Christian believes that God will hear and answer *his* prayers. There is no true faith at all—which is not personal, individual, appropriating. We are, in the business of salvation, not only believers that Christ died for sinners—but that he died for us. We are to apply the general fact to our own particular case. There can be no genuine belief without this—which stops not in generals—but descends to particulars. He who does not believe that Christ died for him, cannot believe that Christ died for all, for he himself is one of the all.

So in the after-exercises of true belief, and especially in the case before us, it is a part of faith in prayer, to be assured God will hear us—that there is nothing in our case, which, provided we perform the conditions of prevailing prayer, should shut us out from the presence, the throne, the ear, and the hand of God. It is one of the exercises of this confidence to say— "Sinful though I am—base and unworthy of Divine notice, yet I am warranted to approach with *my* prayer to God, as truly as the most distinguished of all the servants of God. 'Remember me, too, Lord, when you show favor to your people; come to me with your salvation. Let me share in the prosperity of your chosen ones. Let me rejoice in the joy of your people; let me praise you with those who are your heritage.'" Psalm 106:4, 5.

Before we leave this part of the subject, it is of importance to remark, that much of true faith in prayer lies in expecting the answer of our requests. Perhaps there is no part of our duty in which we are more deficient than in this. If we are warranted to ask for anything, we surely are authorized to expect it. We shall point out the limitations of this, when we come to speak of prayer for a specific object. At present we dwell upon it generally. If prayer means anything, it intends that we should be heard, and answered; and not to look for the answer is to turn the petition into a mockery of God. "There is no surer mark of trifling in prayer, than when men are careless what they get by prayer." There are three classes of people who are deficient in this **duty of expectation**.

First, those whose supplications are mere forms, or so vague and general as to have little or no meaning. How many are there, who, if when they rise from their knees, they were to ask themselves the question—"What have I been asking of God?" would not be able to reply. No answer can be expected here, for no petition was really presented.

Secondly, those who have really asked for some specific object—but who go away and forget their own requests.

Thirdly, they who do not forget, and are not careless—but are doubtful, unbelieving, distrustful. If they do not believe they shall have an answer, why do they ask? David said—"In the morning will I direct my prayer unto you, and will look up." Psalm 5:3. Let us do likewise, and do with our prayers, as merchants do who send their ships to sea, and who look for their return laden with a precious and profitable cargo. Such, then, is the office of faith in prayer, viewed generally.

II. We may now consider faith in prayer for PARTICULAR blessings—for some particular object which we are anxious to obtain, and for which we feel warranted to ask.

We are now supposing the case of a believer who is oppressed with a sense of some great need, which he is impelled to make the matter of earnest prayer, and it may be asked if faith in this case means a persuasion that he shall receive *the very thing* that he prays for, whether it be for a temporal blessing or a spiritual one?

In other words, are we to understand that declaration literally, and without limitation or exception— "All things, whatever you shall ask in prayer believing, you shall receive." Matt. 21:22. In reference to that particular declaration, we would remark that it refers, as the context proves, to miracles, and meant that those to whom this gift was imparted would, if they felt prompted to work a miracle, and had faith to believe they should do it, have power in every instance given them to perform it, in answer to believing prayer. The passage so explained does not therefore apply in its literal meaning to the ordinary experiences of the Christian life.

But we will here refer to a remark laid down in a previous part of this chapter, which must be ever borne in mind—**the rule of faith is the rule of prayer.** And as this, in every case, is the belief of something that God has said, and in the case of a blessing, something he has promised, so in prayer it cannot be exercised in reference to any particular blessing so as to assure us it shall be given, unless that very blessing is actually promised. Some things are promised generally, and our belief of them must have the same general form; while others are promised specially, and these must be looked for specially. Faith does not mean an impression of anything upon our mind, however strong—but a belief of something which God has said. We may now go on to take up the question of **faith in prayer for particular blessings.**

1. We will view faith in prayer, in reference to SPIRITUAL blessings. These, be it observed, are promised specifically, that is to say, they, the very blessings themselves, are promised to everyone who seeks them aright.

