



# **The Return of Prayers**

HOW TO DISCERN GOD'S  
ANSWERS TO PRAYERS

**Thomas Goodwin**



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# TO THE MUCH-HONOURED KNIGHT SIR NATHANIEL RICH

SIR,

GOD, who from all eternity hath had an infinite mass of grace and glory lying by him to bestow upon his church, and did accordingly provide a treasury and magazine sufficient wherein to store up all, the bosom of his Son; in whom are hid riches so unsearchable, Eph. 3:8, as cannot be told over, much less spent to all eternity.

He hath as richly (πλουσίως, Tit. 3:6) shed his Holy Spirit on us; that we, who could never have known of anything bequeathed us, nor what to pray for as we ought, might both fully from him know all that God hath given us, and through him lay claim thereto, who maketh intercession for us, and so doth furnish us with a privy key to all that treasury, which otherwise is fast shut up to all the world.

Through which spirit of prayer and supplications thus poured forth, believers come to be at once anointed to the fellowship and execution of those three glorious offices of Christ their head. Not only of priests, by offering up their prayers as spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, but of kings, to rule with God, Hos. 11:12; being hereby made of privy council to the King of kings, so as their counsels and desires expressed in their petitions are said to be fulfilled, Ps. 20:4, 5, and their decrees in their prayers made, ratified, and established, Job 22:27, 28. Nay, further by virtue of this privilege, advanced to such height of favour, as, by their strength in prayer alone, to have power with God himself, Hos. 12:3, 4; and not only with him, but also over him, and in their wrestlings to prevail. Yea, to command: himself hath said it, 'Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask of me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me,' Isa. 45:11; which so transcendent privilege of power is, by the express words of this great charter, universally extended unto all transactions of this lower part of his dominions, whether ecclesiastical, which do concern his sons,—that is, his church,—or whatever other, the more ordinary works of his hands, that belong to common providence,

Matt. 6:10.

And forasmuch as these grand affairs of this his kingdom, as future and to come, are commended to their prayers as their most proper subject about which they are to treat,—'Ask of me of things to come,'—in this respect they do become as truly prophets also, though not in so full and complete, yet in some kind of true resemblance; not by foretelling, yet by forespeaking in their prayers, things that come to pass. God, who made and upholds this world, and all things in it, by the word of his power, doth likewise rule and govern it by the precedents and prescript rules of the word of his will, Ps. 25:10, exactly dispensing unto men both rewards and punishments, according to the tenor of some or other of his promises and threatenings, and former like proceedings therein recorded; though with such various liberty, in respect of the particulars, that his ways remain 'unsearchable and past finding out:' that look, as he appointed in the heavens those ordinances of the sun, moon, and stars, by their light, heat, and motion, 'to rule the day and night,' to divide and cause the several seasons of the year, and all the changes and alterations that do pass over the animal and natural world; in like manner hath he stretched out that so exceeding broad expanse of his word and law, Ps. 119:96—to which the Psalmist doth assimilate it, Ps. 19:1, 2, compared with Rom. 10:18—over this rational world of angels and men, and therein set his statutes and his judgments, that by the light of precepts, and their influences in rewards and punishments, they might order and direct these his creatures reasonable, and all their actions; also dispose and set out all the issues of them. And seeing his saints they are 'a people in whose hearts is his law,' and their delight is to 'meditate therein both day and night;' they daily calculating and observing the various aspects, conjunctions, and mixed influences of those innumerable precepts, promises, and threatenings which themselves and others, nations or men, stand under; and by a judgment thence resulting, Jer. 8:7, so far as they have attained, endeavouring to frame their supplications and petitions according to God's will: hence their prayers oft full happily succeed, and beforehand do accord to those issues and events that afterwards fall out. That like as the earth comes to be just under the sun and moon in some of their conjunctions, so their desires and prayers sometimes in a direct line fall under, and subordinately concur with, God's secret purposes, and

some revealed promise met in conjunction, to produce such and such effects. 'The Spirit' also herein 'helping their infirmities,' sometimes so guiding and directing them by a gracious preinstinct, though unbeknown to them, to pitch their requests upon such particulars as God hath fully purposed to bring to pass; becoming thereby, as it were, the spirit of prophecy unto them, respectively in some measure and degree.

Thus doth that great King employ his nearest servants as his under-officers and sheriffs, to serve his writs and executions upon his enemies, to execute, the judgment written in his threatenings, Ps. 149:9, and to accomplish his mercies written also, by suing out all the promises; to be as man-midwives, (as Hezekiah's allusion, when he sent a-visiting to the prophet Isaiah for his voice and suffrage, seemeth to import, Isa. 37:2-4,) to help and assist his promises and decrees in their travail with mercies and deliverance, Zeph. 2:2, when these their children do come unto the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth.

In all which they shall therefore have the honour to be accounted co-workers together with God in his greatest works of wonder. And at the latter day, when that great and last edition, both of all God's works and likewise ours, then complete and finished, shall be published to all the world, they shall find their names put to them, together with his own; and the same by him acknowledged to be as truly the works of their hearts and prayers as that they are the sole work of his hands and power. Such honour have all his saints.

And if all the works of God are so exceeding great, Ps. 92:5, and his thoughts therein so very deep that every iota of them doth deserve our deepest studies and intentions, and thereunto require a proper skill and wisdom, to read his hand, peculiar unto the saints, ver. 6; whereunto there must be adjoined the most diligent search and attentive observation, to find out his meaning in them, Ps. 77:6; and withal a special inclination and delight to be conversant therein, 'Thy works are very great, sought out of them that have pleasure in them,' Ps. 111:2; and if, of all the rest, those choicer pieces, his works of mercy, may challenge our best regard, in which his heart and delights are most, on which his wisdom hath laid on the richest workmanship, in the most curious contrivements of his love, Mic. 7:18: then surely that selected volume of

more special mercies, his epistles, vouchsafed in answer to our prayers, is above all other most exactly to be studied, and most diligently to be perused by us; wherein God doth unbosom himself, and lay open his heart more sweetly, more familiarly unto us, which are directed, and in a manner dedicated more particularly unto ourselves alone: many of them written with his own hand, in a more immediate manner discovered and appearing in them; and all of them come sealed with the impress of everlasting love, and down-laden with the enclosure of the most precious tokens of his special favour. Whoso is wise will observe these things, and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, Ps. 107:43.

Neither have such favours only more of mercy in the things themselves bestowed, but are further endeared to us by being made our own mercies, by a more peculiar title to them; by which the kindness in them is rendered double. For therein we have that royal liberty to become our own choosers, and contrivers of our own condition, having all the promises thrown down to us, with blanks for us to write our names in which of them we please, which is the greatest liberty. And we have withal his Spirit secretly directing and fixing the needle of our desires to the same point, wherein his great intentions towards us do meet with our best good; which is indeed the truest liberty. And to be made ourselves, whom we love so well, and therefore delight to do good unto, the chiefest instruments under him of our own greatest happiness, is a privilege than which the creature is not made capable of a more transcendent royalty. And when the greatest love, thus rectified, which possibly we can bear ourselves, hath opened its mouth widest, and stretched our desires in praying to the utmost compass, then will God's infinite vast love not only fit them, but do for us above all that we are able to ask, yea, to think; exceeding abundantly above all; as far above as his thoughts are above out thoughts, which is far more than the heavens are higher than the earth.

All which, when put together, if well considered, how would it provoke us to call in all that precious stock of our time, thoughts, and intentions which we cast away on trifles, to lay out the choicest portion of them in this thriving trade of intercourse with God; the returns whereof are better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. It is

the praying Christian that alone employs the riches of the promises, which we usually let lie by us, like dead stock, unimproved: whilst he, like a wise and diligent merchant, looks abroad upon all the affairs of Jesus Christ that are afloat here in this world, and adventures in them all; is watchful to spy out all advantages, and with a holy πράγμοσυνη intermeddleth in every business that may bring in glory unto God, good unto the church, grace and comfort to his own soul. And how infinitely rich must that man needs become that puts even God's riches out to use, with the increase of ten talents for one, yea, a hundred-fold!

The due estimate whereof would no less quicken us to as diligent an inquiry, what becomes of all those goodly adventures, the prayers we make; to listen what haven they arrive at,—how, and when, and with what fraught they do return.

In which great duty, and most necessary property of all true merchants, many of the best and greatest dealers, that are diligent enough in praying, are yet found failing and deficient; that omit no gainful opportunity of adventure, but are careless and unobservant of their returns.

Some, through ignorance, it may be, that this is at all a duty, or of any such importance, are careful only how to lade in prayers enough, not expecting to find any of this bread cast upon the waters, until that great and general return of themselves and all the world with joy bringing their sheaves with them. Others, though at present many of their prayers come home after a few days, and richly laden, yet through want of skill to read those bills of exchange which God often writes in an obscurer character, they lie unregarded by them. Many, when voyages prove long, though to their greater advantage when once they do return, yet in the meantime through discouragement, they give all for lost, as we do ships at sea we cannot hear of. The most are commonly complaining that their adventures still miscarry, and that little or nothing comes of all their prayers. And all are negligent of keeping their books of accounts, to cast up their comings in and goings out the one with the other. By which they lose the chiefest portion of that comfort which for the present God hath here allotted to us to live upon, the revenues of their prayers. And God also is not only robbed of that custom of his glory which should thence accrue, but wronged also by standing still as debtor in their accounts to



many prayers, in the return of which he hath been creditor long ago.

I have endeavoured in this small treatise to convince believers of the grand importance of this duty, which is so full of gain; to discover like wise the causes of the neglect herein, and remove the temptations and discouragements which do occasion it; and have briefly resolved such cases as do more usually occur in the practice of it. But principally my desire was to give in some few experiments and observations which may help to teach the weaker sort, though not perfectly to read, yet here and there to spell, and especially out of the impressions in their own hearts, God's meaning towards them in his answers. I have cast in some scattered calculations of broken prayers cast up, which though they will not amount to make general and perfect tables out of, yet may serve as instances and examples for young beginners, to direct them in the exercise of this most useful skill and wisdom, how to compute and balance their accounts by comparing their prayers and their returns together.

This small and imperfect embryo I have presumed to send forth into the world; and directed it first of all to present its service unto you, and make an honourable and thankful mention of your name. Your worth deserves a more costly, large, and lasting monument for this inscription. Your own abilities of learning, eloquence, and depth of wisdom in human affairs, would you be persuaded to lay them out as you are able, would erect such a remembrance and sumptuous memorial of you when you are gathered to your fathers, as would bear some proportion to your great worth. But that which emboldened me was the near affinity which meditations of this nature do hold with those other your more retired thoughts you think to none but God and your own soul. You have been long a frequent and constant dealer in this blessed way of intercourse with God in private. Those that know you, know your strict observance of those exchange hours you have devoted to meet with God and enjoy communion with him. But, above all, it was that personal obligation under which a great and special favour from you long since brought me, upon which I devoted (with myself) the first of my labours unto your service. And it became one great relief unto my thoughts, weighing the many inconveniences of appearing thus in public, that it gave so full occasion to pay my vows thus

openly before all the world; which having now done, God, that is rich in mercy to all that call upon him, fill you with all grace, and fulfil all your petitions!—So prays,

Your worship's obliged to love and serve you,

THOMAS GOODWIN.

## Introduction

### THE RETURN OF PRAYERS

I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.—PSALM 85:8.

The coherence of the words.

THIS psalm was penned in the name and for the comfort of the whole church of the Jews, both as a prophecy of, and a prayer for, their return out of the Babylonish captivity, and the flowing in again of that ancient glory, peace, administration of justice, liberty of God's ordinances, plenty and increase, which formerly they enjoyed, but had now suffered an ebb of seventy years' continuance. And first he beginneth with prayer, from the first verse to this we have in hand, putting the Lord in mind of, and urging him with his gracious dealings in former times unto his church. This is not the first time, saith he, that the church hath been in captivity, and that thou hast returned it, (as out of Egypt, &c.,) and therefore we hope that thou wilt do so again: 'Thou hast been favourable unto thy land,' &c. His prayer being finished, and he having spoke, he now stands and listens, as you use to do when you expect an echo, what echo he should have, what answer would be returned from heaven, whither his

prayer had already come: 'I will hear what the Lord will speak;' or, as some read it, 'I hear what the Lord doth speak:' for sometimes there is a present echo, a speedy answer returned to a man's heart, even ere the prayer is half finished; as unto Daniel, chap. 9:20, 21. And in brief it is this, 'The Lord will speak peace unto his people:' this answer he finds written at the bottom of the petition, but with this clause of admonition for time to come added, 'But let them not return again to folly;'—a good use to be made of so gracious an answer.

## **CHAPTER I: That God's people are diligently to observe the answers of their prayers**

The main observation and subject of this discourse thence deduced: That God's people are diligently to observe the answers to their prayers.—The reasons of it.

THESE words being especially spoken in relation to God's returning answer to his prayer made, therefore in that relation I mean principally to handle them.

The observation is this: That when a man hath put up prayers to God, he is to rest assured that God will in mercy answer his prayers; and to listen diligently, and observe how his prayers are answered: both are here to be observed. 'I will hear what God will speak;' that is, how he will accomplish them: and withal he confidently expresseth an assurance that 'God will speak peace.' Thus doth the church, Mic. 7:7, 'I will look to the Lord; I will wait; my God will hear me:' she was both sure of gracious audience with him,—'my God will hear me,'—and she will wait till he answers her; and observe how he doth it, 'I will look to the Lord;' and,

ver. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord till he plead my cause.' So Habakkuk, he having made a prayer against the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar, in the first chapter, having ended it, he begins the second chapter thus, 'I will stand upon my watch tower, and see what he will answer me:' and in the end an answer comes, ver. 2; and as he thus waited for a vision, for sometimes their prophecies were in answer to their prayers, so should we for an answer unto ours.

Reason 1.—Because otherwise you take an ordinance of God in vain in your hearts, which is to take God's name, with whom in that ordinance you deal, in vain; for it is a sign you think your prayer not an effectual means to attain that end it is ordained for, and say secretly in your hearts, as they, Job 21:15, 'What profit have we if we pray to him?' For if we use any means, and expect not the end, it is a sign we think the means vain to accomplish that end. Whereas every faithful prayer is ordained of God to be a means to obtain what we desire and pray for, and is not put up in vain, but shall have answer: 1 John 5:14, 15, 'This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' It is true God heareth an enemy, but to hear with favour is the hearing there meant; and is so used in our ordinary speech, as we say of a favourite that he hath the king's ear; and if a man be obstinate to a man's counsel, we say he would not hear, though he give the hearing: so here, to hear is a word of gracious inclination to do the thing required; and thus God's ears are said to be open to their prayers; and so it follows there, that 'if he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.' As soon as we have prayed, we are said to have our petitions,—that is, they are then granted,—and we may be confident they are assented unto by God; although in regard to outward dispensation, the command for accomplishment is not yet come forth: even as a petitioner is said to have his suit when the word of the king is gone forth that it shall be done, though it passeth not the seal, or be not signed a good while after. And like as when a wicked man sinneth, as soon as the act is committed, so soon doth sentence from God go forth against the sinner, but the execution overtakes him not, it may be, a good while after, according to that of Solomon, Eccles. 8:11, 'sentence against an evil-doer is not presently executed:' it is presently sentenced, as the words imply, but not executed; so in like manner falleth it out when a

godly man prays, that as soon as the prayer arrives in heaven, which is in an instant, so soon is the petition granted,—so Dan. 9:23, 'At the beginning of his prayer the command came forth,' though the angel, who brought the answer, arrived not at him till towards the end in the evening, ver. 21,—but the real accomplishment of it may be deferred. So as no prayer in respect of an answer to it is in vain; but where God hath given a heart to speak, he hath an ear to hear: which not to regard, is to take an ordinance in vain, which is God's name.

