

INTERCESSORY PRAYER



CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

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Intercessory Prayer

*And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends.—
Job 42:10*

Introduction

“The LORD turned the captivity of Job.” So, then, our longest sorrows have a close, and there is a bottom to the profoundest depths of our misery. Our winters shall not frown for ever; summer shall soon smile. The tide shall not eternally ebb out; the floods retrace their march. The night shall not hang its darkness for ever over our souls; the sun shall yet arise with healing beneath his wings (Mal 4:2)—“The LORD turned again the captivity of Job.” Our sorrows shall have an end when God has gotten His end in them. The ends in the case of Job were these: that Satan might be defeated, foiled with his own weapons, blasted in his hopes when he had everything his own way. God, at Satan’s challenge, had stretched forth His hand and touched Job in his bone and in his flesh, and yet the tempter could not prevail against him, but received his rebuff in those conquering words, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). When Satan is defeated, then shall the battle cease. The Lord aimed also at the trial of Job’s faith. Many weights were hung upon this palm tree, but it still grew uprightly. The fire had been fierce enough, the gold was undiminished, and only the dross was consumed.

Another purpose the Lord had was His own glory. And God was glorified abundantly. Job had glorified God on his dunghill; now let him magnify his Lord again upon his royal seat in the gate. God had gotten unto Himself eternal renown through that grace by which He supported His poor afflicted servant under the heaviest troubles which ever fell to the lot of man. God had another end, and that also was served. Job had been sanctified by his afflictions. His spirit had been mellowed. That small degree of tartness towards others, which may have been in Job’s temper had been at last removed, and any self-justification which once had lurked within, was fairly driven out. Now God’s gracious designs are answered, He removed the rod from His servant’s back, and takes the melted silver from

the midst of the glowing coals. God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men for nought (Lam 3:33), and He shows this by the fact that He never afflicts them longer than there is a need for it, and never suffers them to be one moment longer in the furnace than is absolutely requisite to serve the purposes of His wisdom and of His love.

“The LORD turned again the captivity of Job.” Beloved brother in Christ, thou hast had a long captivity in affliction. God hath sold thee into the hand of thine adversaries, and thou hast wept by the waters of Babylon, hanging thy harp upon the willows (Psa 137:1). Despair not! He that turned the captivity of Job can turn thine as the streams in the south. He shall make again thy vineyard to blossom, and thy field to yield her fruit. Thou shalt again come forth with those that make merry, and once more shall the song of gladness be on thy lip. Let not despair rivet his cruel fetters about thy soul. Hope yet, for there *is* hope. Trust thou still, for there is ground of confidence. He shall bring thee up again rejoicing from the land of thy captivity, and thou shalt say of Him, “Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing” (Psa 30:11).

The circumstance which attended Job’s restoration is that to which I invite your particular attention. “The LORD turned again the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends.” Intercessory prayer was the omen of his returning greatness. It was the bow in the cloud, the dove bearing the olive branch, the voice of the turtle announcing the coming summer. When his soul began to expand itself in holy and loving prayer for his erring brethren, then the heart of God showed itself to him by returning to him his prosperity without, and cheering his soul within. Brethren, it is not fetching a laborious compass,¹ when from such a text as this I address you upon the subject of prayer for others. Let us learn today to imitate the example of Job, and pray for our friends, and peradventure² if we have been in trouble, our captivity shall be turned.

Four things I would speak of this morning, and yet but one thing. I would speak upon intercessory prayer thus—first, *by way of commending the exercise*; secondly, *by way of encouraging you to enlist in it*; thirdly, *by way of suggestion, as to the persons for whom you should especially pray*; and fourthly, *by way of exhortation to all believers to undertake and persevere in the exercise of intercession for others*.

1. By Way of Commending the Exercise

Let me remind you that intercessory prayer has been *practiced by all the best of God's saints*. We may not find instances of it appended to every saint's name, but beyond a doubt, there has never been a man eminent for piety personally, who has not always been pre-eminent in his anxious desires for the good of others, and in his prayers for that end.