Suppose the case of a penitent praying for the *pardon of his sins*, he is to ask for that blessing with a full confidence it will be given him. He has no need to qualify and guard his petition with such conditions as— "If it be good for him to receive it, and for God's glory to impart it;" for it *is* good for him, and for God's glory. God has promised that very blessing. He has again and again repeated the promise, and there ought to be neither doubt nor hesitation about the ability or willingness of God to bestow it. The petitioner is to have confidence in God for *that* blessing, and faith in prayer is in this case an assurance that this blessing will be bestowed.

So also, of praying for the *Holy Spirit to sanctify, to comfort, to strengthen for all the duties of the Christian life.* This blessing is promised to everyone who seeks, and the believer seeking Divine influence by prayer should expect it—his confidence in reference to this matter means his casting out all doubts and fears, and his looking for that very thing.

So likewise of prayer for Divine help against any *temptation*, however strong, God has engaged to assist us, and we should pray for aid with a persuasion we shall have it.

In cases of *perplexity* as to the path of duty, if there be a sincere desire to do the will of God, apart from all personal, selfish, and sinful considerations, we may be assured we shall be guided aright. When greatly afflicted, we should pray for Divine support and consolation, being assured that if really willing to be comforted and sustained, we shall have the very blessing.

To pray and not expect to be answered, in all such cases as these, is to pray in unbelief. And this is really a very sinful state of mind, and exceedingly displeasing to God. When by promise and by covenant he has engaged to bestow upon us such blessings—when he has given up his Son to die upon the cross to bestow them upon us—it must be a great transgression against his truth, his power, and his love, to question whether if we pray for them, we shall receive them.

2. But in regard to TEMPORAL blessings, faith in prayer must be a somewhat different exercise. By temporal blessings are meant health; prosperity in business; our own life, and the life of our friends; deliverance out of any particular exigency; preservation from danger in traveling; and a variety of other things. All these it is quite clear, may be made matter of prayer. The apostle's language is very explicit, striking, and encouraging— "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Phil. 4:6. The antithesis between the "being anxious for nothing," and the "everything by prayer" is most impressive, teaching that we are not to allow the *greatest* thing to make us anxious, and we are to carry the *least* to God by prayer. O that we knew, valued, and improved this blessed privilege! But what is faith in reference to these things? Certainly not a persuasion we shall have the very thing, without any condition. For where has God promised when we are in sickness we shall certainly recover? Or that every lawful scheme of industry shall succeed? Or that our friend for whose life we pray shall recover? Or that in traveling we shall never meet with an accident? We have not the promise we shall have these very blessings, and therefore we can have no certain belief that they will certainly come—even in answer to prayer.

But is there then no room for *any* faith in such prayers, and in reference to such things? Unquestionably there is. We are to believe that God authorizes us to pray for such matters—that he will hear the prayers we present, and not drive us in our troubles from his presence, saying— "Bring no such matters here!"—that he will accept the very act of presenting our supplications unto him with favor, as an act of homage to himself—that he will in some way answer our prayers, if not in the letter, yet in the spirit; if not by giving us the thing we ask, bestowing upon us something better. God takes his own time, and his own manner, in answering our prayers; and **as regards temporal favors, has reserved to himself these two conditions—if they are for our spiritual good, and for his own glory.**

Here is room, ample and delightful room, for faith in prayer, in reference to temporal blessings, without supposing we shall have in every case the very things we ask for; here is a firm, a tranquilizing, a joyful assurance, that **God will hear our prayers, and give the very blessing we ask, if it be for our good**

and for his own glory; and a belief that it will not be given, yes, a wish that it may not, unless on these conditions. Who could desire it to be otherwise? Who would ask to be left at the mercy of their own prayers? Who would not be afraid to pray for *any* temporal blessing at all—if God took off these checks to our petitions, these guards of our welfare? This is the duty enjoined by the apostle James, in reference to temporal blessings, to believe that God does so conduct himself, that he acts upon the principle of granting only what he sees best and fittest to be given. This is a confidence in his wisdom, love, faithfulness, and power—all at once. It is a noble exercise of trust to carry the dearest object of our affection to him, and laying it down before his throne to say— "Lord, grant me this, if it be your will; and if not, I entirely confide in your glorious perfections that it will be right to deny me."

