

the
Ministry
of
INTERCESSION

Andrew
MURRAY



WHITAKER
HOUSE

Publisher's note:

The author's selection of Bible versions has been retained whenever possible, including the Revised Version when it was originally cited. The text of this book, however, has been updated for the modern reader. Words, expressions, and sentence structure have been revised for clarity and readability.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible. Scripture quotations marked (RV) are taken from the Revised Version of the Holy Bible. Scripture quotations marked (ASV) are from the American Standard Edition of the Revised Version of the Holy Bible.

THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

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Introduction

A friend who heard that this book was being published asked how it differed from my previous one on the same subject, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. An answer to that question may be the best introduction I can give to the present volume.

Any acceptance the former work has had must be attributed, as far as the contents go, to the prominence it gives to two great truths: the first is the certainty that prayer will be answered. Some believe that to ask and expect an answer is not the highest form of prayer. They maintain that fellowship with God is more than supplication, which is often selfish. To worship is more than to beg. With others, the thought that prayer is so often unanswered is so prominent that they think more of the spiritual benefit derived from the exercise of prayer than the actual gifts to be obtained by it.

While admitting the measure of truth in these views, when kept in their true place, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* points out how our Lord continually spoke of prayer as a means of obtaining what we desire. It illustrates how He seeks in every possible way to awaken in us the confident expectation of an answer to prayer. I was led to show how prayer—in which a man could enter into the mind of God, could assert the royal power of a renewed will and bring down to earth what, without prayer, would not have

been given—is the highest proof of man’s having been made in the likeness of God’s Son. He is found worthy of entering into fellowship with Him, not only in adoration and worship, but in having his will actually taken up into the rule of the world and becoming the intelligent channel through which God can fulfill His eternal purpose. The book sought to reiterate and enforce the precious truths Christ preaches so continually: the blessing of prayer is that you can ask and receive what you will; the highest exercise and the glory of prayer is that persevering importunity can prevail and obtain what God at first could not and would not give.

With this truth there was a second one that came out very strongly as we studied the Master’s words. In answer to the question as to why, if the answer to prayer is so positively promised, there are such numerous unanswered prayers, we found that Christ taught us that the answer depended upon certain conditions. He spoke of faith, of perseverance, of praying in His name, of praying in the will of God. However, all these conditions were summed up in the central one: *“If ye abide in me...ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”* (John 15:7). It became clear that the power to pray the effective prayer of faith depended upon the life. It is only to a man given up to live as entirely in Christ and for Christ as the branch in the vine and for the vine that these promises can come true. *“In that day,”* Christ said, the Day of Pentecost, *“ye shall ask...in my name”* (John 16:23). It is only in a life full of the Holy Spirit that the true power to ask in Christ’s name can be known. This led to the emphasizing

of the truth that the ordinary Christian life cannot appropriate these promises. It needs a spiritual life, altogether sound and vigorous, to pray in power. The teaching naturally led to press the need of a life of entire consecration. More than one person has told me how it was in the reading of the book that he first saw what the better life was that could be lived, and must be lived, if Christ's wonderful promises are to come true to us.

In regard to these two truths, there is no change in the present volume. One only wishes that one could present them with such clearness and force as to help every beloved fellow Christian to some right impression of the reality and the glory of our privilege as God's children: "*ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*" (John 15:7). The present volume owes its existence to the desire to enforce two truths, of which formerly I had no such impression as now.

The one is that Christ actually meant prayer to be the great power by which His church should do its work and that the neglect of prayer is the great reason the church has not greater power over the masses in Christian and in heathen countries. In the first chapter, I have stated how my convictions in regard to this have been strengthened and what gave occasion to the writing of the book. It is meant to be, on behalf of myself and my brothers in the ministry and all God's people, a confession of shortcoming and of sin. At the same time, it is a call to believe that things can be different and that Christ waits to fit us by His Spirit to pray as He would have us. This call, of course, brings me back to what I

spoke of in connection with the former volume: that there is a life in the Spirit, a life of abiding in Christ, within our reach, in which the power of prayer—both the power to pray and the power to obtain the answer—can be realized in a measure which we could not have thought possible before. Any failure in the prayer life, any desire or hope really to take the place Christ has prepared for us, brings us to the very root of the doctrine of grace as manifested in the Christian life. It is only by a full surrender to the life of abiding, by the yielding to the fullness of the Spirit's leading and quickening, that the prayer life can be restored to a truly healthy state. I feel deeply how little I have been able to put this in the volume as I could wish. I have prayed and am trusting that God, who chooses the weak things, will use it for His own glory.

