

The
BIBLE AND THE CLOSET
OR
HOW WE MAY READ THE SCRIPTURES WITH
THE MOST SPIRITUAL PROFIT,
BY REV. THOMAS WATSON;
AND
SECRET PRAYER SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED,
BY REV. SAMUEL LEE;
Ministers Ejected in 1662.
EDITED BY
JOHN OVERTON CHOULES.
WITH A RECOMMENDATORY LETTER FROM
REV. E. N. KIRK.
BOSTON
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PREFACE.

It is a proper ground for regret, that a people who owe their origin, social habits, religious privileges and national character, to the Puritans and Non-conformists of England, should manifest so little interest and curiosity, in regard to the names, persons, manners, sufferings, and writings, of their ancestry, as appears to be the case at present in the United States. The members of the churches properly attached to the doctrines of the Non-conformists, do not have that lively impression of gratitude and obligation to the struggles of the Puritans, which should characterize men who enjoy inestimable blessings, purchased by cruel bonds, far exilements, and bloody death. The young are almost ignorant of the church history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and when they do hear of the Puritans, it is probably from some infidel novelist or historian, who describes them as uncouth, sour, ignorant fanatics, or from the bigoted representations of half-popish ecclesiastics, who seem to regard amputation from Rome as a severe affliction.

The ordinations of the ministers in Congregational, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches usually take place without any reference to the distinctive principles for which our fathers contended, and which are now challenged and ridiculed by men who call Hampden¹ and Pym² traitors, Archbishop Laud³ a saint, and Charles I.⁴ a blessed martyr. The con-

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sequence is, that our young people suppose these things are unimportant; and while they hear them assailed by fashionable and popular preachers, and no refutation is offered, they naturally fear that we have a poor cause. It has become a common thing with a certain clique of the press and pulpit, to deny piety, sound theology and literature to the Non-conformists.⁵ It is high time that the incomparable works of these men be made known to our churches, and they will appear an ample testimonial to their worth. It is probable that history cannot afford in any age or country a body of clergymen equal in virtue, talent, and aptness to teach, with that ejected from the Church of England by the act of uniformity passed by Charles, in 1662. The world was called to witness the reality of religious principle, when more than two thousand ministers, described by John Locke as “worthy, learned, pious, orthodox divines,” sacrificed their all, rather than injure their consciences and desert the cause of civil and religious liberty. The celebrated Harvey observes: “I esteem the Puritans as some of the most zealous Christians that ever appeared in our land, to settle faith on its proper basis — the meritorious righteousness of Christ; to deduce obedience from its true origin — the love of God shed abroad in the heart; to search the conscience and convince the judgment; to awaken the lethargic and comfort the afflicted soul, with a thorough knowledge joined to a masterly application of the divine word. These are real excellences: these entered into the preaching; these, if we examine impartially, are to be found in the

¹ John Hampden (ca. 1595–1643) When the English Civil War began, he was appointed a member of the committee for safety, and levied a regiment of Buckinghamshire men for the parliamentary cause against the tyranny of the Catholic crown (Charles I).

² John Pym, (1584-1643) Leader of the political opposition to Charles I in the Long Parliament, and primary architect of Parliament’s victory in the First English Civil War.

³ William Laud (1573–1645) Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633 to 1645. He opposed Puritanism, persecuting the Puritans with the *Act of Uniformity*, using it to eject them from their pulpits in 1662 (“The Great Ejection”).

⁴ Charles believed he had a divine right (license) to rule, and not just a divine appointment. Many of his English subjects opposed his interference in the churches, and levying taxes on them without parliamentary consent.

⁵ Those who would not *conform* to the *Act of Uniformity* which imposed Roman Catholic theology and practice on the Protestant churches.

writings of the Puritans.” Whitfield bears the same testimony: “The Puritans of the last century, burning and shining lights, wrote and preached after they were cast out of the church, as men having authority; a peculiar unction attends their writings to this day; and for these thirty years past I have remarked that the more the true and vital religion has revived at home and abroad, the more the good old puritanical writings have been called for.”

Brown of Haddington, in his general history, has the following remarks: “Never perhaps, since the apostolic age, was the Christian system better understood than by the British divines under Cromwell.” “The Puritans,” says Robert Hall, “are unquestionably the safest of all uninspired guides. The masculine sense, the profound learning, the rich and unequalled unction of the fathers of the modern church, exert a powerful influence on the mind, and greatly contribute to form and mature the characters of men.”