3. But there is another class of cases, I mean such as relate to **spiritual blessings for OTHERS**. Christian parents are concerned, or should be deeply so, for the salvation of their children; and as one way of expressing their solicitude, they pray for them—ought they in such prayer to believe that every one of them will be really converted to God? Before we come to that point, let us enquire whether we have any rule for our expectation in such a case? Now we have, undoubtedly, some declarations. "I will be a God unto you, and to your seed after you." Gen. 17:7. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." "I will pour my spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring, and they shall spring up among the grass, as willows by the water courses." Isaiah 44:3-4. "You and your house shall be saved." Acts 16:31. "Fathers provoke not your children to wrath—but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Ephes. 6:4.

Now though these declarations are certainly somewhat vague and general, yet they encourage a hope of saving results—so far as to warrant an expectation of the conversion of such children to God; and the prayer for their conversion ought to be presented in something of a pleasing belief that God will hear our prayers, and grant his grace upon our efforts. But then consider what these prayers for their conversion imply. They must proceed from a heart that really desires and longs for their conversion. It should be an intense yearning—a longing in some measure proportioned to the object itself. Their conversion must be the first object concerning them, to which all others must be subordinated. This object must be sought by all the appropriate means of godly training and example. Everything must be done that would conduce to their conversion to God, and everything kept away that would hinder it. There must not only be instruction—but in the fullest sense of the term, education. The character must be formed; and in order to this, the parent must present a model of exemplary piety in himself. And with these conditions, the father may go and pray for his children's conversion, and expect their conversion. Prayers so presented and so followed up, will very generally be answered.

It is, no doubt, a fact that very many *do* pray and see comparatively little result of their prayers—their children do not become godly. Why? I would by no means suggest that it is in *all* cases to be traced up to parental neglect. I would not pour vinegar upon the wounds of many a lacerated heart, bleeding under the misconduct of a prodigal son, by asserting that parental sins have led to this; but at the same time, there can be little doubt of the general principle—that godly training, carried on from the dawn of reason, through childhood and youth, with judgment, uniformity, consistency, and affection, enforced by an eminently holy and consistent example, and sanctified by believing prayer—would be followed in *most* cases with the blessed result of their conversion to God.

To pray with expectation of a favorable result, when none of the conditions of prevailing prayer in such cases have been complied with, is but presumption. It is true, God does sometimes in sovereignty answer prayers where these conditions have been neglected, or at any rate bestow the blessings thus asked; but he has not bound himself to answer them.

Still, it must be admitted, there are cases which perplex and puzzle us, of children converted to God, whose parents, if they prayed for them at all, neither took pains to educate them religiously—nor ever expected—nor scarcely wished their conversion; while on the other hand, there are young people who have enjoyed the best godly culture—but who never personally come under the influence of true piety, and that too while other members of the same family did. Such instances go to prove that a *general* faith, giving rise to a lively hope of their conversion, a pleasing expectation of it, is all that we are warranted to indulge, without going so far as to say— "I am sure that *all* my children will be ultimately brought to God." Has God in any case promised to anyone, that all his children shall become truly godly, and saved eternally? Has he, in fact, given an absolute promise concerning any one in particular? True, he has given such general promises as encourage a general expectation; and perhaps this is all.