The second truth that I have sought to enforce is that we have far too little conception of the place that intercession, as distinguished from prayer for ourselves, ought to have in the church and the Christian life. In intercession, our King upon the throne finds His highest glory; in it we will find our highest glory, too. Through it, He continues His saving work and can do nothing without it; through it, alone we can do our work, and nothing avails without it. In it, He ever receives from the Father the Holy Spirit and all spiritual blessings to impart; in it, we too are called to receive in ourselves the fullness of God's Spirit, with the power to impart spiritual blessing to others. The power of the church to truly bless rests on intercession: asking and receiving heavenly gifts to carry to men. Because this is so, it is

no wonder that where—owing to lack of teaching or spiritual insight—we put the trust in our own diligence and effort—to the influence of the world and the flesh—and work more than we pray, the presence and power of God are not seen in our work as we would wish.

Such thoughts have led me to wonder what could be done to rouse believers to a sense of their high calling in this and to help train them to take part in it. And so this book differs from the former one in the attempt to open a practicing school and to invite all who have never taken systematic part in the great work of intercession to begin and give themselves to it. There are tens of thousands of workers who have known and are proving wonderfully what prayer can do. But there are tens of thousands who work with little prayer. Many more do not work at all because they do not know how or where they might all be added to the host of intercessors who are to bring down the blessings of heaven to earth. For their sakes, and the sake of all who feel the need of help, I have prepared helps and hints for a school of intercession for a month at the end of this book.

I have asked those who want to join to begin by giving at least ten minutes a day to this work. It is in doing that we learn to do; it is as we take hold and begin that the help of God's Spirit will come. It is as we daily hear God's call, and at once put it into practice, that the consciousness will begin to live in us: I too am an intercessor. We will feel the need of living in Christ and being full of the Spirit if we do this work correctly. Nothing will so test and stimulate the Christian

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life as the honest attempt to be an intercessor. It is difficult to conceive of how much we ourselves and the church will gain if, with our whole hearts, we accept the post of honor God is offering us. With regard to the school of intercession, I am confident that the result of the first month's course will be to awaken the feeling of how little we know how to intercede; a second and a third month may only deepen the sense of unfitness. This will be a great blessing. The confession, "*We know not how to pray as we ought*" (Romans 8:26 ASV) is the introduction to the experience, "*The Spirit...maketh intercession for us*" (v. 26). Our sense of ignorance will lead us to depend on the Spirit praying in us, to feel the need of living in the Spirit.

We have heard a great deal about systematic Bible study, and we praise God for thousands and thousands of Bible classes and Bible readings. Let all the leaders of such classes try to start prayer classes—helping their students to pray in secret and training them to be, above everything, people of prayer. Let ministers ask what they can do in this. The faith in God's Word can nowhere be so exercised and perfected as in the intercession that asks, expects, and looks out for the answer. Throughout Scripture, in the life of every saint, of God's own Son, throughout the history of God's church, God is, first of all, a prayer-hearing God. Let us try to help God's children to know their God and encourage all God's servants to labor with the assurance: the chief and most blessed part of my work is to ask and receive from my Father what I can bring to others.

It will now easily be understood that what this book contains will be nothing but the confirmation and the call to put into practice the two great lessons of the former one. *“Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”* (John 15:7). *“What things soever ye desire...believe that ye receive them”* (Mark 11:24). These great prayer promises, as part of the church’s endowment of power for her work, are to be taken as literally and actually true: *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you”* (John 15:7), *“In that day ye shall ask...in my name.”* (John 16:23). These great prayer conditions are universal and unchangeable. A life abiding in Christ and filled with the Spirit, a life entirely given up as a branch for the work of the vine, has the power to claim these promises and to pray the effective prayer that avails much (James 5:16).

“Lord, teach us to pray.”

—Luke 11:1

—Andrew Murray

chapter 1

The Lack of Prayer

Ye have not, because ye ask not.

