

Speedily, though bearing long**Andrew Murray:**

‘And He spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint. . . . And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry to Him day and night, and He is long-suffering over them? I say unto you, that He will avenge them speedily.’—Luke xviii. 108.

OF all the mysteries of the prayer world, the need of persevering prayer is one of the greatest. That the Lord, who is so loving and longing to bless, should have to be supplicated time after time, sometimes year after year, before the answer comes, we cannot easily understand. It is also one of the greatest practical difficulties in the exercise of believing prayer. When, after persevering supplication, our prayer remains unanswered, it is often easiest for our slothful flesh, and it has all the appearance of pious submission, to think that we must now cease praying, because God may have His secret reason for withholding His answer to our request.

It is by faith alone that the difficulty is overcome. When once faith has taken its stand upon God’s word, and the Name of Jesus, and has yielded itself to the leading of the Spirit to seek God’s will and honour alone in its prayer, it need not be discouraged by delay. It knows from Scripture that the power of believing prayer is simply irresistible; real faith can never be disappointed. It knows how, just as water, to exercise the irresistible power it can have, must be gathered up and accumulated, until the stream can come down in full force, there must often be a heaping up of prayer, until God sees that the measure is full, and the answer comes. It knows how, just as the ploughman has to take his ten thousand steps, and sow his ten thousand seeds, each one a part of the preparation for the final harvest, so there is a need-be for oft-repeated persevering prayer, all working out some desired blessing. It knows for certain that not a single believing prayer can fail of its effect in heaven, but has its influence, and is treasured up to work out an answer in due time to him who persevereth to the end. It knows that it has to do not with human thoughts or possibilities, but with the word of the living God. And so even as Abraham through so many years ‘in hope believed against hope,’ and then ‘through faith and patience inherited the promise,’ it counts that the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation, waiting and hastening unto the coming of its Lord to fulfil His promise.

To enable us, when the answer to our prayer does not come at once, to combine quiet patience and joyful confidence in our persevering prayer, we must specially try to understand the two words in which our Lord sets forth the character and conduct, not of the unjust judge, but of our God and Father towards those whom He allows to cry day and night to Him: ‘He is long-suffering over them; He will avenge them speedily.’

He will avenge them speedily, the Master says. The blessing is all prepared; He is not only willing but most anxious to give them what they ask; everlasting love burns with the longing desire to reveal itself fully to its beloved, and to satisfy their needs. God will not delay one moment longer than is absolutely necessary; He will do all in His power to hasten and speed the answer.

But why, if this be true and His power be infinite, does it often last so long with the answer to prayer? And why must God’s own elect so often, in the midst of suffering and conflict, cry day and night? ‘He is long-suffering over them.’ ‘Behold! the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being long-suffering over it, till it receive the early and the latter rain.’ The husbandman does indeed long for his harvest, but knows that it must have its full time of sunshine and rain, and has long patience. A child so often wants to pick the half-ripe fruit; the husbandman knows to wait till the proper time. Man, in his spiritual nature too, is under the law of gradual growth that reigns in all created life. It is only in the path of development that he can reach his divine destiny. And it is the Father, in whose hands are the times and seasons, who alone knows the moment when the soul or the Church is ripened to that fulness of faith in which it can really take and keep the blessing. As a father who longs to have his only child home from school, and yet waits patiently till the time of training is completed, so it is with God and His children: He is the long-suffering One, and answers speedily.

The insight into this truth leads the believer to cultivate the corresponding dispositions: patience and faith, waiting and hastening, are the secret of his perseverance. By faith in the promise of God, we know that we have the petitions we have asked of Him. Faith takes and holds the answer in the promise, as an unseen spiritual possession, rejoices in it, and praises for it. But there is a difference between the faith that thus holds the word and knows that it has the answer, and the clearer, fuller, riper faith that obtains the promise as a present

experience. It is in persevering, not unbelieving, but confident and praising prayer, that the soul grows up into that full union with its Lord in which it can enter upon the possession of the blessing in Him. There may be in these around us, there may be in that great system of being of which we are part, there may be in God's government, things that have to be put right through our prayer, ere the answer can fully come: the faith that has, according to the command, believed that it has received, can allow God to take His time: it knows it has prevailed and must prevail. In quiet, persistent, and determined perseverance it continues in prayer and thanksgiving until the blessing come. And so we see combined what at first sight appears so contradictory; the faith that rejoices in the answer of the unseen God as a present possession, with the patience that cries day and night until it be revealed. The speedily of God's long-suffering is met by the triumphant but patient faith of His waiting child.