Take Abraham, the father of the faithful. How earnestly did he plead for his son Ishmael! "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen 17:18). With what importunity did he approach the Lord on the plains of Mamre, when he wrestled with Him again and again for Sodom; how frequently did he reduce the number, as though, to use the expression of the Puritan, "He were bidding and beating down the price at the market." "Peradventure there be fifty; peradventure there lack five of the fifty; peradventure there be twenty found there; peradventure there be ten righteous found there: wilt thou not spare the city for the sake of ten?" (see Gen 18:28-32). Well did he wrestle, and if we may sometimes be tempted to wish he had not paused when he did, yet we must commend him for continuing so long to plead for that doomed and depraved city.

Remember Moses, the most royal of men, whether crowned or uncrowned; how often did he intercede! How frequently do you meet with such a record as this—Moses and Aaron "fell on their faces" before God! Remember that cry of his on the top of the mount, when it was to his own personal disadvantage to intercede, and yet when God had said, "Now therefore let me alone...I will make of thee a great nation" (Exo 32:10), yet how he continued, how he thrust himself in the way of the axe of justice, and cried, Spare them, Lord, "and if not," (and here he reached the very climax of agonizing earnestness) "blot me out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exo 32:32). Never was there a mightier prophet than Moses, and never one more intensely earnest in intercessory prayer.

Or pass on, if you will, to the days of Samuel. Remember his words, "God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you" (1Sa 12:23). Or bethink you of Solomon, and of his earnest intercession at the opening of the temple, when, with outstretched hands he prayed for the assembled people; or if you want another royal example, turn to Hezekiah

with Sennacherib's letter spread out before the Lord, when he prayed not only for himself, but for God's people of Israel in those times of straits. Think ye, too, of Elias, who for Israel's sake would bring down the rain that the land perish not; as for himself, miracles gave him his bread and his water. It was for others that he prayed, and said to his servant, "Go again seven times" (1Ki 18:43).

Forget not Jeremy, whose tears were prayers—prayers coming too intensely from his heart to find expression in any utterance of the lip. He wept himself away, his life was one long shower, each drop a prayer, and the whole deluge a flood of intercession. And if you would have an example taken from the times of Christ and His apostles, remember how Peter prays on the top of the house, and Stephen amidst the falling stones (Act 7:60). Or think you, if you will, of Paul, of whom even more than of others it could be said that he never ceased to remember the saints in his prayers, "making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph 1:16), stopping in the very midst of the epistle and saying, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:14). As for the cloud of holy witnesses in our own time, I will hazard the assertion that there is not a single child of God who does not plead with God for his children, for his family, for the church at large, and for the poor ungodly perishing world. I deny his saintship if he does not pray for others.

But further, while we might commend this duty by quoting innumerable examples from the lives of eminent saints, it is enough for the disciple of Christ if we say that *Christ in His holy gospel has made it your duty and your privilege* to intercede for others. When He taught us to pray, He said, "Our Father" (Mat 6:9ff), and the expressions which follow are not in the singular but in the plural—"Give *us* this day *our* daily bread" (v. 11). "Forgive *us our* debts" (v. 12); "Lead *us* not into temptation" (v.13); evidently intending to set forth that none of us are to pray for ourselves alone. While we may have sometimes prayers so bitter that they must be personal like the Saviour's own—"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Mat 26:39). Yet, as a rule, our prayers should be public prayers, though offered in private; and even in secret we should not forget the church of the living God. By the mouth of Paul how frequently does the Holy Ghost exhort us to pray for ministers! "Brethren," says Paul, "pray for

us” (2Th 3:1); and elsewhere after exhorting them to offer prayers and supplications for all classes and conditions of men, he adds, “And for me... that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph 6:19-20). While James, who is ever a practical apostle, bids us pray for one another, in that same verse, where he says, “Confess your faults one to another,” he says, “and pray one for another,” and adds the privilege “that ye may be healed” (Jam 5:16), as if the healing would not only come to the sick person for whom we pray, but to us who offer the prayer—we, too, receiving some special blessing when our hearts are enlarged for the people of the living God.