Reason 2.—And, secondly, not simply God's name, as in an ordinance made known, but also his name, that is, his attributes, are taken in vain. For it is a sign you think of that God you pray to, that either 'his ear is heavy, that he cannot hear, or his hand shortened, that he cannot save,' or his heart straitened, and his bowels restrained, that he will not; and thus you rob him, and despoil him of one of his most royal titles, whereby he styles himself, Ps. 65:2, 'a God that heareth prayers;' who is so regardful of them, that, in 1 Kings 8:59, they are said to be 'nigh the Lord day and night;' they are all before him, and he sets them in his view, as we do letters of friends, which we stick in our windows, that we may remember to answer them, or lay them not out of our bosoms, that we might be sure not to forget them: so the petitions of his people pass not out of his sight, till he sends an answer, which is called 'speaking' here; God speaking as well in his works as in his word. But you, by your neglect herein, make an idol god of him, such as were the vanities of the heathen, as if he 'had ears and heard not, eyes and saw not' your need, &c. Such a god as Elias mocked; 'You must speak aloud,' says he, 'he may be in a journey,' &c. Even such a god do you make the God of heaven and earth to be, whilst you put no more confidence in him, or make no more reckoning of your prayers to him than the heathens did of their sacrifices to their gods. Petitioners do not only put up their requests, but use to wait at great men's doors, and inquire, and listen what answer is given unto them; and it is part of an honour to great men that we do so: and for the same end are we also to wait on God, to shew his greatness, and our distance from him, and dependence upon him. 'As the eyes of the servants look to the hand of their masters, so do we,' saith David, 'on thee, till thou hast mercy on us,' Ps. 123:2. And, Ps. 130, after he had prayed, ver. 2, he says he 'waited more than they that watch for the morning:' like those that

having some great business to do on the morrow, long for the daylight, and look often out to spy the day; so he for a glimmering and dawning of an answer. The like we have Psalm 5:3, 'In the morning will I direct my prayer to thee, and look,' that is, for an answer.

Reason 3.—Again, if God doth give you an answer, if you mind it not, you let God speak to you in vain, when you do not listen to what he answers. If two men walk together, and the one, when himself hath said and spoke what he would, listens not, but is regardless of what the other answers, he exceedingly slights the man. As, non respondere pro convitio est, not to answer again is contempt; so, non attendere, not to attend to what one says. Now our speaking to God by prayers, and his speaking to us by answers thereunto, is one great part of our walking with God; and to study out his dealings with us, to compare our prayers and his answers together, which are as dialogues between us and him. It is said of Samuel's prophecy, that not a word of it fell to the ground, 1 Sam. 3:19: and so it may be said of our prayers; and so it ought to be of God's answers, not a word of them should fall to the ground; as there doth, if you by your observation and listening thereunto catch them not, (as Benhadad's servants are said to do Ahab's words,) apprehend and observe them not. And by the same reason that you are to observe the fulfilling of God's promises, you are of your prayers also. Now, 1 Kings 8:56, it is said, 'not one word failed of all he promised.' Solomon had observed this by a particular survey and register made of all that God had spoken and done for them, and found not a promise unperformed. And there is the like reason both of answers to prayers and for our observing of them, for prayers are but putting promises into suit; and therefore Solomon brings those words in there to this very purpose, to confirm their faith in this, that no prayers made would fail, being grounded on a promise; thereby to encourage others and his own heart to diligence herein, as also as a motive unto God to hear him; for, ver. 59, he infers upon it, 'Let my words be nigh thee,' &c., seeing thou always thus performest thy good word unto thy people.

Reason 4.—Yea, you will provoke the Lord not to answer at all; he will forbear to answer, because he sees it will be thus in vain. When a man is talking to one that listens not to him, he will cease to answer, and leave

off speaking; and so will God. So as that which the Apostle says of faith, Heb. 10:36, that it is not enough to believe, but 'when you have done the will of God, you have need of patience' to eke out faith, 'that you may inherit the promises,' may be also said, and is alike true, of praying. It is not enough to pray, but after you have prayed, you have need to listen for an answer, that you may receive your prayers; God will not fulfil them else. As he said, the sermon was not done when yet the preacher had done, because it is not done till practised; so our prayers are not done when yet made, but you must further wait for and attend the accomplishment.

Reason 5.—If you observe not his answers, how shall you bless God and return thanks to him for hearing your prayers? Ps. 116:1, 'I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplication;' and therefore he goes on to thank him throughout the whole psalm. You are to 'watch unto prayer with thanksgiving,' Col. 4:2; and therefore, as to watch, to observe, and recollect your own wants, which you are to pray for, that you may have matter of requests to put up, so also to observe God's answers for matter of thanksgiving; and many fill that commonplace head full of matter to furnish them for petitioning, but as for this other of thanksgiving, they watch not unto it against they come to pray, nor study matter for that head also. And if any study will furnish you this way, it is the studying out of God's answers to your prayers. The reason you pray so much, and give thanks so little is, that you observe not God's answers; you do not study them. When we have put up a faithful prayer, God is made our debtor by promise, and we are to take notice of his payment, and give him an acknowledgment of the receipt of it; he loseth of his glory else.

Reason 6.—As God loseth, so yourselves also the experience which you might get thereby. (1.) Both experience of God and his faithfulness, which will cause in you hope and confidence in God another time, when you have found him again and again answering your prayers. It was a speech of one eminent in holiness, upon occasion of the accomplishment of a great request made to God by him, that God having never denied him any request, 'I have tried God often, now,' says he, 'henceforth I will trust him.' If the hearing the prayers of another will encourage us to go to God,

—as Ps. 32:6, 'For this cause shall every one that is godly pray unto thee,'—much more when we observe and have experience that our own are heard; therefore, says David, Ps. 116:2, 'The Lord hath heard me, and I will call upon him as long as I live;' as if he had said, Now that God hath heard me, I know whither to go: this experiment, if I had no more, is enough to encourage me for ever to pray unto God; I have learned by it to call upon him as long as I live. And also, (2.) by observing God's answers to your prayers, you will gain much insight into your own hearts, and ways, and prayers, and may thereby learn how to judge of them. So, Ps. 66:18, 19, David's assurance that he did not regard iniquity in his heart was strengthened by God's having heard his prayers; for thus he reasons, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me; but God hath heard me.' For, [1.] if God doth not grant your petitions, it will put you to study a reason of that his dealing; and so you will come to search into your prayers and the carriage of your hearts, therein to see whether you did not pray amiss: according to that, 'Ye lust and have not, ... because ye ask amiss,' James 4:3. As if you send to a friend, who is punctual in that point of friendship of returning answers, and useth not to fail, and you receive no answer from him, you will begin to think there is something in it. And so also here, when a petition is denied, you will be jealous of yourselves, and inquisitive what should be the matter; and so by that search come to see that in your prayers which you will learn to mend the next time. Or, [2.] if they be answered, yet because that therein usually God deals in a proportion with you to your prayers,—as you might perceive if you would observe his dealings with you,—you would by this means come to have much insight into God's acceptation and opinion of your ways: for you should see his dealings with you, and yours with him, to be exceeding parallel and correspondent, and hold proportion each with other. So, Ps. 18:6, 'In my distress I called upon the Lord;' and so, ver. 7, 8, &c., he goes on to describe his deliverance, which was the fruit of those prayers, and then, at ver. 20, 21, &c., he adds his observation upon both, 'According to the cleanness of my hands hath he dealt with me,' &c. 'For with the pure thou shalt show thyself pure.'

Reason 7.—You will lose much of your comfort. There is no greater joy than to see prayers answered, or to see souls converted by us: John 16:24, 'Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.' The receiving



answers makes joy to abound and overflow. Yea, even when we pray for others, if our prayers be answered for them, our joys are exceeding great; much more when in our own behalf. And therein, even in the smallest things which a Christian doth enjoy, doth his comfort exceed another's, that he hath them by virtue of prayers and promises. he knows how he came by them. If 'stolen waters be sweet, and bread eaten in secret,' &c., (as Solomon says, Prov. 9:17,) to wicked men, begged meat is much more sweet to godly men; yea, in the very praying for outward mercies, there is more sweetness than they have in enjoying them. As it is joy to a good heart to see any one converted, but much more to him that is the means of it,—'I have no greater joy,' says St John, 'than that my children walk in truth,' 3 Epist. 4,—so to see God do good to his church, and hear others' prayers, is a comfort, but much more to see him do it at a man's own prayers. Therefore, when God restores comfort to a drooping soul, he is said, Isa. 57:18, to 'restore comfort also to his mourners,' that is, to those that prayed and mourned for him, as well as unto that soul itself; it being a comfort to them to see their prayers answered. Comfort it is many ways: (1.) To hear from God, as to hear from a friend, though it be but two or three words, and that about a small matter; if there be at the bottom this subscription, 'your loving father,' or, 'your assured friend,' it satisfies abundantly; so also, (2.) to know that God is mindful of us, accepts our works, fulfils his promises. (3.) How doth it rejoice one to find another of his mind in a controversy; but that God and we should be of one mind, and concur in the desire of the same things,—not two in the earth only agree, Matt. 18:19, but God who is in heaven and we to agree,—this rejoiceth the heart exceedingly. And thus it is when a man perceives his prayer answered. Therefore you lose much of your comfort in blessings when you do not observe answers to your prayers.

## **CHAPTER II: Three Cases Propounded**

Three cases propounded: the first concerning prayers for the church, and for the accomplishment of such promises as may fall out in ages to come.

NOW as for rules and helps to find out God's meaning towards you in your prayers, and to spy out answers, and how to know when God doth anything in answer to your prayers, this is the next thing to be handled: wherein, first, I will answer some cases and queries which may fall out in several sorts of prayers, about the answering of them.

1. As, first, concerning prayers put up for the church, for the accomplishment of such things as fall out in ages to come.
2. Concerning prayers made for others, of your friends, kindred, &c.
3. Concerning those prayers, whether for yourselves or others, wherein others join with you.

1. For the first:—

(1.) There may be some prayers which you must be content never yourselves to see answered in this world, the accomplishment of them not falling out in your time: such as are those you haply make for the calling of the Jews, the utter downfall of God's enemies, the flourishing of the gospel, the full purity and liberty of God's ordinances, the particular flourishing and good of the society and place you live in. All you whose hearts are right do treasure up many such prayers as these, and sow much of such precious seed, which you must be content to have the church, it may be, in after ages to reap; all which prayers are not yet lost, but will have answers: for as God is an eternal God, and Christ's righteousness an 'everlasting righteousness,' and therefore of eternal efficacy, Dan. 9:24, 'being offered up by the eternal Spirit,' Heb. 9:14, so are prayers also, which are the work of the eternal Spirit of Christ, made to that God in his name, and in him are eternally accepted, and of eternal force, and therefore may take place in after ages. So the prayer that St Stephen made for his persecutors took place in Saul when St Stephen was dead. So David's prayer against Judas, Ps. 109:8, 9, took effect above a thousand years after, as appears, Acts 1:20. So the prayers of the church, for three hundred years, in the primitive times, that kings might come to

the knowledge of the truth, and they 'lead peaceable and quiet lives, in all godliness and honesty,' (which St Paul, in Nero's time, exhorted unto, 1 Tim. 2:2,) were not answered and accomplished till Constantine's time, when the church brought forth a man-child, Rev. 12:5. So, Isa. 58, after he had exhorted to, and given directions for fasting and prayer in a right manner, he adjoineth this promise, 'Thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach;' namely, for this, because his fasting and prayers might have influence into many ages yet to come, in the accomplishment of what was prayed for. And that which Christ says of the apostles' reaping the fruit of St John the Baptist's ministry, and the seed he had sown, is in like manner herein verified, John 4:37, 'One soweth and another reapeth.' And in this sense, that which the Papists say is true, that there is a common treasury of the church, not of their merits, font of their prayers. There are bottles of tears a-filling, vials a-filling to be poured out for the destruction of God's enemies. What a collection of prayers hath there been these many ages towards it! And that may be one reason why God will do such great things towards the end of the world, even because there hath been so great a stock of prayers going for so many ages, which is now to be returned. And herein it falls out to us in our prayers as in their prophecies to the prophets of old: 1 Pet. 1:11, 'The Spirit in them did signify the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things that are now revealed.' And thus is it in the spirit of prayer, which is instead of the spirit of prophecy; for we pray through the guidance of the Spirit, 'who teacheth us what to ask,' for many things that come to pass in after ages.

(2.) Only at present in prayer it may be that thou hast revealed unto thee, by a secret impression made on thy spirit, that these things shall come to pass, and so hast thy faith confirmed in them, and withal an evidence, that even for thy prayers, among others, God will perform them; and that the contribution of thy prayers doth help to make up the sum. And upon such prayers God usually for the present also testifies the acceptance of a man's person, and reveals himself most to him that he is his, as he did to Moses: he never revealed his love to Moses more than when he prayed most for God's people. And haply thou hast that as one of thy best

evidences of the uprightness of thy heart, that thou canst pray for the church's good, though for a long time to come, which thou mayest never behold with thine eyes, even as David also did, and rejoiced in it.

(3.) And when they are accomplished, and thou in heaven, thy joy will surely be the more full for these thy prayers: as at the conversion of those thou hast prayed for, so at the ruin of the church's enemies, &c., whom thou didst pray against; for if there be joy in heaven at the conversion of a sinner, as at the birth of a new prince and heir of heaven, then haply in a proportion he shall rejoice most whose prayers had most hand in it, and a special interest therein. And so as thy other works, so thy prayers follow thee, and 'the fruit of them,' as Jeremiah speaks, chap. 17:10; and, however, yet at the day of judgment thou shalt rejoice, as well as they that enjoyed the fruit of thy prayers in their times, thou having sown the seed of their happiness: 'Both he that sows and he that reaps shall then rejoice together,' as Christ says, John 4:36.

## **CHAPTER III: The Second Case**

The second case, concerning prayers made for others, of our friends, &c.  
—How they are answered.

2. THE second case is concerning answers to our prayers for others, for particular men, as friends and kindred, &c., and likewise for temporal blessings.

