



Prayer and Boldness

"I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth."—[Luke 11:8](#).

"And He spake a parable unto them, to the end, they ought always to pray and not to faint.... Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry to Him day and night, and He is long-suffering with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily."—[Luke 18:1-8](#).

Our Lord Jesus thought it of such importance that we should know the need of perseverance and boldness in prayer, that He spake two parables to teach us this. This is proof sufficient that in this aspect of prayer we have at once its greatest difficulty and its highest power. He would have us know that in prayer all will not be easy and smooth; we must expect difficulties, which can only be conquered by persistent, determined perseverance.

In the parables our Lord represents the difficulty as existing on the side of the persons to whom the petition was addressed, and the boldness as needed to overcome their reluctance to hear. In our intercourse with God the difficulty is not on His side, but on ours. In connection with the first parable He tells us that our Father is more willing to give good things to those who ask Him than any earthly father to give his child bread. In the second, He assures us that God longs to avenge His elect speedily.

The need of urgent prayer cannot be because God must be made willing or disposed to bless: ***the need lies altogether in ourselves***. But because it was not possible to find any earthly illustration of a loving father or a willing friend from whom the needed lesson of importunity could be taught, He takes the unwilling friend and the unjust judge to encourage in us the faith, that perseverance can overcome every obstacle.

The difficulty is not in God's love or power, but in ourselves and our own incapacity to receive the blessing. And yet, because there is this difficulty with us, this lack of spiritual preparedness, there is a difficulty with God too. His wisdom His righteousness, yea His love, dare not give us what would do us harm, if we received it too soon or too easily.

The sin, or the consequence of sin, that makes it impossible for God to give at once, is a barrier on God's side as well as ours; to break through this power of sin in ourselves, or those for whom we pray, is what makes the striving and the conflict of prayer such a reality. And so in all ages men have prayed, and that rightly too, under a sense that there were difficulties in the heavenly world to overcome. As they pleaded with God for the removal of the unknown obstacles, and in that persevering supplication were brought into a state of utter brokenness and helplessness, of entire resignation to Him, of union with His will, and of faith that could take hold of Him, the hindrances in themselves and in heaven were together overcome. As God conquered them, they conquered God. ***As God prevails over us, we prevail with God.***

God has so constituted us that the clearer our insight is into the reasonableness of a demand, the more hearty will be our surrender to it. One great cause of our remissness in prayer is that there appears to be something arbitrary, or at least something incomprehensible, in the call to such continued prayer. If we could be brought to see that this apparent difficulty is a Divine necessity, and in the very

nature of things the source of unspeakable blessing, we should be more ready with gladness of heart to give ourselves to continue in prayer. Let us see if we cannot understand how the difficulty that the *call to perseverance* throws in our way is one of our greatest privileges.

I do not know whether you have ever noticed what a part difficulties play in our natural life. They call out man's powers as nothing else can. They strengthen and ennoble character.

We are told that one reason of the superiority of the Northern nations, like Holland and Scotland, in strength of will and purpose, over those of the sunny South, as Italy and Spain, is that the climate of the latter has been too beautiful, and the life it encourages too easy and relaxing—the difficulties the former had to contend with have been their greatest boon; how all nature has been so arranged by God that in sowing and reaping, as in seeking coal or gold, nothing is found without labour and effort.

What is education but a daily developing and disciplining of the mind by new difficulties presented to the pupil to overcome? The moment a lesson has become easy, the pupil is moved on to one that is higher and more difficult. With the race and the individual, it is in the meeting and the mastering of difficulties that our highest attainments are found.

It is even so in our intercourse with God. Just imagine what the result would be if the child of God had only to kneel down and ask, and get, and go away. What unspeakable loss to the spiritual life would ensue. *It is in the difficulty and delay that calls for persevering prayer*, that the true blessing and blessedness of the heavenly life will be found.

*We here learn how little we delight in fellowship with God, and how little we have of living faith in Him. We discover how earthly and unspiritual our heart still is, how little we have of God's Holy Spirit. We there are brought to know our own weakness and unworthiness, and to yield to God's Spirit to pray in us, to take our place in Christ Jesus, and abide in Him as our only plea with the Father. There our own will and strength and goodness are crucified. There we rise in Christ to newness of life, with our whole will dependent on God and set upon His glory. **Do let us begin to praise God for the need and the difficulty of importunate prayer, as one of His choicest means of grace.***

Just think what our Lord Jesus owed to the difficulties in His path. In Gethsemane it was as if the Father would not hear: He prayed yet more earnestly, until "He was heard" In the way He opened up for us, He learned obedience by the things He suffered, and so was made perfect; His will was given up to God; His faith in God was proved and strengthened; the prince of this world, with all his temptation, was overcome.

This is the new and living way He consecrated for us; it is in persevering prayer we walk with and are made partakers of His very Spirit. Prayer is one form of crucifixion, of our fellowship with Christ's Cross of our giving up our flesh to the death. O Christians! Shall we not be ashamed of our reluctance to sacrifice the flesh and our own will and the world, as it is seen in our reluctance to pray much? Shall we not learn the lesson which nature and Christ alike teach? The difficulty of importunate prayer is our highest privilege; the difficulties to be overcome in it bring us our richest blessings.