But, brethren, I shall not stay to quote the texts in which the duty of praying for others is definitely laid down. Permit me to remind you of *the high example of your Master*; He is your pattern; follow ye His leadership. Was there even one who interceded as He did? Remember that golden prayer of His, where He cried for His own people, Father, keep them, “keep them from the evil” (Joh 17:15)! Oh what a prayer was that! He seems to have thought of all their wants, of all their needs, of all their weaknesses, and in one long stream of intercession, He pours out His heart before His Father’s throne. Bethink you how, even in the agonies of His crucifixion, He did not forget that He was still an intercessor for man. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luk 23:34). Oh, remember, brethren, it is your Saviour’s example to you today, for there before the throne, with outstretched hands, He prays not for Himself, for He has attained His glory; not for Himself, for He rests from His labours, and has received His everlasting recompense; but for you, for the purchase of His blood, for as many as are called by His grace, yea, and for those who shall believe on Him through our word.

*“For all that come to God by him,
Salvation he demands;
Points to the wounds upon his heart,
And spreads his bleeding hands.”*

Come, brethren, with such an example as this, we are verily guilty if we forget to plead for others.

But I will go a little further. If in the Bible there were no example of intercessory supplication, if Christ had not left it upon record that it was His

will that we should pray for others, and even if we did not know that it was Christ's practice to intercede, yet *the very spirit of our holy religion* would constrain us to plead for others. Dost thou go up into thy closet, and in the face and presence of God think of none but thyself? Surely the love of Christ cannot be in thee, for the Spirit of Christ is not selfish. No man liveth unto himself when once he has the love of Christ in him. I know there are some whose piety is comfortably tethered within the limits of their own selfish interests. It is enough for them if *they* hear the Word, if *they* be saved, if *they* get to heaven. Ah, miserable spirit, thou shalt not get there! It would need another heaven for thee, for the heaven of Christ is the heaven of the unselfish, the temple of the large-hearted, the bliss of living spirits, the heaven of those who, like Christ, are willing to become poor that others may be rich. I cannot believe—it were a libel upon the cross of Christ, it were a scandal upon the doctrine which He taught—if I could ever believe that the man whose prayers are selfish has anything of the Spirit of Christ within him.

Brethren, I commend intercessory prayer, because it opens man's soul, gives a healthy play to his sympathies, constrains him to feel that he is not everybody. And that this wide world and this great universe were not after all made that he might be its petty lord, that everything might bend to his will, and all creatures crouch at his feet. It does him good, I say, to make him know that the cross was not uplifted alone for him, for its far-reaching arms were meant to drop with benedictions upon millions of the human race. Thou lean and hungry worshipper of self, this is an exercise which would make another man of thee, a man more like the Son of Man, and less like Nabal the churl.

But again, I commend the blessed privilege of intercession, because of its sweet brotherly nature. You and I may be naturally hard, and harsh, and unlovely of spirit, but praying much for others will remind us we have, indeed, a relationship to the saints, that their interests are ours, that we are jointly concerned with them in all the privileges of grace. I do not know anything which, through the grace of God, may be a better means of uniting us the one to the other than constant prayer for each other. You cannot harbour enmity in your soul against your brother after you have learned to pray for him. If he hath done you ill, when you have taken that ill to the

Mercy Seat, and prayed over it, you must forgive. Surely you could not be such a hypocrite as to invoke blessings on his head before God and then come forth to curse him in your own soul. When there have been complaints brought by brother against brother, it is generally the best way to say, "Let us pray before we enter into the matter."

