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NEW LESSONS IN GOD'S SCHOOL OF PRAYER

*At the close of these details (with reference to the year from Dec. 9, 1839, to Dec. 9, 1840)
I make a few remarks in connexion with them.*

1. Though our trials of faith during this year also have been many, and recurring more frequently than during any previous year, and though we have been often reduced to the greatest extremity; yet the Orphans have lacked nothing; for they have always had good nourishing food, and the necessary articles of clothing, etc.

2. Should it be supposed by any one in reading the plain details of our trials of faith during this year, that on account of them we have been disappointed in our expectations, or are discouraged in the work, my answer is, that the very reverse is the fact. Such days were expected from the commencement of the work; nay, more than this, the chief end for which the Institution was established is, that the Church of Christ at large might be benefited by seeing manifestly the hand of God stretched out on our behalf in the hour of need, in answer to prayer. Our desire, therefore, is not that we may be without trials of faith, but that the Lord graciously would be pleased to support us in the trial, that we may not dishonour him by distrust.

3. This way of living brings the Lord remarkably near. He is, as it were, morning by morning inspecting our stores, that accordingly he may send help. Greater and more manifest nearness of the Lord's presence I have never had, than when after breakfast there were no means for dinner, and then the Lord provided the dinner for more than one hundred persons; or when, after dinner, there were no means for the tea, and yet the Lord provided the tea; and all this without one single human being having been informed about our need. This moreover I add, that although we, who have been eye witnesses of these gracious interpositions of our Father, have not been so benefited by them as we might and ought to have been, yet we have in some measure derived blessings from them. One thing is certain, that we are not tired of doing the Lord's work in this way.

4. It has been more than once observed, that such a way of living must lead the mind continually to think whence food, clothes, etc., are to come, and so unfit for spiritual exercises. Now, in the first place, I answer, that our minds are very little tried about the necessaries of life, just because the care respecting them is laid upon our Father, who, because

we are his children, not only allows us to do so, but will have us to do so. Secondly, it must be remembered, that, even if our minds were much tried about the supplies for the children, and the means for the other work, yet, because we look to the Lord alone for these things, we should only be brought, by our sense of need, into the presence of our Father, for the supply of it; and that is a blessing, and no injury to the soul. Thirdly, our souls realize that for the glory of God and for the benefit of the church at large, it is that we have these trials of faith, and that leads again to God, to ask him for fresh supplies of grace, to be enabled to be faithful in this service.

5. My heart's desire and prayer to God is, that all believers, who read this, may by these many answers to prayer be encouraged to pray, particularly as it regards the conversion of their friends and relations, their own state of heart, the state of the Church at large, and the success of the preaching of the gospel. Do not think, dear reader, that these things are peculiar to us, and cannot be enjoyed by all the saints. Although every child of God is not called by the Lord to establish Schools and Orphan-Houses, and to trust in the Lord for means for them; yet there is nothing on the part of the Lord to hinder, why you may not know by experience, far more abundantly than we do now, his willingness to answer the prayers of his children. Do but prove the faithfulness of God. Do but carry your every want to him. Only maintain an upright heart. But if you live in sin; if you wilfully and habitually do things, respecting which you know that they are contrary to the will of God, then you cannot expect to be heard by him. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer." Psalm 66:18, 19.

6. As it regards the children of God, who by the labour of their hands, or in any business or profession, earn their bread, particularly the poorer classes of them, I give my affectionate yet solemn advice, to carry into practice the principles on which this Institution is conducted, as it regards not going into debt. Are you in debt? then make confession of sin respecting it. Sincerely confess to the Lord that you have sinned against Rom. 13:8. And if you are resolved no more to contract debt, whatever may be the result, and you are waiting on the Lord, and truly trust in him, your present debts will soon be paid. Are you out of debt? then whatever your future want may be, be resolved, in the strength of Jesus, rather to suffer the greatest privation, whilst waiting upon God for help, than to use unscriptural means, such as borrowing, taking goods on credit, etc., to deliver yourselves. This way needs but to be tried, in order that its excellency may be enjoyed.