The same remarks will apply to other cases. It is not uncommon for eminently godly people to have their minds deeply concerned and exercised for some object of affectionate interest, whose conversion is to them a matter of prayerful solicitude; and has been sought either by praying alone, or in connection with it, by the use of means. In that case, how far should faith in prayer go? Are we authorized fully to believe that the individual *will* be converted? To this it may be interrogatively replied—Has God anywhere promised the conversion of *that* person? If so, we may be firmly assured that this blessed result will take place. But since no such promise is granted, all that we can do is to hope for it; and we are in many cases encouraged *strongly* to hope. Hope means the union of desire and expectation, and certainly includes some *degree* of faith; for what we expect, we must in some measure believe.

In like manner must all the labors of the faithful minister be carried on, and indeed all attempts for the conversion of others. There must not only be the use of appropriate means—but also earnest prayer to God; and that prayer must be in faith. We are not, I think, warranted fully to believe that any particular effort will certainly be blessed for the conversion of such and such a person; for is it promised? Such particularity of

faith is not warranted, for such particularity of promise is not given. General expectation that God will bless the means in some measure, and to such people as he thinks fit, is warranted; and strong hopes may be often entertained of the special efficacy of the means in particular and selected cases; but if belief is to be ruled by the promise, and no special promise can be found, no special and certain answer to prayer may be looked for with absolute certainty. Surely, here is ample room even with this latitude, for believing prayer.

Churches, in praying for their ministers, ought to pray in faith that they will be blessed; and ministers in praying for themselves, ought to do the same, because we have God's promise— "That as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and return not there again—but water the earth and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth—it shall not return unto me void—but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Isaiah 55:10, 11. This, and many other general promises, warrant a very strong general expectation.

And in that general faith, both ministers and people are lamentably deficient—a remark which applies with equal truth and force to our efforts for the conversion of the world. We must give ourselves far more to prayer for this great event than we have ever yet done, before it will take place. Money alone will never do it, though we had the revenue of the British empire at command. It is greatly to be feared that our dependence is yet far more upon money, than upon prayer. We seem to calculate our success by our means. Our funds are the atmosphere which raise or depress the quicksilver of our hopes—and as God works by means, this, to a certain extent, is natural. But we carry it to excess—it would seem as if money were everything, and prayer nothing. We shall never convert the world as we are—the church is not in a state for such an enterprise—it is not strong enough in faith and prayer for such a work. Believing prayer is needed, the God-exalting and honoring spirit of wrestling faith. Our churches must be full of prayers, and our prayers full of faith. But then, even here, we have none but general promises, and cannot have anything but general faith. We know not which mission, or which missionary shall prosper—this or that—or whether all shall be alike.

We have heard a great deal said about the conversion of sinners at home and abroad, which appeared to us not warranted either by reason, revelation, or experience. In enquiring why no more good has been done, two opposite causes have been assigned by two different classes of respondents. Some have resolved it all into Divine sovereignty—and others all into the neglect of appointed means. Both are wrong, by ascribing it *all to one* cause. There is no question that against the opinion of the one, the deficiency of result, in great part, arises from the deficiency of appropriate means, and not all from the sovereignty of God. It is not that God is deficient to honor his promise—but that man is deficient in his duty. On the other hand, it must be admitted that the most appropriate means are not always successful. Was there anything lacking in the personal ministry of Christ? and yet how generally unsuccessful was he? Had not the apostles often to complain of a lack of success? and were *they* deficient in the use of proper means? And how is it that precisely the same means are followed with such different results, in the case of different people? *Something* then must be set down to the sovereignty of God, not in the way of excusing man's neglect—but in the way of accounting for the various measures of success in the use of means. The whole subject resolves itself into the nature of the connection between moral means and their results, which of course is quite different from that existing between physical cause and effect—in the latter case it is fixed and invariable—in the former, it is contingent both upon man's will and God's.