Pray for others you know we must; so the elders of the church for those that are sick, James 5:15, 16: 'Pray one for another,' says St James. As in case a man is troubled with a lust, tell some private friend of it: 'Confess your sins one to another,' that when a man's own prayers are not strong enough to cast it out, it may be done by the help of another's prayers

joined with his. So it follows, 'that ye may be healed,' ver. 16, for in that sense I understand healing in ver. 16. So also, 1 John 5:16, 'If a man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death,'—that is, not against the Holy Ghost,—'he shall ask life for him, and God shall give him life that sins not unto death.'

Concerning this case, I give these considerations, how such prayers are answered:—

First consideration.—Such prayers God often heareth; why else are any such promises made? As, 'that they shall be healed in their bodies,' James 5:15, 'healed of their lusts,' ver. 16; 'converted to life,' 1 John 5:16. God hath made these to encourage us to pray, and to testify his abundant love to us; that it so overflows and runs over, that he will hear us, not only for ourselves, but for others also; which is a sign we are in extraordinary favour. So God intimates concerning Abraham to Abimelech, Gen. 20:7, 'He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live.' And as he was a prophet, so we are priests, as for ourselves, so for others also, to God our Father; and it is a prerogative we have through the fellowship we have, and communion of Christ's priestly office, 'who hath made us kings and priests,' Rev. 1:6, to prevail and intercede for others, and a special token and pledge of extraordinary love; for if God hears a man's prayers for others, much more for himself in his own behalf. So when Christ healed the man sick of the palsy, it was, as it is said, for the faith of the standers-by, Matt. 9:2: 'He, seeing their faith, said, Thy sins are forgiven thee.' The meaning is not as if for their faith's sake he forgave that man his sins, for, Hab. 2:4, 'the just doth live by' his own 'faith;' but to encourage them who out of faith brought that sick man to him, and us all in like manner to bring others and their complaints by prayer before him, he therefore then took occasion to declare and pronounce forgiveness to that poor man; he therefore then said, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.'

Second consideration—Yet, secondly, prayers for others may often also not obtain the particular thing prayed for them. So Samuel's prayer for Saul, 1 Sam. 15:35; so David for his enemies, Ps. 35:13.

For it is in this as it is in the use of other means and ordinances for the good of others; God making such like kind of promises to our prayers

herein as he hath made to our endeavours to convert when we preach to men: that look, as we preach to many, and yet but few believe,—for 'who hath believed our report?' Rom. 10:16, even 'as many as are ordained to eternal life;' we 'become all to all, and win but some,'—so we pray for many, not knowing who are ordained to eternal life, which whilst we know not, we are yet to pray for them, 1 Tim. 2:3, 4. Only as where God hath set his ordinance of preaching, it is more than a probable sign he hath some to convert, and usually the word takes among some, though often but a few; so when he hath stirred up our hearts to pray for others, it is a sign God will hear us for some of those we pray for, yet so as we may be denied. For God doth require it as a duty on our parts, because it is an outward means ordained by God, by which sometimes he useth to bring things to pass; but yet not as such a certain and infallible means, as he hath tied himself universally unto, to bring the thing to pass on his part.

And though indeed his promise to hear and accept the prayer is general and universal, yet the promise to hear it, by granting the very thing itself prayed for, is but an indefinite promise, such as he makes to other means of doing men good; as to our admonitions and reproofs, and to our preaching, &c. He makes such promises because sometimes he doth hear and convert by them. For instance, that promise, James 5:15, of healing the sick, cannot be universal; for it might then be supposed, as a truth implied in it, that sick men might never die, whereas 'it is appointed for all men once to die,' Heb. 9:27, seeing it may be supposed that the elders may at all such times of danger of death still come and pray with them. But the meaning is, that it is an ordinance which God hath made a gracious promise unto, because he often doth restore the sick at their prayers: and therefore upon every such particular occasion, we are to rely upon God for the performance of it by an act of recumbency, though with an act of full assurance that we shall obtain it we cannot; the promise being not universal, but indefinite.

Of the like nature are all other promises of things temporal and outward, of which we herein speak, as when God promiseth to give long life to them that honour their parents, riches and honours to them that fear him; the tenor and purport of which promises is not, as if absolutely,

infallibly, and universally God doth always perform these to those that are yet truly qualified with the conditions specified in those promises; the contrary both Scripture instances and common experience shews: they are therefore indefinitely meant, and so to be understood by us. For, because whenever God doth dispense any such mercies to any of his, he would do it by promise; all his ways to his being truth, that is, the fulfilling of some truth promised; and also God having purposed in his outward dispensation of things here in this world, to bestow riches and honours upon some that fear him, though not upon all, for how then should 'all things fall alike to all,' Eccles. 9:2, poverty and contempt upon them that fear God, even as well as those that fear him not? He hath therefore indefinitely expressed his gracious dispensation herein: requiring answerably an act of faith—which principle in us is suited to a promise, as a faculty is to its proper object—suitable to that his meaning in the promise; that as he intended not in such promises an absolute, infallible, universal obligation of himself to the performance of them to all that fear him, so the act of faith which a man is to put forth toward this promise, in the application of it for his own particular, is not required to be an absolute, infallible persuasion and assurance that God will bestow these outward things upon him, having these qualifications in him; but only an indefinite act, as I may so call it, of recumbency and submission, casting and adventuring ourselves upon him for the performance of it to us, not knowing but he may in his outward dispensations make it good to us, yet with, submission to his good pleasure, if otherwise he disposeth it.

It is true, indeed, that that act of general assent which faith is to give to this promise, in the general abstract truth of it, is to be an assured certain persuasion and belief that God hath made this promise, and that he certainly will and doth perform it unto some according to his purpose expressed therein; which act of general assent is that believing without wavering,—namely, of the truth of the promise in general,—which St James calls for in prayer, chap. 1:6. But yet that special act of application, as divines call it, required in this faith, whereby I am to rest upon it for my own particular, is not required to be such an undoubted persuasion as to think that I shall certainly have this particular promise in kind fulfilled to me; for the truth, purpose, and intent of the promise is not universal, but indefinite. So as it is but an it may be, as God elsewhere expresseth

such promises, as Zeph. 2:3, that it shall be performed to me; and yet because it may be God will perform it unto me, therefore my duty is to cast myself upon God, and put in for it, with submission to his good pleasure for the performance of it to me. So that so far as the truth and intent of it is revealed to be infallible and certain, so far a man is bound to have an answerable act of faith, of certain and infallible persuasion towards it, as to believe without wavering that God hath made such a promise, and will perform it according to his intent in making it, which is unto some. But yet withal, because the tenor of it is but indefinite, and in that respect whether it shall be performed to me or no is not therein certainly revealed; therefore God requires not of me, in the application of such a promise, an absolute full persuasion that he will perform it to me in such or such a manner, &c.; but only an act of dependence and adherence, with referring it to his wise and righteous good pleasure towards me.

And yet again, if God should at any time give a man such a special faith concerning any such particular temporal blessing for himself or another, then he is bound to believe it thus in particular: as when he gave power to any to work miracles, as to his apostles he did, with a commission to work them, then they were bound to believe that such and such a miracle should infallibly be wrought by them, as that the devils should be cast out by them, &c. And therefore in this case Christ rebukes his disciples for not believing thus upon such particular occasions, Matt. 17:20.

And then it is also true that if God give such a faith, he will infallibly perform it; and thus those his words are to be understood, Matt. 21:22, 'Whatsoever ye ask in faith, believing, ye shall receive:' he speaks it of the faith of miracles; for, ver. 21, he had said, 'If ye believe and doubt not, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove into the sea, and it shall be removed.' So that when God works such a faith, and we are called to it, we are bound to believe with a certain persuasion that such a thing will be done, and it shall be done; but unto such a kind of special faith in temporal promises for ourselves or others, God doth not now always call us. If indeed at any time we did believe and doubted not, by reason of a special faith wrought by God, that God would remove a mountain into the sea, or bestow any outward mercy, it should be done; for he that stirred up such



a faith would accomplish the thing. But it is not that which God requires of believers, that they should without doubting thus believe concerning outward things; the promises thereof being not universal but indefinite; and therefore answerably a man is not absolutely bound to believe that God will certainly bestow such a temporal blessing on him, no, not though he should have the qualification which the promise is made unto, the promise being not universal, made to all so qualified, but indefinite, to some of such so qualified. The case is the same of believing promises made to our praying for others, which is the thing in hand.

Third consideration.—When the prayers are thus made out of conscience of our duty for such whom yet God doth not intend that mercy unto, then they are returned again into our own bosoms, to our advantage; even as St Paul saith, that his rejoicing that others preached, though they lost their labour, should turn to his salvation, Phil. 1:19. So prayers for others, though to the parties themselves we prayed for they prove in vain, yet they turn to our good. So, Ps. 35:12, 13, when his enemies were sick, David prayed and humbled himself; 'and my prayers,' says he, 'returned into my bosom.' David did by this his prayer in secret for his enemies testify the sincerity of his heart to God, and his true forgiveness of them, —for it is the usual disposition of God's children to pray for them that are the greatest enemies to them,—and this prayer, though it did not profit them, yet it turned to David's own good; it came back, and home again to him, with blessings to himself; God delighting in and rewarding such a disposition in his child, as much as any other, because therein we resemble Christ so truly, and shew that God is our Father, and ourselves to have his bowels in us. And God stirreth up this praying disposition in his children for their enemies, not always that he means to hear them for them, but because he means to draw forth, and so have an occasion to reward, those holy dispositions which are the noblest parts of his image in them, and wherewith he is so much delighted; and so their prayers return into their own bosom, and it is taken as if they had prayed for themselves all that while. Thus in like manner, when Moses prayed so earnestly for the people of Israel, God offered to return his prayer into his own bosom, and do as much for him alone as he had desired that God would do for them. 'I will make thee a great nation,' says God to him, for whom I will do as much for thy sake as thou hast prayed I should do for

these. As in preaching the gospel, Christ told the disciples, that if in any house they came to preach peace, there were not a 'son of peace,' Luke 10:6, on whom the message might take place, and their peace rest, 'your peace,' says he, 'shall return unto you again.' So is it if your prayers take not place.

Fourth consideration.—If we have prayed long for those whom God intends not mercy unto, he will in the end cast them out of our prayers and hearts, and take our hearts off from praying for them. That which he did by a revelation from heaven to some prophets of old, as to Samuel and Jeremiah, the same he doth by a more undiscerned work; that is, by withdrawing assistance to pray for such by withdrawing the spirit of supplication from a man, for some men, and in some businesses. Now thus he did with Samuel: 'Why dost thou mourn for Saul?' 1 Sam. 16:1. So with Jeremiah, chap. 7:16, 'Pray not for this people.' And this he doth because he is loath when his people do pray but to hear them, and would not that such precious breath as that of prayer is should be without its full and direct success, or be in vain; therefore when he means not to hear, he lays the key of prayer out of the way, so desirous is he to give answers to every prayer. It falls out in this case of praying for another as in reproofing another. One whom God intends not good unto, God will lock up a man's heart towards such a man, that he shall not be able to reprove him; when towards another God doth enlarge it as much, where he intends good. Thus it is sometimes in praying for another; so as in praying a man shall not be able to pray for, as not to reprove such a man, though his heart was to do both: but it fareth with him as God threateneth concerning Ezekiel towards that people, that he 'makes his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth,' Ezek. 3:26.

Fifth consideration.—God will hear those prayers for, and answer them in, some others, in whom we shall have as much comfort as in those we prayed for; and so it often proves and falls out. God, to shew 'he looks not as man looks,' nor chooseth as he chooseth, lets our hearts be set on work to pray for the conversion or good of one he intends not mercy to; and then answers them in some other, whom he makes as dear unto us. When God had cast off Saul, still Samuel's heart lingered after him, and he mourned for him; but God, at the same time, when he bids him cease

mourning for Saul, 1 Sam. 16, to shew that yet he accepted that his mourning as it came from him, 'Go,' says he, 'and anoint one of the sons of Jesse,' 1 Sam. 16:1. Samuel desired to see a good successor in that government, and he having been their ruler it was his special care; he having anointed Saul, it exceedingly grieved him that he should prove so wicked: and God saw and answered the ground of his desires; and therefore immediately upon his prayers, sent him to anoint the best king that ever was upon that throne, who was the issue and man-child of those his prayers. And again, when Samuel came to anoint one of the sons of Jesse, when he saw Eliab, ver. 6, 'Surely,' says he, 'the Lord's anointed is before me.' If Samuel had been to choose, he would have chosen him, and would have prayed for and desired him; but 'God seeth not as man seeth,' ver. 7, and chooseth not as man chooseth; but in David was his prayer fully heard and answered, and that better. So Abraham, he had prayed for Ishmael, and 'O let Ishmael live in thy sight!' Gen. 17:18; but God gave him Isaac instead of him. So perhaps thou prayest for one child more than for another, out of thy natural affection, looking on his countenance and stature, as Samuel did on Eliab's; but yet thy prayers being sincere in the ground of them, in that thou desirest a child of promise, God therefore answers thee, though in another, for whom yet haply thy heart was not so much stirred; who yet, when he is converted, proves to thee as great a comfort: and it is as much as if that other thou didst most pray for had been wrought upon.

## **CHAPTER IV: The Third Case**

The third case, about such prayers wherein others join with us.—How therein to discern the influence of our own prayers.

3. THE third case to be considered is, when a man prays for something with others, or which others likewise pray for with him, so as he is not alone in it; how then should he know that his prayers have a hand in obtaining it, as well as theirs? For in such cases Satan is apt to object, Though the thing is granted indeed, yet not for thy prayers, but for the prayers of those others joined in it with thee.

(1.) If thy heart did sympathise and accord in the same holy affections with those others in praying, then it is certain thy voice hath helped to carry it: 'If two agree on earth,' says Christ, Matt. 18:19, the word is συμφωνήσωσιν; that is, if they harmonially agree to play the same tune; for prayers are music in God's ears, and so called 'melody to God,' Eph. 5:19. It is not simply their agreeing in the thing prayed for, but in the affections; for it is the affections that make the concert and the melody. Now if the same holy affections were touched and struck by God's Spirit in thy heart that in theirs, then thou doest help to make up the concert, and without thee it would have been imperfect; yea, without thee the thing might not have been done, for God stands sometimes upon such a number of voices, and one voice casts it; as when he named ten righteous persons to save Sodom. When therefore the same holy motives and affections affected thee in thy prayer which did them in theirs, it was the work of the same Spirit both in them and thee, and God hath heard thee.

Especially if God did stir up the same secret instinct in thee to sympathise with another in praying for such a thing unbeknown one to another, as sometimes it falls out; then surely thy prayers are in it as well as his. You shall observe sometimes a general instinct of the Spirit put into God's people's hearts, generally to pray for or against a thing, without each other's stirring up one another; even as Ezekiel by the river Chebar prophesied the same things Jeremiah did at home at Jerusalem. Thus against the time that Christ the Messiah came in the flesh, there was a great expectation raised up in the hearts of the godly people to look and pray for him, Luke 2:27, 38.