Müller, George. A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller. Vol. 1. London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1860. Print.

What is prayer? (In your own words as well as the definition found in the Shorter Catechism Baptist Version)

Being known as a man of prayer, George Müller routinely received inquiries from others about prayer and the provision of God. Pierson notes that a particular question of unbelief was often among such inquiries: “*From time to time he met those to whom his courageous, childlike trust in God was a mystery; and occasionally unbelief’s secret misgivings found a voice in the question, what he would do if God did not send help! What, if a meal-time actually came with no food, and no money to procure it; or if clothing were worn out, and nothing to replace it?*”

How did Müller answer such questions?

Despite the fact that failure on God’s part is inconceivable, Müller never neglected the proper use of means. This included the acknowledgment that while we are to take every matter to God, we must take heed how we come. Pierson summarizes five grand conditions of prevailing prayer that were always before Müller’s mind:

1. *Entire dependence upon the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only ground of any claim for blessing. (See John 14:13, 14; 15:16, etc.)*
2. *Separation from all known sin. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us, for it would be sanctioning sin. (Psalm 66:18.)*
3. *Faith in God’s word of promise as confirmed by His oath. Not to believe Him is to make Him both a liar and a perjurer. (Hebrews 11:6; 6:13–20.)*
4. *Asking in accordance with His will. Our motives must be godly: we must not seek any gift of God to consume it upon our own lusts. (1 John 5:13; James 4:3.)*
5. *Importunity in supplication. There must be waiting on God and waiting for God, as the husbandman has long patience to wait for the harvest. (James 5:7; Luke 18:1–10.)*

To which phrase of our definition of prayer does the first condition most directly relate? How so?

What is the process through which we pursue condition 2? What definition have we developed for that activity?

When we see mention of God's oath, what other act of God ought we to recall?

What attribute of God would we be denying if we did not believe Him?

What does it mean to ask "in accordance with His will"? How does that relate to our definition of prayer?

What does "importunity" mean in the context of supplication?

What common feature follows each of these conditions in Pierson's summary? Why is that significant?

Why are these “*not arbitrary limitations affixed to prayer by a despotic will*”?

In what way are they necessitated by God’s character/attributes?

Pierson at this point notes that “*for the purpose of persuasion the most effective figure of speech is repetition,*” and that for that reason Müller “*hesitated at no frequency of restatement by which such truths might find root in the minds and hearts of others.*”

First from memory, then using aids as necessary, list the 10 Spiritual Disciplines.

Now list the 10 Marks of a Healthy Church Member in similar fashion.

Why is repetition so necessary?

Won’t studying these same things over and over end up being a waste of time as new methods of discipleship come out? Why or why not?

It is in this vein that Pierson observes, “*There has never been a saint, from Abel’s day to our own, who has not been taught the same essential lessons. All prayer which has ever brought down blessing has prevailed by the same law of success.*” What is that law of success?

How can this truth be a comfort to us today?

This truth is one that Müller often felt the need to impress upon others:

And lastly, once more, let not Satan deceive you in making you think that you could not have the same faith, but that it is only for persons who are situated as I am. When I lose such a thing as a key, I ask the Lord to direct me to it, and I look for an answer to my prayer; when a person with whom I have made an appointment does not come, according to the fixed time, and I begin to be inconvenienced by it, I ask the Lord to be pleased to hasten him to me, and I look for an answer; when I do not understand a passage of the word of God, I lift up my heart to the Lord, that he would be pleased, by his holy Spirit, to instruct me, and I expect to be taught, though I do not fix the time when, and the manner how it should be; when I am going to minister in the word, I seek help from the Lord, and while I in the consciousness of natural inability as well as utter unworthiness, begin this his service, I am not cast down, but of good cheer, because I look for his assistance, and believe that he, for his dear Son’s sake, will help me. And thus in other of my temporal and spiritual concerns I pray to the Lord, and expect an answer to my requests; and may not you do the same, dear believing reader? Oh! I beseech you, do not think me an extraordinary believer, having privileges above other of God’s dear children, which they cannot have; nor look on my way of acting as something that would not do for other believers. Make but trial! Do but stand still in the hour of trial, and you will see the help of God, if you trust in him. But there is so often a forsaking the ways of the Lord in the hour of trial, and thus the food of faith, the means whereby our faith may be increased, is lost.

