

THE
Prayer
LIFE

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ANDREW MURRAY


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THE PRAYER LIFE

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PREFACE

A few words with regard to the origin of this book and the object with which it was written will help to put the reader into the right position for understanding its teaching. It was the outcome of a conference of ministers at Stellenbosch, South Africa, April 11–14, 1912. The occasion of the conference was as follows: Professor de Vos of our theological seminary had written a letter to the ministers of our church (Dutch Reformed Church) concerning the low state of spiritual life which marked the church universal generally, which, he said, ought to lead to the inquiry as to how far that statement included our church too. What had been said in

the book *The State of the Church* called for deep searching of heart. He thought there could be no doubt about the truth of the statement in regard to the lack of spiritual power. He asked whether it was not time for us to come together and in God's presence to find out what might be the cause of the evil. He wrote: "If only we study the conditions in all sincerity, we shall have to acknowledge that our unbelief and sin are the cause of the lack of spiritual power; that this condition is one of sin and guilt before God, and nothing less than a direct grieving of God's Holy Spirit."

His invitation met with a hearty response. Our four theological professors, with more than two hundred ministers, missionaries, and theological students, came together with the above words as the keynote of our meeting. From the very first in the addresses there was the tone of confession as the only way to repentance and restoration. At a subsequent meeting the opportunity was given for testimony as to what might be the sins that made the life of the church so feeble. Some began to mention failings that they had seen in other ministers, either in conduct or in doctrine or in service. It was soon felt that this was not the right way; each must acknowledge that in which he himself was guilty.

The Lord graciously so ordered it that we were gradually led to the sin of prayerlessness as one of the deepest roots of the evil. No one could plead himself free from this. Nothing so reveals the defective spiritual life in minister and congregation as the lack of believing and unceasing prayer. Prayer is

indeed the pulse of the spiritual life. It is the great means of bringing to the minister and people the blessing and power of heaven. Persevering and believing prayer means a strong and an abundant life.

When once the spirit of confession began to prevail, the question arose as to whether it would be indeed possible to expect to gain the victory over all that had in the past hindered our prayer lives. In smaller conferences held previously, it had been found that many were most anxious to make a new beginning, and yet they had not the courage to expect that they would be able to maintain that prayer life that they saw to be in accordance with the Word of God. They had often made the attempt but had failed. They did not dare to make any promise to the Lord to live and to pray as He would have them; they felt it was an impossibility for them.

Such confessions gradually led to the great truth that the only power for a new prayer life is to be found in an entirely new relationship to our blessed Savior. It is as we see in Him the Lord who saves us from sin—including the sin of prayerlessness—and our faith yields itself to a life of closer communion with Him, that a life in His love and fellowship will make prayer to Him the natural expression of our soul's life. Before we parted, many were able to testify that they were returning with new light and new hope to find in Jesus Christ strength for a new prayer life.

Many felt that this was only a beginning. Satan, who had so long prevailed in the inner chamber, would do his utmost with his temptations to make us yield once again to the power of the flesh and the world. Nothing but the teaching and the fellowship of Christ Himself could ever give the power to remain faithful.

The need was felt for some statement of the truths that had been dealt with at the conference, to remind those who had been present of what they had learned and of what would help them in the new endeavor after that prayer life that is so essential to a minister's success. It was also needed for those who had been prevented from coming and for the eldership in our church, who had in many cases felt the deepest interest in hearing what the purpose was for which their ministers had gone from home.

Early copies of the book were sent out with the thought that if the leaders of the church, ministers and elders, begin to see that in spiritual work everything depends upon prayer, and that God Himself is the helper of those who wait on Him, it would indeed be a day of hope for our church. It was at the same time meant for all believers who long for a life of more entire separation to the Lord. For all who desired to pray more and pray better, it sought to point them to the glory of God in the inner chamber, and the way in which that glory can rest upon the soul.

When first asked to have the book translated into English, I felt as if its composition had been too hurried

and its tone, owing to the close connection with the meetings that had preceded, too colloquial to make this desirable. Further, my own limited strength made it impossible for me to think of rewriting it. When, however, my friend, Reverend W. M. Douglas, asked permission to translate it, I gave my consent. If God has a message through the book to any of His servants, I would count it a privilege to tell what He has done here in our church, as a suggestion of what He may do in other churches.