Mr. Erskine very finely observes: “This class of men, in respect of character and services, are universally venerated. By their sufferings and labors they rescued the key of knowledge from the unworthy hands in which it had long lain rusted, and been misused, and generously left it as a rich inheritance to all coming generations. They speak with the solemn dignity of martyrs; deep and solemn seriousness is the common character of them all. They seem to have felt much; religion was not allowed to remain an unused theory in their heads; they were forced to live upon it as their

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food; to live upon it as their only strength and comfort; hence their thoughts are never given as abstract views. These venerable worthies do not merely give us ideas, but ideas colored by deep affections. This gives us a great interest in their writings. They are real men, and not books we are conversing with. These were the great men of England; they were indeed a noble army.”

It is proposed to publish, in uniform style, and in close succession, a selection of the writings of the Puritans and Non-conformists, who were ejected from the Church of England in 1662. Let it appear if they were not of a kindred spirit to those martyrs recorded in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and of whom the Spirit of God testifies that they were men “of whom the world was not worthy.” Every volume will be complete in itself and it is designed to render the publication not only profitable to the private Christian as a guide to his devotions, but useful to the clergy, by introducing them to works which, from their exceeding scarceness, can hardly be procured in England. As far as practicable, there will be biographical notices of the authors affixed to each reprint; for to allow the memory of such men to die, is injurious to posterity. The reader is earnestly entreated to consult the texts which are so freely quoted; he will find it a delightful task, and with God’s blessing upon it he will become “mighty in the Scriptures.”

JNO. OVERTON CHOULES.

May, 1842.

RECOMMENDATORY LETTER

FROM THE

REV. E. N. KIRK.

University Place, New York.

My Dear Brother Choules:

Your proposal to republish the "Morning Lectures," in detached portions and a cheap form, I may say delights me. This class of publications may supply the most striking deficiency in the practical religious literature of our day. It was the defect of our fathers, that they thought efficiently without efficient action. It is ours, that action, though rarely excessive, is yet generally disproportioned to thought. The problem of the age is, to unite profound biblical thought with intense and judicious action. Now it is true that we cannot think by proxy; but it is also true, in every department of knowledge, that others

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can furnish us the richest material of thought, and enable us, as it were, almost to commence where they left off. There are rich veins of scriptural illustration and of religious sentiment, buried in the tomes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it is a good service to the church of the nineteenth century to reopen those mines. Our neophytes need it, and our ministerial corps may find models which can be most profitably imitated in some points. The American pulpit is probably the most efficient in the world, in the great work of conversion. But we fail just where the Mantons, the Howes, the Owens, the Godwins excelled: in "edifying the body of Christ." May the Master approve and bless your work.

Your fellow-servant,

EDW. N. KIRK.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

*The Rev. Thomas Watson, A. M., of Emanuel College, Cambridge,
and Minister of St. Stephen's Church, Walbrook.*

Of the early life of Mr. Watson, there are not many traces. It is said that he was a hard student. Richard Baxter, in his own history, edited by Sylvester, says, p. 95, part 3: "Mr. Watson is so well known for his ability and piety, that I need not describe him." There is an interesting anecdote respecting his pulpit performances. Once on a public lecture, in London, the learned Bishop Richardson came in to hear him, and

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was much pleased with the sermon, and especially with the prayer after it; so that he called on him at his house, to return him thanks and ask for a copy of it. "Alas," said Mr. Watson, "that is what I cannot give, for I do not pen my prayers. It was not a studied theory, but uttered as God enabled me, from the abundance of my heart and affections." The good Bishop was surprised that any man could pray in that manner extempore. Mr. Watson, after his ejection, continued to preach in London, as Providence opened a door.

It is worthy of note that he was one of the party arrested by the Rump parliament, on the charge of treason, for assisting the royal cause in Scotland. Mr. Christopher Love was beheaded on Tower hill. Mr. Jenkin, the famous commentator on Jude, died in prison. Mr. Watson deserved a better treatment

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from Charles than he received. This fact is only a solitary one, while a mass may be collected, to prove that the overturn of the monarchy was not the work of Puritan ministers alone — very many of whom were attached to the royal family, and bitterly regretted the death of Charles; and a remonstrance signed by sixty-nine of the leading ministers was addressed to Cromwell, to prevent that tragedy. (See Bennett's Memorial, p. 227.) In the admirable collection of "Farewell Sermons," there are three by Mr. Watson, in which he exemplifies much of the spirit of the gospel, in recommending love to enemies. In one of the discourses he insists largely on "the ardent affections of a right gospel minister towards his people."

