

**SEVEN SERMONS ON
PRAYER, PREACHED
IN HAGLEY CHURCH
DURING LENT 1867**

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Seven Sermons on Prayer, Preached in Hagley Church During Lent 1867 by Various

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VARIOUS

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S E R M O N I.

Introductory.

PSALM lxxiii. 22—25, & 27.

“Nevertheless I am always by Thee: for Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel: and after that receive me with glory. Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. . . . But it is good for me to hold me fast by God, to put my trust in the Lord God; and to speak of all Thy works in the gates of the daughter of Sion.”

THESE words of David express the very spirit of prayer—the feeling out of which prayer of man to God must always spring. You see in them, as in all David's words, the most intense sense of the presence of God near him always, of His willingness to hear; and the wish not only to ask things from Him, but also to set forth His praises; and that not alone, but with all God's

people. In this way it is a very complete text on the subject of prayer. As the course of sermons to be preached this Lent will refer to prayer, I will speak to-day, first, of the duty of prayer, and of its true nature.

Of the three parts of a Christian's duty into which the Baptismal vow divides it, namely, renouncing evil, believing what God reveals, and doing His Will, there are many who to a great degree overlook the second, that is the life of faith, as essential to salvation. They may loyally try altogether to renounce evil, and to do good actively in the spirit of self-sacrifice for the love of God, but there is in their life one great blank, one great omission—the omission through large parts of their lives of the secret life of faith in Things and Persons unseen. Their souls dwell in an atmosphere of this world. Some of these are very sad cases to contemplate. Like Esau they may be most amiable men in common life, but they are not in any true sense religious or godly men. They are what is sometimes called "good moral men," but they are not men of *faith*. They speak to man, but they do not speak to God; they listen to man, but when do they listen to God? They think of this world and of future events in this *world*, but when do their thoughts wander beyond

the grave, or think of spirits, or of invisible beings, or of the Future Life in Eternity?

Such men, my brethren, cannot properly be called Christians. They may never, or scarcely ever, "do any harm" to any one outwardly; they may be very unselfish, very full of kindness; they may have many amiable and even noble qualities, but where is the *life of God*, and *to God*, in their souls? In that respect they are like the lower animals who receive blessings from God continually, but never think of Him from whom they come and in whom they themselves "live and move and have their being."

Let me, however, add that I do not believe that what I have now said can ever be a perfectly true description of any man. At least, it is little less than a miracle if a man is thoroughly moral, and continues so,—giving up self, resisting the unceasing 'bribery and corruption' of the world, turning away indignantly from its many hands ceaselessly outstretched, saying, "All this will I give thee if thou wilt serve me, or thyself, instead of God,"—I say it is little less than a miracle for any man to go on resisting all this, except by one means, that is, by living in secret communion with God. Depend upon it, my brethren, to cut off from the soul of man the secret life of

faith, is to cut off the only perennial spring from which the life of holiness can flow, and go on flowing, in this or in any world. The cistern of goodness must be filled from a hidden and supernatural source, else it will ere long dry up for ever. But even if such a case as I have described could be conceived, still the man would be no real and complete Christian, because he would omit one great duty, or set of duties, of every living soul, the duty of prayer and devotion, of personal, direct, conscious communion with God.

The questions then, my brethren, which this course of Sermons is intended to lead us to ask ourselves, are such as these:—Have we lived *praying* lives? Do we do so as much as we ought? and in the way we ought? Does God acknowledge us as among those who live unto Him, speaking to Him, listening loyally for His voice, seeking to know Him better, to be in fellowship with Him always? Such questions are all-important,—they go to the root of the spiritual life; the answer to them forms one most important part of the test, whether we deserve the name of *Christians*,—followers and imitators of Him who could always say: “I am not alone, because the Father is with me,” and in whom was seen in absolute *perfection* a Son of man who was also a Son of

God, living in ceaseless communion with His Father in Heaven.

Consider then, first, man's power of praying, from which follows his duty to pray.

We are the only creatures on this earth, so far as we know, who have the power of thinking of the God who made all things, of speaking to Him, and hearing Him speak in return. All other creatures receive blessings from God, but do not know from whom they come. But men, as they sit at meals can 'say grace', or return conscious thanks to God who gives them. As they look about them at the great and wonderful world in the midst of which they live, they can have fellow-feeling with Him who made it; they can see something of *why* He made it as it is made, and so can share in some degree in His blessed Sabbath of contemplation, when He "*saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.*" Thus have we the wonderful power given us of understanding how God's work is good, and so having fellowship with the Maker of all things.

But you will not have this living fellowship with God without trying for it. You must think of God, else you will not learn to know or to love Him. Ah, my brethren, many and many in this world live practically without God, simply for