I close with my greetings to all the ministers of the gospel and to the church members who may read these pages. I pray fervently that the grace of God would work among us conviction of sin, confession of deep need and helplessness, and then give the vision and the faith of what Jesus Christ can do for those who trust Him. May He give to more than one who reads, the courage to take counsel with his brothers and to seek for and obtain that full fellowship with God in prayer which is the very essence of the Christian life. It has been said: "It is only the prayerless who are too proud to own up to prayerlessness." Let us believe that there are many hearts waiting for the call inviting them to united and whole-hearted confession of shortcoming, as the only but the sure way of a return and restoration to God's favor, and the experience of what He will do in answer to prayer.

I wish to add one word more, in regard to "the Pentecostal prayer meetings" held throughout our church. These have had a very interesting and important place in our work. At

the time of the great revival in America and Ireland in 1858 and following years, some of our elder ministers issued a circular urging the churches to pray that God might visit us also. In 1860, the revival broke out in various parishes. In April 1861, in one of our oldest congregations, there was very deep interest shown in prayer. During the week preceding Pentecost, the minister, who ordinarily preached only once on a Sunday, announced that in the afternoon there would be a public prayer meeting in the church. The occasion was one of extraordinary interest, and many hearts were deeply touched. As one result, the minister suggested that in the future the ten days between Ascension and Pentecost should be observed by daily prayer meetings. This took place the following year. The blessing then received was such that all the neighboring congregations took up the suggestion, and now for fifty years the ten days of prayer have been observed throughout the whole church.

Each year notes were issued as subjects of addresses and prayer. The result has been that throughout our whole church Christians have been educated in the knowledge of what God's Word teaches regarding the Holy Spirit, and have been stirred to seek and to yield themselves to His blessed leading.

These ten days have often proved the occasion for special effort with the unconverted, and of partial revival. And they have been the means of untold blessing in leading ministers and people to recognize the place that the Holy Spirit

ought to have as the executive of the Godhead in the heart of the believer, in the dealing with souls, and in consecration to the service of the kingdom.

There is still very much indeed lacking of the full knowledge and power of the Holy Spirit, but we feel that we cannot be sufficiently grateful to God for what He has done through His leading us to dedicate these days to special prayer for the movings of His Holy Spirit.

I have written this with the thought that there may be some who will be glad to know of it, and in their sphere to unite in the observance.

—*Andrew Murray*

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THE SIN OF PRAYERLESSNESS

In order for the conscience to do its work and for the heart to be thoroughly repentant, each individual must mention his sin by name. The confession must be severely personal. With ministers there is probably no single sin that each one of us ought to acknowledge with deeper shame—"Guilty, verily guilty"—than the sin of prayerlessness.

What is it, then, that makes prayerlessness such a great sin? At first it is looked upon merely as a weakness. There is so much talk about lack of time and all sorts of distractions that the deep guilt of the situation is not recognized. Let it

be our honest desire that, for the future, the sin of prayerlessness may be to us truly sinful. Consider the following.

1. What a reproach it is to God.

There is the holy and most glorious God who invites us to come to Him, to converse with Him, to ask from Him such things as we need, and to experience what a blessing there is in fellowship with Him. He has created us in His own image and has redeemed us by His own Son, so that when we are in prayer with Him, we might find our highest glory and salvation.

What use do we make of this heavenly privilege? How many there are who take only five minutes for prayer! They say that they have no time and that the heart desire for prayer is lacking; they do not know how to spend half an hour with God! It is not that they absolutely do not pray; they pray every day—but they have no joy in prayer, as a token of communion with God that shows that God is everything to them.

If a friend comes to visit them, they have time, they make time, even at the cost of sacrifice, for the sake of enjoying conversation with him. Yes, they have time for everything that really interests them, but no time to practice fellowship with God and delight themselves in Him! They find time for a creature who can be of service to them; but day after day, month after month passes, and there is no time to spend one hour with God.

Do not our hearts begin to acknowledge what a dishonor this is to God, that I dare to say I cannot find time for fellowship with Him? If this sin begins to appear plain to us, will we not with deep shame cry out: “*Woe is me! for I am undone*’ (Isaiah 6:5), O God, be merciful to me and forgive this awful sin of prayerlessness”?