Mr. Watson is best known at the present day by his folio volume of one hundred and

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seventy-six sermons on the Assembly's Catechism, recommended by Dr. Bales, Mr. Howe and others. His popularity as a preacher kept him constantly engaged. At length nature gave way, and he retired into Essex, and there was found dead in his closet at prayer.

HOW WE MAY READ THE SCRIPTURES WITH THE MOST SPIRITUAL PROFIT.

BY REV. THOMAS WATSON

“And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this Law and to do these Statutes.” — Deut. 17.19.

What Cicero said of Aristotle’s politics, may not unfittingly be said of this book of Deuteronomy, it is full of golden eloquence. In this chapter, God instructs the Jews about setting a king over them, and there are two things specified, as to his election, and his religion.

1. His election, verse 15. “You shall in any way set him king over you, whom the Lord your God shall choose.” There is good reason that God should have the choice of their king, since “by him kings reign.” Prov. 8.15.

2. His religion, verse 18. “When he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priest.” Here

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was a good beginning of a king’s reign; the first thing he did after he sat upon the throne, was to copy out the word of God in a book. And in the text, “It shall be with him, and he shall read it, all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this Law and to do these Statutes.” “It shall be with him.” The Book of the Law shall be his *Vade Mecum*, or daily companion. Charles the Great used to set his crown upon the Bible. Indeed the Bible is the best support of government. “And he shall read it.” It is not below the majesty of a prince to peruse the oracles of Heaven; in them are comprised sacred apothegms, Prov. 8.6: “I will speak of excellent things.” In the Septuagint it is “grave things,” in the Hebrew, “princely things,” such as are fit for a God to speak and a king to read. Nor must the king only read the Book of the Law at his first installment into his kingdom, but he “shall read it all the days of his life.” He must not leave off reading, till he has left off reigning. And the reasons why he must be conversant in the law of God, are in the subsequent words: 1. “That he may

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learn to fear the Lord his God.” Reading the word is the best means to usher in the fear of the Lord, 2. “That he may keep all the words of this Law, to do them.” 3. “That he may prolong his days in his kingdom.”

I shall now confine myself to these words, “He shall read it all the days of his life;” i. e. the Book of the Law.

The Holy Scripture is, as Austin¹ says, a golden epistle sent to us from God. This is to be read diligently; ignorance of Scripture is the mother of error, not of devotion. Matt, 22.29: “You err, not knowing the Scriptures.” We are commanded to “search the Scriptures.” John 5.39. The Greek word signifies to search as for a vein of silver. How diligently does a child read over his father’s will and testament! and a citizen peruse his charter! With like diligence we should read God’s word, which is our Magna Charta for Heaven. It is a mercy that the Bible is not

¹ Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430).

prohibited. Trajan the emperor forbade the Jews to read in the Book of the Law. Let us inquire at this sacred oracle. Apollos was “mighty in the Scriptures.” Acts 18.24. Melancthon,

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when he was young, sucked the sincere milk of the word. Alphonsus, King of Arragon, read over the Bible fourteen times. That Roman Lady, Cecilia, had by much reading of the word, made her heart the Library of Christ, as Jerome relates. Were the Scriptures confined to the original tongues, many would plead an excuse for not reading; but when the sword of the Spirit is unsheathed, and the word is made plain to us by being translated, what should hinder us from a diligent search into these holy mysteries?

Adam was forbidden upon pain of death to taste of the tree of knowledge. Gen. 2.17: “In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.” But there is no danger of touching this tree of Holy Scripture; if we do *not* eat of *this* tree of knowledge we shall surely die. What will become of those who are strangers to the Scriptures? Hosea 8.12: “I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were considered as a strange thing.” Many lay aside the Scriptures like rusty armor. Jer. 8.9. “They are better-read in romances than in Paul; they spend many hours between the comb and the glass, but their eyes begin to be sore

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when they look at a Bible.” Even the Turks will rise up in judgment against these Christians. The Turks reverence the Books of Moses; and if they find just a leaf on which anything of the Pentateuch is written, they take it up and kiss it. Those who slight the written word, slight God himself, whose stamp it bears. To slight the king’s edict is an affront to the person of the king. Those who reject and vilify the Scriptures are in a state of condemnation. Prov. 13.13: “Whoever despises the word shall be destroyed.” Nor is it enough to read the word of God, but it should be our care to get some spiritual reward and profit by it, so that our souls may be nourished in the words of faith. 1Tim. 4.6. Why else was the Scripture written but that it might profit us? God did not give us his word only as a landscape to look at, but he delivered it as a father delivers a stock of money to his son to improve on it. ‘Tis sad not to profit by the word, to be like the body in consumption, that does not thrive. Men would be loath to trade and get no profit. The grand question I am to speak to is this. How we may read the Scriptures with the

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most spiritual profit. In answering this question, I shall lay down several rules or directions about the reading of Scripture.

