

TOA  
OMNIA  
VINCIT  
VERITAS

# PRAYER

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PUBLISHED BY  
AUGSBURG PUBLISHING HOUSE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

## BOOK ONE

### What Prayer Is

*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."*

—REVELATION 3:20.

*Rehearsal*  
- come back to X  
- renew fellowship  
- communion  
7. Luke 24 → Vital

**I** DOUBT that I know of a passage in the whole Bible which throws greater light upon prayer than this one does. It is, it seems to me, the key which opens the door into the holy and blessed realm of prayer.

To pray is to let Jesus come into our hearts.

This teaches us, in the first place, that it is not our prayer which moves the Lord Jesus. It is Jesus who moves us to pray. He knocks. Thereby He makes known His desire to come in to us. Our prayers are always a result of Jesus' knocking at our hearts' doors.

This throws new light upon the old prophetic passages: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). Yea, verily, before we call, He graciously makes known to us what gift He has decided to impart to us. He knocks in order to move us by prayer to open the door and accept the gift which He has already appointed for us.

From time immemorial prayer has been spoken of as the breath of the soul. And the figure is an excellent one indeed.

The air which our body requires envelopes us on every hand. The air of itself seeks to enter our bodies and, for this reason, exerts pressure upon us. It is well known that it is more difficult to hold one's breath than it is to

breathe. We need but exercise our organs of respiration, and air will enter forthwith into our lungs and perform its life-giving function to the entire body.

The air which our souls need also envelopes all of us at all times and on all sides. God is round about us in Christ on every hand, with His many-sided and all-sufficient grace. All we need to do is to open our hearts.

Prayer is the breath of the soul, the organ by which we receive Christ into our parched and withered hearts.

He says, "If any man open the door, I will come in to him."

Notice carefully every word here. It is not our prayer which draws Jesus into our hearts. Nor is it our prayer which moves Jesus to come in to us.

All He needs is access. He enters in of His own accord, because He desires to come in. And He enters in wherever He is not denied admittance.

As air enters in quietly when we breathe, and does its normal work in our lungs, so Jesus enters quietly into our hearts and does His blessed work there.

He calls it to "sup with us."

In Biblical language the common meal is symbolical of intimate and joyous fellowship. This affords a new glimpse into the nature of prayer, showing us that God has designed prayer as a means of intimate and joyous fellowship between God and man.

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Notice how graciously prayer has been designed.

To pray is nothing more involved than to let Jesus into our needs. To pray is to give Jesus permission to employ His powers in the alleviation of our distress. To pray is to let Jesus glorify His name in the midst of our needs.

The results of prayer are, therefore, not dependent upon the powers of the one who prays. His intense will, his fervent emotions, or his clear comprehension of what he is praying for are not the reasons why his prayers will be heard and answered. Nay, God be praised, the results of prayer are not dependent upon these things!

To pray is nothing more involved than to open the door, giving Jesus access to our needs and permitting Him to exercise His own power in dealing with them.

He who gave us the privilege of prayer knows us very well. He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. P. 103, 14

That is why He designed prayer in such a way that the most impotent can make use of it. For to pray is to open the door unto Jesus. And that requires no strength. It is only a question of our wills. Will we give Jesus access to our needs? That is the one great and fundamental question in connection with prayer.

When Israel had sinned against the Lord in the wilderness, He sent among them exceedingly fiery serpents. In their distress the people humbled themselves and cried to God for mercy. And the Lord had mercy upon His rebellious people. But He did not take away the serpents. What He did was to tell Moses to raise up a serpent of brass in the midst of the camp, that all might see it. And He ordained it so in His mercy that they who had been bitten by the serpents needed but to turn and look unto the serpent of brass, and they would be given the power which would heal them from the death-dealing poison of the serpents' bites.

This was indeed a gracious ordinance. By this all could be saved if they so willed.

If the Lord had ordained that those who had been bitten by the serpents must drag themselves over to the serpent of brass and touch it, most of them would never

have been saved, because the poison took effect almost immediately, and those who had been poisoned were unable to walk more than a few steps. All that was required of them was to turn their heads, look unto the serpent of brass, and they would be healed!

Just so has the Lord in mercy ordained help also for the serpent-bitten Israel of the New Covenant: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

No matter in what distress we may be, distress of body or of soul, we need but look unto Him who is always near with that healing power which can immediately overcome the death-dealing poison of sin and its terrible consequences both to body and soul.