Our great danger in this school of the answer delayed, is the temptation to think that, after all, it may not be God's will to give us what we ask. If our prayer be according to God's word, and under the leading of the Spirit, let us not give way to these fears. Let us learn to give God time. God needs time with us. If we only give Him time, that is, time in the daily fellowship with Himself, for Him to exercise the full influence of His presence on us, and time, day by day, in the course of our being kept waiting, for faith to prove its reality and to fill our whole being, He Himself will lead us from faith to vision; we shall see the glory of God. Let no delay shake our faith. Of faith it holds good: first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Each believing prayer brings a step nearer the final victory. Each believing prayer helps to ripen the fruit and bring us nearer to it; it fills up the measure of prayer and faith known to God alone; it conquers the hindrances in the unseen world; it hastens the end. Child of God! give the Father time. He is long-suffering over you. He wants the blessing to be rich, and full, and sure; give Him time, while you cry day and night. Only remember the word: 'I say unto you, He will avenge them speedily.'

The blessing of such persevering prayer is unspeakable. There is nothing so heart-searching as the prayer of faith. It teaches you to discover and confess, and give up everything that hinders the coming of the blessing; everything there may be not in accordance with the Father's will. It leads to closer fellowship with Him who alone can teach to pray, to a more entire surrender to draw nigh under no covering but that of the blood, and the Spirit. It calls to a closer and more simple abiding in Christ alone. Christian! give God time. He will perfect that which concerneth you. 'Long-suffering—speedily,' this is God's watchword as you enter the gates of prayer: be it yours too.

Let it be thus whether you pray for yourself, or for others. All labour, bodily or mental, needs time and effort: we must give up ourselves to it. Nature discovers her secrets and yields her treasures only to diligent and thoughtful labour. However little we can understand it, in the spiritual husbandry it is the same: the seed we sow in the soil of heaven, the efforts we put forth, and the influence we seek to exert in the world above, need our whole being: we must give ourselves to prayer. But let us hold fast the great confidence, that in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

And let us specially learn the lesson as we pray for the Church of Christ. She is indeed as the poor widow, in the absence of her Lord, apparently at the mercy of her adversary, helpless to obtain redress. Let us, when we pray for His Church or any portion of it, under the power of the world, asking Him to visit her with the mighty workings of His Spirit and to prepare her for His coming, let us pray in the assured faith: prayer does help, praying always and not fainting will bring the answer. Only give God time. And then keep crying day and night. 'Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry to Him day and night, and He is long-suffering over them. I say unto you, He will avenge them speedily.'

'LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY.'

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O Lord my God! teach me now to know Thy way, and in faith to apprehend what Thy Beloved Son has taught: 'He will avenge them speedily.' Let Thy tender love, and the delight Thou hast in hearing and blessing Thy children, lead me implicitly to accept Thy promise, that we receive what we believe, that we have the petitions we ask, and that the answer will in due time be seen. Lord! we understand the seasons in nature, and know to wait with patience for the fruit we long for—O fill us with the assurance that not one moment longer than is needed wilt Thou delay, and that faith will hasten the answer.

Blessed Master! Thou hast said that it is a sign of God's elect that they cry day and night. O teach us to understand this. Thou knowest how speedily we grow faint and weary. It is as if the Divine Majesty is so much beyond the need or the reach of continued supplication, that it does not become us to be too importunate. O Lord! do teach me how real the labour of prayer is. I know how here on earth, when I have failed in an undertaking, I can often succeed by renewed and more continuing effort, by giving more time and thought: show me how, by giving myself more entirely to prayer, to live in prayer, I shall obtain what I ask. And above all, O my blessed Teacher! Author and perfecter of faith, let by Thy grace my whole life be one of faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me—in whom my prayer gains acceptance, in whom I have the assurance of the answer, in whom the answer will be mine. Lord Jesus! in this faith I will pray always and not faint. Amen.