An important and interesting question will here arise— "Whether a strong impression upon the mind, to ask for a particular blessing which is not specially promised, is a sufficient ground and warrant for faith to expect it with certainty, as an answer to prayer." Manton, in his Commentary on James, when writing on the passage we have quoted and explained, remarks— "*Some that have more near communion with God may have a particular faith of some particular occurrences.*" By some special instincts in prayer from the Spirit of God, they have gone away, and said with David—*In this, I will be confident.* I do not say it is usual—but sometimes it may be so. We cannot curtail the Spirit of his liberty of revealing himself to his people. But remember, *Privileges do not make rules.* These are acts of *God's prerogative*, not according to his *standing law and rule*. However, this I conceive is common, that in a particular case, we may conceive the more hope, when our hearts have been drawing out to God by an *actual trust*—that is when we have urged a particular promise to God in prayer, with submission yet with hope—for God seldom fails a trusting soul. They may lay hold on God by virtue of a double claim, partly by virtue of the single promise that first invited them to God, and then by virtue of another promise made to their *trust*, as 'You will keep him in perfect peace, who puts his trust in you—because he trusts in you.'—Isaiah 26:3."

This is cautiously worded—and much caution is necessary. To say that God never so lays a subject upon the heart of his people, and so stirs up their desires and prayers after it, as to be an intimation of his mind to grant it, of his will that they should certainly expect it, would perhaps be saying more than we have authority for doing. But when we consider how liable such a supposed intimation of the Divine will is to be abused, and how much it has been abused, in giving rise to the wildest, most extravagant and mischievous enthusiasm, mysticism, and fanaticism—we should be very cautious how we admitted, even in the most general and occasional form, the principle that impressions of our mind are a special revelation from God, and intended to be a rule of conduct, or a ground of expectation.

The safest rule of action and expectation is to abide close by God's written Word, and where we have only **general promises**, to be satisfied with a general faith—to ask for such things only as God has promised to give. In regard to **spiritual blessings**, to look for the very blessings themselves. In regard to **temporal blessings**, to qualify and regulate every petition with a profound submission to the will of God, believing

that he hears every prayer we present, and will answer it at such time, and in such manner, as shall be most for his glory and our good.

It may be both instructive and encouraging to exhibit a few **examples** out of many that may be selected from the Word of God, **of faith in prayer**. And where shall we begin—but with him, who is our great Exemplar, and who in this, as well as in other things, has left us an example that we should follow his steps. Our Lord JESUS Christ is said to be "the author and finisher of faith." In his human nature, he was both a man of faith, and a man of prayer, and was the highest of all instances of believing prayer. "Ask of me," said the Eternal Father to the Son, in the covenant transactions of redeeming mercy— "and I will give you the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession." He did ask, and in all the full assurance of faith. What promises were made to Him in his covenant relations and work as Mediator. How beautiful the language of the ancient prophets. Isaiah 49:1-12-53:10-12. Do we desire a specimen of His prayer, we may find one, and it is but a specimen—but how glorious an one, in John 17. "These words spoke Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said—Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you." That wondrous prayer is full of faith, and this is one of the uses we should make of it, to see how Jesus prayed, and how he believed. And as to his confidence in God, his whole life was full of it, as it was also of the most sublime devotion. Let his followers learn of him in this respect, as well as in others.

But, perhaps, examples less magnificent and lofty will also instruct us. Turn then, first of all, to the prayer of MOSES for Israel, when, for the sins of the people in worshiping the gods of Egypt, in the wilderness, God said to him— "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and consume them, and I will make of you a great nation." What an appeal to his ambition, if he had any, to become the head and stock of a new great nation! Yet it had no charm for him, when, as he thought, the glory of his God was involved, and likely to be obscured. "But Moses pleaded with the Lord his God not to do it. "O Lord!" he exclaimed. "Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and mighty acts? The Egyptians will say, 'God tricked them into coming to the mountains so he could kill them and wipe them from the face of the earth.' Turn away from your fierce anger. Relent about this terrible disaster you are planning against your people! Remember your covenant with your servants—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You swore by your own self, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. Yes, I will give them all of this land that I have promised to your descendants, and they will possess it forever.' " Exodus 32:11-13.