2. The sin of prayerlessness is the cause of a deficient spiritual life.

It is a proof that, for the most part, our lives are still under the power of the flesh. Prayer is the pulse of life; by it the doctor can tell what is the condition of the heart. The sin of prayerlessness is a proof for the ordinary Christian or minister that the life of God in the soul is in deadly sickness and weakness.

Much is said and many complaints are made about the feebleness of the church to fulfill her calling, to exercise an influence over her members, to deliver them from the power of the world, and to bring them to a life of holy consecration to God. Much is also spoken about her indifference to the millions of heathen whom Christ entrusted to the church that she might make known to them His love and salvation.

What is the reason that many thousands of Christian workers in the world do not have a greater influence? Nothing except this—the prayerlessness of their service. In the midst of all their zeal in the study and in the work of the church, of all their faithfulness in preaching and conversation with the

people, they lack that ceaseless prayer that has attached to it the sure promise of the Spirit and the “*power from on high*” (Luke 24:49).

Once again, it is nothing but the sin of prayerlessness that is the cause of the lack of powerful spiritual life!

3. The church suffers a dreadful loss as a result of prayerlessness of the minister.

The business of a minister is to train believers to a life of prayer, but how can a leader do this if he himself has little understanding of the art of conversing with God and of receiving from the Holy Spirit, every day, abundant grace for himself and for his work? A minister cannot lead a congregation higher than he is himself. He cannot with enthusiasm point out a way, or explain a work, in which he is not himself walking or living.

Many thousands of Christians know next to nothing of the blessedness of prayer fellowship with God! Many more know something of it and long for a further increase of this knowledge, but in the preaching of the Word they are not persistently urged to keep on until they obtain the blessing! The reason is simply and only that the minister understands so little about the secret of powerful prayer and does not give prayer the place in his service that, in the nature of the case and in the will of God, is indispensably necessary. What a difference we would notice in our congregations if ministers

could be brought to see in its right light the sin of prayerlessness and were delivered from it!

4. With prayerlessness evident, it is impossible to preach the gospel to all men.

To proclaim the Good News to the world—as we are commanded by Christ to do—is an utterly unattainable dream as long as this sin is not overcome and cast out.

Many feel that the great need of missions is the obtaining of men and women who will give themselves to the Lord to strive in prayer for the salvation of souls. It has also been said that God is eager and able to deliver and bless the world He has redeemed, if His people were but willing, if they were but ready, to cry to Him day and night. But how can congregations be brought to that unless there comes first an entire change in ministers, that they begin to see that the indispensable thing is not preaching, not pastoral visitation, not church work, but fellowship with God in prayer until they are clothed with “*power from on high*” (Luke 24:49)?

Oh, that all thought and work and expectation concerning the kingdom might drive us to the acknowledgment of the sin of prayerlessness! God help us to root it out! God deliver us from it through the blood and power of Christ Jesus! God teach every minister of the Word to see what a glorious place he may occupy if he first of all is delivered from this root of evils; so that with courage and joy, in faith and perseverance, he can go on with his God!

The sin of prayerlessness! May the Lord lay the burden of it so heavy on our hearts that we cannot rest until it is taken far from us through the name and power of Jesus. He will make this possible for us.

A WITNESS FROM AMERICA

In 1898, there were two members of the Presbytery in New York who attended the Northfield Conference for the deepening of their spiritual lives. They returned to their work with the fire of a new enthusiasm. They endeavored to bring about a revival in the entire Presbytery. In a meeting that they held, the chairman was guided to ask the other believers a question concerning their prayer life: "Brothers," said he, "let us today make confession before God and each other. It will do us good. Will everyone who spends half an hour every day with God in connection with his work hold up a hand?" One hand was held up. He made a further request: "All who thus spend fifteen minutes hold up a hand." Not half of the hands were held up. Then he said, "Prayer, the working power of the church of Christ, and half of the workers make hardly any use of it! All who spend five minutes hold up a hand." All hands went up. But one man came later with the confession that he was not quite sure if he spent five minutes in prayer every day. "It is," said he, "a terrible revelation of how little time I spend with God."