To pray is nothing more involved than to lift the eye of prayer unto the Savior who stands and knocks, yea knocks through our very need, in order to gain access to our distress, sup with us and glorify His name.

Let us think of patients who are ill with tuberculosis.

The physicians put them out in the sunlight and fresh air, both in summer and in winter. There they lie until a cure is gradually effected by the rays of the sun. The recovery of these patients is not dependent upon their thinking, in the sense of understanding the effect of the sun's rays or how these rays work. Neither does their recovery depend upon the feelings they experience during the rest cure.

Nor does it depend upon their wills in the sense of exerting themselves to will to become well.

On the contrary, the treatment is most successful if the patients lie very quietly and are passive, exerting neither their intellects nor their wills. It is the sun which effects the cure. All the patients need to do is to be in the sun.

Prayer is just as simple.

We are all saturated with the pernicious virus of sin; every one of us is a tubercular patient doomed to die! But "the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings has arisen." All that is required of us, if we desire to be healed both for time and for eternity, is to let the Son of righteousness reach us, and then to abide in the sunlight of His righteousness.

To pray is nothing more involved than to lie in the sunshine of His grace, to expose our distress of body and soul to those healing rays which can in a wonderful way counteract and render ineffective the bacteria of sin. To be a man or woman of prayer is to take this sun-cure, to give Jesus, with His wonder-working power, access to our distress night and day.

To be a Christian is in truth to have gained a place in the sun!

Permit me to use still another illustration to show how simple the Lord has made prayer.

The man sick of the palsy, mentioned in the second chapter of Mark, had some very good friends. They knew that Jesus could help him. So they carried him to the house where Jesus was. But they could not get in because of the multitude. Undaunted, they lifted the sick man to the roof, made a hole in it and lowered him to the very feet of Jesus.

There these good friends undoubtedly stood and waited for the authoritative word from Jesus by which their sick friend would immediately become well. But, strange enough, no such word was forthcoming from Jesus. Instead they heard these words spoken with authority: "Son, thy sins are forgiven!"

Another prayer had been crying louder to Jesus. It was the sick man's plea for the forgiveness of sins. And yet he had not spoken one word to Jesus. He was lying

quietly on his bed. It is easy for me to think that he lay there looking to Jesus, only looking to Jesus.

And Jesus heard the unuttered prayer for the forgiveness of sins which arose from the sick man's heart. And He answered this prayer first. Afterward He answered the other prayer also and restored the man to physical health.

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This helps us to get a little deeper insight into the secret of prayer.

Prayer is something deeper than words. It is present in the soul before it has been formulated in words. And it abides in the soul after the last words of prayer have passed over our lips.

Prayer is an attitude of our hearts, an attitude of mind. Prayer is a definite attitude of our hearts toward God, an attitude which He in heaven immediately recognizes as prayer, as an appeal to His heart. Whether it takes the form of words or not, does not mean anything to God, only to ourselves.

What is this spiritual condition? What is that attitude of heart which God recognizes as prayer? I would mention two things.

In the first place, helplessness.

This is unquestionably the first and the surest indication of a praying heart. As far as I can see, prayer has been ordained only for the helpless. It is the last resort of the helpless. Indeed, the very last way out. We try everything before we finally resort to prayer.

This is not only true of us before our conversion. Prayer is our last resort also throughout our whole Christian life. I know very well that we offer many and beautiful prayers, both privately and publicly, without help-

lessness as the impelling power. But I am not at all positive that this is prayer.

Prayer and helplessness are inseparable. Only he who is helpless can truly pray.

Listen to this, you who are often so helpless that you do not know what to do. At times you do not even know how to pray. Your mind seems full of sin and impurity. Your mind is preoccupied with what the Bible calls the world. God and eternal and holy things seem so distant and foreign to you that you feel that you add sin to sin by desiring to approach God in such a state of mind. Now and then you must ask yourself the question, "Do I really desire to be set free from the luke-warmness of my heart and my worldly life? Is not my Christian life always lukewarm and half-hearted for the simple reason that deep down in my heart I desire it that way?"

Thus an honest soul struggles against the dishonesty of his own being. He feels himself so helplessly lost that his prayers freeze on his very lips.

Listen, my friend! Your helplessness is your best prayer. It calls from your heart to the heart of God with greater effect than all your uttered pleas. He hears it from the very moment that you are seized with helplessness, and He becomes actively engaged at once in hearing and answering the prayer of your helplessness. He hears today as He heard the helpless and wordless prayer of the man sick with the palsy.