1. If you would profit by reading, *remove those things that will hinder your profiting*. That the body may thrive, obstructions must be removed. There are three obstructions that must be removed if you would profit by Scripture.

1. Remove the love of every sin. Let a physician prescribe ever so good recipes, if the patient takes poison, it will hinder the virtue and operation of the medicine. The Scripture prescribes excellent recipes, but sin that is lived in, poisons all. The body cannot thrive in a fever, nor can the soul thrive under the feverish heat of lust. Plato calls the love of sin *magnus daemon*, a great devil. As the rose is destroyed by the canker¹ which breeds in it, so are the souls of men destroyed by those sins in which they indulge.

¹ That is, *fungus*.

2. Take heed of those thorns which will choke the word that is read. These thorns our Saviour expounds to be the cares of this world. Matt. 13.22. By “cares” is meant *covetousness*. A covetous man has such diversity of secular employment that he can scarcely find time to read, or if he does, what errors does he commit

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in reading? While his eye is upon the Bible, his heart is upon the world; it is not the writings of the Apostles that he is so much taken up with, as the writing in his account books. Is this man likely to profit? You may as soon extract oil and syrup out of a flint, as for him to have any real benefit out of Scripture.

3. Take heed against jesting with Scripture; this is playing with fire. Some cannot be merry unless they make bold with God; when they are sad, they bring forth the Scripture as their harp to drive away the evil spirit, like a drunkard who having emptied his cups, calls to his fellows, “Give us your oil, for our lamps have gone out.” In the fear of God, beware of this. King Edward IV would not allow his crown to be jested with, but executed anyone who said *he would make his son heir to the Crown*, meaning the sign of the Crown on his tavern. Much less will God allow us to jest with his word. Eusebius relates about someone who took a piece of Scripture to jest with, that God struck him with panic. The Lord may justly give over such persons to a reprobate mind. Rom. 1.23.

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2. If you would profit, ***prepare your hearts for reading the word***; the heart is an instrument that needs to be tuned. 1Sam 7.3: “Prepare your hearts to the Lord.” The heathen, as Plutarch notes, thought it was indecent to be too hasty or rash in the service of their supposed deities. This preparation for reading consists in two things:

1. In summoning our thoughts together to attend to that solemn work we are about to do. Our thoughts are stragglers; therefore rally them together.

2. In purging those unclean affections which indispose us to reading. Before we come to the water of life, let us cast away the poison of impure affections. Many come rashly to the reading of the word; it is no wonder that if they come without *preparation*, they go away without *profit*.

3. ***Read the Scriptures with reverence***; think about every line you read; God is speaking to you. The ark in which the law was put, was overlaid with pure gold, and was carried on bars, so that the Levites might not touch it. Ex. 25, Why was this if not to breed in the people a reverence for the law? When Ehud told Eglon he had a message for him

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from God, Eglon arose from his throne. Judges 3.20, The written word is a message from Jehovah; we should receive it with that veneration.

4. ***Read the books of Scripture in order***. Though circumstances may sometimes divert our method, yet, for a *constant* course, it is best to observe an order in reading. Order is a help to memory. We do not begin to read a friend’s letter in the middle.

5. ***Get a right understanding of Scripture***. Psalm 119.73: “Give me understanding, that I may learn your commandments.” Though there are some knots in Scripture which are not easily

untied, yet the Holy Ghost has plainly pointed out to us things essential to salvation. The knowledge of the sense of the Scriptures is the first step to profit. In the Law, Aaron was first to light the lamps, and then to burn the incense; the lamp of the understanding must first be lighted before the affections can be inflamed. Get what knowledge you can by comparing scriptures, by conferring with others, and by using the best annotators.¹ Without knowledge, the Scripture is a sealed book; every line is too high for us; and if the word shoots above our head, it can never hit our heart.

