

# Pray On, And Pray Fervently

by Horatius Bonar

“*Continuing instant in Prayer.*”—Romans 12:12.

Prayer takes for granted that God is full, and we are empty; that He is infinitely full, and we unspeakably empty. I do not say *infinitely* empty, because God only is infinite. The creature is finite, alike in evil and in good: The emptiness or evil of any creature, or a whole universe of creatures, can never be infinite. Else what would become of us? Infinitude belongs to Godhead; finitude to creaturehood. And here is the first ray of hope to us. Our poverty and want must ever be a mere nothing in comparison with the fullness of Him who filleth all in all. We are sometimes alarmed at the thought of His greatness. Foolish alarm! Were He not so great, so full, so infinite, what would become of us?

Prayer takes for granted that there is a connection between this fullness and our emptiness. The fullness is not inaccessible. It is not too high for us to reach, or for it to stoop. It is not too great for us, nor too distant, so as to be incommunicable. There is a connection, and it has been established by God himself; it is a divine medium of communication: “Ask, and ye shall receive.” It is as *righteous* as it is divine.

Prayer takes for granted that we are entitled to use this channel, this medium; and that, in using it, there will be a sure inflow of the fullness into us. “Every one that asketh receiveth.” It is *men*, not angels, who are invited to use this medium. It is to *sinner*s that the gate is thrown open; for them is the access provided. Free, yet righteous access for unrighteous men. God’s love has made it *free*; the blood of His Son hath made it righteous.

It takes for granted God’s willingness to receive every applicant. His willingness is like His fullness, *infinite*. “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,” applies to prayer; but still more does John 4:10 “If thou knewest the gift of God, thou wouldest have asked, and He would have given.” He makes no exceptions, He does not bid the sinner qualify himself, or ascertain his election, or get up some preliminary preparation, or make sure of the quantity or quality of his faith; He throws open wide His gate and His throne to any applicant, the unworthiest of the human race. His willingness to receive each coming one is infinite. Prayer is not meant to *create* or *produce* willingness; to move the heart of an unwilling God. It assumes this willingness, and acts upon it. It is not “tentative”; it does not go in order to make an *experiment* on God’s willingness. To “experiment” upon it is in reality to *deny* it; and to act upon such an experimenting principle is to deal with an unknown God.

Prayer takes for granted *expectation* on our part. This is in a measure implied in the willingness of God; but it needs special notice; for it is that to which Paul referred when he wrote, “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” *Length* will not do; nor *repetition*; nor *regularity*; no, not even *earnestness*; nay, earnestness is often the mere expression of unbelief, and the indication of a secret feeling on our part that God is not wholly willing, but requires our earnestness to make Him so.

If, then, we examine our prayers, and strip them of all that is not prayer, how little remains? Take away the vain words, the mere meditative parts; the mere expression of solemn feeling; the mere sentimentalism; the mere utterance of petitions, because urged by conscience and a sense of duty; the requests not accompanied with expectation, and how little remains in the best of our prayers! What multitudes of prayers are ascending on this day. How much of these will God recognize as prayer? What a small residuum would remain if divested of all prayerless accessories. I cannot compare it to the amount of grain when the chaff is winnowed away, nor of gold when the dross is purged off; but to the tiny gem or little crystal which you pick out of some great rock, after breaking it in pieces, and sifting its endless fragments.

Let us mark such things as the following in reference to this kind of prayer:

1. *The irksomeness of non-expecting prayer.* Sometimes there may be such an amount of natural feeling as may make what is called “devotion” pleasant. But in the long run it becomes irksome, if not accompanied with expectation, sure expectation. It is expectation only that can produce and keep up truly devotional feeling; expectation founded on God’s infinite willingness to give, and on His promises to the applicant.

2. *The uselessness of non-expecting prayer.* It bears no fruit; it brings no answer; it draws down no blessing. It is expectation that honors God, and that God will honor. The answer always runs in this form, “According to thy faith be it unto thee.” It is non-expectation that, more than anything else, ruins and nullifies prayer.

3. *The sinfulness of non-expecting prayer.* The utterance of petitions is nothing to God; it does not recommend the petitioner. Many seem to think so; and to suppose there is some secret virtue or influence, if not merit, in all prayer, however unbelieving. It is not so; nay, there is guilt, deep guilt, in every unbelieving petition; for thus God is dishonored, His willingness is denied, His Son is set aside, His Spirit is grieved, and He is addressed both as an hard master and an unknown God. Oh the guilt involved in the religion of religious men; men whose prayers are as regular as the rising or setting sun!