



CHAPTER I

God's Great Need

“God wondered.” This is a very striking thought! The very boldness of the idea ought surely to arrest the attention of every earnest Christian man, woman, and child. A wondering God! Why, how staggered we might well be if we knew the cause of God’s “wonder”! Yet we find it to be, apparently, a very little thing. But if we are willing to consider the matter carefully, we shall discover it to be one of the greatest possible importance to every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing else is so momentous—so vital—to our spiritual welfare.

God “wondered that there was no intercessor” (Isa. 59:16)—“none to interpose” (RV, marg.¹). But this was in the days of long ago, before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ “full of grace and truth”—

¹ Marginal readings (alternate translations) of Bible references are indicated by “marg.” after the reference.

Kneeling Christian

before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, full of grace and power, “helping our infirmity,” “himself making intercession for us” and in us (Rom. 8:26). Yes, and before the truly amazing promises of our Savior regarding prayer; before men knew very much about prayer; in the days when sacrifices for their sins loomed larger in their eyes than supplication for other sinners.

Oh, how great must be God’s wonder today! For how few there are among us who know what prevailing prayer really is! Every one of us would confess that we believe in prayer, yet how many of us truly believe in the *power* of prayer? Now, before we go a step farther, may the writer most earnestly implore you not to read hurriedly what is contained in these chapters. Much—very much—depends upon the way in which every reader receives what is here recorded. For everything depends upon prayer.

Why are many Christians so often defeated? Because they pray so little. Why are many church-workers so often discouraged and disheartened? Because they pray so little.

Why do most men see so few brought “out of darkness to light” by their ministry? Because they pray so little.

Why are not our churches simply on fire for God? Because there is so little real prayer.

The Lord Jesus is as powerful today as ever before. The Lord Jesus is as anxious for men to be saved as ever before. His arm is not shortened that it cannot save: but he cannot stretch forth his arm unless we pray more—and more.

We may be assured of this—the secret of all failure is our failure in secret prayer.

If God “wondered” in the days of Isaiah, we need not be surprised to find that in the days of his flesh our Lord “marveled.” He marveled at the unbelief of some—unbelief which actually prevented him from doing any mighty work in their cities (Mark 6:6).

But we must remember that those who were guilty of this unbelief saw no beauty in him that they should desire him, or believe on him. What then must his “marvel” be today, when he sees amongst us, who do truly love and adore him, so few who really “stir themselves up to take hold of God” (Isa. 64:7). Surely there is nothing so absolutely astonishing as a practically prayerless Christian? These are eventful and ominous days. In

God's Great Need

fact, there are many evidences that these are “the last days” in which God promised to pour out his Spirit—the Spirit of supplication—upon all flesh (Joel 2:28). Yet the vast majority of professing Christians scarcely know what “supplication” means; and very many of our churches not only have no prayer-meetings, but sometimes unblushingly condemn such meetings, and even ridicule them.

The Church of England, recognizing the importance of worship and prayer, expects her clergy to read prayers in Church every morning and evening.

But when this is done, is it not often in an empty church? And are not the prayers frequently raced through at a pace which precludes real worship? “Common prayer,” too, often must necessarily be rather vague and indefinite.

And what of those churches where the old-fashioned weekly prayer-meeting is retained? Would not “weakly” be the more appropriate word? C. H. Spurgeon² had the joy of being able to say that he conducted a prayer-meeting every Monday night “which scarcely ever numbers less than from a thousand to twelve hundred attendants.”³

My brothers, have we ceased to believe in prayer? If you still hold your weekly gathering for prayer, is it not a fact that the very great majority of your church members never come near it? Yes, and never even think of coming near it. Why is this? Whose fault is it?

“Only a prayer-meeting”—how often we have heard the utterance! How many of those reading these words really enjoy a prayer-meeting? Is it a joy or just a duty? Please forgive me for asking so many questions and for pointing out what appears to be a perilous weakness and a lamentable short-coming in our churches. We are not out to criticize—far less to condemn. Anybody can do that. Our yearning desire is to stir up Christians “to take hold of” God, as never before. We wish to encourage, to enhearten, to uplift.

We are never so high as when we are on our knees.

² Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) was a well known British Baptist preacher and extremely prolific writer whose powerful sermons and writings still resonate with Christians today.

³ From a collection of sermons entitled *Only a Prayer-Meeting*, by C. H. Spurgeon.

Kneeling Christian

Criticize? Who dare criticize another? When one looks back upon the past and remembers how much prayerlessness there has been in one's own life, words of criticism of others wither away on the lips.

But we believe the time has come when a clarion call to the individual and to the Church is needed—a call to prayer.

Now, dare we face this question of prayer? It seems a foolish query, for is not prayer a part and parcel of all religions? Yet we venture to ask our readers to look at this matter fairly and squarely. Do I really believe that prayer is a power? Is prayer the greatest power on earth, or is it not? Does prayer indeed “move the Hand that moves the world”?

Do God's prayer-commands really concern me? Do the promises of God concerning prayer still hold good? We have all been muttering “Yes, yes, yes” as we read these questions. We dare not say “No” to any one of them. And yet . . .