(2.) God doth usually and often evidence to a man, that his prayers contributed and went among the rest towards the obtaining of it; as—

[1.] By some circumstance: as, for example, sometimes by ordering it so

that that man that prayed most for a thing of concernment, should have the first news of it when it comes to be accomplished; which God doth, as knowing it will be most welcome news to him. God doth herein as we do with a friend, who we know is cordial in, and wisheth well to a business; he sends him the first word of it who was most hearty in it, and prayed most about it. Good old Simeon had surely been earnest in seeking the Lord, as well as the rest in Jerusalem, to send the Messiah into the world, to restore and raise up the ruins of Israel; for God did reveal to him that he should see him before he died: and therefore to evidence to him his respect to his prayers, God carried the good old man into the temple just at the time when the child was brought into the temple, for to 'be presented to the Lord,' Luke 2:27, 28. And in like manner good Anna, 'who had served God with fasting and prayer, night and day,' God ordereth it so that she must also come in at the same instant, Luke 2:38. By some such like peculiar circumstance or other doth God often use to witness to a man's heart that he hath heard him in businesses prayed for in common with others.

[2.] By filling the heart with much joy in the accomplishment of what a man prayed for: which is an evident argument that his prayers did move the Lord to effect it, as well as the prayers of others. Thus that good old Simeon, seeing his prayers now answered, he was even willing to die through joy; and thought he could not die in a better time: 'Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace' For when the desires have vented and laid out much of themselves, then when the return comes home, they have an answerable part and share in the comfort of it: and as desires abounded in praying, so will joy and comfort also in the accomplishment. As when a ship comes home, not only the chief owners, but every one that ventured shall have a share out of the return, in a proportion to the adventure; so here, though some one whom it mainly concerns hath especial interest in the mercy obtained, yet thou shalt have thy prayers out in joy from God that the thing is granted. St Paul had planted a church at Thessalonica, but he could not stay to water it with his own preaching, yet when absent he waters those plants which he had set, with prayers, night and day: 1 Thess. 3:10, 'Night and day praying exceedingly for you,' says he. And as his prayers were exceeding abundant for them, so was his joy as abundant in them, when he had heard that they stood steadfast, and fell

not back again: 'Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord,' ver. 8. 'And what thanks can we render to God for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before the Lord?' ver. 9.

[3.] If God give you a heart thankful for a blessing vouchsafed to another, prayed for by you with others, it is another sign your prayers have some hand in it. St Paul knew not what thanks to give for the answering of his prayers, as in that forementioned place. Old Eli had put up but one short ejaculatory petition, that we read of, for Hannah; and that was, 'The Lord grant thy petition!' 1 Sam. 1:17; and for the return of that one prayer, when Hannah related how God had answered her, ver. 26, 27, he returned solemn thanks: 'and he worshipped the Lord there,' ver. 28.

(3.) And, lastly, in case the thing concerned thyself, which was prayed for by others helping thee therein, what cause hast thou but to think that it was granted for thy own prayers, and not for theirs only? seeing God stirred up their hearts to pray for thee, and gave thee a heart to pray for thyself, and besides gave thee the thing which thou desiredst. Which argues thou art beloved as well as they, and accepted as well as they. 'I know this shall turn to my salvation through your prayers,' saith St Paul, Phil. 1:19. Though their prayers went to the business, yet had not St Paul been accepted himself, the prayers of all the men in the world would have done him but little good. God may hear the prayers of the godly for wicked men, when they do not pray themselves, in temporal things: so he did hear Moses for Pharaoh, Abraham for Abimelech: and he may hear godly men the sooner for others' prayers; so he heard Aaron and Miriam the sooner for Moses's sake, Num. 12:13. But if God stirs up thy heart to pray for thyself, as well as others for thee, then God that gave thee a heart to pray hath heard thy prayers also, and hath had a respect to them more in it than to theirs, because it concerned thyself, as a more special mercy unto thee.

## **CHAPTER V: Common directions helpful in all cases and prayers**

Common directions helpful in all cases and prayers.—First, from such observations as may be taken from before, and in praying.

HAVING premised these cases, I come now to more general and common directions to help you in discerning and observing the mind of God, and his answers to you in your prayers. All which directions are such as may be helpful in all the forementioned cases, and in all sorts of prayers whatever. And they are taken from observations to be made upon your prayers, &c., both before, in, and after praying.

First, before praying; when God bespeaks a prayer, as I may so speak,—that is, when God secretly speaks to the heart to pray much about a thing. I express it thus according to that phrase of David, Ps. 27:8, 'Thou saidst, Seek my face, and I said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Now God then speaks to the heart to pray when not only he puts upon the duty by saying to the conscience, This thou oughtest to do; but God's speaking to pray is such as his speech at first was, when he made the world, when he said, 'Let there be light, and there was light:' so he says, Let there be a prayer, and there is a prayer; that is, he pours upon a man a spirit of grace and supplication, a praying disposition; he puts in motives, suggests arguments and pleas to God; all which you shall find come in readily, and of themselves, and that likewise with a quickening heat and enlargement of affections, and with a lingering, and longing, and restlessness of spirit to be alone, to pour out the soul to God, and to vent and form those motions and suggestions into a prayer, till you have laid them together and made a prayer of them. And this is a speaking to the heart. And observe such times when God doth thus, and neglect them not, then to strike whilst the iron is hot; thou hast then his ear; it is a special opportunity for that business, such a one as thou mayest never have the like. Suitors at court observe *mollissima fandi tempora*, their times of begging when they have kings in a good mood, which they will be sure to

take the advantage of; but especially if they should find that the king himself should begin of himself to speak of the business which they would have of him: and thus that phrase of Ps. 10:17 is understood by some, that God prepares the heart, and causeth the ear to hear; that is, he fashions it, and composeth it into a praying frame. And sure it is a great sign that God means to hear us when himself shall thus indite the petition.

And by the way let me give this note of difference between these speakings to the heart and those whereby Satan puts us upon such duties at unseasonable hours and times; as when we are otherwise necessarily to be employed in our callings, to eat, or to sleep, &c.; then to put upon praying is a device of his he useth to tire out new converts with. The difference will appear in this: the devil comes in a violent imperious manner upon the conscience, but enlargeth not the heart a whit unto the duty; but whensoever God at such extraordinary by-times doth call upon us, he fits and prepares the heart, and fills the soul with holy suggestions, as materials for the duty; for whatsoever he calls to, he gives abilities withal to the thing he calls for.

And thus usually, when he will have any great matters done and effected, he sets men's hearts a-work to pray by a kind of gracious preinstinct; he stirs them up and toucheth the strings of their hearts by his Spirit sent down upon them. Thus against the return of the captivity he stirred up Daniel's heart, chap. 9:1; he knowing by books the time to be near expiring, was stirred up to seek God. And so he that made this psalm, 'salvation being then nigh,' Ps. 85:9, 10; then God stirred him up to pray, and pen this prayer for their return; which God had foretold he would do, Jer. 29:10–12. For having promised, ver. 10, I will cause you to return after seventy years; 'then,' says he, ver. 12, 'shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.' He speaks it not only by way of command, what it was they ought to do, but as prophesying also what they should do; for then he meant to stir up their hearts, as then he did, as appears by those forementioned instances. Therefore observe what things God thus, by an instinct, doth enlarge thy heart to pray for at times, and sometimes at extraordinary by-times, when haply thou didst not think to pray about any such thing; yet he then stirred thee up most, it may be, as thou wert walking, &c., and having



spare time, he draws thee into his presence, and moves thee in that manner specified.

Now, secondly, as God thus speaks to the heart to pray, so also in praying; and his speaking to the heart in prayer may be discerned by these particulars:—

1. When God quiets, and calms, and contents the heart in prayer, which is done by speaking something to the heart, though what is spoken be not always discerned. If you should see one who was an earnest and importunate suitor, and exceeding anxious when he went in to a great man, but beheld him after coming out from him contented, and quieted, and cheerful in his spirit, you would conceive that certainly something had been said to him which gave him encouragement, satisfaction, and contentment in his suit. Thus when thou goest to God, and hast been importunate in a business,—as suppose for Christ: O give me Christ, or else I die!—and thy desires were exceedingly up for it; but thou risest up with thy mind calmed and satisfied, and feelest the anxiousness, the solicitude of thy heart about the thing taken off and dispelled: this is a good sign that God hath heard thy prayer, and hath spoken something to thy heart which makes it thus composed. When Hannah, out of much bitterness and with strong desires, which by a long delay had been made more violent, so as her heart was much disquieted,—for, Prov. 13:12, 'hope,' and by the same reason desire also, 'deferred makes the soul sick,'—when out of the abundance of her grief she had poured her soul out before the Lord, 1 Sam. 1:16, Eli the priest joining in prayer also for her, 'The Lord grant thy petition;' after that prayer she found her heart so quieted, that 'she looked no more sad,' as the text says there, she arose quieted and calmed, and it was that prayer that did both fill Eli's mouth with that word of prophecy and her heart with quietness, and a secret word from God accompanying it that did still those waves: and accordingly God gave her a son, a son of her desires.

And the like God doth now, by speaking, as I said, something to the heart: as by dropping in some promise or other into the heart, or some like consideration; saying, as it were, to the heart, even as Eli from God did to her, 'The Lord grants thy petition.' As to St Paul, when he was earnest with God about removing his buffetings by Satan, which whether they

were the stirring up a lust, or temptations of blasphemy, I do not now dispute; 'I besought God thrice,' that is, earnestly, says he, 'that it might depart;' and to this he had an answer in the meantime given him, till it should be taken away, enough to still and quiet him: so 2 Cor. 12:8, 9. 'And he said,'—that is, in prayer the Lord did put in this consideration and promise into his thoughts,—'And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, and my power is made perfect in weakness.' This answer thus coming in, this promise thus seasonably suggested, stayed and quieted Paul's heart. In like manner, thou hast, it may be, been long praying against poverty or the like distress, and God lets fall this or the like promise into thy heart, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,' Heb. 13:5, which quiets and contents thy mind. This is an answer; and observe such answers, for they are precious.

2. If whilst thou art a-praying God doth draw nigh to thy soul, and revealeth himself to it in and upon such or such a particular petition: as in case thou didst mainly intend, when thou didst begin to pray, to set thyself to beg some temporal mercy at his hands, some great matter for the good and prosperity of the church,—as Daniel, chap. 9, did set himself to seek God for the return of the captivity,—and even before thou comest to ask it, or in asking it, God smiles upon thee, welcomes thee, falleth about thy neck and kisseth thee; this thou art to observe as a sign he hears thy prayer, and accepteth both thee and it. When there is such a strong sense of God's favour and presence whilst thou art upon such a suit and request, more than at other times or than in other passages of the same prayer, this is a token God hears thee in that particular, and thou art to observe this his speaking to thy heart; when thus thou shalt no sooner come into his presence to inquire of him, but he says, 'Here I am,' as the promise is, Isa. 58:9. Therefore, Ps. 69:17, 18, 'Hear me speedily,' says David; 'and,' that I may know thou hearest me, 'draw nigh to me.' Therefore when God draws nigh to thee, it is a sign he hears thee. Daniel having fasted and prayed for three weeks together, chap. 10:2, 3, then an angel came, and one of the three Persons came and told him he was 'a man greatly beloved,' ver. 11, 19. When, in like manner, God by his Spirit comes down, and meets thee, and tells thy heart in secret that thou art his beloved and he is thine, then thy prayers are certainly heard; for if he accepts thy person, much more thy prayers, 1 John 5:13, 14. Men, false

men,—false upon the balance, as David speaks, when they come to be tried and weighed,—they will, out of cunning, use suitors most kindly then when they mean to put them off, and deny them their requests; but God, who is truth and faithfulness itself, doth not use so to deal, but when he means to answer the prayer, he withal sometimes reveals his free grace most, to the end they may see and acknowledge the fountain of all to be his everlasting love, and so take the thing granted as a fruit of it, and thereby come to be the more abundantly thankful.

Only let me add this caution, which may be of great use to you: That it is not always infallibly true that when God draws nigh to you in a particular request, that that request in particular shall be granted in that manner you desired; but it is a certain evidence that thy prayer is heard, and that the thing thou askest is agreeable to his will, and that he approves of thee and thy request exceedingly, and thinketh the better of thee for it, and he will give thee it, or something that is better. There may be herein, and sometimes is, a mistake of God's meaning, to think that always then the thing shall be granted when God draws nigh to a man: experience sometimes shews the contrary.

Quest.—But you will say, Why doth God draw so nigh if he means not to grant it?

Ans. 1.—He shews thereby his approving will of the thing prayed for. Now God approves many things he decrees not. There is his approving will and his decreeing will. God may shew his approving will of the thing thou askest,—as suppose it be in view a matter which is of great consequence to the church,—which he doth for thy encouragement; but yet it follows not that his decreeing will is for the accomplishment of that very thing in particular.

Ans. 2.—God may accept the person and the prayer when he doth not grant the thing prayed for; and by that drawing nigh witness his acceptance of thy person and thy prayer. Yea—

Ans. 3.—That revealing of himself is oftentimes all the answer he intended to such a prayer; and it is answer enough, too, to enjoy in the stead of a particular mercy the assurance of God's love. As suppose thou

didst pray against some evil coming upon his church, which he yet intends to bring, which he did set thy heart a-work to pray against, thereby to manifest the sincerity thereof, and then he, seeing thee thus sincere, draws nigh to thee, and tells thee, however, it shall go well with thee, and that thou art greatly beloved of him: thou art sometimes to take this for all the answer he means to give. And this he doth sometimes also to content the heart, and prepare it for a denial in the thing; whereas otherwise the denial of what a Christian hath been earnest in might occasion, as in many it doth, a questioning and doubting of God's love.

3. When God stirs up in the heart a particular faith in a business, as sometimes he doth, and upholds the heart to wait for it, maugre all discouragements. So he did in David, Ps. 27:3. David was then in great hazards by reason of Saul, or Absalom, and those such and so often, as that to sense and outward probabilities he was like never to live quietly again at Jerusalem, and enjoy God's ordinances there in peace; but for this David had prayed, and had made it as the grand request of his whole life,—as every man hath some one great request of all other, even as he hath some special grace above all other, or gift, &c., so request to God, next to his salvation, as haply for his ministry, or the like, therefore says David, ver. 4, 'This one thing have I desired,'—and accordingly God gave him a special faith in this thing above all other, because it was his great request; 'In this will I be confident,' ver. 3. And though a host of men should again and again encompass me, says he, yet in this I will be confident, that I shall still escape, and see Jerusalem again, and enjoy the ordinances and live in peace. And though his faith failed him often, as in the persecution of Saul it did, for he said he should 'one day perish by the hand of Saul,' 1 Sam. 27:1, yet at other times his faith was marvellously upheld, and he was confident in this. He used not to be so in other requests thus absolutely, particularly, and distinctly; and therefore he says, 'In this,' &c. As there is a witness of the Holy Ghost immediate to the heart, sealing up adoption to a man's person, so in some cases there is the like testimony for the obtaining of some eminent thing we have asked. Which particular special faith doth in a kind of similitude answer to the faith of miracles of old, whereby a man had a particular confidence that God would do such a miracle by him. So in and by means of prayer, in some things there may be a particular strengthening and assuring the

heart, that God will do such a thing for a man: which I confess is rare and extraordinary, as also that immediate testimony concerning our persons is, which many want that go to heaven. And haply this other, concerning the accomplishment of special mercies, is much more rare, and but in some businesses, and is a thing which some men are not acquainted with, but yet may be in some cases existent to some men's spirits, as it was to David's in the thing mentioned.