Wherever there is a case to be decided by the pastor, he ought always to say to the brethren who contend, "Let us pray first," and it will often happen that through prayer the differences will soon be forgotten. They will become so slight, so trivial, that when the brethren rise from their knees they will say, "They are gone; we cannot contend now after having been one in heart before the throne of God." I have heard of a man who had made complaints against his minister, and his minister wisely said to him, "Well, don't talk to me in the street; come to my house, and let us hear it all." He went, and the minister said, "My brother, I hope that what you have to say to me may be greatly blessed to me; no doubt I have my imperfections as well as any other man, and I hope I shall never be above being told of them, but in order that what you have to say to me may be blessed to me let us kneel down and pray together." So our quarrelsome friend prayed first and the minister prayed next, both briefly. When they rose from their knees, he said, "Now, my brother, I think we are both in a good state of mind; tell me what it is that you have to find fault with." The man blushed, and stammered, and stuttered, and said, he did not think there was anything at all, except in himself. "I have forgotten to pray for you, sir," said he, "and of course I cannot expect that God will feed my soul through you when I neglect to mention you at the Throne of Grace."

Ah, well, brethren, if you will exercise yourselves much in supplication for your brethren you will forgive their tempers, you will overlook their rashness, you will not think of their harsh words; but knowing that you also may be tempted, and are men of like passions with them, you will cover their faults, and bear with their infirmities.

Shall I need to say more in commendation of intercessory prayer except it be this, that it seems to me that when God gives any man much grace, it must be with the design that he may use it for the rest of the family. I would compare you who have near communion with God to courtiers³ in the king's palace. What do courtiers do? Do they not avail themselves of their

influence at court to take the petitions of their friends, and present them where they can be heard? This is what we call patronage—a thing with which many find fault when it is used for political ends, but there is a kind of heavenly patronage which you ought to use right diligently. I ask you to use it on my behalf. When it is well with you, then think of me (Gen 40:14). I pray you use it on the behalf of the poor, the sick, the afflicted, the tempted, the tried, the desponding, the despairing; when thou hast the King's ear, speak to Him for us. When thou art permitted to come very near to His throne, and He saith to thee, "Ask, and I will give thee what thou wilt"; when thy faith is strong, thine eye clear, thine access near, thine interest sure, and the love of God sweetly shed abroad in thy heart—then take the petitions of thy poor brethren who stand outside at the gate and say, "My Lord, I have a poor brother, a poor child of Thine, who has desired me to ask of Thee this favour. Grant it unto me; it shall be a favour shown unto myself; grant it unto him, for he is one of Thine. Do it for Jesus' sake!"

Nay, to come to an end in this matter of commendation, it is utterly impossible that you should have a large measure of grace, unless it prompts you to use your influence for others. Soul, if thou hast grace at all, and art not a mighty intercessor, that grace must be but as a grain of mustard-seed—a shrivelled, uncomely, puny thing. Thou hast just enough grace to float thy soul clear from the quicksand, but thou hast no deep floods of grace, or else thou wouldst carry in thy joyous bark⁴ a rich cargo of the wants of others up to the throne of God, and thou wouldst bring back for them rich blessings which but for thee they might not have obtained. If thou be like an angel with thy foot upon the golden ladder which reaches to heaven, if thou art ascending and descending, know that thou wilt ascend with others' prayers and descend with others' blessings, for it is impossible for a full-grown saint to live or to pray for himself alone. Thus much on commendation.

2. By Way of Encouragement

We turn to our second point, and endeavour to say something by way of encouragement, that you may cheerfully offer intercessory supplications.

First, remember that intercessory prayer is the sweetest prayer God ever hears. Do not question it, for the prayer of Christ is of this character. In all the incense which now our Great High Priest puts into the censer, there is not a single grain that is for Himself. His work is done; His reward obtained. Now you do not doubt but that Christ's prayer is the most acceptable of all supplications. Very well, my brethren, the more like your prayer is to Christ's, the more sweet it will be; and while petitions for yourself will be accepted, yet your pleadings for others, having in them more of the fruits of the Spirit, more love, perhaps more faith, certainly more brotherly kindness, they will be as the sweetest oblation⁵ that you can offer to God, the very fat of thy sacrifice.

Remember, again, that intercessory prayer is exceedingly prevalent. What wonders it has wrought!

Intercessory prayer has stayed plagues. It removed the darkness which rested over Egypt; it drove away the frogs which leaped upon the land. It scattered the lice and locusts which plagued the inhabitants of Zoar; it removed the murrain, and the thunder, and the lightning. It stayed all the ravages which God's avenging hand did upon Pharaoh and his people.