O, the boldness—the holy familiarity—the unselfishness—the pure zeal for God's glory, contained in this wondrous prayer—and then the faith! How he took his stand upon the covenant; and held up the promise; and laid hold of the uplifted arm of God; and by his faith, threw round it the silken cord, and golden chain, and held it fast in these bonds, so that it could not fall in consuming anger upon the people!

And DANIEL also, that man of deep devotion, how when he knew by the records of prophecy the seventy years of the captivity were expiring, he set his face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, for the restoration of Jerusalem, and the deliverance of the people. His belief in the certainty of the event, instead of releasing him from prayer, set him upon it, and he thus pleaded in faith. And previously to this, when that cruel plot was formed against his life—see him when he "learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God." Daniel 6:10. There, was the prayer of faith, in one of its most beautiful instances. He prayed for grace to be faithful in that hour of trial, and he confided in his God, either to deliver him out of the mouths of the lions, or to sustain him to endure a martyrdom so dreadful. And what a reward!

The page of the New Testament is adorned with instances of this confidence in prayer. Behold the Canaanite woman appealing to Incarnate Mercy for her possessed daughter, beseeching for a cure from him who alone could effect it, and whom she believed could, if he would. What a plea! "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession!" One would think that such an appeal of course will be instantly heard and granted. No. "But Jesus gave her no reply--not even a word!" What, the 'ear of pity' deaf to such a petition! "What," one would have imagined she would say— "is this the mercy, the fame of which has reached even my afflicted home? Will he not hear me, look on me, answer me? Must I return, and tell all who come to inquire about my plight—that he would not bestow a word or even a look upon me?" To increase her distress and discouragement, the disciples urged him to send her away. "Tell her to leave," they said. "She is

bothering us with all her begging." Is this all the mercy that could be found in the hearts of all the twelve apostles? Poor woman, we pity you. There is very little hope for you.

Jesus at length breaks **silence**, and says— "I was sent only to help the people of Israel--God's lost sheep--not the Gentiles." His **words** are more distressing than his silence! His *silence* might have arisen from his not hearing the request, or from his meditating what answer to return to them—but these apparently harsh words, seem to put her beyond the pale of hope. Still her faith holds on, and her prayer continues, for "she came and worshiped him and pleaded again—Lord, help me!" To this he makes a reply that *seems* to add **insult** to neglect. "It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs!" Mysterious answer! O Savior, how apparently unlike yourself!

What must have been the poor widow's reflections—"My heart is now almost broken—am I not a Gentile woman? and must I be called a dog? Is it thus he will confute his own character, and break the bruised reed? Must I go home and look upon my poor child with the sting of this insult and its venom rankling in my

tortured bosom?" Surely she will now give up her suit—stop her plea—and renounce her faith. Yes, she would have done so—had her faith been less strong. "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even dogs are permitted to eat crumbs that fall beneath their master's table!" Marvelous reply, one of the finest responses which language ever formed, and the most ingenious deductions ever drawn. Jesus could hold out no longer. He could protract the trial no farther. Like Joseph under the influence of his feelings when his heart was moved by the discourse of his brothers, he drops the innocent disguise which his bursting compassion could sustain not another moment, and with delighted surprise he exclaims— "Woman, your faith is great. Your request is granted." And her daughter was instantly healed. (Matthew 15:22-28)

What was the meaning of all this? What was the secret of Christ's seemingly inexplicable conduct? What? He saw he had a subject which would enable him to exhibit to the world an extraordinary instance of faith in prayer, and he determined to draw it forth in all its power and beauty. His heart was moved towards her from the beginning. He knew what he would do—and though he beat her off with one hand, he held her fast by the other.