If you are a mother, you will understand very readily this phase of prayer.

Your infant child cannot formulate in words a single petition to you. Yet the little one prays the best way he knows how. All he can do is to cry, but you understand very well his pleading.

Moreover, the little one need not even cry. All you need to do is to see him in all his helpless dependence upon you, and a prayer touches your mother-heart, a prayer which is stronger than the loudest cry.

He who is the Father of all that is called mother and all that is called child in heaven and on earth deals with us in the same way. Our helplessness is one continuous appeal to His father-heart. He is forever occupied with hearing this prayer of ours and satisfying all our needs. Night and day He is active in so doing, although we as a rule do not even notice it, not to speak of thanking Him for it.

If you are a mother, you will understand this, too, better than the rest of us. You care for your little one night and day, even though he does not understand what you are doing, sacrificing and suffering for him. He does not thank you, and often he is even contrary, causing you not a little difficulty. But you do not let that hinder you. You hear and answer incessantly the prayer which his helplessness sends up to your mother-heart.

Such is God.

Only that He does perfectly what human love can only do imperfectly. As a true mother dedicates her life to the care of her children, so the eternal God in His infinite mercy has dedicated Himself eternally to the care of His frail and erring children.

Thus God deals with us all.

Also with you, my unconverted reader. Most likely you think that God does not love you. At times you even think that He pays no attention to you whatsoever. At other times again you feel as though God is pursuing you with vengeance and retaliation, as though He were seeking to upset your plans and destroy your happiness.

Listen, and I will tell you what God is like: "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth

rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Christ spent His last strength and His last moments in prayer for His enemies. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). When Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the last time and had no further means of saving the ungodly and rebellious city, He stood on the Mount of Olives and wept for the city. His prophetic eye saw the terrible doom which would befall the city and from which there was no escape.

Such is God.

He loves His enemies. When He sees the distress of the ungodly, their empty joys and their real sorrows, their disappointments, their sufferings and their anxieties as they are irresistibly swept along by the stream of time toward the everlasting anguish of hell, their distress and helplessness cry to His heart. And He hears their cry and stoops down to the helpless children of men in order to help them.

The unconverted man accepts His help when it pertains to temporal things. But as soon as God offers to help him spiritually, helpless man turns away and often flees from God in great terror. He refuses to be converted!

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#### Prayer is for the helpless

Behold the sinner who no longer flees from God. He stands in the light of heaven. More or less gradually he begins to see his former sins, the boundless depths of impurity in his heart, his impenitent coolness, indifference and rebelliousness toward God, his dislike of the Bible and of prayer and the permanent desire of his weak will towards sin.

What does he do now?

Like everybody else he cries in his distress to God. He cries more or less intensely, more or less often, more

or less regularly. But he receives no answer from God. He feels that he is forsaken, that he is like a man being driven along on an upturned keel out on the open, raging sea. He cries with all his strength. He cannot stop even though not a soul can hear him.

Then this helpless soul says to himself, "God does not answer me because I do not pray right. Can my prayers really be called prayers? Are they anything but words, empty words? Do they reach higher than the roof? If I do not put more holy zeal and more decided determination into my prayers, they will not be prayers which God can hear."

My helpless friend, your helplessness is the most powerful plea which rises up to the tender father-heart of God. He has heard your prayer from the very first moment that you honestly cried to Him in your need, and night and day He inclines His ear toward earth in order to ascertain if any of the helpless children of men are turning to Him in their distress.

Now listen again. It is not your prayer which moves God to save you. On the contrary, your prayer is a result of the fact that Jesus has knocked at your heart's door and told you that He desires to gain access to your needs. You think that everything is closed to you because you cannot pray. My friend, your helplessness is the very essence of prayer.

To pray is to open the door unto Jesus and admit Him into your distress. Your helplessness is the very thing which opens wide the door unto Him and gives Him access to all your needs.

"But why doesn't He answer me?" you ask perplexed.

He has answered your prayer.

He has entered into your life, through the door which you in your helplessness have opened for Him. He is

already dwelling in your heart. He is doing the good work within you.

As yet you have not really understood His answer. But in this respect you are like all the rest of us who pray. We pray, and our prayers are answered; but we do not see the answer immediately, often not until a long time afterward.

