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"Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" Matthew 7:9

The illustration of prayer that Our Lord uses here is that of a good child asking for a good thing. We talk about prayer as if God heard us irrespective of the fact of our relationship to Him (cf. Matthew 5:45). Never say it is not God's will to give you what you ask, don't sit down and faint, but find out the reason, turn up the index. Are you rightly related to your wife, to your husband, to your children, to your fellow-students - are you a "good child" there? "O Lord, I have been irritable and cross, but I do want spiritual blessing." You cannot have it, you will have to do without until you come into the attitude of a good child.

We mistake defiance for devotion; arguing with God for abandonment. We will not look at the index. Have I been asking God to give me money for something I want when there is something I have not paid for? Have I been asking God for liberty while I am withholding it from someone who belongs to me? I have not forgiven someone his trespasses; I have not been kind to him; I have not been living as God's child among my relatives and friends. (v.12.)

I am a child of God only by regeneration, and as a child of God I am good only as I walk in the light. Prayer with most of us is turned into pious platitude, it is a matter of emotion, mystical communion with God. Spiritually we are all good at producing fogs. If we turn up the index, we will see very clearly what is wrong - that friendship, that debt, that temper of mind. It is no use praying unless we are living as children of God. Then, Jesus says - "Everyone that asketh receiveth."