And concerning this also I will also add a caution, as about the former: That it doth not always fall out upon all such kind of evidences made to a man's spirit, and that by God, that the thing prayed for doth come to pass. For these very persuasions stirred up by God, may be and are often but conditional, though thus immediately made to a man's spirit, and are so to be understood, and not peremptory and absolute. It cannot be imagined that all these should always be of greater absoluteness and peremptoriness than were many of those revelations made by God to the prophets, wherein he manifested his gracious purpose towards such a man or people, either to vouchsafe them such a mercy, or bring such a judgment; which forewarning, though they were particular and express, yet limited and intended with a condition, according to the performance or not performance of which it fell out, either the judgment expressly threatened was diverted, or that good thing which was as directly and fully promised was not bestowed: as it was in the case of Jonah threatening the destruction of Nineveh; and so in the promise concerning Eli's house, 1 Sam. 2:30, 'I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever:' but now the Lord says it shall not be so, for they had broken the condition which was implied in it, they had despised the Lord; 'and them that despise me,' says God there, 'I will despise.'

In like manner is God's meaning expressed towards us in such like persuasions wrought in us by prayer, to be understood: as that such mercies will surely come to pass, but still under a condition of obedience, and performing of those vows which a man joined with those his petitions, to move the Lord to grant the things; which if a man fail in, or ceaseth to go on to believe, it may and doth often come to pass that things fall out contrary to that persuasion; and then we are apt to question

whether it was from God or no; which it might be, and truly wrought by his Spirit, and yet not always absolutely meant,—that was your mistake so to take it,—but conditionally only. For in such great requests of the soul unto God, there use to pass mutual covenants between God and us, and indentures are drawn and sealed unto by us—that is, we in prayer offer and promise to do thus and thus, if God will vouchsafe us such a mercy, and plead it to God to move him to bestow it; and God, he thereupon, it may be, seals a covenant on his part to grant the thing, and works such an undoubted persuasion; but if we, in that interim of waiting for that mercy, do deal falsely in that covenant which we have made, and this even whilst we are yet in dependence upon God for it, whereby it appears that we would have done so much more after we should have received it once,—in this case God denies the thing, and yet notwithstanding that persuasion and evidence was from God that heard the prayer. He said indeed he would do thus and thus for thee,—as he told David, 'I would have given thee much more,'—because thou saidst to him, thou wouldst walk thus and thus, or didst vow this or that to him: thou failest in thy word, upon which God uttered his; and thereupon, says God, as to Eli, 'Now it shall not be so,' and yet God had spoken it afore, and not Satan, nor thine own heart only.

4. When God doth put a restless importunity into the heart, maugre all discouragements. So in that Psalm 27:4, 'One thing I have desired, and I will seek after it,'—that is, as I have sought it, so I will not leave seeking to God for it. When God maintains this in the heart, it is a sign he hears and will answer; for you know the parable, that the unjust judge heard her for her importunity: therefore when God puts an importunity into the heart, he means to hear.

Only this likewise is to be added in this, there is a double importunity: one out of such an inordinate desire to a thing, as the heart knows not how to be without such a mercy, and so continues to ask, but 'asketh amiss, and so receives not,' James 4:3. But there is an importunity joined with a subjection to God's will, which, when it runs along with it, then God hath stirred it up; and then look for something to come: otherwise you may be importunate, as 'they seek me daily,' when yet God heard not, Isa. 58:2.

## **CHAPTER VI: Observations made upon the disposition of the heart after prayer**

Further observations to be made on the dispositions and carriage of our hearts after prayer, until the issue of the thing prayed for.

NEXT: after thou hast prayed, observe what God doth towards thee.

As, first, how he doth guide thy feet and heart after praying; there is much in that. That which was the spirit of supplication in a man when he prayed, rests upon him as the spirit of obedience in his course; so as that dependence he hath upon God for the mercy he seeks for, is a special motive and means to keep him fearful of offending, and diligent in duty; to look to his paths, to walk and behave himself as becomes a suitor, as well as to come and pray as a suitor. Thus David, he walked by this principle, Ps. 66:18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me;' that consideration still came in as a curb unto sin; and without this a man provokes God, and so casts himself behindhand again, and by sinning loseth what ground he had got by praying. Therefore David, Ps. 143:8–10, when he was to pray, even as for his life, as then he did, it being a deliverance from his enemies he sought, he specially prays God to direct him and keep him, that he might not sin against him; for he knew by sinning he should enervate and spoil all his prayers: not only 'hear me speedily,' says he, but also 'cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; teach me to do thy will.' This he especially prays for, and more than for deliverance, for else he knew God would not hear him. Therefore when thou art in treaty with God for any mercy, observe, doth God still after praying keep thee in a more obedient frame of spirit? It is a sign he intends to answer thee; as in like manner, when he keeps thee from using ill means, &c. When he meant to give David the kingdom, he kept him innocent, and his heart tender, that it smote him but for 'cutting off the

lap of Saul's garment:' he was not so tender after. Therefore, in Ps. 18, when he was delivered from all his enemies, he says, 'God dealt with him according to his uprightness; for I kept myself from mine iniquity.' So also, Ps. 27:11.

Secondly, When God after prayer strengtheneth the heart to wait for the mercy; so, Ps. 27:14, David having prayed, says to his soul, 'Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he will strengthen thy heart.' Honest men, when they nourish hopes in one that is in dependence on them, who waiteth and is obsequious upon the hopes he hath of a suit, use not to deny him: it were dishonesty in them to keep a man underhand, and then frustrate his expectations; therefore, when God keeps thy soul after praying in such a dependent frame, look for some good answer. And indeed when a man hath prayed long, in the end he begins to wait, as I may so say, rather than pray, though he pray still, because now he looks God should perform. Before, and at first, he told the Lord he desired it, but now he can with some boldness tell him that he waits for it and expects it. The hope of a godly man and his expectation should make him ashamed if it were not answered, therefore in this case answers use to come.

Both these two last we have together joined, Ps. 37:34, 'Wait on the Lord, AND KEEP HIS WAYS, and he shall exalt thee.'

## **CHAPTER VII: Observations made after prayer upon the issue**

Observations to be made after prayer, upon the issue of what was prayed for; and, first, if accomplished, whether as the fruit of prayers, or out of common providence.—Helps herein.



WHEN a man hath thus waited, and kept his way, then let him observe the issue and conclusion of what he sought for, how things are cast by God. Now of necessity, one of these two must fall out, that either the thing desired is accomplished, or not accomplished; and in either of these he may come to spy out answers to his prayers, for prayer may be answered though the thing be not done.

I mean to insist severally on these:—

I. If the thing thou prayest for doth come to pass, then what needest thou doubt of an answer, and whether God heard thee or no? for thou beholdest it with thine eyes. And so often it falls out, that God doth grant according to the desires of a man's heart; and not only so, but also fulfils his counsel therein, as it is Ps. 20:4; that is, fulfils not only his desire and aim of his prayer, but in that very way, by that very means, which his judgment and counsel pitch upon in his own thoughts. The desire of the heart may be satisfied when God gives some other thing, but the counsel of the heart is then fulfilled when a man is answered in that particular which his own judgment pitched upon as best for him. For counsel is an act of the understanding, deliberating about means to an end, and directing to choose a particular means tending to an end: so that, as Eliphaz says to Job, chap. 22:27, 28, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer to God, and he shall hear thee: and decree a thing, and it shall be established to thee;' that is, a man is guided to decree and pitch upon such mercies in his prayers as God makes good in particular: he says what he would have, and God performs it; and this privilege thou shalt have, says Eliphaz there, if thou wilt turn to him, and be acquainted with him, and receive the law from his mouth. Thou shalt not err in praying; but what thou settest upon to pray for, shall be accordingly granted to thee. Such a man shall have the privilege *fingeres sibi fortunam* in a right sense, to be his own chooser, and carver of his own mercies; and as Christ said, 'Be it according to thy faith,' so God says sometimes, 'Be it according to thy prayers.' And Eliphaz speaks of it as of a special favour, that whereas other prayers are answered obliquely, thine, says he, shall be answered directly, which is more comfortable, as direct beams are, and have more heat in them than collateral and oblique. Thus if a man will hear God and obey him, God will hear him: for if a man be subject to Christ's kingly

office, his prophetic office shall guide him, and cause him not to err in his petitions; but by an unerring providence and preinstinct infused by his Spirit, God will so guide him as to ask even that very thing which God intends to give; whereas of himself he knows not what nor how to ask.

So David asked long life, and God gave it him, Ps. 21:2–4. God not only gave him his heart's desire, but 'the request of his lips,' ver. 2. Hannah asked a son, and God answered her in the very thing she desired, and therefore she called him Samuel, 1 Sam. 1:20, 'Because,' says she, 'I asked him of the Lord;' and ver. 27, 'For this child I prayed, and the Lord' did not give another thing instead of it, but 'hath given me my petition I asked of him.' So, 1 Chron. 4:10, 'Jabez called on God,' it is said, 'and God granted him the thing he requested.' And thus God often deals with his children. And to this end hath God given us his Spirit; and made Christ wisdom unto us, who knows what is good for us, though we do not; and hath, therefore, also commanded us to spy out mercies for ourselves, and then come to him for them: and to this end hath made such particular promises of particular mercies, which he would have us have an eye unto in our prayers; all which is because often he means to bestow the very things we ask.

And yet because although we have the very things we did ask and desire, such is the jealousy and infidelity of our hearts, that we often discern not nor acknowledge that it was our prayers that obtained them from God; but we are apt, when once we have them, either to look but to things below and the second causes of them, though before we did earnestly seek them of God, or else still distrustfully to question whether or no it was at our prayers that he granted them, or out of common providence. Thus Job, in his distemper, chap. 9:16, 'As though I had called, and God had answered me; yet,' says he, 'I would not believe that he had hearkened to my voice,'—that is, not that he did it in respect to my prayer and request, because he now deals so severely with me,—'for he breaketh me with a tempest,' ver. 17. And thus do our distrustful hearts, which are apt to be unsatisfied with all the clearest pledges of God's favour, and still to misconstrue and pervert them; although God doth answer us upon our calling upon him, yet we will not believe that he hearkened to our prayer in it. Therefore that you may be further enabled to discern how and when

things you have prayed for come in by prayer, I give you these further directions:—

Direct. 1.—When God doth a thing in answer to prayers, he often doth it in such a manner that his hand may be in a more than ordinary manner seen in it. There are few prayers, wherein a man hath sought God much, but in the answers of them God discovers himself much, and turns many great wheels in the accomplishment of them, and 'manifests,' as David desires, Ps. 17:7, 'his marvellous loving-kindness;' and indeed when God hears prayers that have been a long while a making, he shews usually half a miracle one way or other.

Now God discovers his immediate hand in the answers of prayers many ways:—

(1.) When he carries a thing through many difficulties; when there were a great many cross wards in a business prayed for, the least whereof would have kept the key from turning, when God shall make, as it were, a key on purpose to unlock it; when God plots and contrives all the passages in a business thou didst pray for, and so accomplisheth it; this is a sign it is a fruit of prayer, and that prayer had been a-making that key all that while. So in bringing David to the kingdom; Joseph out of prison; Mordecai to honour; and likewise St Peter out of prison, which was done at the prayers of the church, Acts 12. He was sleeping between two soldiers, if they had waked he had been discovered; and he was in chains, but they fall off, ver. 6, 7; and the keepers stood before the door, but they mind him not, ver. 6; and when one watch is passed, he passeth quietly through another, ver. 10; and when both these were passed, an iron gate flies open of its own accord, ver. 10. Now such difficulties are there in many businesses, which yet in the end are accomplished by prayer; iron chains fall off, iron gates, enemies' hearts fly open of their own accord; and though not in that miraculous manner, by the means of an angel, yet no less wonderfully.

(2.) Or, secondly, when God facilitates all means to accomplish the thing which was prayed for, so as all means do in view conspire and combine in it; that thou hast wind and tide, and a fair day, and all the way paved, or, as David says, hast thy 'way made plain before thee;' and there falls out a

great conjunction and meeting of many circumstances together to effect it, which had influence into it, whereof if any one had been wanting, haply the thing had not been done: when the thing prayed for is thus granted, prayer then hath done it. Thus, when he delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt, which was the accomplishment of their long desires and prayers,—'their cry came up,' the text says,—how were all things facilitated! They that detained them do themselves come and entreat them to go out; yea, 'are urgent,' says the text, and that at midnight; nay, hire them to go out with their ear-rings, Exod. 12:31, 33, 35; and Pharaoh himself then parts lovingly and fairly with them, and desires their prayers, 'Bless me also,' ver. 32. Yea, to shew there was no resistance, the text says, 'a dog did not move his tongue:' the brute creatures did not disturb them, though at midnight, when those creatures use to be most obstreperous through noises.

(3.) When he doth it suddenly, and accomplisheth the thing thou hast long prayed for, ere thou art aware of it; as the return of the captivity of Babylon, which was the conclusion of many prayers, was done in a trice, 'they were as men in a dream,' Ps. 126:1, they could scarce believe it was so when it was done: it was because they had sown many prayers, which came up on the sudden, ver. 5, 6. So Peter, he was fast asleep, and did not so much as dream of deliverance. So Joseph's delivery out of prison, and advancement to be the greatest man in the kingdom, the suddenness of it shewed it was God's remembering of him, and hearing his prayers.

(4.) When God grants the thing with an overplus above what we did ask, and casteth many other mercies in, together with that which we long prayed for; this also may be a sign God did hear our prayers in it; for when he doth hear indeed, he useth 'to do above what we did ask or think,' thereby the more to overcome the heart. So David asked 'long life,' and he gave him more than he asked, Ps. 21:2–5. So Solomon, he asked but wisdom, and he gave him more than he asked; 'peace, riches, honour,' and all, with it, 1 Kings 3:12, 13. Hannah, she asked but 'one male child,' 1 Sam. 1:11, but God gave her three sons more, and two daughters, chap. 2:21. When prayers are answered, usually mercies come thick, they come tumbling in; the thing we prayed for comes not alone: as when sins are punished, then miseries also they come like armies in troops upon us. As

temptations likewise come together, and we fall into many of them at once, as St James speaks, chap. 1:2, thus do mercies also.