You have imagined that you would receive an answer from God according to your own thinking, and that you would receive either peace, assurance or joy in your soul. Not receiving these things, you thought that God had not answered you. Jesus has many things to tell us and much to accomplish within us which we do not understand at the time. We are impatient and think that He ought to do something else for us or say something else to us than what He does. Just as Peter did when Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1-10). But Jesus does not permit Himself to be disturbed by our impatience. He proceeds calmly, saying, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter" (John 13:7).

Be not anxious because of your helplessness. Above all, do not let it prevent you from praying. Helplessness is the real secret and the impelling power of prayer. You should therefore rather try to thank God for the feeling of helplessness which He has given you. It is one of the greatest gifts which God can impart to us. For it is only when we are helpless that we open our hearts to Jesus and let Him help us in our distress, according to His grace and mercy.

From the heavenly perspective many things look different than they do here on earth. I think that our prayers, too, look different when viewed from above.

There is, for instance, the prayer meeting. One after another prays. First they pray who are accustomed to

pray aloud in the presence of others. They pray well, and their prayers edify. When they say, Amen, everybody acquiesces quietly in the fact that it was a good prayer. But at the same prayer meeting there may also be another believing soul who would like very much to lift his voice in prayer at the meeting. He feels that he needs it, more, perhaps, than any of the others. However, he is not accustomed to it; and he does not succeed very well when he tries. His thoughts become disconnected, and he speaks stumblingly. Finally he becomes so bewildered that he even forgets to say, Amen. After the meeting he is so downcast because of the prayer he has offered and because of the condition of his heart that he scarcely dares to look any one in the face.

But I know that a new song of praise has already been sung by the saints in glory, rejoicing because they have heard a man pray to God who in his helplessness did not know what else to do. Such prayers make an impression in heaven.

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Let me say one more word about helplessness in prayer.

It can be experienced in various ways. Especially may it result in widely varying reactions in our emotional life. As a rule we will feel our helplessness most, it will make the deepest impression upon our emotional life, in the beginning of our Christian life.

During the time when the Lord is making us humble of spirit and contrite of heart (Isaiah 57:15), when He is crushing our self-conceit and self-sufficiency, our emotional life will no doubt be stirred most profoundly. Not because it is all so new and strange, but mostly because it is so incomprehensible.

God is such that we cannot fully understand Him. He is so great than none of His creatures can comprehend

Him completely. No man can meet God without discovering that he can not understand God fully.

As mentioned above, it does not take long before an awakened sinner realizes that some of God's ways are past finding out. "Why do I not receive peace, assurance and joy? Why does not God help me out of the distress which I can no longer endure? Why does He let me sink into eternal perdition when He sees how earnestly I desire to be saved? Why does He not answer with a single word any of the distressing cries which arise from my soul?"

We can endure a great many things with a calm mind if we can see the reason for, or the purpose of, our suffering. It is that which we cannot understand and which therefore seems meaningless that irritates us and makes us rebellious more than anything else. For that reason no aspect of God becomes a stumblingblock to us more easily than His inscrutability. It reminds us of the poignant words of Jesus, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me" (Matthew 11:6).

For this reason no aspect of God breaks down our self-conceit and our self-sufficiency more quickly than this. For the first time we come to a point where we do not know what to do. We are unable to go back to our former life, and we cannot find the way to God. We have not learned as yet to surrender to a God whose ways are past finding out. As a result our whole being is in a state of rebelliousness. That which is incomprehensible always fills us with paralyzing fear.

Every one who continues in this fear and does not flee from God or his own conscience, and who tarries in the presence of the inscrutable God, experiences a miracle. God breaks down his self-conceit and self-sufficiency. Without knowing how, the helpless soul is drawn into the fellowship of our incomprehensible God. God Him-

Isa 55:8-9  
Ps 131:1

self in Christ enables him to humble himself beneath the inscrutability of God, to endure it, and to rely upon and rest in the God whose way he cannot fully understand.

Thereby a thing of decisive importance has taken place in that sinner's life.

He has become reconciled not only to the inscrutability of God but also to his own helplessness. While up to this time this has put his whole being into a state of rebelliousness and anxiety, now he has experienced the fact that helplessness is a sinner's proper plea in the presence of God.

Not by reflection, but by the certainty of experience, he knows now that an infant is no more helpless in its relation to its mother than he is in his relation to God. At all points he is equally helpless: whether it be in connection with the forgiveness of sins, the conquest of sin, the new life in his soul, growth in grace or faithfulness in his daily life with God and men.

