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Collection

HIGHWAY OF OUR GOD

PART II: TREADING THE HIGHWAY

**CHAPTER FOUR: Prayer that God Cannot Answer**

THERE is no experience perhaps more common in these days than this among professing Christians: 'I have prayed a long time for certain things, but I don't seem to get any answers to my prayers.' I often wonder such people do not give up praying altogether.

This is a very God-dishonouring experience, and to account for it something must be wrong either with the suppliants or the Giver. Often I feel what a deeply dishonouring thing it is when Christians meet, as they do, to pray for a revival or for some specific thing in their churches and in their families, and it never comes.

Some years ago, when a wave of revival was sweeping over Ireland and America, the churches in this country united to pray that it might come to England; but it did not come, and the infidels wagged their heads and wrote in their newspapers: 'See, the Christians? God is either deaf or gone a-hunting, for they have had prayer meetings all over the land for a revival and it has not come.'

How my cheeks burned with shame as I thought of it. I knew it was not because God was asleep, not because His arm was shortened, not because His bowels of compassion did not yearn over sinners, not because He could not have poured out His Spirit and given us glorious times of refreshing. There was only one reason, and that was that His people asked amiss. They did not fulfil the conditions of prevailing prayer. If they had prayed till now and maintained the same attitude, they would not have got the answer, because there are conditions to God's promises.

We may pray ourselves black in the face, but if we do not comply with the conditions God will never move an inch to meet us. There are plenty of gracious promises in the Book, in which God has bound Himself to answer the faithful prayers of His people. 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.'

Why is it, then, that a great mass of professing Christians do not get answers to their prayers? In the first place they are not the characters to whom God has made the promises. The promises are made to those who keep His commandments, who walk in the light and have fellowship with Him through



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the Holy Spirit who, therefore, can make intercession for them. How can the Spirit make intercession for a man when He is not in him? Those who are walking in the light can see what sort of requests to make, when to make them, and how to make them. They see it all, because they are in the light. Such people ask and receive. But, alas! Because there are so few of these, God's character is traduced every day and infidels laugh at us and at Him. I challenge anybody to find me promises in this Book, taken with the context (except in the case of repenting sinners, who are a special class and met with special promises), that are made to any except to saints. Certainly they are not made to everybody. The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to God, except it be when he is forsaking his wickedness. The promises are made to people who are in fellowship with God. 'If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you,' said Jesus, 'ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' The promises, I say, are made to those who, having been brought into living fellowship by a living faith, maintain that union, who walk in it, live in it, and avail themselves of the opportunities and privileges which Jesus has bestowed upon them by virtue of it.

It is not enough to have been in union with Jesus, in order to get answers to prayer. There are thousands who have let go the grasp of faith, and are not abiding in Christ, and yet are constantly praying and wondering why God does not answer their prayers. You see, the first condition is wanting. There is no possible way of approach to the Father but through the Son, and no prayers made while out of living union with His Son are accepted.

That does not mean saying, 'For the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.' It does not matter much what people say. God never pays attention to people's words. What they mean and feel He pays attention to, and He knows when people really offer their prayers in union with His Son. When they are not in union their prayers never rise any higher than the room in which they are offered.

The next condition of prevailing prayer is obedience to the light. What does it mean to walk in obedience? It is coming right out and saying, 'Lord Jesus, I want to know Thy will. Pour Thy light upon me. I am prepared to follow it, even though it be to the block and to the stake.'

There is plenty of light; but you must say, 'Lord I am willing to have it, even if it condemns my life, my companions and indulgences, my business or my family relations.'

To walk in the light means to obey His voice, to walk so that your own heart condemns you not. The obedient child who lives in complacent affection with his parent has no fear in coming up to ask for



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favours. He knows he will be given them. His own heart does not condemn him. 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.'

I defy any man to separate confidence from obedience. If you will not be obedient, you cannot have confidence, and every Christian knows he cannot go up to the throne of God in faith for any blessing when his own heart condemns him. He has to get that state of condemnation taken away. Walk in the light, have fellowship with Him, and his Blood will cleanse you from all sin. Then the Spirit will teach you how to pray, and what to pray for, which the great mass of those who profess religion know nothing about.

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

Many professors do not know what the spirit of intercession means. They do not know anything about the Spirit making intercession for them with groanings which cannot be uttered. When we get more of this spirit of intercessory prayer in parents we shall see more spiritual children born. We know not what to pray for as we ought unless the Spirit teaches; hence people are constantly, as James says, asking and not receiving, because they ask amiss. 'Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts'—that means, your earthly desires and purposes.

I believe in my soul that this is the great reason why thousands of Christians pray and never get answers. They are selfish in their prayers. Mothers tell me that they have prayed for their children for years, and not had one of them converted. Why? Because they prayed merely selfish prayers, because they were their children, or because they wanted them to be religious, so that they would not bring disgrace upon the family, or it would be so nice to have them religious. They don't want them to cut off the vanities and fooleries of this world, and give themselves up wholly to Christ. That would be too much. They want just enough religion to make them a comfort to themselves. Would you answer such prayers if you were God? You must look at your child always as God's, as having a precious soul redeemed with the precious Blood of Jesus, and having talents and capacities to glorify Him and spread His kingdom, and you must ground your prayers on that and say, 'I would



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rather lay them in the grave than that they should grow up to dishonour Thee.' Then you will have your prayers answered.

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

There is very little difficulty about believing for people who have taken the three preceding steps. Those who are in fellowship with Jesus, those who are walking in the light, those who have the Holy Ghost as an interceding Spirit—they know what to pray for; they know what the mind of the Spirit is: they know how the Spirit is leading them, and they can march up to the throne and ask and receive. They know their request is according to the mind of God, and they can wrestle, if need be, if He sees fit to try their faith. God does not always answer at once. He lets His people wrestle with groans that cannot be uttered; but they know they will get it, because they know the Spirit is making intercession for them, and they hold on, sometimes amidst great discouragement and temptation, till the answer comes. They get the assurance of faith, which says, 'Yes, it shall be done.'

You say the age of miracles is past. Yes, because the age of that sort of faith is past. You will get miracles back when that sort of faith returns. God has bound Himself over to the faith of His real people, and He would sooner break all the laws of nature than break the laws of grace. He can easily set aside a law of nature, but He will never set aside a law of grace. He has bound Himself to faith—the only power in the universe to which He has bound Himself—and nobody can truly rise up in this world and say, 'I trusted God, and He deceived me.' Prayer is agony of soul, a wrestling of the spirit. You know how men and women deal with one another when they are in desperate earnestness for something to be done. That is prayer, whether it be to man or to God; and when you get your heart influenced and melted and wrought up and burdened by the Holy Ghost for souls, you will have power, and you will never pray but somebody will be convinced, some poor soul's dark eyes will be opened, and spiritual life will commence.