Intercessory prayer has healed diseases. We know it did in the early church. We have evidence of it in old Mosaic times. When Miriam was smitten with leprosy, Moses prayed, and the leprosy was removed. It has restored withered limbs. When the king's arm was withered, he said to the prophet, "Pray for me," and his arm was restored as it was before.

Intercessory prayer has raised the dead, for Elias stretched himself upon the child seven times, and the child sneezed, and the child's soul returned. As to how many souls intercessory prayer has instrumentally saved, recording angel, thou canst tell! Eternity, thou shalt reveal!

There is nothing which intercessory prayer cannot do. O believer, you have a mighty engine in your hand; use it well, use it constantly, use it now with faith, and thou shalt surely prevail. But perhaps you have a doubt

about interceding for some one who has fallen far into sin. Brethren, did ye ever hear of men who have been thought to be dead while yet alive? Have ye never heard by the farmer's fire some old-fashioned story of one who was washed and laid out, and wrapped up in his shroud to be put into his coffin, and yet he was but in a trance and not dead? And have ye not heard old legends of men and women who have been buried alive? I cannot vouch for the accuracy of those tales, but I can tell you that spiritually there has been many a man given up for dead that was still within reach of grace.

There has been many a soul that has been put into the winding sheet⁶ even by Christian people, given up to damnation even by the ministers of Christ, consigned to perdition⁷ even by their own kinsfolk. But yet into perdition they did not come, but God found them, and took them out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay, and set their living feet upon his living rock. Oh! give up nobody; still pray, lay none out for spiritually dead until they are lain out for dead naturally. But perhaps you say, "I cannot pray for others, for I am so weak, so powerless." You will get strength, my brethren, by the exertion.

But besides, the prevalence of prayer does not depend upon the strength of the man who prays, but upon the power of the argument he uses. Now, brethren, if you sow seed you may be very feeble, but it is not your hand that puts the seed into the ground which produces the harvest—it is the vitality in the seed. And so in the prayer of faith. When you can plead a promise and drop that prayer into the ground with hope, your weakness shall not make it miscarry; it shall still prevail with God and bring down blessings from on high. Job! thou comest from thy dunghill to intercede, and so may I come from my couch of weakness. Thou comest from thy poverty and thy desertion to intercede for others, and so may we. Elias was a man of like passions (sweet word!)—of like passions, like infirmities, like tendencies to sin, but he prevailed, and so shalt thou. Only do thou see to it that thou be not negligent in these exercises, but that thou pray much for others even as Job prayed for his friends.

Now that the air is very hot, and the atmosphere heavy and becalmed, our friends find it difficult to listen, more difficult even than the speaker finds it to preach. Now, that I may have your attention yet once again—and a change of posture may do you all good—will you stand up and put the

text into use by offering an intercessory prayer and then I will go on again.
It shall be this one:

*“Pity the nations, O our God,
Constrain the earth to come;
Send thy victorious word abroad,
And bring the strangers home!”*

3. By Way of Suggestion

The third head is a suggestion as to the persons for whom we should more particularly pray. It shall be but a suggestion, and I will then turn to my last point. In the case of Job, he prayed for his *offending* friends. They had spoken exceedingly harshly of him. They had misconstrued all his previous life, and though there had never been a part of his character which deserved censure—for the Lord witnessed concerning him, that he was a perfect and an upright man—yet they accused him of hypocrisy, and supposed that all he did was for the sake of gain. Now, perhaps, there is no greater offence which can be given to an upright and a holy man, than to his face, to suspect his motives, and to accuse him of self-seeking. And yet, shaking off everything, as the sun forgets the darkness that has hidden its glory, and scatters it by its own beams, Job comes to the Mercy Seat, and pleads. He is accepted himself, and he begs that his friends may be accepted too. Carry your offending ones to the throne of God; it shall be a blessed method of proving the trueness of your forgiveness. Do not do that, however, in a threatening way. I remember having to deal faithfully with a hypocrite, who told me, by way of threatening, he should pray for me. It was a horrid threat, for who would wish to have his name associated with a prayer which would be an abomination to the Lord. Do not do it in that sense, as though like a supercilious⁸ hypocrite, you would make your prayer itself a stalking horse⁹ for your vain glory; but do it when you are alone before God, and in secret; not that you may gratify your revenge by telling the story out again, for that were abominable indeed; but that you may remove from your erring brother any sin which may have stained his garments, by asking the Lord to forgive him.