THE CAUSE OF PRAYERLESSNESS

In an elder's prayer meeting, a brother asked the question: "What, then, is the cause of so much prayerlessness? Is it not unbelief?"

The answer was: "Certainly; but then comes the question—what is the cause of that unbelief?" When the disciples asked the Lord Jesus: "*Why could not we cast [the devil] out?*" (Matthew 17:19), His answer was, "*Because of your unbelief*" (v. 20). He went further and said: "*Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting*" (v. 21). If the life is not one of self-denial, of fasting—that is, letting the world go—of prayer—that is, laying hold of heaven—faith cannot be exercised. A life lived according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit—it is in this that we find the origin of the prayerlessness of which we complain. As we came out of the meeting, a brother said to me: "That is the whole difficulty; we wish to pray in the Spirit and at the same time walk after the flesh, and this is impossible."

If one is sick and desires healing, it is of prime importance that the true cause of the sickness be discovered. This is always the first step toward recovery. If the particular cause is not recognized, and attention is directed to subordinate causes, or to supposed but not real causes, healing is out of the question. In the same way, it is of the utmost importance for us to obtain a correct insight into the cause of the sad condition of deadness and failure in prayer in the inner

chamber, which should be such a blessed place for us. Let us seek to realize fully what is the root of this evil.

Scripture teaches us that there are but two conditions possible for the Christian. One is a walk according to the Spirit, the other a walk according to the flesh. These two powers are in irreconcilable conflict with each other. So it comes to pass, in the case of the majority of Christians, that, while we thank God that they are born again through the Spirit and have received the life of God—yet their ordinary daily life is not lived according to the Spirit but according to the flesh. Paul wrote to the Galatians: “*Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*” (Galatians 3:3). Their service lay in fleshly outward performances. They did not understand that where “*the flesh*” is permitted to influence their service for God, it soon results in open sin.

So he mentions not only grave sins as the work of the flesh, such as adultery, murder, drunkenness; but also the more ordinary sins of daily life—wrath, strife, variance—and he gives the exhortation: “*Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh....If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:16, 25). The Spirit must be honored not only as the Author of a new life, but also as the Leader and Director of our entire walk. Otherwise we are what the apostle calls “carnal.”

The majority of Christians have little understanding of this matter. They have no real knowledge of the deep sinfulness and godlessness of that carnal nature that belongs

to them and to which unconsciously they yield. “*God...condemned sin in the flesh*” (Romans 8:3)—in the cross of Christ. “*They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*” (Galatians 5:24). “*The flesh*” cannot be improved or sanctified. “*The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*” (Romans 8:7). There is no means of dealing with the flesh except as Christ dealt with it, bearing it to the cross. “*Our old man is crucified with him*” (Romans 6:6); so we by faith also crucify it, and regard and treat it daily as an accursed thing that finds its rightful place on the accursed cross.

It is saddening to consider how many Christians there are who seldom think or speak earnestly about the deep and immeasurable sinfulness of the flesh: “*In me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing*” (Romans 7:18). The man who truly believes this may well cry out: “*I see another law in my members...bringing me into captivity to the law of sin....O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (vv. 23–24). Happy is he who can go further and say: “*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord....For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death*” (Romans 7:25, 8:2).

Would that we might understand God’s counsels of grace for us! The flesh on the cross—the Spirit in the heart and controlling the life.

This spiritual life is too little understood or sought after; yet it is literally what God has promised and will accomplish

in those who unconditionally surrender themselves to Him for this purpose.

Here then we have the deep root of evil as the cause of a prayerless life. The flesh can say prayers well enough, calling itself religious for so doing and thus satisfying conscience. But the flesh has no desire or strength for the prayer that strives after an intimate knowledge of God, that rejoices in fellowship with Him, and that continues to lay hold of His strength. So, finally, it comes to this: the flesh must be denied and crucified.

The Christian who is still carnal has neither desire nor strength to follow after God. He rests satisfied with the prayer of habit or custom. But the glory, the blessedness of secret prayer is a hidden thing to him, until one day his eyes are opened, and he begins to see that the flesh, in its disposition to turn away from God, is the archenemy that makes powerful prayer impossible for him.

