

# *Plain Village Sermons on the Lord's Prayer*

by  
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## Sermon I

**"Continuing instant in prayer."  
Romans 12:12**

If there be one duty which makes more frequent or more urgent calls upon a Christian than any other, it is that of prayer. Anyone who has entered in earnest upon the divine life, will not be long before he perceives this. As a natural man, indeed, he owes a debt to his good and gracious God, which he can never acknowledge often enough, or be too mindful of; he is also dependent on God every day for every thing, being merely the creature of His hands to do with as He thinks fit.

What then can be more proper or more seemly, than, if for these reasons only, to fall down before the Lord his Maker, and while he acknowledges himself to be one of the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand, to beg for a continuance of that upholding care which has hitherto preserved him? So that, if this were all -- if the air which we breathe and the raiment which clothes us, and the food which we eat day by day, were all we received at God's hands, common gratitude would require that we should thank Him for it; and a common sense of our dependence on Him, that we should request the continuance of it.

But we are not alone in the world -- God has placed each of us here, surrounded by others of the same form and blood with himself; He has appointed that each of us should be brought into the world, not by a sudden and particular creation from Himself, but by the means of others on whom we are immediately dependent: and thus we find ourselves, as soon as we can discern good from evil, placed in a situation in which we have many duties to fulfill towards those about us, which duties continually increase as we grow in years: and it has pleased His good Providence that those towards whom we owe these duties should also be the persons to whom we are most attached, and from whose society we derive the greatest pleasures. Here then, again, is a mercy which requires at our hands a distinct acknowledgement -- and a duty, to whose fulfilment finding ourselves inadequate, we are led to look to a higher source for support to enable us and give us strength.

But yet more than this might be gathered from looking at us merely as the creatures of God's providence. If we cast our eyes around us, we plainly see that those who best fulfil the duties which are required of them by their stations in life, are not always the most prosperous; that evil men are often permitted to obtain the mastery and oppress the righteous. We also may see, that frequently the more the righteous are brought low and in misery, the clearer does their righteous dealing shew itself, and the more are they purified. Hence we learn to conclude, that worldly goods and prosperity are not the great objects of desire or of prayer -- that we have something within us which is better than they, and which they are only employed as the means of trying and preparing us for something after this life. Hence we are led to suppose, that our chief care should be about our *souls*, that superior part of us which is better than the things about us. Here then is a fresh set of duties laid upon us, and a far more difficult one than any of the former; and a mercy also is conferred upon us, a treasure committed to us, far more precious than the others were: and both of these call upon us for continual acts of drawing near unto God -- the one for help, and the

other for gratitude's sake. Therefore, if this were all, if we merely knew ourselves as the creatures of God's providence, according to what we have seen, the duty of prayer would be more and more urgent upon us, the more we came to know of our state and circumstances. Every fresh discovery of God's dealings with us and those around us, would open to us new mercies, and new duties arising in consequence of them; and thus, the more knowledge we had, the more occasion should we have to seek God -- both to acknowledge His mercies and to seek His assistance.

\*\*\*Now add to all this the sense which we must have that our thoughts and actions very frequently are in opposition to God -- that we must be offending Him continually -- which would lead us to Him to obtain pardon for the past and strength for the time to come, and would not allow us to trust to ourselves, but in our actions, as well as our being, to see our dependence upon Him; and you will see, upon looking back upon what has been said, the great force with which this duty of prayer presses on us, considered merely as in a natural state, with no revelation from God. Mind, I do not now speak of the difficulties which would attend prayer in this case, only because I am at present engaged in shewing you the *duty* of it, and arguing, that if our only grounds for it were God's mercies of providence, they would be powerful enough to engage us to it continually. And why am I going this? That I may beg of you to bear this in mind, while I go on to shew you on what other grounds the command to be instant in prayer is made to us.

If we could conceive a person not only created into life and being by God, but after that creation, undergoing another birth equally wonderful with his former one -- so that, as by that he was brought from being nothing to be that human form which he now is, so by this fresh birth, he is brought from being the man that he now is, into a life which is as glorious in comparison to his former one, as that was sin comparison to not being at all; would not such a person have the claims on to acknowledge God's mercies, and to pray for sustenance in this new life, vastly increased? If we suppose, also, that with this new being a great accession of knowledge had been made to him, that many ways of God which were before dark to him, were now made clear -- will it not be the case, that as we saw before the duty of prayer increase as knowledge of God's ways increased; so now also, by this fresh knowledge, it will press more forcibly on the newly-enlightened person? Suppose also, that in this new life the way of prayer was made clear, the difficulties removed, and the person brought into a state in which he could have constant access to God, and a promise that his requests should always be heard and considered; would not this also greatly increase the obligation? In short, if the man were in his former life bound to pray, will he not now, in his fresh life, be tenfold more bound? . . .

Here is our new life, our new state of duty, mercy, and obligation. God, who brought us out of a state of nothingness and death into the world, hath also brought us out of the death of sin, and caused us to be born into a life of righteousness. Now, therefore, let us turn and see on what grounds the duty of prayer presses on us.

First, we need continually sustaining in this our new life; as in our natural life, if it were not for God's preservation of us we should be overtaken by death, so in this, our spiritual life, He must continually hold us up, or we shall become those who have a name to live and yet are dead. For this, then, we must continually be having recourse to Him for supplies of His grace; for as His providence was the upholding power in the former life, so is His grace in that into which we are born, -- by grace we were brought into it, and by grace we stand in it. And connected with this, is the duty of giving Him thanks who has thus begotten us anew in Christ Jesus, -- thanks, as far as we are able, proportioned to the greatness of the blessing -- earnest, constant, and unfeigned.