Again: be sure you take there your *controverting*¹⁰ friends. These brethren had been arguing with Job, and the controversy dragged its weary length along. Brethren, it is better to pray than it is to controvert. Sometimes you think it would be a good thing to have a public discussion upon a doctrine. It would be a better thing to have prayer over it. You say, “Let two good men, on different sides, meet and fight the matter out.” I say, “No! Let the two good men meet and pray the matter out.” He that will not

submit his doctrine to the test of the Mercy Seat, I should suspect is wrong. I can say that I am not afraid to offer prayer that my brethren who do not see believers' baptism may be made to see it. If they think it is wrong, I wish that they would pray to God to set us right; but I have never heard them do that. I have never heard them pray to the Lord to convince us of the truth of infant sprinkling—I wish they would, if they believe it to be scriptural. And I am perfectly willing to put it to the old test, the God that answereth by fire, let him be God, and whichever shall prevail, when prayer shall be the ultimate arbiter, let that stand. Carry your dear friends who are wrong in practice, not to the discussion-room, or to the debating-club, but carry them before God, and let this be your cry, “O Thou that teachest us to our profit (Isa 48:17), teach me if I be wrong, and teach my friend wherein *he* errs, and make him right.”

This is the thing we ought also to do with *haughty* friends. Eliphaz and Bildad were very high and haughty—Oh, how they looked down upon poor Job! They thought he was a very great sinner, a very desperate hypocrite; they stayed with him, but doubtless they thought it very great condescension. Now, you sometimes hear complaints made by Christians about other people being proud. It will not make them humble for you to grumble about that. What if there be a Mrs. So-and-so who wears a very rustling dress, and never takes any notice of you because you cannot rustle too! What if there be a brother who can afford to wear creaking boots, and will not notice you in the street because you happen to be poor! Tell your Father about it; that is the best way. Why, you would not be angry, I suppose, with a man for having the gout, or a torpid¹¹ liver, or a cataract in the eye; you would pity him. Why be angry with your brother because of his being proud? It is a disease, a very bad disease, that scarlet fever of pride; go and pray the Lord to cure him; your anger will not do it. It may puff him up and make him worse than ever he was before, but it will not set him right. Pray him down, brother, pray him down. Have duel with him, and have the choice of weapons yourself, and let that be the weapon of all-prayer; and if he be proud, I know this, if you prevail with God, God will soon take the pride out of His own child and make him humble as he should be.

But particularly let me ask you to pray most for those who are *disabled from praying* for themselves. Job's three friends could not pray for themselves, because the Lord said He would not accept them if they did. He said He was angry with them, but as for Job, said He, "Him will I accept" (Job 42:8). Do not let me shock your feelings when I say there are some, even of God's people who are not able to pray acceptably at certain seasons. When a man has just been committing sin, repentance is his first work, not prayer; he must first set matters right between God and his own soul before he may go and intercede for others. And there are many poor Christians that cannot pray; doubt has come in, sin has taken away their confidence, and they are standing outside the gate with their petitions; they dare not enter within the veil. There are many tried believers, too, that are so desponding that they cannot pray with faith, and therefore they cannot prevail. Now, my dear brethren, if you can pray, take their sins into court with you, and when you have had your own hearing, then say, "But, my Lord, inasmuch as Thou hast honoured me, and made me to eat of Thy bread, and drink from Thy cup, hear me for Thy poor people who are just now denied the light of Thy countenance."