His helplessness now becomes a new factor in his prayer life.

Before, his helplessness was the storm center of his prayer life, either driving him to supplicatory cries of distress, or stopping his mouth so effectively that he could not find a single word with which to give utterance to his needs.

His helplessness has now become the quiet, sustaining power of his prayer life. A humble and contrite heart knows that it can merit nothing before God, and that all that is necessary is to be reconciled to one's helplessness and let our holy and almighty God care for us, just as an infant surrenders himself to his mother's care.

Prayer therefore consists simply in telling God day by day in what ways we feel that we are helpless. We are moved to pray every time the Spirit of God, which

is the spirit of prayer, emphasizes anew to us our helplessness, and we realize how impotent we are by nature to believe, to love, to hope, to serve, to sacrifice, to suffer, to read the Bible, to pray and to struggle against our sinful desires.

It often happens that we slip out of this blessed attitude of helplessness before God. Our former self-conceit and self-sufficiency reassert themselves. The result is that we fail again to grasp the meaning of helplessness. Once more it fills us with anxiety and perplexity. Everything becomes snarled again. We are not certain of the forgiveness of sins. The peace of God disappears from our lives. Worldliness, slothfulness and lack of spiritual interest begin to choke our spiritual lives. Sin gains the victory again in our daily lives, and an unwilling spirit works its way into the service we render toward God.

This continues until God again can make us humble and contrite of heart and we again become reconciled to being helpless sinners, who can do nothing but this one thing: to permit the infinite God to have mercy on us, to love us and care for us. Then our helplessness re-establishes us in our right relationship both to God and to man. Above all it restores us to the right attitude in prayer.

Helplessness in prayer resembles in a striking way the condition of a person who is lame or sick of the palsy. At first it is painful, almost unbearable, to be so helpless that one cannot hold a spoon to his mouth or chase a fly from his face. It is easy to understand why a person thus afflicted cannot experience this without strong inner revulsion and protest, at the same time as he puts forth the most intense efforts to use his limbs as before.

But notice this same person after he has become resigned to his illness and reconciled to his helplessness. He is just as helpless as he was before, but his helpless-

ness no longer causes him any pain or anxiety. It has become a part of himself and has set its stamp upon all his movements and all his attitudes.

He must be helped in everything. It feels very humiliating. Notice, too, how this humiliation has set its stamp upon him. When he quietly and humbly asks for help, he does so as though he were apologizing for doing so. Notice, too, how grateful he is for the least bit of assistance that he receives.

All his thinking and all his planning have been conditioned by his helplessness. He is, of course, dependent in all things upon those who care for him. We notice, too, that this feeling of dependence develops into a peculiar bond of sympathy between him and them, the strongest bond by which human beings can become attached to one another.

Thus our helplessness should make us attached to God and make us more strongly dependent upon Him than words can describe. Recall to mind the words of Jesus, "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). In one single line He tells us here what it takes us a whole lifetime to learn, and even when we reach the portals of death we have not learned it fully.

I never grow weary of emphasizing our helplessness, for it is the decisive factor not only in our prayer life, but in our whole relationship to God. As long as we are conscious of our helplessness we will not be overtaken by any difficulty, disturbed by any distress or frightened by any hindrance. We will expect nothing of ourselves and therefore bring all our difficulties and hindrances to God in prayer. And this means to open the door unto Him and to give God the opportunity to help us in our helplessness by means of the miraculous powers which are at His disposal.

## 2. Faith.

I come now to another aspect of that attitude which constitutes the essence of prayer, that condition of the heart which God recognizes as prayer rising to Him from earth, whether it is uttered or not.

It is written, "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him" (Hebrews 11:6). Without faith there can be no prayer, no matter how great our helplessness may be. Helplessness united with faith produces prayer. Without faith our helplessness would be only a vain cry of distress in the night.

I need but mention faith, and every man and woman of prayer will know that we are touching upon one of the aspects of prayer life about which we are most sensitive.

The Bible contains many pointed passages about praying in faith if we expect to be heard.

"If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:21-22).

"Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

"As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee" (Matthew 8:13).

"But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord; a doubleminded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:6-8).

These words have sent many a poor man and woman of prayer down into the dust of despair and rendered them so completely helpless that they have felt it impossible

to pray. It is all so self-evident. He who would pray to God must believe in God. It is blasphemy toward God to turn to Him in prayer and not believe in answer to prayer.