In importunity there are various elements. Of these the chief are perseverance, determination, intensity. It begins with the refusal to at once accept a denial. It grows to the determination to persevere, to spare no time or trouble, till an answer comes. It rises to the intensity in which the whole being is given to God in supplication, and the boldness comes to lay hold of God's strength. At one time it is quiet and restful; at another passionate and bold. Now it takes time and is patient; then again it claims at once what it desires. In whatever different shape, it always means and knows—God hears prayer: I must be heard.

Remember the wonderful instances we have of it in the Old Testament saints. Think of Abraham, as he pleads for Sodom. Time after time he renews his prayer until the sixth time he has to say, "Let not my Lord be angry." He does not cease until he has learnt to know God's condescension in each time consenting to his petition, until he has learnt how far he can go, has entered into God's mind, and now rests in God's will. And for his sake Lot was saved. "God remembered Abraham, and delivered Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." And shall not we, who have a redemption and promises for the heathen which Abraham never knew, begin to plead more with God on their behalf.

Think of Jacob, when he feared to meet Esau. The angel of the Lord met him in the dark, and wrestled with him. And when the angel saw that he prevailed not, he said, "Let me go." And Jacob said, "I will not let thee go." And he blessed him

there. And that boldness that said, "I will not," and forced from the reluctant angel the blessing, was so pleasing in God's sight, that a new name was there given to him: "Israel, he who striveth with God, for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

And through all the ages God's children have understood, what Christ's two parables teach, that God holds Himself back, and seeks to get away from us, until what is of flesh and self and sloth in us is overcome and we so prevail with Him that He can and must bless us. Oh! Why is it that so many of God's children have no desire for this honour—being princes of God, strivers with God, and prevailing? What our Lord taught us, "What things soever ye desire, *believe that ye have received*" is nothing but His putting of Jacob's words, "I will not let Thee go except thou bless me." This is the importunity He teaches, and we must learn: to claim and take the blessing.

Think of Moses when Israel had made the golden calf. Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." That was importunity, that would rather die than not have his people given him. Then, when God had heard him, and said He would send His angel with the people, Moses came again, and would not be content until, in answer to his prayer that God Himself should go with them ([33:12](#), [17](#), [18](#)), He had said, "I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken." After that, when in answer to his prayer, "Show me Thy glory," God made His goodness pass before him, he at once again began pleading, "Let my Lord, I pray Thee, go among us." And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights ([Ex. 34:28](#)). Of these days he says, "I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights, I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sin which ye sinned."

As an intercessor Moses used importunity with God, and prevailed. He proves that the man who truly lives near to God, and with whom God speaks face to face, becomes partaker of that same power of intercession which there is in Him who is at God's right hand and ever lives to pray.

Think of Elijah in his prayer, first for fire, and then for rain. In the former you have the importunity that claims and receives an immediate answer. In the latter, bowing himself down to the earth, his face between his knees, his answer to the servant who had gone to look toward the sea, and come with the message,

"There is nothing," was "Go again seven times." Here was the importunity of perseverance. He had told Ahab there would be rain; he knew it was coming; and yet he prayed till the seven times were fulfilled. And it is of this Elijah and this prayer we are taught, "Pray for one another. Elijah was a man of like passions with ourselves. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Will there not be some who feel constrained to cry out, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"—this God who draws forth such effectual prayer, and hears it so wonderfully. His name be praised: He is still the same. Let His people but believe that He still waits to be inquired of! Faith in a prayer-hearing God will make a prayer-loving Christian.

We remember the marks of the true intercessor as the parable taught us them. A sense of the need of souls; a Christ like love in the heart; a consciousness of personal importance; faith in the power of prayer; courage to persevere in spite of refusal; and the assurance of an abundant reward;—these are the dispositions that constitute a Christian an intercessor, and call forth the power of prevailing prayer.

These are the dispositions that constitute the beauty and the health of the Christian life, that fit a man for being a blessing in the world, that make him a true Christian worker, who does indeed get from God the bread of heaven to dispense to the hungry.

These are the dispositions that call forth the highest, the heroic virtues of the life of faith. There is nothing to which the nobility of natural character owes so much as the spirit of enterprise and daring which in travel or war, in politics or science, battles with difficulties and conquers.

No labour or expense is grudged for the sake of victory. And shall we who are Christians not be able to face the difficulties that we meet in prayer? It is as we "labour" and "strive" in prayer that the renewed will asserts its royal right to claim in the name of Christ what it will, and wields its God-given power to influence the destinies of men.

Shall men of the world sacrifice ease and pleasure in their pursuits, and shall we be such cowards and sluggards as not to fight our way through to the place where we can find liberty for the captive and salvation for the perishing? Let each servant of Christ learn to know his calling. His King ever lives to pray. The Spirit of

the King ever lives in us to pray. It is from heaven the blessings, which the world needs, must be called down in persevering, importunate, believing prayer. It is from heaven, in answer to prayer, the Holy Spirit will take complete possession of us to do His work through us. Let us acknowledge how vain our much work has been owing to our little prayer. Let us change our method, and let henceforth more prayer, much prayer, unceasing prayer, be the proof that we look for all to God, and that we believe that He heareth us. Andrew Murray, The Ministry of Intercessory Prayer • Chapter 4.