(5.) When the thing is granted by prayers, there is often some particular circumstance of providence concurrent with it, which is a token for good, and sealeth to us that it is from God; such often as a man himself takes notice of, and which others take notice of also. 'Shew me a token for good,' says David, Ps. 86:17, 'that others may see it and be ashamed.' And such tokens doth God often make small circumstances to be. Things small in themselves may be magna indicia, great signs and tokens. For example, Moses and Aaron and the Israelites had long cried to God for the deliverance of his people, and laid up many prayers; 'their cry came up,' as was said; and when God doth deliver them, what tokens were there of good, and of God's hand in it, and of his answer to their prayers? The text notes, as was observed before, that 'a dog did not bark at their going out,' Exod. 11:7, which was a small circumstance, but it was magnum indicium, and so intended by God; for the text adds, 'that ye may know that God puts a difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians.' This was a token of God's hand, to overrule the tongues of rude brute creatures, that use to stir at such unusual noises and at travellers, especially in the night. So when Isaac and Abraham, and his servant also, had prayed for a wife for Isaac, see by what a token God shewed he had heard their prayers: Rebekah was the first that came out to the servant sent to bring a wife for him; and if she be the woman appointed for Isaac, says the servant, Gen. 24:13, 14, 'let her offer me drink, and my camels also.' This was a small thing in appearance, but a great indicium of God's hand in it; and therefore the servant bowed at it, and worshipped. And the sign in itself was such as argued a good nature in her, and a kind, courteous disposition, which therefore, it may be, he singled out as a token of a meet wife, as a thing especially to be looked at in the marriage choice.

Direct. 2.—Again, the consideration of the time wherein the things we have asked are granted, may much help us to discern whether it be in answer to our prayers; for God, who doth all things in weight and measure, shews his wisdom and love as much in the season as in giving the thing itself. God considereth all times of thy life, and still chooseth the

best and fittest to answer thy prayers in: 'In an acceptable time have I heard thee,' so Isa. 49:8. As David likewise says 'he prayed in an acceptable time,' Ps. 69:13. So accordingly God answers in the best and most acceptable time to us; for 'he waits to be gracious, for he is a God of judgment,' Isa. 30:18; that is, he is a wise God, that knows the fittest times and seasons wherein to shew kindnesses, and to deal forth his favours in.

As, first, it may be that at that very time when thou hast been most instant and earnest, yea, even whilst thou art a-praying, or presently after, the thing is done and accomplished. To this purpose is that of Isa. 65:24, that as sometimes 'he hears before they call,' which argues much love to give mercies unsought, so also 'whilst they are speaking I will hear,' and grant the thing, which argues no less love; and he culls out that time on purpose that they might rest assured that it was in answer to their prayer. Thus to assure Hezekiah his prayer was heard, God sent the prophet in unto him whilst he was a-praying and weeping, with hid head turned towards the wall So Isaac, going out to pray in the field, meets his Rebekah then a-coming, that blessing of a good wife being surely the great request temporal he was then in treaty with God for: this Rebekah was the fruit of many prayers. So when St Peter was in prison, the church being gathered together to pray for him, St Peter comes and knocks 'at the same hour,' Acts 12:12–17. So as it often falls out herein, as to the ruler in the gospel, John 4:52, who inquiring diligently, found that 'the same hour that Christ had said to him, Thy son liveth, his son recovered; and so he believed, and his whole household:' so also here, that sometimes the thing is done, or the news of it comes the same hour, or soon after, wherein a man was praying about it, and haply then when the heart was most stirred about it, more than at any time else. This is a sign it was an answer of prayers, and may help to confirm a man's faith in it, as that also did his.

Or, secondly, when it is the most acceptable and every way the fittest time to have the thing granted: at that time when thou hadst most need, and when thy heart was most fit for it: For in answering prayers, God aims especially at two things: to shew his mercy, that a man might magnify and exalt that; and to have the heart satisfied and filled with joy and

contentment in his answer, and the thing made sweet, and a mercy indeed to him: in brief, that his goodness might be delighted in, and his mercy exalted. And for these two purposes he culls out such times when we have most need, and also when our hearts are most subdued and our lusts mortified. For then we are fittest to relish his goodness alone, and not to be drawn away with the carnal sweetness that is in the thing. The one you have expressed, Isa. 30:18, 'He waits to be gracious, to have his mercy exalted.' The second intimated, James 4, 'Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, to consume upon your lusts.' Such prayers, whilst the heart is in this temper, the Lord denies, or defers in mercy till the heart be weaned.

For the first of these: As, suppose thou didst pray long for assurance of salvation, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and when thou hadst most need of it, either when 'thy spirit would have failed' without it, as Isa. 57:16, or against some great affliction approaching, or some great encounter with the world for the name of Christ, then God filled thy heart with it, &c., that was the fittest time: now hath God heard thy prayer. As St Peter, he was in prison, and had been so for many days; as appears by the 4th and 5th verses, Acts 12. God could have delivered him all that while the church prayed for him, ver. 5. But God kept him in on purpose till that very night, when in the next morning Herod meant to bring him forth to execution, and then God delivered him at the prayers of the church; then was the most fit time: as the Psalmist says, 'the full time to have mercy on him was come,' Ps. 102:13. And then to receive an answer is a sign God did it out of special love, which love he 'would have exalted by thee,' as Isa. 30:18.

If, secondly, when thy heart was most fit for the mercy, it was granted, then art thou also heard in an acceptable time: for God doth not withhold mercies from those that are his out of want of love; neither so much for what is past, as for the present evil disposition of their hearts, whereby they are unfit to receive them: and in this sense likewise may that be understood, that God prepareth the heart and heareth the prayer, Ps. 10:17.

As when thy heart is most weaned from that temporal mercy, supposing it such, granted thee upon seeking of it. So David, when had he the

kingdom in possession given him? Then when he was as a weaned child, and had his high thoughts, which haply at the first news of it had risen in his mind, purged out, Ps. 131:2, 'I have no high thoughts,' &c., says he then. Thus when thy heart had let all carnal ends go, and had betaken itself alone to God, for thy portion to be had alone out of him, then the thing prayed for comes to pass; this was the fittest season.

Obj.—But you will be ready to say, To have a thing when ray heart is taken off from it, and even contented not to have it, makes it to be as no mercy; for where there is no desire there is no rejoicing.

Ans.—If thy desire be taken off the thing, then thou wilt rejoice the more in God now; and though the thing of itself should now give thee less satisfaction, yet God by the thing will give thee more, and he will make it up: for thou wilt relish his love and sweetness in it now, which is better than life, and therefore much better than that thing enjoyed; and indeed the violence of the desire before would have made it less sweet, for the thing alone would not have filled and contented that desire when it was an inordinate lust, and so thou wouldest have been vexed with it, rather than satisfied, and found a greater vanity in it: but now when it is become a subordinate desire unto God, that the desire is down, and the heart quieted and contented with God in the thing, the heart says, as she said, 'I have enough.' So likewise thou mayest have an affliction thou prayedst long against taken off then when thy heart was most willing to accept thy punishment, Lev. 26:41, as Moses's phrase is, and to submit to God in it.

Direct. 3.—A third thing you are to observe concerning the accomplishment of the thing prayed for, whereby yon may discern whether granted in answer to prayers, is, when thou seest God in his dealings with thee, and answering of thee, to deal in a kind of proportion with thy manner of praying and seeking of him, and of walking with him whilst thou wert dependent on him, for such or such a mercy. And as you may see a proportion between sins and punishments, which are the rewards of them, that you can say, Such a sin brought forth this affliction, it is so like the father; so you might see the like proportion between your prayers and your walking with God, and God's answers to you, and his dealings with you. So did David, Ps. 18:24, 'According to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me,' &c. His speech notes some



similitude or likeness; as, for example, the more by-ends or carnal desires you had in praying, and the more you mingled of these with your holy desires, and the more want of zeal, fervency, &c., were found in your prayers, the more you shall, it may be, find of bitterness mingled with the mercy, when it is granted, and so much imperfection and want of comfort in it. So says David in the same psalm, ver. 25, 26, 'With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure.' Pure prayers have pure blessings; et è contra, 'With the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.' And again, as you in praying sometimes slackened and grew cold, so you might see the business in like manner to cool, and cast backward: as 'when Moses's hands were down, Amalek prevailed;' but when they were 'lifted up, Israel had the better,' Exod. 17:12. God let him see a proportion, which argued his prayer was the means of prevailing. A man finds in praying that his suit sometimes sticks, and goes not on as he expected; this is because he gives not so good a fee as he was wont, and doth not ply God and solicit him; but, on the contrary, when he was stirred up to pray, then still he found things to go well. By this a man may clearly see that it was the prayer which God did hear and regarded. Thus, likewise, when a man sees hills and dales in a business, fair hopes often, and then all dashed again, and the thing in the end brought to pass, let him look back upon his prayers. Didst not thou in like manner just thus deal with God? When thou hadst prayed earnestly, and thought thou hadst even carried it, then dash all again by interposing some sin, and thus again and again? Herein God would have you observe a proportion; and it may help you to discern how and when they are answered and obtained by prayer, because God deals thus with you therein in such a proportion to your prayers.

## **CHAPTER VIII: Seven Observations More**

Seven observations more, from the effects which the accomplishment of the mercy hath upon the heart, &c.

Direct, 4.—FOURTHLY, Thou mayest discern whether they be in answer to thy prayers by the effects upon thy heart. As—

(1.) If the thing that is granted upon thy prayers draw thy heart more near unto God, it is then certain that it was granted as an answer to thy prayers. Things granted out of ordinary providence only do increase our lusts, and are snares to us, as Saul gave David his daughter Michal to be a snare to him; so their full tables are made snares, Ps. 69:22; so God gave the Israelites their will, the things they desired, but withal gave them up to their lusts, Ps. 106:15: he gave them their requests, but sent leanness into their souls. The quails might fat some of their bodies that survived, yet their souls grew lean; there was a curse upon their spirits; this new delicate food made their bodies more lustful, they did eat and drink, and rose up to play, Exod. 32:6. But things obtained by prayer are sanctified to us, for every thing is sanctified by prayer, 1 Tim. 4:5, so as it shall not ensnare nor entangle our hearts. A thing obtained by prayer, as it came from God, so a man will return it to God, and use it for his glory: so Hannah having obtained Samuel by prayer, she returns him unto God, 1 Sam. 1:27, 28, 'For this child I prayed; and God gave me my petition: and therefore also I have lent him to the Lord as long as he liveth.' If therefore thou findest this his dealing with thee in answering thee to be a kindly motive to cause thee to mourn for sin, and to be as a restraint against sin, it is a sign it was the fruit of prayer. Thus it wrought with David, Ps. 6:8, 'Away from me, ye that work iniquity; God hath heard the voice of my weeping?'

Also, if thou rejoicest in God more than in the thing obtained;—so Hannah begins her song when she blesseth God for her child, 'My heart rejoiceth in the Lord,' &c., 1 Sam. 2:1; she rejoiceth not so much in the gift as in the giver and his favour; more in this, that her prayer was answered, than in the thing obtained;—this is a sign of having obtained the mercy through prayers, when it is thus sanctified unto a man's spirit.

(2.) Prayers answered will enlarge thy heart with thankfulness, and thus usually they do. Self-love makes us more forward to pray than to give

thanks, for nature is all of the craving and taking hand: but where grace is, there will be no eminent mercy gotten with much struggling but there will be a continued particular thankful remembrance of it a long while after, with much enlargement; and as prayers abounded, so will thanksgiving abound also. Hannah she makes a song, 1 Sam. 2:1. Great blessings that are won with prayer are worn with thankfulness: such a man will not ask new, but he will withal give thanks for old. Thankfulness, of all duties, proceeds from pure grace; therefore, if the Spirit stirs thee unto it, it is a sign he made the prayer. 'What thanks shall I render to God for the joy I have in you?' saith St Paul, 1 Thess. 3:9, 10. So in all his other epistles, all those he writes to, as he prays for them, so he tells them he gives thanks for them, and for their graces which he had prayed for. And if answering prayers for others makes St Paul so thankful, what when for himself? Prayer and thanks are like the double motion of the lungs; the air that is sucked in by prayer is breathed forth again by thanks. Is thy heart afresh enlarged, as to mourn for past sins long since committed, so in like manner for past mercies won with long prayers, and this for a long while after? it is a sign that they were obtained by prayer.

(3.) If the mercy obtained doth encourage thee to go to God another time, to pray again the more confidently and fervently, it is a sign thou hast got the former that way; for the Holy Ghost having once shewed thee this way of procuring mercy, hence it is thou art thus ready to take the same course another time. Ps. 116:2, 'The Lord hath heard me, and I will call on him as long as I live.' I know, says he, now what course to take, if I be in any want, even to call upon him; and he calls upon others to do so too.

(4.) When, God having heard thy prayers upon solemn vows made by thee, thy heart is made careful to pay those vows which thou didst make in the time of thy suing to God for that mercy; this may be an argument to thee, the thing being granted, that thy prayer was heard. For—

First, It argueth that thy heart itself doth secretly make such an account, that upon them God did grant the thing, and thou doest therefore make conscience to return all again to God in service, as the condition of thy indentures made with him, and as a homage due, and an acknowledgment for ever that such a mercy was won by prayer; and by

this preservest the memory of the receipt of that mercy, vows being of the nature of homage. And—

Secondly, In this also it is an evidence that the thing was obtained by prayer: in that God calls for those vows from thee, by his Spirit in thy heart, and stirs thee up to perform them, it argues that, in relation to thy prayers answered, he takes them as dues from thee; that having despatched thy suit, he now calls for what was agreed to be given him when it should be performed. And—

Thirdly, In that also he doth accept the payment of these thy vows of thee, he acknowledgeth that those vows and prayers were heard; for as Manoah\* said in another case, Judges 13:23, 'If he meant to have destroyed us, he would not have accepted a sacrifice,' so in this case it may be said, if God had not heard thy prayers, he would not have accepted thy vows after thy praying. Thus David, Psalm 66:13, 14, 'I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in my trouble.' The reason follows, ver. 17, 19, because that 'verily God hath heard me when I cried to him.' And so Eliphaz in Job doth connect and hang these two together, chap. 22:27, 'Thou shalt make thy prayer to him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.' This which he speaks of paying his vows was not only as it was to be his duty, but also as a consequent that would follow the other,—that when his prayers should be heard, he thereupon would perform his vows; for his scope is to move Job to turn to God, shewing what benefit would accrue to him by it, and amongst others this, the hearing his prayers and performing his vows.

(5.) When thou art enabled by faith to see clearly God's hand shewed forth in the effecting of that mercy over and above the power of second causes, and to acknowledge it to his glory; for the truth is, one main caviling reason in our blind hearts, whereby we are usually hindered and put by from apprehending our prayers to be answered when yet the thing is done, we shall find to be, that our eyes are terminated and bounded in second causes, and not raised to see God's hand in the thing: therefore, on the contrary, when God enableth thee to see that he hath done thee this kindness, so as thy mind is clear in it, this is a fruit of his hearing thy prayers; and this you will usually find to be true, that so much faith and

dependence as you had upon God in prayer for the obtaining of a mercy, so much faith and acknowledgment you will have in the accomplishment of it. Parallel with this rule is that other, which in another case is usually given: that in performance of duties, so much as the soul did go out of itself to God for strength to perform them, so much, when they are performed, will the heart acknowledge God's assistance and be humbled. And this is a sign of prayer being heard upon this ground, because God's end of hearing prayers is that we 'might glorify him.' So, Ps. 50:15, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' Therefore, when the heart hath prayed much for a mercy, with dependence before the obtaining of it, and then is enabled to exalt God when it is obtained, it is a sign that God did it in relation to those prayers. For there is that connexion made between these as between the cause and the effect: 'I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' David, when he was delivered out of all his troubles, as when he made that 18th Psalm he was, as appears by the title of it, then at the 6th verse he relates how he had prayed, and how he was heard: and see thereupon how his heart was enlarged to acknowledge God alone to have done all, in the rest of that psalm, so from the 27th and also from the 31st verses. When we see angels from God, beyond the power of second causes, descending, it is a sign that prayers, as angels, first ascended, and obtained that mercy. Thus also the church, Isa. 26, having obtained those deliverances by prayer, ver. 17, (for which there she makes that song by way of thankfulness,) she ascribes all unto God: ver. 12, 'Thou hast wrought all our works for us;' and, ver. 18, 'Verily we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth.'