—James 4:2

*And he saw that there was no man, and wondered
that there was no intercessor.*

—Isaiah 59:16

*There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth
up himself to take hold of thee.*

—Isaiah 64:7

The entire morning session of a convention I recently attended was devoted to prayer and intercession. Great blessing was found, both in listening to what the Word teaches of our need and power and in joining in continued, united supplication. Many felt that we knew too little of persevering, importunate prayer, and that it is, indeed, one of the greatest needs of the church.

We pray too little! There is even a lack of hope for any great change, due to force of habit and the pressured feeling that prayer is a duty.

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What I have heard lately regarding prayer has made a deep impression on me. What affected me the most was that God's servants should feel hopeless about the prospect of an entire change being made. I prayed God would give me words that might help to direct attention to the problem and to stir up faith, awakening the assurance that God, by His Spirit, will enable us to pray as we should. Real deliverance can be found from a failure that hinders our own joy in God and our power in His service.

Let me begin, for the sake of those who have never had their attention directed to the matter, by giving some examples that prove how universal the sense of shortcoming in prayer is.

Dr. Whyte, of Free St. George's, Edinburgh, made an address to ministers. In it, he said that as a young minister, he had thought that he should spend as much of his free time as possible with his books in his study. This was because he wanted to feed his people with the very best he could prepare for them. However, he had now learned that prayer was of more importance than study. He remembered that deacons were elected to take charge of the collections, so that the apostles could "*give [themselves] continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*" (Acts 6:4). At times, when the deacons of his congregation brought him his salary, he had to ask himself whether he had been as faithful in his responsibilities as they had been in theirs. He felt as if it were almost too late to regain what he had lost and urged his brothers to pray more. What a solemn confession and warning from one of the high places—we pray too little!

During a convention several years ago, I was discussing the subject of prayer in conversation with a well-known London minister. He maintained that if so much time must be given to prayer, it would involve the neglect of the responsibilities of his position. "There is the morning mail, before breakfast, with ten or twelve letters that must be answered. Then there are committee meetings waiting, with countless other engagements, more than enough to fill up the day. It is difficult to see how it can all be done."

My answer was, in substance, that it was simply a question of whether the call of God for our time and attention was of more importance than that of man. If God was waiting to meet us and to give us blessing and power from heaven for His work, it was a shortsighted policy to put other work in the place that God and waiting on Him should have.

At one of our ministerial meetings, the superintendent of a large district put the case this way: "I rise in the morning and, before breakfast, have half an hour with God in the Word and in prayer. I go out and am occupied all day with a multiplicity of engagements. I do not think many minutes elapse without my breathing a prayer for guidance or help. After my day's work, I return in my evening devotions and speak to God about the day's work. But of the intense, definite, importunate prayer of which Scripture speaks, I know little." What, he asked, must I think of such a life?

Imagine the difference between a man whose profits are just enough to maintain his family and keep up his business, and another whose

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income enables him to extend the business and to help others. There can be an earnest Christian life in which there is prayer enough to keep us from backsliding, just maintaining the position we have, without much growth in spirituality or in becoming more and more like Christ. This prayer attitude is more defensive—seeking to ward off temptation—than it is aggressive—reaching out after higher attainment.

If we are to grow in strength, with some large experience of God's power to sanctify ourselves and to bring down real blessing on others, there must be more definite and persevering prayer. The Scriptures, which teach us about "*cry[ing] day and night*" (Luke 18:7), "*continuing stedfastly in prayer*" (Romans 12:12 ASV), "*watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication*" (Ephesians 6:18), and being heard because of insistent importunity (Luke 11:8), must become our experience, in some large degree, if we are really to be intercessors.

Another example is this: a pastor of quite a large church who had many responsibilities once said to me, "I see the importance of much prayer, and yet my life hardly leaves room for it. Are we to submit, or how can we attain what we desire?" I admitted that the difficulty was universal. A most honored South African missionary, now gone to his rest, had the same complaint. I recalled his words: "In the morning at five, the sick people are at the door waiting for medicine. At six, the printers come, and I have to set them to work and teach them. At nine, the school calls me, and till late at night, I am kept busy with a large correspondence."