Besides, there are millions of poor sinners who are dead in sin and they cannot pray. Pray for *them*; it is a blessed thing—that vicarious¹² repentance and vicarious faith, which a saint may exert towards a sinner. "Lord, that sinner does not feel; help me to feel for him because he will not feel; Lord, that sinner will not believe in Christ; he does not think that Christ can save him, but I know He can, and I will pray believingly for that sinner, and I will repent for him, and though my repentance and my faith will not avail him without his personal repentance and faith, yet it may come to pass that through me he may be brought to repentance and led to prayer."

4. By Way of Exhortation

Now, lest I should weary you, let me come to the closing part of my discourse. And, O God, lend us thy strength now, that this duty may come forcibly home to our conscience, and we may at once engage in this exercise! Brethren, I have to exhort you to pray for others. Before I do it, I will ask you a personal question. Do you always pray for others? Guilty or not guilty here? Do you think you have taken the case of your children, your church, your neighbourhood, and the ungodly world before God as you ought to have done? If *you* have, *I* have not. For I stand here a chief culprit before the Master to make confession of the sin; and while I shall exhort you to practice what is undoubtedly a noble privilege, I shall be most of all exhorting myself.

I begin thus, by saying, brethren, how can you and I repay the debt we owe to the church unless we pray for others? How was it that you were converted? It was because somebody else prayed for you. I, in tracing back my own conversion, cannot fail to impute it, through God's Spirit, to the prayers of my mother. I believe that the Lord heard her earnest cries when I knew not that her soul was exercised about me. There are many of you that were prayed for when you were asleep in your cradles as unconscious infants. Your mothers' liquid prayers fell hot upon your infant brows, and gave you what was a true *christening* while you were still but little ones. There are husbands here who owe their conversion to their wives' prayers; brothers who must acknowledge that it was a sister's pleading; children who must confess that their sabbath-school teachers were wont¹³ to pray for them. Now, if by others' prayers you and I were brought to Christ, how can we repay this Christian kindness, but by pleading for others? He who has not a man to pray for him may write himself down a hopeless character. During one of the revivals in America, a young man was going to see the minister, but he did not, because the minister had avoided him with considerable coldness. A remark was made to the minister upon what he had done, and he said, "Well, I did not want to see him; I knew he had only come to mock and scoff. What should I see him for; you do not know him as well as I do, or else you would have done the same." A day or two after

there was a public meeting, where the preaching of the Word was to be carried on in the hope that the revival might be continued. A young man who had been lately converted through the prayers of another young man was riding to the worship on his horse, and as he was riding along he was overtaken by our young friend whom the minister thought so godless. He said to him, "Where are you going today, William?" "Well, I am going to the meeting, and I hear that you have been converted." "I thank God I have been brought to a knowledge of the truth," he answered. "Oh!" said the other, "I shall never be; I wish I might." His friend was surprised to hear him whom the minister thought to be so hard say that, and he said, "But why cannot you be converted?" "Why?" said the other, "you know you were converted through the prayers of Mr. K—." "Yes, so I was." "Ah," said the other, "there is nobody to pray for me; they have all given me up long ago." "Why," said his friend, "it is very singular, but Mr. K—, who prayed for me, has been praying for you too; we were together last night, and I heard him." The other threw himself back in his saddle, and seemed as if he would fall from his horse with surprise. "Is that true?" said he. "Yes, it is." "Then blessed be God, there is hope for me now, and if he has prayed for me, that gives me a reason why I should now pray believingly for myself." And he did so, and that meeting witnessed him confessing his faith in Christ. Now, let no man of your acquaintance say that there is nobody to pray for him; but as you had somebody to plead for you, let poor souls of your acquaintance find in you a person to plead for them.

Then, again, permit me to say, how are you to prove your love to Christ or to His church if you refuse to pray for men? "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1Jo 3:14). If we do not love the brethren, we are still dead. I will aver¹⁴ no man loves the brethren who does not pray for them. What! It is the very least thing you can do, and if you do not perform the least, you certainly will fail in the greater. You do not love the brethren unless you pray for them, and then it follows you are dead in trespasses and sins. Let me ask you again how is it that you hope to get your own prayers answered if you never plead for others? Will not the Lord say, "Selfish wretch, thou art always knocking at My door, but it is always to cry for thine own welfare and never for another's; inasmuch as thou hast never asked for a blessing for one of the

least of these My brethren, neither will I give a blessing to thee. Thou lovest not the saints, thou lovest not thy fellow men, how canst thou love Me whom thou hast not seen, and how shall I love thee and give thee the blessing which thou askest at My hands?"