(6.) When with the mercy there cometh the assurance of God's love, and an evidence of his favour; when God sends not a bare token only, but a letter also with it, to bear witness of his love, in which the token is wrapt. I need not make that a sign, for when this comes with a mercy, it carries its own evidence; you will then know well enough that it is the fruit of prayer.

(7.) Lastly, it will be evident by the event. Things obtained by prayer have few thorns in them, the curse is taken out; but what comes but by ordinary providence comes as it were up of itself alone, and, like the earth

untilled, is full of thorns and briars, and many vexations. The reason is, for what comes in by prayer comes as a blessing, and so no sorrow is added to it; and also because prayer killeth those inordinate lusts which are the cause of that vanity and vexation which are in the things enjoyed. But when 'the blessing of God maketh rich, he addeth no sorrow with it,' Prov. 10:22. Things long deferred, at last obtained by prayer, prove most comfortable, and in a settled manner such; they prove standing and stable blessings: and what trouble the heart was put to in the deferring, it is recompensed by the more settled, constant, unmixed sweetness in the enjoying; prayer having long perfumed it, and the thing being steeped therein, it proves exceeding pleasant. So, Prov. 13:12, 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick;' but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life, and heals that sickness, and abundantly comforts the heart. Thus Isaac found Rebekah a great blessing, and a comfortable wife to him, Gen. 24:67. Such a comfort also was Isaac to Abraham, Gen. 17:18, 19, 'a son indeed,' a son of laughter,' as his name signifies. And such was Samuel to Hannah; she had not only a son of him, but a good son, a blessed son, a prophet, and the judge of the people of God. Whereas Jacob getting the blessing, but without prayer, how embittered was it to him, though a blessing to him in the event, by twenty years' banishment from his mother's house! When Israel themselves set up a king, 'but not by me,' as God says, what a punishment was he to them! 'Given in wrath, and taken away in anger,' Hos. 13:11.

## **CHAPTER IX: Considerations to quiet the heart**

Considerations to quiet the heart, and to help it to discern an answer to, and acceptation of, the prayer when the thing is not accomplished.

II. BUT now the next and more difficult question is, when the thing is not

granted, how shall we then discern and know that God doth notwithstanding hear the prayer?

Concerning which I must premise this, that it is true that always the very thing itself desired is not granted, when yet the prayer is heard. Christ prayed 'the cup might pass from him,' which though some interpret the word passing for the short continuance of the brunt, and that therefore in that respect he was heard directly in what he asked; yet if so, why was that clause, 'if it be possible,' added? That argues his petition was for a total removal, yet with subjection to God's will, for he knew there was no great impossibility in a short removal of it; nay, it was impossible but that it should pass, Acts 2:24. But, howsoever, it is plain in Moses, about his going into Canaan, Deut. 3:26: 'I besought the Lord,' says he, ver. 23, 'and he was angry with me, and would not hear me,' ver. 26. Likewise, ere I come to resolve the case, an objection is also to be removed; which is—

Obj.—That if the Spirit of God doth make every faithful prayer in us,—as, Rom. 8:26, it is said he doth, 'We know not what to pray for, but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities,' &c.; and he 'searcheth the deep things of God,' as it is said, 1 Cor. 2:10,—that therefore he knowing that God will not grant such a thing, you may think that he should not stir up the heart to pray for that which God means to deny, but always guide the heart aright, and not let us err or miss in the things we pray for. To this, in brief, by way of answer:—

Ans. 1.—The Spirit makes not prayers in us always according to what God's secret will and foreknowledge is, but according to his revealed will to us, both in his word and in his providence, as things therein are presented to us, and do lie before our view, and so not always according to what he means to do, but according to what it is our duty to pray most for. For he concurs to assist us to pray, as he doth in preaching or using other such like means and ordinances, wherein though the Spirit know whom God means to convert, whom not, yet he assists us ministers in our spirits oftentimes as much to preach to those he means not to convert, as to those he means to convert; he dealing with us therein according to what is our duty, not according to what is his decree.

Ans. 2.—Again, secondly, that phrase helps to answer this, when he is

said to 'help our infirmities;' and therefore not according to his own vast knowledge doth he frame our prayers, but so as he applies his assistance to our infirm, weak, and narrow apprehensions, and stirs up desires in us to such things as according to our knowledge we are in duty to conceive, and which by all we can see, by what is before us revealed in his providence, we think to be most for our good and his glory; and God accepts such, desires as from us, but yet doth for us according to the largeness of his own love.

And so now to come to the case propounded, and therein unto helps to pacify and direct the heart about those prayers at which the things are not granted.

1. And, first, how didst thou frame thy prayer for that thing which is denied thee? Didst thou pray for it absolutely and peremptorily, as simply best for thee? Thou must not then think much if such a prayer be denied, for therein thou wentest beyond thy commission. But if thou didst pray for it conditionally, and with an if, as Christ did,—'if it be possible,' (which instance is a strong ground for such Kind of prayers,) and 'not my will, but thy will be done,'—so as thou didst refer it unto, and trust God's judgment in the thing, and not thine own, only didst put him in mind, as thy duty was, of what was represented to thee as best for thee in view, and so left it to him to cast, and didst refer it to his will and wisdom; then thy prayer may be most fully answered and heard, and yet the thing denied, and thou art to interpret and take God's meaning and mind revealed in the event in the best sense, which way soever it falls; for otherwise Christ had not been heard, when yet the text says 'he was heard in all he feared,' Heb. 5:7.

2. Observe if there were not a reservation in that denial, for some greater and further mercy, whereof that denial was the foundation. Thus—

(1.) Oftentimes some great cross is prevented by the denial of a thing which we were urgent for. If we had had many of our desires, we had been undone. So it was a mercy to David that his child was taken away, for whose life he was yet so earnest, who would have been but a living monument of his shame. It was also a mercy to David that Absalom was taken away,—whom surely he prayed much for, for he loved him much,—



who, if he had lived, might have been the ruin of him and his house. As a wicked man's deliverance and the granting his request lays a foundation, and is a reservation of him to a worse judgment; so the denial of a godly man's prayer is for his greater good, and is laid as a foundation of a greater mercy. And again—

(2.) Oftentimes the very denial breaks a man's heart, and brings him nearer to God, puts him upon searching into his ways and estate, and in his prayers to see what should be amiss therein; which alone is a great mercy, and better than the thing, seeing by the loss of that one thing he learns how to pray better, and so to obtain a hundred better things afterward. Christ desired the cup might pass; it did not, and that was the foundation of our salvation, and the way to his glory, he being to pass through that suffering into his glory. The woman that had the bloody issue, though she used many means, and haply prayers among the rest, and all in vain, yet none took effect; that in the end she might come to Christ, and have both body and soul healed at once.

3. Observe if there be not a transmutation and a translation or turning of the thing desired into some other greater blessing of the same kind; for God, all whose ways are mercy and truth to his people, doth improve, husband, and lay out the precious stocks of their prayers to the best advantage, in things whereby the greatest returns and gains may accrue. As old Jacob laid not his hands of blessing as Joseph would have guided them, but laid the right hand upon the younger son, whom Joseph did set at his left; so Often doth God take off his hand of blessing from the thing we prayed for, and lays and discovers it in another more for our good. And as God giving Isaac the power and privilege to bless a son, though Isaac intended it for Esau, yet God unbeknown to him transmitted it to Jacob, yet so as the blessing was not lost. Thus is it in our prayers for blessings both upon ourselves and others. There is often a transmutation, never a frustration of them; which may as truly and directly be called an answer to the prayer, as if a factor beyond sea, when the owner sends for such and such commodities, supposing thorn more vendible and advantageous, but the factor knowing the state of things and the prices, sends him over, instead of them, such as shall sell better and bring in more profit, may be said to answer his letters, and that better than if he

had sent those very commodities he writ for. Thus Abraham's prayers for Ishmael were turned for Isaac; David's for the child to Solomon.

4. Observe if in the end God doth not answer thee still according to the ground of thy prayer; that is, see if that holy end, intention, and affection which thou hadst in prayer be not in the end fully satisfied, though not in the thing thou didst desire; for God answers *secundum cardinem*. according to the hinge which the prayer turns upon. As when a general is sent out with in army by a king or a state, who give him many particular directions how to order and dispose and manage the war, although in many particulars that fall out, wherein they could not foresee to give so punctual and particular directions, he swerves from the directions, yet if he keeps to the intent of their commission, and doth what is most advantageous for their ends, he maybe said to keep to his commission. For as they say of the law, *mens legis est lex*,—the mind of the law is the law, not the bare words it is printed in,—so the meaning of the Spirit is the prayer, Rom. 8:27, and not simply the things desired, wherein we express those our desires. And still the meaning, the intent, the ground of our prayers shall be answered.

To open this: the main ends and meanings of our hearts in our requests are God's glory, the church's good, and our own particular comfort and happiness. We can desire but comfort; and a man looketh out and spieth out such a particular mercy, which he thinketh tends much to God's glory and his happiness, and yet that thing is denied; yet notwithstanding God will answer him according to the meaning of his prayers: his glory shall certainly be advanced, even for that prayer of his, some other way, and his comfort made up, which is the common desire of all mankind. And thou canst have but comfort, let the thing be what it will that conveys it to thee. And God will take order that that comfort thy soul desired thou shalt have come in one way or other, which, when it doth, thou canst not but say thy prayers are heard. For as God fulfils his promises, so he hears prayers; there is the same reason of both. Now God hath promised, 'He that leaves father and mother shall have a hundred-fold.' Not in specie, as we say: in kind this cannot always be fulfilled, for a hundred fathers he cannot have. God fulfils it not therefore always in the same kind, but in some other things, which shall be more than a hundred fathers would be.

Moses prays he might go into Canaan: God answers the ground of his prayer, though not in the matter in it expressed and desired, and that both for Moses's comfort and his own glory; for he takes him up into heaven, the true Canaan, whereof that Canaan was but a type; and he appoints Joshua, a fresh and a young man,\* coming on in the world, and one whom Moses himself had tutored and brought up, and was his pupil, servant, and attendant, Num. 11:28. And this was more for God's glory, for Joshua was therein to be the type of Christ leading us to heaven, which the law, of which Moses was the type, could not bring us unto, by reason of the weakness of it; and he being young did it better; and it was not so much also for God's glory that one man should do all and whereas Moses desired to have the honour of it, in that his servant that attended him, and had been brought up by him, and had all from him, that he was the man should do it, was well-high as great an honour to Moses as if he had been the leader himself. And so David, when he desired to build the temple and a house to God, for the like reasons God denied it, but yet honoured him to prepare the materials, and to draw the pattern, as also in that his son did it, who was therein also the like type of Christ, being a prince of peace, but David a man of blood and war; and likewise God accepted this of David, as if he had built it, and will recompense him as much.

5. Observe if in the thing which thou hast prayed much about, though it be denied thee, yet if God doth not endeavour to give thee (as I may so speak) all satisfaction that may be, even as if he were tender of denying thee, and therefore doth much in it for thy prayers' sake, though the conclusion proves otherwise, as being against some other purpose of his for some other ends: as when he denied Moses to go into the land of Canaan, he did it with much respect (as I may so speak with reverence) to Moses. He yielded as far as might be, for he let him lead them till he should come to the very borders; and he let him see that good land, carrying him up to a hill, and, as it is thought, by a miracle enabled his sight to view the whole land. And the man he chose to perform this work was his servant, which was a great honour to Moses, that one brought up by him should succeed him. So when Abraham prayed for Ishmael, 'O let Ishmael live in thy sight!' Gen. 17:18, God went as far in granting his request as might be; for, says he, ver. 20, 'I have heard thee; and I have

blessed him, and I will make him fruitful, and multiply him exceedingly, and he shall beget twelve princes: but my covenant I will establish with Isaac.' So likewise, when in casting that thing thou didst seek at his hands, he shews an extraordinary hand in turning it, it is a sign he had a respect to thee, that he would vouchsafe to discover his hand so much in it. Let the thing fall which way it will, if God's hand appear much in it, thou mayest comfortably conclude that there is some great thing in it, and that prayer wrought that miracle in it to dispose it so; and that there is some great reason why he denies thee, and a great respect had to thy prayers, in that he is pleased to discover so extraordinary a providence about it.

6. Lastly, look into the effect of that denial upon thine own heart; as—

(1.) If thy heart be enlarged to acknowledge God to be holy and righteous in his dealings with thee, and thine own unworthiness the cause of his denying thee. Thus we often find the saints expressing themselves in their prayers. That Ps. 22, though typically made of Christ, yet as it was penned by David, and as it may concern his person, it may serve for an instance for this: 'I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not;' this might have made him jealous of God, but says he, 'Thou art holy,' &c., and dealest now with me in a holy manner, and art just in it. Others 'have called on thee,' and have been heard, though I now for my unworthiness am denied; 'but I am a worm.' It might have put a man off when he should think others are heard, but not I; but it puts not him off, but humbles him: 'I am a worm,' &c., and 'Thou art holy.'

(2.) If God fill thy heart with a holy contentment in the denial; if he speak to thy heart, as he did to Moses when he denied him, Deut. 3:28, 'Let it suffice thee;' if as to St Paul, when he was so earnest about removing that buffeting, if thou gettest but such an answer as that to him, 'My grace is sufficient,' or that some such like consideration is dropped in that stays thee. It was the effect of David's seven days' fasting that he did so contentedly bear the loss of the child, which his servants thought would have overwhelmed him, 2 Sam. 12:19–21. But a consideration was dropped in, which was the fruit of his prayer, 'that he should go to him, not he return hither;' and his mind was comforted thereby, insomuch, as it is said, ver. 24, that 'he comforted Bathsheba also.'

(3.) If thou canst be thankful to God out of faith, that God hath cast and ordered all for the best, though he hath denied thee; and although thou seest no reason but that the thing prayed for would have been for the best, yet art thankful upon the denial of it, out of faith resting in God's judgment in it, as David in all those forementioned places was: 'Thou art holy that inhabitest the praises of Israel;' he praises God for all this. David, before he did eat, after his seven days' fasting for the child, arose, 'and went first into the temple, and worshipped,' 2 Sam. 12:20; and of what kind of worship it was appears by his anointing himself and changing his raiment, which was in token of rejoicing and thanksgivings and it fell out to him according to his faith, for presently after Solomon was begotten, ver. 24.