When an honest soul examines himself in the light of the Scriptures, he soon finds that faith is just what seems lacking in his prayers. It says that he should ask in faith, nothing doubting. He does just the opposite. He doubts before he prays, while he prays and after he has prayed. He is just like the surge of the sea; he is driven and tossed to and fro by the winds of doubt. He is the very man whom Scripture depicts: "a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

He is in distress; he is helpless; and he prays. But he does not receive what he prays for, even though he prays fervently and frequently and cries to God in his distress, on his own behalf as well as on behalf of his loved ones. After such a prayer the secret hope surges through his soul: Perhaps God will hear me this time? He waits intently for an answer. But, alas, no change occurs.

He feels that God has passed judgment upon his prayer. God cannot hear him because he does not pray in faith. He prays, doubting. Alas, how doubt bores its way into every prayer! It makes him anxious and afraid of prayer, afraid of sinning against God by the very act of praying.

My doubting friend, your case is not as bad as you think it is.

You have more faith than you think you have. You have faith enough to pray; you have faith enough to believe that you will be heard. Faith is a strange thing; it often conceals itself in such a way that we can neither see nor find it. Nevertheless, it is there; and it manifests itself by definite and unmistakable signs. Let us examine these briefly.

The essence of faith is to come to Christ.

This is the first and the last and the surest indication that faith is still alive. A sinner has nothing but sin and distress. The Spirit of God has made that clear to him. And faith manifests itself clearly and plainly when a sinner, instead of fleeing from God and his own responsibility, as he did before, comes into the presence of Christ with all his sin and all his distress. The sinner who does this believes.

It is written, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

That was just what those folk did who came to Christ and heard from Him these words before they departed, "Thy faith hath saved thee." All they did was to come to Jesus and plead their distress before Him, whether it was physical or spiritual or both.

Notice the simple, but unmistakable, mark of a living faith.

Such a faith as this sees its own need, acknowledges its own helplessness, goes to Jesus, tells Him just how bad things are and leaves everything with Him.

You and I can now tell how much faith we need in order to pray. We have faith enough when we in our helplessness turn to Jesus.

This shows us clearly that true prayer is a fruit of helplessness and faith. Helplessness becomes prayer the moment that you go to Jesus and speak candidly and confidently with him about your needs. This is to believe.

The reason that more faith than this is not necessary in order to pray lies in the very nature of prayer.

We have seen above that prayer is nothing more involved than to open the door when Jesus knocks and give

Him access to our distress and helplessness with all His miracle-working powers.

It is not intended that our faith should help Jesus to fulfill our supplications. He does not need any help; all he needs is access. Neither is it intended that our faith should draw Jesus into our distress, or make Him interested in us, or solicitous on our behalf. He has long since cared for us. And He Himself would like to gain access to our distress in order to help us. But He can not gain admittance until we "open the door," that is, until we in prayer give Him an opportunity to intervene.

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You have looked upon that state of doubt and inner uncertainty, in which you so often have gone into and returned from the hour of prayer, as unbelief. This is due to confused thinking, which, alas, is very common, but none the less dangerous to our prayer life.

*Unbelief* is something very different from doubt. Unbelief is an attribute of the will and consists in a man's refusal to believe, that is, refusal to see his own need, acknowledge his helplessness, go to Jesus and speak candidly and confidently with Him about his sin and his distress.

Doubt, on the other hand, is anguish, a pain, a weakness, which at times affects our faith. We could therefore call it faith-distress, faith-anguish, faith-suffering, faith-tribulation.

Such faith-illness can be more or less painful and more or less protracted, like all other ailments. But if we can begin to look upon it as suffering which has been laid upon us, it will lose its sting of distress and confusion.

All suffering which is laid upon us should work together for our good. So also faith-suffering. It is not as

Unbelief

Doubt

*Unbelief (attribute of will): Confessional basis of limited love* ← *faith indicated, not of facts*  
 • Mk 9:24 "I b.-help my unbelief" (Lk 24:38)

*Doubt (mixture w/ f.): Skeptical basis w/ little love.* ← moving away fr. O (f/c)  
 "Jas 1:6-8; Mt 13:13" ← involving weaker claims

dangerous as we feel that it is. It is not harmful to faith nor to prayer. It does serve to render us helpless. And, as we have seen above, helplessness is, psychologically, *in your soul*, the sustaining and impelling power of prayer. Nothing so furthers our prayer life as the feeling of our own helplessness.