NOTE

The need of persevering importunate prayer appears to some to be at variance with the faith which knows that it has received what it asks (Mark xi. 24). One of the mysteries of the Divine life is the harmony between the gradual and the sudden, immediate full possession, and slow imperfect appropriation. And so here persevering prayer appears to be the school in which the soul is strengthened for the boldness of faith. And with the diversity of operations of the Spirit there may be some in whom faith takes more the form of persistent waiting; while to others, triumphant thanksgiving appears the only proper expressions of the assurance of having been heard.

In a remarkable way the need of persevering prayer, and the gradual rising into greater ease in obtaining answer, is illustrated in the life of Blumhardt. Complaints had been lodged against him of neglecting his work as a minister of the gospel, and devoting himself to the healing of the sick; and especially his unauthorized healing of the sick belonging to other congregations. In his defense he writes: "I simply ventured to do what becomes one who has the charge of souls, and to pray according to the command of the Lord in James i. 6, 7. In no way did I trust to my own power, or imagine that I had any gift that others had not. But this is true, I set myself to the work as a minister of the gospel, who has a right to pray. But I speedily discovered that the gates of heaven were not fully opened to me. Often I was inclined to retire in despair. But the sight of the sick ones, who could find help nowhere, gave me no rest. I thought of the word of the Lord: "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Luke xi. 9, 10). And farther, I thought that if the Church and her ministers had, through unbelief, sloth, and disobedience lost what was needed for overcoming of the power of Satan, it was just for such times of leanness and famine that the Lord had spoken the parable of the friend at midnight and his three loaves. I felt that I was not worthy thus at midnight, in a time of great darkness, to appear before God as His friend and ask for a member of my congregation what he needed. And yet, to leave him uncared for, I could not either. And so I kept knocking, as the parable directs, or, as some have said, with great presumption and tempting God. Be this as it may, I could not leave my guest unprovided. At this time the parable of the widow became very precious to me. I saw that the Church was the widow, and I was a minister of the Church. I had the right to be her mouthpiece against the adversary; but for a long time the Lord would not. I asked nothing more than the three loaves; what I needed for my guest. At last the Lord listened to the importunate beggar, and helped me. Was it wrong of me to pray thus? The two parables must surely be applicable somewhere, and where was greater need to be conceived?

And what was the fruit of my prayer? The friend who was at first unwilling, did not say, Go now; I will myself give to your friend what he needs; I do not require you; but gave it to me as His friend, to give to my guest. And so I used the three loaves, and had to spare. But the supply was small, and new guests came; because they saw I had a heart to help them, and that I would take the trouble even at midnight to go to my friend. When I asked for them, too, I got the needful again, and there was again to spare. How could I help that the needy continually came to my house? Was I to harden myself, and say, What do you come to me? there are large and better homes in the city, go there. Their answer was, Dear sir, we cannot go there. We have been there: they were very sorry to send us away so hungry, but they could not undertake to go and ask a friend for what we wanted. Do go, and get us bread for we suffer great pain. What could I do? They spoke the truth, and their suffering touched my heart. However much labour it cost me, I went each time again, and got the three loaves. Often I got what I asked much quicker than at first, and also much more abundantly. But all did not care for this

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bread, so some left my home hungry.Â¹

In his first struggles with the evil spirits, it took him more than eighteen months of prayer and labour before the final victory was gained. Afterwards he had such ease of access to the throne, and stood in such close communication with the unseen world, that often, with letters came asking prayer for sick people, he could, after just looking upward for a single moment, obtain the answer as to whether they would be healed.

¹From Johann Christophe Blumhardt, Ein Lebenabild von F. Etindel.