I had once, at a conference, spoken on the subject of prayer and made use of strong expressions about the enmity of the flesh as a cause of prayerlessness. After the address, the minister's wife said that she thought I had spoken too strongly. She was also guilty of having too little desire for prayer, but she believed her heart was sincerely set on seeking God. I showed her what the Word of God said about the flesh, and that everything that prevents the reception of the Spirit is nothing else than a secret work of the flesh. Adam was created to have fellowship with God and enjoyed

it before his Fall. After the Fall, however, there came immediately a deep-seated aversion to God, and he fled from Him. This incurable aversion is the characteristic of the unregenerate nature and the chief cause of our unwillingness to surrender ourselves to fellowship with God in prayer. The following day she told me that God had opened her eyes; she confessed that the enmity and unwillingness of the flesh was the hidden hindrance in her defective prayer life.

Oh, my fellow believers, do not seek to find in circumstances the explanation of this prayerlessness over which we mourn; seek it where God's Word declares it to be, in the hidden aversion of the heart to a holy God.

When a Christian does not yield entirely to the leading of the Spirit—and this is certainly the will of God and the work of His grace—he lives, without knowing it, under the power of the flesh. This life of the flesh manifests itself in many different ways. It appears in the hastiness of spirit, or the anger that so unexpectedly arises in you, or the lack of love for which you have so often blamed yourself. It also appears in the pleasure found in eating and drinking when your conscience chides you; in that seeking for your own will and honor, that confidence in your own wisdom and power, that pleasure in the world, of which you are sometimes ashamed before God. All this is life after the flesh. “*Ye are yet carnal*” (1 Corinthians 3:3)—that text, perhaps, disturbs you at times; you have not full peace and joy in God.

I pray that you will take time and give an answer to the question: Have I not found here the cause of my prayerlessness, of my powerlessness to effect any change in the matter? I live in the Spirit, I have been born again, but I do not walk after the Spirit—the flesh lords it over me. The carnal life cannot possibly pray in the spirit and power. God forgive me. The carnal life is evidently the cause of my sad and shameful prayerlessness.

THE STORM CENTER ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Mention was made in the conference of the expression “strategic position” used so often in reference to the great strife between the kingdom of heaven and the powers of darkness.

When a general chooses the place from which he intends to strike the enemy, he pays the most attention to those points that he thinks are the most important in the fight. Thus there was on the battlefield of Waterloo a farmhouse that Wellington immediately saw as the key to the situation. He did not spare his troops in his endeavor to hold that point; the victory depended on it. So he won the victory. It is the same in the conflict between the believer and the powers of darkness. The inner chamber is the place where the decisive victory is obtained.

The enemy uses all his power to lead the Christian, and above all the minister, to neglect prayer. He knows that however admirable the sermon may be, however attractive the

service appears, however faithful the pastoral visitation, none of these things can damage him or his kingdom if prayer is neglected. When the church shuts herself up to the power of the inner chamber, and the soldiers of the Lord have received on their knees "*power from on high*" (Luke 24:49), then the powers of darkness will be shaken and souls will be delivered. In the church, on the mission field, with the minister and his congregation, everything depends on the faithful exercise of the power of prayer.

In the week of the conference I found the following in *The Christian*:

Two persons quarrel over a certain point. We call them Christian and Apollyon. Apollyon notices that Christian has a certain weapon that would give him a sure victory. They meet in deadly strife, and Apollyon resolves to take away the weapon from his opponent and destroy it. For the moment the main cause of the strife has become subordinate; the great point now is who will get possession of the weapon on which everything depends? It is of vital importance to get hold of that.

So it is in the conflict between Satan and the believer. God's child can conquer everything by prayer. Is it any wonder that Satan does his utmost to snatch that weapon from the Christian, or to hinder him in the use of it?

Now how does Satan hinder prayer? By temptation to postpone or curtail it, by bringing in wandering thoughts and all sorts of distractions, or through unbelief and hopelessness. Happy is the prayer hero who, through it all, takes care to hold fast and use his weapon. Like our Lord in Gethsemane, the more violently the enemy attacked, the more earnestly He prayed and did not cease until He had obtained the victory. After all the other parts of the armor had been named, Paul added, "*With all prayer and supplication in the Spirit*" (Ephesians 6:18). Without prayer, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's Word, have no power. All depends on prayer. May God teach us to believe this and to hold fast!