Has it ever occurred to you that our Lord never gave an unnecessary or an optional command? Do we really believe that our Lord never made a promise which he could not, or would not, fulfill? Our Savior's three great commands for definite action were:

Pray ye—

Do this—

Go ye!

Are we obeying him? How often his command, “Do this,” is reiterated by our preachers today! One might almost think it was his only command! How seldom we are reminded of his bidding to “Pray” and to “Go.” Yet, without obedience to the “Pray ye,” it is of little or no use at all either to “Do this” or to “Go.”

In fact, it can easily be shown that all want of success, and all failure in the spiritual life and in Christian work, is due to defective or insufficient prayer. Unless we pray aright we cannot live aright or serve aright. This may appear, at first sight, to be gross exaggeration, but the more we think it over in the light Scripture throws upon it, the more convinced shall we be of the truth of this statement.

Now, as we begin once more to see what the Bible has to say about this mysterious and wonderful subject, shall we endeavor to read some of

God's Great Need

our Lord's promises as though we had never heard them before. What will the effect be?

Some twenty years ago the writer was studying in a Theological College. One morning, early, a fellow-student—who is today one of England's foremost missionaries—burst into the room holding an open Bible in his hands. Although he was preparing for Holy Orders, he was at that time only a young convert to Christ.

He had gone up to the University “caring for none of these things.” Popular, clever, athletic—he had already won a place amongst the smart set of his college, when Christ claimed him. He accepted the Lord Jesus as a personal Savior, and became a very keen follower of his Master. The Bible was, comparatively, a new book to him, and as a result he was constantly making “discoveries.” On that memorable day on which he invaded my quietude he cried excitedly—his face all aglow with mingled joy and surprise—“Do you believe this? Is it really true?”

“Believe what?” I asked, glancing at the open Bible with some astonishment.

“Why, this . . .” and he read in eager tones St. Matthew 21:21–22:

If ye have faith and doubt not . . . all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

“Do you believe it? Is it true?”

“Yes,” I replied, with much surprise at his excitement, “of course it's true—of course I believe it.” Yet, through my mind there flashed all manner of thoughts!

“Well, that's a very wonderful promise,” said he. “It seems to me to be absolutely limitless! Why don't we pray more?”

And he went away, leaving me thinking hard. I had never looked at those verses quite in that way. As the door closed upon that eager young follower of the Master, I had a vision of my Savior and his love and his power such as I never had before. I had a vision of a life of prayer—yes, and “limitless” power, which I saw depended upon two things only—faith and prayer. For the moment I was thrilled. I fell on my knees, and as I bowed before my Lord, what thoughts surged through my mind—what hopes and aspirations flooded my soul! God was speaking to me in an extraordinary

Kneeling Christian

way. This was a great call to prayer. But—to my shame be it said—I heeded not that call.

Where did I fail? True, I prayed a little more than before, but nothing much seemed to happen. Why? Was it because I did not see what a high standard the Savior requires in the inner life of those who would pray successfully?

Was it because I had failed to measure up my life to the “perfect love” standard so beautifully described in the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians?

For, after all, prayer is not just putting into action good resolutions “to pray.” Like David, we need to cry, “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Ps. 51) before we can pray aright. And the inspired words of the Apostle of Love need to be heeded today as much as ever before: “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and [then] whatsoever we ask, we receive of him” (1 John 3:21–22, marg.).

“True—and I believe it.” Yes, indeed, it is a limitless promise, and yet how little we realize it, how little we claim from Christ. And our Lord “marvels” at our unbelief. But if we could only read the Gospels for the first time, what an amazing book it would seem! Should not we “marvel” and “wonder”? And today I pass on that great call to you. Will you give heed to it? Will you profit by it? Or shall it fall on deaf ears and leave you prayerless?

Fellow-Christians, let us awake! The Devil is blinding our eyes. He is endeavoring to prevent us from facing this question of prayer.

These pages are written by special request. But it is many months since that request came. Every attempt to begin to write has been frustrated, and even now one is conscious of a strange reluctance to do so. There seems to be some mysterious power restraining the hand. Do we realize that there is nothing the Devil dreads so much as prayer? His great concern is to keep us from praying. He loves to see us “up to our eyes” in work—provided we do not pray. He does not fear because we are eager and earnest Bible students—provided we are little in prayer. Someone has wisely said, “Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.” All this is so familiar to us—but do we really pray? If

God's Great Need

not, then failure must dog our footsteps, whatever signs of apparent success there may be.

Let us never forget that the greatest thing we can do for God or for man is to pray. For we can accomplish far more by our prayers than by our work. Prayer is omnipotent; it can do anything that God can do! When we pray, God works. All fruitfulness in service is the outcome of prayer—of the worker's prayers, or of those who are holding up holy hands on his behalf. We all know how to pray, but perhaps many of us need to cry as the disciples did of old, "Lord, teach us to pray."

*O Lord, by whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way,
The path of prayer thyself hast trod;
Lord, teach us now to pray.*