These thoughts seem, however, to conflict with the Scripture passages cited above. They stated categorically that he who prays, doubting, cannot expect to be heard.

But these passages must not be torn out of their context. We must compare them with other passages of the Scriptures bearing on the same thought. Special mention must be made of the characteristic little account in Mark 9:14-30. While Jesus and three of His twelve disciples were experiencing the Transfiguration on the mountain top, a man had brought his boy, possessed with demons, to the other disciples; but they were not able to cast out the evil spirit. When Jesus came, the father hastened to bring the child to Him.

In answer to Jesus' question, the father told Him how long the child had been thus afflicted and how terrible his suffering had been. Then he added in distress, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." To which Jesus answered, "If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth." The man seemed to sense the seriousness of Jesus' words and exclaimed in distress, "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!"

Mk 9:24

Here we have a typical example of doubting faith. Doubt, in this instance, and as is usually the case, follows two trends, one with reference to God and one with reference to faith. The man expresses exactly what he feels: "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us!" He is really not fully certain that Jesus can help him.

When Jesus had met his skepticism on this score by his incisive words about faith, "If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth," the man gave way completely. He felt the truth of Jesus' words, but he felt also that his faith was failing him. At that moment everything was at stake. But he knew not what else to do but to tell just exactly how faith and doubt were struggling for mastery in his soul. So he says, "I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!"

The characteristic thing to notice here is that he uses the expression unbelief. He himself condemns his doubt as unbelief. That is what sincere faith always does; it judges itself strictly and unmercifully.

But we should notice what judgment Jesus passed upon this doubting, unstable, shaky condition. In His eyes this was faith. This is clearly evident from the fact that Jesus healed the boy. Had the father's doubt actually been unbelief, Jesus would not have been able to heal him. This is clear from verse twenty-three. And this is stated with exceptional clearness in Mark 6:5-6: "And he could there do no mighty work. . . . And he marvelled because of their unbelief."

Here we see how weak, unstable and doubting faith can be.

Notice how faith at the moment of prayer condemned itself as unbelief. And yet faith was there.

It was there in sufficient degree to enable Jesus to perform one of His greatest miracles. The disciples had tried to heal the boy, but had failed.

What is the reason that such a weak, unstable and doubting faith could be heard and answered? Because it was characterized by the essence of living faith: it went to Jesus. It pleaded its distress before Him. It complained

of its faith-distress by telling Jesus how full of doubt this faith was.

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The insight we have now gained into the nature of prayer and faith will undoubtedly simplify our prayer life and make it easier.

In the first place, it has become clear to us that the answer to prayer is not dependent upon our emotions or our thoughts before, during or after prayer. The illustration about the afflicted father in Mark 9 has shown us that plainly. His emotions were less than nothing to build upon both before, during and after his prayer. Everything seemed hopeless. The disciples had tried to heal his son, but had not succeeded. Then Jesus came. He insisted strongly on faith. When the poor father cried out in his distress, "I believe; help my unbelief," I wonder if he did not feel that every avenue was closed?

And his thoughts gave him no more encouragement than his feelings. He has told us some of the things he was thinking about. "If thou canst do anything?" He was not at all certain whether the Lord could succeed any better than the disciples. And when he understood from Jesus' words that it depended somewhat upon him, too, upon his faith, he despaired still more. He felt as though he were swinging to and fro between faith and unbelief.

This is something for us to think about, we who have exactly the same experiences when we pray. We vacillate between doubt and faith. We are not certain whether we are praying right, whether we are praying according to the will of God, or not. And even if we feel certain that what we are praying for is according to the will of God, there is frequently so little earnestness and sincerity in our prayer that we, for that reason, doubt that we will

be heard. We feel that it is almost blasphemy toward God to pray in such a state of mind.

At such a time it is blessed to know that we have faith enough when we bring our needs to Jesus and leave them with Him. And though there be much doubt and but little faith in our hearts, we can do as the father did who came to Jesus. We can begin by telling Him about our doubts and our weak faith. This makes it easier for us, and we can pray more confidently.

I need not exert myself and try to force myself to believe, or try to chase doubt out of my heart. Both are equally useless. It begins to dawn on me that I can bring everything to Jesus, no matter how difficult it is; and I need not be frightened away by my doubts or my weak faith, but only tell Jesus how weak my faith is. I have let Jesus into my heart. And He will fulfill my heart's desire.