Here then we have an instance of prayer continued under delays, apparent neglect, and repulse—and continued through the power of faith. The woman still believed that there was mercy in that heart to which she for a long time appealed in vain, and that she should ultimately succeed—and she did.

Then is our belief in God's faithfulness most tried and most triumphant—when we still maintain it amid those hopes delayed, which make the heart sick. **God often sees fit to postpone for a season, his compliance with our requests. Though his ears are always open to our cries, he carries it sometimes in such a manner as if they were fast closed against them; or as if he had covered his throne with a cloud, through which our prayer could not pierce.**

A **minister** praying for the success of his labors may be heard in mercy—though it does not happen as soon, or though he cannot see it as clearly as he may naturally desire. A **parent** may pray for the salvation of his children, and his desires may have gone up with acceptance before the throne, although the accomplishment may be yet far distant, and they seem for the time to increase unto more ungodliness. An **afflicted** person may have actually obtained the sanctified improvement of his tribulation, although he cannot yet perceive the ends of Divine Providence in it; the happy discovery of which may be a feast reserved, a cordial in store—for him at some future season. In general a mercy may be granted with advantage and increase, though it be suspended for a time. The fruits of God's love must hang to ripen in the warm beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and to be filled out with the rain and dews of heaven, which the hand of his unwise and clamorous children would sometimes pluck in a state of immaturity. In this interval, however, the Christian's eyes will be ready to fail with looking long; and he may be in danger of losing his faith and stopping his prayers. Therefore our Lord spoke a parable on purpose to teach men always to pray and not to faint. Luke 18:1.

Another lesson taught its by the faith, perseverance, and success of this Canaanite woman is, to continue believing prayer under the frowning and discouraging aspect of providential occurrences. The Christian may be sure he is warranted to carry a matter to God in prayer—he may have every reason to believe it is in entire accordance with the will of God; he may have all possible grounds to expect an answer to his prayer; yet all this while there may be a strange and perplexing aspect of God's providence. Events may conspire to discourage him. Not only does God delay to answer—but he seems to give out nothing but rebuffs. Sometimes like Job, he is compelled to say— "He has fenced up my way that I cannot pass; and he has set darkness in my paths!" Chapter 19:8. At other times he echoes the plaint of Jacob— "All these things are against me!" He seems farther and farther from obtaining his object—and if he hearkened to reason, or judged by sense, he would abandon the suit. But no— "I am right," he says— "I have God's clear promise. I will hold on by faith, and not cease to pray. He is a God who hides himself. Clouds and darkness are round about him; but within those clouds, and wrapped in that darkness, is the object I am seeking; and by and by it will come out of the cloud in all its brightness in answer to believing prayer. I will take hold of his covenant and wait his time."

How much reproof does this subject administer to all God's children, for their neglect of prayer itself—that blessed privilege, which gives such honor to God, and brings such comfort to man. Especially does it reprove us for the weakness of our faith in prayer. How many pray as if they never expected their prayers to be answered. Prayer is little else to them than a duty to be performed, and when it is ended it is done with. They act in prayer, pretty much like those men who carry about bills, knocking at every door and leaving them under the knocker—but never expecting an answer and never waiting for one. They knock and go on. But is *this* prayer? Nothing like it. "I will climb up into my watchtower now and wait to see what the Lord will say to me and how he will answer my complaint," said the prophet. Habakkuk 2:1. He had sent up his prayer, and he was now observing and waiting to see what would come of it; whether the blessing would come, and whence it would come.

It is our shame to think so little of prayer—to have such low, dark, desponding thoughts concerning it. And why? Because our faith itself is weak. Therefore let us pray— "Lord increase our faith." It is but a little while longer we shall have need of either faith or prayer. These are the exercises, the invariable exercises of grace; the ebullitions of that well of water which has been opened in the soul by the gift of Christ in the Holy Spirit, and which is ever springing up to everlasting life!