Brethren, again I say I would earnestly exhort you to intercede for others, for how can you be Christians if you do not? Christians are priests, but how priests if they offer no sacrifice? Christians are lights, but how lights unless they shine for others? Christians are sent into the world, even as Christ was sent into the world, but how sent unless they are sent to pray? Christians are meant not only to be blessed themselves, but in them shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, but how if you refuse to pray? Give up your profession, cast down, I pray you, the ephod of a priest if you will not burn the incense, renounce your Christianity if you will not carry it out, make not a mock and sport of solemn things. And you must do so if you still refuse selfishly to give to your friends a part and a lot in your supplications before the throne.

O brethren, let us unite with one heart and with one soul to plead with God for this neighbourhood! Let us carry "London" written on our breasts just as the high priest of old carried the names of the tribes. Mothers, bear your children before God! Fathers, carry your sons and your daughters! Men and brethren, let us take a wicked world and the dark places thereof which are full of the habitations of cruelty! Let us cry aloud and keep no silence, and give to the Lord no rest till He establish and make His church a praise in the earth (Isa 62:6-7). Wake, ye watchmen upon Zion's walls, and renew your shouts! Wake, ye favourites of heaven, and renew your prayers! The cloud hangs above you, it is yours to draw down its sacred floods in genial showers by earnest prayers. God hath put high up in the mountains of His promise springs of love; it is yours to bring them down by the divine channel of your intense supplications. Do it, I pray you, lest inasmuch as you have shut your bowels of compassion and have refused to plead with God for the conversion of others, He should say in His wrath, "These are not My children. They have not My spirit. They are not partakers of My love, neither shall they enter into My rest." Why, there are some of you that have not prayed for others for months, I am afraid, except it be at a prayer meeting. You know what your night prayers are. It is, "Lord, take care of

my family.” You know how some farmers pray. “Lord, send fair weather in this part of the country. Lord, preserve the precious fruits of the field all round this neighbourhood. Never mind about their being spoilt anywhere else, for that will send the markets up.” And so there are some who make themselves special objects of supplication; and what care they for the perishing crowd? This is the drift of some men’s wishes, “Lord, bless the church, but don’t send another minister into our neighbourhood lest he should take our congregations from us. Lord, send labourers into the vineyard, but do not send them into our corner lest they should take any of our glory from us.” That is the kind of supplication. Let us have done with such. Let us be Christians; let us have expanded souls and minds that can feel for others. Let us weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice; and as a church and as private persons, we shall find the Lord will turn our captivity when we pray for our friends. God help us to plead for others! And as for you that have never prayed for yourselves, God help you to believe in the Lord Jesus! Amen.

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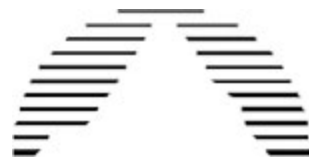
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Notes

[[←1](#)]

fetching a laborious compass – reaching too far for meaning.

[←2]

peradventure – perhaps; possibly.

[←3]

courtiers – attendants at a royal court.

[←4]

bark – a sailing ship.

[←5]

oblation – an offering of a sacrifice, thanksgiving, etc. to God.

[←6]

winding sheet – a shroud; a cloth used to wrap a corpse for burial.

[←7]

perdition – the loss of a soul; damnation.

[←8]

supercilious – full of pride or scorn; haughty.

[←9]

stalking horse – something used to disguise or conceal intentions.

[[← 10](#)]

controverting – arguing; debating; discussing.

[[← 11](#)]

torpid – sluggish in functioning.

[[← 12](#)]

vicarious –performed by one person in the place of another.

[[← 13](#)]

wont – accustomed to.

[[← 14](#)]

aver – assert confidentially.