These, then, constitute our first matter for prayer in our Christian state, and I cannot sum them up better than in the words which you all know, -- "I heartily thank my heavenly Father that He has brought me into this state of salvation through Jesus Christ our Savior. And I pray unto God to give me His grace that I may continue in the same unto my life's end."

The second ground for an increased obligation to prayer in the Christian life is, that we are, by it, brought into new relationships and new duties towards others, which circumstance, as before, calls for a special acknowledgment of mercy, and a special petition for help. In this state, God is our reconciled Father; we had before fathers of our flesh, and we were in subjection to them; now we are brought into subjection to the Father of spirits; and all that we owed to them, reverence, love, obedience, more deeply do we owe to our new Father, in proportion as the new life to which of His own will He hath begotten us, is of a higher kind and more glorious than our earthly one. For all this we need His continual help, and because this help is promised to us constantly, and we may always have access to His glorious presence, we are therefore bound to yield Him most humble and hearty thanks for his His fatherly care towards us. . . .

Thirdly, we are bound to pray in our Christian life, to help forward the work of our sanctification. An active progress in holiness is required of all who are baptized into Christ, and there can be no progress in holiness without a frequent communion with God, without realising His presence and setting Him at our right hand. This is our preparation for our state of glory, and, therefore, will be much occupied in the company, as far as we can now enjoy it, of Him who is to be the delight and crown of that state. And the more we advance in this blessed progress, the more we see the fruits of faith springing up in our lives and thoughts, the more we are bound to render humble and hearty thanks to Him of whom comes every good thought and deed. So here again are our thanksgivings and our petitions for help requiring us to be instant in prayer.

Next, we are called in our state of salvation constantly into the presence of God to confess and bewail our manifold sins and transgressions against Him. The carnal promptings of our mortal bodies are perpetually drawing us back from knowing our high vocation of God in Christ Jesus, and we are tempted by our great spiritual adversary to disbelieve and distrust our state in Him, and to look to ourselves, as if it were a state that we had to put ourselves into, or to get admitted to. All these backslidings and shortcomings from the simple truth as it is in Jesus need to be often and deeply bewailed before God, and solemnly repented of, as unworthy of our state in Christ and a denying of the Lord that bought us.

Now besides all these calls to prayer on us as members of Christ, there is another which should and may be as powerful as any,--nay, the most so of all,--but which requires, in order to its exercise, active and unceasing practice of the requirements of the rest. It is the duty of giving God thanks and praise for all His glorious character as shewn forth to us in His word. "We give Thee thanks for Thy great glory," are the words we use in our Communion Service after we have fed on Christ, have been admitted within the veil of His flesh, have drunk of His blood, and have become possessed and filled with holy things. The Church, the spouse of the Heavenly King, loves Him for Himself, and every member of that Church will not allow His love to God to stop with gratitude for the blessings he has received, but will be drawn out in active love to God as He is in Himself, in all His wonderful manifestations of love. And this love will call him to continual communion with God,--to continual searchings of His word with prayer, that he may trace His footsteps and the wonders of His hand wherever he turns.

So many, so powerful, are the Christian's calls to prayer; and surely he who neglects them, or thinks lightly of them, can hardly deserve the name. We are apt to attach pleasant thoughts to the sound of the bells that call us to these our public prayers; and I have heard of some who, I fear, cared little for prayer,--that could not bear to stay at home when the bells were going for Church; but in the ears of the man who loves His Saviour and values His grace and ready help, bells are always sounding to prayer. When He rises before the daylight to His work, before he leaves his chamber, he hears the call within him, 'Come to prayer;' when in his daily hours evil thoughts rise in him, or ungodly companions tempt him, that sweet sound comes to him again, as it were upon the wind, 'Come to prayer;' when he meets his family safe by God's mercy in the evening, there is the well known chime in the midst of them, 'Come to prayer;' and when he is preparing to lay himself down in the confidence of sleep, since God will not remove, the same welcome call is still at his heart's door, "Come to prayer!" By prayer he lives, in prayer he hopes to die. Prayer is his only cordial, his surest medicine, his only key to his best treasure. His Saviour spent whole nights in prayer, and he prays that he may be able to pray like Him.

And now, with all this before you, will any soul in this Church go home, and live from day to day and night to night without a prayer or thought of God? I fear many will--for I know too well the hardness of the human heart, to think that any thing I can say will break it, unless the powerful arm of God descend to further His Word and give efficacy to it. All of you who really care for the souls of others, here is another great call to prayer on you--pray that what we speak in God's name, may in His name be received, and by His Spirit rendered fruitful.

You have heard now the *duty* of prayer--how it presses on us as men, but how much more forcibly, as we are Christians and inheritors of heaven. I hope, if God spare us, to set before you next Sunday the efficacy of prayer: and both these discourses will be a preparation to explain to you the divine prayer which our Saviour has given us.

Meanwhile I earnestly beseech you, as one who very deeply cares for your souls, to lay to heart what I have said. Let those who pray be more constant and more earnest in prayer, remembering how it is their refuge and strength in all circumstances; and let those who do not pray--I tremble to say it--seriously consider what an awfully dangerous state they are falling into,--no less than that of rejecting the state of salvation into which they are brought by Christ. Let them begin this very day this their bounden, but neglected, duty, with humble acknowledgment of their grievous omission, and cries for forgiveness and grace for the time to come.

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