Müller, George. *A Narrative of Some of the Lord’s Dealings with George Müller*. Vol. 1. London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1860. Print.

One last truth should be noted with regards to prayer at this point. Müller states that truth as he had learned in May of 1841:

While I was staying at Nailsworth, it pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, irrespective of human instrumentality, as far as I know, the benefit of which I have not lost, though now, while preparing the sixth edition for the press, more than eighteen years have since passed away. The point is this; I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my

soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished. For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit. Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer, after having dressed myself in the morning. Now I saw, that the most important thing I had to do was, to give myself to the reading of the word of God and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, by means of the word of God? whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon his precious word, was, to begin to meditate on the word of God, searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon; but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication: so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer. When thus I have been for awhile making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me, that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened, and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart. Thus also the Lord is pleased to communicate unto me that, which either very soon after, or at a later time, I have found to become food for other believers, though it was not for the sake of the public ministry of the word that I gave myself to meditation, but for the profit of my own inner man. With this mode I have likewise combined the being out in the open air for an hour, an hour and a half, or two hours before breakfast, walking about in the fields, and in the summer sitting for a little on the stiles, if I find it too much to walk all the time.* I find it very beneficial to my health to walk thus for meditation before breakfast, and am now so in the habit of using the time for that purpose, that when I get into the open air, I generally take out a New Testament of good sized type, which I carry with me for that purpose, besides my Bible: and I find that I can profitably spend my time in the open air, which formerly was not the case, for want of habit. I used to consider the time spent in walking a loss, but now I find it very profitable, not only to my body, but also to my soul. The walking out before breakfast is of course not necessarily connected with this matter, and every one has to judge according to his strength and other circumstances.—The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this. Formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer, except when I felt my soul to be more than usually barren, in which case I read the word of God for food, or for refreshment, or for a revival and renewal of my inner man, before I gave myself to prayer. But what was the result. I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour on my knees, before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then began really to pray. I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father, and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it!) about the things that he has brought before me in his precious word. It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point. In no book did I ever read about it. No public ministry ever brought the matter before me. No private intercourse with a brother stirred me up to this matter. And yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as any thing, that the first

thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is, to obtain food for his inner man. As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time, except we take food; and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning; so it should be with the inner man. We should take food for that, as every one must allow. Now what is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God; and here again not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts. When we pray, we speak to God. Now, prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season, therefore, when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed, is, after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us. We may therefore profitably meditate, with God's blessing, though we are ever so weak spiritually; nay, the weaker we are, the more we need meditation for the strengthening of our inner man. There is thus far less to be feared from wandering of mind, than if we give ourselves to prayer, without having had previously time for meditation.—I dwell so particularly on this point because of the immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself, and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow-believers to ponder this matter. By the blessing of God I ascribe to this mode the help and strength which I have had from God to pass in peace through deeper trials in various ways, than I had ever had before; and after having now above eighteen years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it.—In addition to this, I generally read after family prayer larger portions of the word of God, when I still pursue my practice of reading regularly onward in the Holy Scriptures, sometimes in the New Testament and sometimes in the Old, and for more than thirty years I have proved the blessedness of it. I take also either then or at other parts of the day, time more especially for prayer.

How different, when the soul is refreshed and made happy early in the morning, from what it is when, without spiritual preparation, the service, the trials, and the temptations of the day come upon one!

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NEXT LESSON:

FOLLOWING THE PILLAR OF GOD AND FIRE

At the end of May, 1843, I entered upon a remarkable part of my life, upon which I must dwell somewhat at length, especially as it will, by God's blessing, still further show the Reader the preciousness of depending upon God for every thing.

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