(4.) If thou canst pray still, and givest not over, although thou standest for mercies which thou missest; if when thou hast mercies granted thou fearest most, and when denied lovest most, and art not discouraged, thy prayers are heard. Ps. 80:4, though God seemed angry with their prayers, yet they pray, and expostulate with him, and give not over, for they made that psalm as a prayer, 'And how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?' So, Ps. 44:17, 'Though we are cast among dragons, yet we have not been false in thy covenant.' So say thou, I will pray still, though I never have an answer in this life. It moves ingenuous natures to see men take repulses and denials well, which proud persons will not do: and so it moves God.

## **CHAPTER X: Application: A reproof of those that pray**

Application: a reproof of those that pray, but look not after the return of their prayers.—The causes of this neglect.

THE use of all is to reprove those who put up prayers, and are earnest in begging, but look not after them when they have done, no more than if they had not prayed; who still venture, and have a great stock of prayers going, but look not after the returns that are made, cast not up their comings in and gainings by prayers; and when they have prayed, sit down discouraged, as not making account in earnest that ever they shall hear of their prayers again, even as if they had been but as words cast away, 'as beating the air,' as 'bread cast upon the waters,' which they think sinks or is carried away, and they shall find it no more. But herein you despise God's ordinance, and err, not knowing the power of prayers; and ye condemn the Lord. But you will say as they in the prophet said, 'Wherein do we condemn him?' If you asked a man a question, and when you had done did turn your back upon him, as scoffing Pilate asked in scorn of Christ, 'What is truth?' but would not stay for an answer, did you not condemn him? As not to answer when a question is asked you is contempt, so not to regard the answer made, when you have been earnest in begging, is no less contempt also. If you had written letters to a very friend about important business, and had earnestly solicited him for an answer, and he were careful in due time to send one, if you should make account to hear of him no more, should you not wrong him in your thoughts? Or if he did write, if you should not vouchsafe to read over his answer, were it not a contempt of him? So is it here, when you have been earnest with God for blessings, and regard not the answer. And because verily this is a fault among us, I will therefore endeavour to discover to you the causes and discouragements, which, though they keep you not from praying, yet from this earnest expectation, and real and true making account to hear of answers of your prayers. Only my scope is not to shew you so much the reasons why God denies you many requests, as why even in your own hearts you are discouraged after you have prayed, as if they would not be answered, although God doth answer them. These discouragements are partly temptations, partly sinful impediments, wherein we are more faulty.

1. Because your assurance that your persons are accepted is weak, therefore your confidence that your prayers are heard is weak also. For as God doth first accept the person, and then our prayers; so the belief that God doth accept our persons is that which also upholds our hearts in

confidence that our prayers shall be granted. This you may find in 1 John 5:13–15: in the 13th verse he says, 'These things have I written to you, that ye may know you have eternal life;' and upon that assurance this will follow, ver. 14, 15, 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us,' &c.; 'and if we know he hears us, we know we have the petitions we desired of him.' Mark how he links these three together, as effects and consequences each of other. (1.) 'These things I write unto you, that you may be assured that life and heaven is yours,' as in the 12th and 13th verses. And upon that, (2.) this confidence will follow in your hearts, 'that God hears you,'—that is, that you have his ears open to you, and his heart enlarged towards you. And then, (3.) if you be assured that God hears you, then from this will follow an assurance that you shall have anything granted you desire. Yea, and he makes this one of the main and immediate effects of assurance of justification; therefore he says, 'this is the confidence that we have in him,'—that is, this effect there is of this confidence. For whereas they might say, What benefit will accrue to us by this assurance? Why this, says he, which is one of the great and main privileges of a Christian, even assurance that God will hear him; and not only so, but grant him all his prayers. For when a man is assured God hath given him his Son, he will then easily be induced to believe and expect, 'How shall he not with him give me all things?' Rom. 8:32. If once he looks upon God as a father, he will then easily conceive that which Christ says, 'If fathers that are evil can give good things to their children, how much more shall not your Father give his Spirit and all good things to them that ask them?' And if he gave his Son when we did not pray to him, how much more shall he not with him give us all things we pray for? If a man comes to sue to any man whose mind he knew not, whether he loved him or not, he would have small hope or expectation of having his suit granted, though he came again and again; but if he be assured he is in favour with him, according to that degree of favour he supposeth himself to stand in with him, he is assured and confident of obtaining his request.

2. Discouragement is the weakness of their prayers. Though a man thinks his person is accepted; yet, Alas! says he, my prayers are so poor and weak, as surely God will never regard them.

(1.) To remove which, let me first ask thee this question, Dost thou pray with all thy might? Then though that thy might be weak in itself, and in thine own apprehension such, yet because it is all the might which thou hast, and which grace hath in thee, it shall be accepted. 'For God accepts according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not,' 2 Cor. 8:12.

(2.) Thou art to consider that God doth not hear thee for thy prayers' sake, though not without them, but 'for his name's sake,' and his 'Son's sake,' and because thou art his child; as the mother when her child cries, suppose it be a weak child, doth not neglect to hear and relieve it, but tenders it, not because it doth cry more loud, but because it cries, and pities it the more the weaker it is.

(3.) Again, though the performance in itself be weak, yet considered as a prayer, it may be strong, because a weak prayer may set the strong God a-work. As faith for the act of it, as produced by us, may be weak, yet because its object is Christ, therefore it justifies: so is it in prayer; it prevails, not because of the performance itself, but because of the name which it is put up in, even Christ's name. And therefore, as a weak faith justifies, so a weak prayer prevails as well as a stronger; and both for the like reason in both, for faith attributes all to God, and so doth prayer: for as faith is merely a receiving grace, so prayer a begging grace. And therefore dost thou think thy prayers are accepted at all, notwithstanding their weakness? If that they are accepted, then they must be accepted as prayers. Now if they be accepted as prayers, then as effectual motives to prevail with God to grant the thing you ask; for if he should not accept them to that end for which they were ordained, it is as if he accepted them not at all. As, therefore, when he approves of any man's faith as true and sincere, he approves and accepts of it to that purpose for which it was ordained, which is to save and justify, and to this end doth as fully accept the weakest act of faith as the strongest; so is it with their prayers, which being ordained as a means to obtain mercies from him, if he accepts them at all, it is with relation to the accomplishment of them, which is their end.

(4.) Men are mistaken in judging of the weakness of their prayers. They judge of the weakness of their prayers by their expressions, and gifts in



performing them, or by the stirring and overflow of affections; whereas the strength and vigour of prayer should be estimated from the faith, the sincerity, the obedience, the desires expressed in it. As it is not the loudness of a preacher's voice, but the weight and holiness of the matter, and spirit of the preacher, that move a wise and an intelligent hearer; so not gifts, but graces in prayers are they that move the Lord. The strength of prayer lies not in words, but in that it is fitted to prevail with God. One prayer is not more strong than another, further than it is so framed as it hath power with God more or less; as of Jacob it is said, 'He had power with God,' Hos. 12. Now prayers move God, not as an orator moves his hearers, but as a child moves his father. Two words of a child humbled, and crying at his father's feet, will prevail more than penned orations, Rom. 8: it is the meaning of the spirit that God looks unto, more than the expression; for the groans there are said to be unutterable. Hezekiah's expressions were so rude and broken, that he says, Isa. 38:14, that he did but 'chatter,' he being then sick, 'even as a crane;' yet God heard them.

3. A third discouragement is failings of answers: I have prayed often and long, and I have been seldom or never answered, and therefore I make little account of my prayers that they are heard; others have the revenues of their prayers coming in, but I do miss whatsoever almost I stand for. Therefore say they as those, 'Why have we fasted and thou regardedst it not?' Isa. 58:3.

To remove this, consider—

(1.) That thou hast the more reason to wait, for thou hast the more answers to come; for as wicked men treasure up wrath, so do godly men mercy, and especially by their prayers: and therefore mercies and answers do often come thick together, even as afflictions also do.

(2.) Suppose thou shouldest have few answers concerning the things thou seekest for here, either in praying for thyself or others, yet thy reward is with the Lord. It is in praying as in preaching, a man may preach faithfully many a year, and yet not convert a soul, and yet a man is not to give over waiting, but to observe after every sermon what good is done, and whether 'God will give men repentance,' as it is, 2 Tim. 2:25. And if none be converted, yet, as Isa. 49:4, 'a man's reward is with the Lord.'

'Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour,' 1 Cor. 3:8; and not according to the success of his labour only. So it is in praying: though thou missest again and again, and nothing succeeds thou prayest for, yet be not discouraged, for thy reward is with the Lord, which will come in one day.

(3.) God doth it, not that he hears thee not, but to try thee. For a man to say as David says, Ps. 116:1, 2, 'God hath heard my prayer, therefore I will call upon him as long as I live;' that is nothing so much as to be able to say, Well, I have prayed thus long, and for these many things, and never sped, and yet I will call upon him whilst I live, though I find no answer in this life. To find comings in a trade, and yet to hold out trading still, argues not so much faithfulness in a man's calling, as when a man hath losses, and castings behindhand, and yet to follow it.

(4.) God usually stays so long that we have done expecting: Luke 18:8, 'The elect cry day and night,' but God stays so long, ver. 7, that when he comes he finds not faith, they have done expecting, have forgot their prayers, and then he doth things they looked not for, Isa. 64:3.

Other discouragements there are wherein we ourselves are more faulty, and which are our sins more than our temptations, which yet weaken the expectation of having our prayers answered: as—

1. Slothfulness in prayer, when we do not put to all our might in praying; and then no wonder we do not only not obtain, but that our own hearts misgive us, that we look for little success and issue of such prayers: qui frigide rogat, docet negare,—he that shews himself cold in a suit, teaches him he sues to deny him. If we see one seeking to us faintly and slightly, we are not then solicitous to deny him, but think he will be easily put off, and not think much; so accordingly when we shall observe so much by ourselves, and see ourselves slothful in praying, and praying as if we prayed not, no wonder if by reason of that consciousness we look not after the success of such prayers, which in the performance we slighted, when we pray as if we were willing to be denied, we knowing that the Scripture says that the fervent prayer only prevails, that prayer which is ἐνεργουμένη, that sets all the faculties on work, James 5:16. How should we then expect that God should grant any good thing to us? For though

God sells nothing to us for our prayers, but gives freely, yet he would have his gifts accepted; now without large desires and longings they would not be accepted. And what is fervent prayer but the expression of such fervent desires? Jacob wrestled when he obtained. 'Many seek to enter,' says Christ, 'but you must strive.'

Now when we know these things and yet are slothful, how can we expect any answers at all? Will not the consciousness of it quell all our expectations? And hence it comes to pass that God, proportioning his dealings with us to our prayers, because we seem to pray, and yet pray not to purpose; therefore God sometimes seems like one asleep, and then sometimes to wake, and make fair offers to help, and yet falls as it were asleep again, because we were thus drowsy in our prayers. Those prayers that awaken God must awaken us; those prayers that stir God must 'stir us to lay hold on God,' as Isaiah speaks. As obedience strengthens faith and assurance, so fervency in prayer begets confidence of being heard. In all other things slothfulness doth discourage and weaken expectation. Doth any man expect that riches should come upon him when he doth his business negligently? For 'it is the diligent hand that maketh rich.' Doth any man expect a crop and a harvest if he take not pains to plough and sow his corn? No more, if you do not take pains with your hearts in prayer, can you expect an answer, or indeed will you.

2. A second cause, or sinful discouragement herein, is looking at prayer only as a duty to be performed, and so performing it as a task, and not so much out of desires stirred up after the things to be obtained, nor out of faith that we shall obtain them; which is as if a physician having a sick servant, to whom he prescribeth, and commandeth to take some physic to cure him, and his man should take it indeed because it is commanded and prescribed by his master, looking at it as an act of duty, as he obeys him in other businesses, but not as looking at it as a medicine or means that will have any work upon him to cure him, and therefore orders himself as if he had taken no such thing. Thus do most in the world pray to God; take prayer as a prescription only, but not as a means. They come to God daily, but as to a master only in this performance, not as to a father; and thus doing, no wonder if they look for little effect of prayers, for our expectation never exceeds nor reaches further than our end and

intention which we had in any business. If I perform any ordinance but as a duty, then I rest therein and expect no further; as if a man preacheth for filthy lucre only, he performs his duty and then looks for his hire, but looks not after any other effect of his sermons: so nor will men do after their prayers for answers to them, when they perform them as duties only. Now, to help you in this, you are to look to two things in prayer: first, to a command from God; secondly, to the promise of God; and so to consider it in a double relation, first, as a duty, in respect to the command; secondly, as a means to obtain or procure blessings at God's hand, in relation to his promises. Therefore, in prayer, first an act of obedience, secondly an act of faith, is to be exercised: 'Ask in faith, nothing wavering,' James 1. Now the most in the world perform it as an act of obedience only, and so rest in the present performance and acceptation of it; but if a man pray in faith, he will pray with an eye to the promises, and look on prayer as a means, for time to come, to obtain such or such a mercy at God's hands: and if so, then he is not satisfied till he hath an answer of his prayer, and till then will wait, as the church says, 'she would wait till he did arise and plead her cause.'

3. A third sinful discouragement is returning to sins after prayers. When a man hath prayed for some mercy, and riseth full of much confidence that his prayers are heard, and so a while he walks, yet falling into a sin, that sin doth dash all his hopes, undoes his prayers, as he thinks, and calls them back again—meets, as it were, with the answer, which is God's messenger, and causeth it to return to heaven again. How often when God had even granted a petition, and the decree was a-coming forth, and the grant newly written, and the seal a-setting to it, but an act of treason coming between, stops it in the seal and defers it, blots and blurreth all, both prayer and grant, when newly written, and leaves a guilt in the mind which quells our hopes, and then we look no more after our prayers. And this especially if, when we were a-sinning, such a thought came in, (as often it doth to restrain us,) Are you not in dependence upon God for such a mercy, and have prayed for it, and are fair for it? how then dare you do this, and sin against him? When in this case the heart goes on, this blots all the prayer, and discourageth a man; for, saith the conscience, will God hear sinners? as he said.

And thus far it is true that sinning thus between interrupts and hinders the obtaining our petitions: that answerably as we do thus dash and betray and undo our prayers, so in a proportion we find, in the way to our obtaining the thing we prayed for, so many rubs and difficulties do arise; for as we lay blocks in God's way coming towards us to do us good, so he in ours; therefore, often when a business goes prosperously on, and we think we shall carry it, comes some accident between the cup and the lip, that casts all behindhand again, because answerably we dealt with God. For when we had prayed, and were encouraged and in good hopes, then by some sin or other we spoiled all, and bereaved ourselves of our expectation. But yet this you are to consider, that as in the end praying useth to overcome sin in God's children, so also God in the end overcomes difficulties, and brings the matter to pass. And know it is not sins past so much that hinder the prayers of God's people, as the present unfitness and indisposition of their hearts for mercy.