In my answer, I quoted a Dutch proverb: "What is heaviest must *weigh* heaviest." I said that is what must have first place. The law of God is unchangeable; as on earth, so in our traffic with heaven, we only get as we give. Unless we are willing to pay the price and sacrifice time, attention, and what appears to be legitimate or necessary for the sake of the heavenly gifts, we need not look for a large experience of the power of the heavenly world in our work. The whole company present joined in the sad confession; it had been thought over and mourned over, times without number. Yet somehow, there they were, all these pressing claims and all the ineffectual resolves to pray more barring the way. I do not need to say to what further thoughts our conversation led; the substance of them will be found in some of the later chapters in this volume.

Let me call just one more witness. In the course of my journey, I met with one of the Cowley Fathers who had just been holding retreats for clergy of the English Church. I was interested to hear from him the line of teaching he follows. In the course of conversation, he used the expression, "the distraction of business," and it came out that he found it one of the great difficulties he had to deal with in himself and others. Of himself, he said that by the vows of his order he was bound to give himself specially to prayer, but he found it exceedingly difficult. Every day he had to be at four different points of the town he lived in; his predecessor had left him the charge of a number of committees where he was expected to do all the work. It was as if everything conspired to keep him from prayer.

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All this testimony clarifies the fact that prayer does not have the place it should have in our ministerial and Christian life. The shortcoming is one of which all are willing to confess, and the difficulties in the way of deliverance are such as to make a return to a true and full prayer life almost impossible. Blessed be God: *"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God"* (Luke 18:27). *"God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Do let us believe that God's call to much prayer need not be a burden and cause of continual self-condemnation. He means it to be a joy. He can make it an inspiration, giving us strength for all our work and bringing down His power to work through us in our fellowmen. Do not be afraid to fully admit to the sin that shames us and then to face it in the name of our Mighty Redeemer. The light that shows us our sin and condemns us for it will show us the way out of it into the life of liberty that is well pleasing to God. If we allow this one matter, unfaithfulness in prayer, to convict us of the lack in our Christian lives, God will use the discovery to bring us not only the power to pray that we long for, but also the joy of a new and healthy life, of which prayer is the spontaneous expression.

And what is the way by which our sense of the lack of prayer can be made the means of blessing, the entrance on a path in which the evil may be conquered? How can our fellowship with the Father, in continual prayer and intercession, become what it ought to be, if we and the world

around us are to be blessed? As it appears to me, we must begin by going back to God's Word to study what place God means prayer to have in the life of His child and His church. A fresh sight of what prayer is according to the will of God, of what our prayers can be, through the grace of God, will free us from those feeble, defective views in regard to the absolute necessity of continual prayer that lie at the root of our failure. As we get an insight into the reasonableness and rightness of this divine appointment and come under the full conviction of how wonderfully it fits in with God's love and our own happiness, we will be freed from the false impression of its being an arbitrary demand. With our whole hearts and souls, we will consent to it and rejoice in it, as the only possible way for the blessing of heaven to come to earth. All thought of task and burden, of self-effort and strain, will pass away in the blessed faith that as simple as breathing is in the healthy, natural life, praying will be in the Christian life that is led and filled by the Spirit of God.

As we occupy ourselves with and accept this teaching of God's Word on prayer, we will be led to see how our failures in the prayer life were owing to failure in the spirit life. Prayer is one of the most heavenly and spiritual of the functions of the spirit life. How could we try or expect to fulfill it so as to please God, except as our souls are in perfect health, and our lives are truly possessed and moved by God's Spirit? The insight into the place God means prayer to have, and that it only can have in a full Christian life, will show us that we have not been living the true,

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abundant life. It will show us that any thought of praying more effectively will be vain, except as we are brought into a closer relationship with our blessed Lord Jesus.

Christ is our life. Christ lives in us in such reality that His life of prayer on earth, and of intercession in heaven, is breathed into us in just such measure as our surrender and our faith allow and accept it. Jesus Christ is the Healer of all diseases, the Conqueror of all enemies, the Deliverer from all sin. If our failures teach us to turn afresh to Him, and to find in Him the grace He gives to pray as we should, this humiliation may become our greatest blessing. Let us all unite in praying to God that He would visit our souls and fit us for that work of intercession, which is at this moment the greatest need of the church and the world. It is only by intercession that that power can be brought down from heaven, which will enable the church to conquer the world. Let us stir up the slumbering gift that is lying unused and seek to gather, train, and band together as many as we can to be God's remembrancers and to give Him no rest until He makes His church a joy in the earth. Nothing but intense, believing prayer can meet the intense spirit of worldliness, which is complained of everywhere.