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6. Read the word with seriousness. If one goes over the Scripture cursorily, says Erasmus, there is little good to be got by it; but if he is serious in reading it, it is the savor of life; and we may well be serious if we consider the importance of those truths which are bound up in this sacred volume. Deut. 32.47: “It is not a vain thing for you; it is your life.” If a letter were to be opened and read, in which a man’s whole estate were concerned, how serious would he be in reading it? In the Scripture, our salvation is concerned; it addresses the love of Christ, a serious subject. Christ has loved mankind more than the angels that fell. Heb. 2.7. The loadstone, indifferent to gold and pearl, draws the iron to it; thus Christ passed by the angels, who were of more noble extraction, and drew mankind to himself. Christ loved us more than his own life; indeed, though we had a hand in his death, yet he would not leave us out of his will. This is a love that *passes knowledge*; who can read this without seriousness? The Scripture speaks of

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the mystery of faith, the eternal recompenses, and the paucity of those who shall be saved. Matt. 20.16: “Few chosen.” Someone said the names of all the good emperors of Rome might be engraved in a little ring; and there are but (comparatively) few names in the Book of Life. The Scripture speaks of striving for heaven as in an agony. Luke 13.24. It cautions us not to fall short of the promised rest. Heb. 4.1. It describes the horrors of the infernal torments, the worm, and the fire. Mark 9.44. Who can read this and *not* be serious? Some have light, feathery, spirits; they run over the most weighty truths in haste (like Israel who ate the Passover in haste); and so they are not benefited by the word. Read with a solemn, composed spirit. Seriousness is the Christian’s ballast, which keeps him from being overturned with vanity.

7. Labor to remember what you read. Satan would steal the word out of our mind; not that he intends to make use of it himself, but lest *we* should make use of it. The memory should be like the chest in the ark, where the ark was put.² Psa 119.52: “I remembered your judgments of old.”

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Jerome speaks of that religious lady, Paula, that she knew most of the Scriptures by heart; we are bid to have “the word dwell in us.” Col. 3.16, The word is a jewel; it adorns the hidden man, and shall we not remember it? If the word does not stay in the memory, it cannot profit. Some can better remember a piece of news than a line of Scripture; their memories are like those ponds where the frogs live, but the fish die.

8. Meditate upon what you read. Psalm 119.15: “I will meditate on your precepts.” The Hebrew word to meditate, signifies to be *intense* in the mind. In meditation there must be a fixing of the

¹ That is, commentators such as Calvin, Matthew Henry, John Gill, etc.

² Refers to 1Sam 6.4-8; the ark and the chest containing the gold guilt offerings were kept together.

thoughts upon the object. Luke 2:19: “Mary pondered those things.” Meditation is the concoction of Scripture; reading brings a truth into our head, meditation brings it into our heart; reading and meditation, like Castor and Pollux,¹ must appear together. Meditation without reading is erroneous; reading without meditation is barren. The bee sucks the flower, and then works it into the hive, and so turns it into honey. By reading, we suck the flower of the word; and by meditation, we work it into the hive of our mind, and so

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it turns to our profit. Meditation is the bellows of the affection. Psalm 39:3: “While I was musing the fire burned.” The reason we come away so cold from reading the word, is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.

9. Come to the reading of Scripture with humble hearts; acknowledge how unworthy you are that God would reveal himself in his word to you. God’s secrets are with the humble. Pride is an enemy to profiting. It has been said that the ground on which the peacock sits is barren; that heart where pride sits is *really barren*. An arrogant person disdains the counsels of the word, and hates the reproofs: is he likely to profit? James 4:6: “God gives grace to the humble.” The most eminent saints have been of low stature in their own eyes; like the sun at the zenith, they showed least when they were at the highest. David had “more understanding than all his teachers.” Psalm 119:99: but how humble he was. Psalm 22:6: “I am a worm and no man.”

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10. Give credence to the written word; believe it is of God; see the name of God in every line. The Romans, so that they might gain credit for their laws, reported that they were inspired by the gods at Rome. Believe the Scriptures to be divinely inspired. 2Tim. 3:16: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Who but God could reveal the great doctrines of the Trinity, the atonement of Jesus Christ for sinners, and the resurrection? From where would the Scriptures come, if not from God?

1. *Sinners* could not be the authors of Scripture. Would they indite² such holy lines, or inveigh so fiercely against the sins which they love?
2. *Saints* could not be the authors of Scripture; how could it stand with their sanctity to counterfeit God’s name, and put “thus says the Lord,” to a book of their own devising?
3. *Angels* could not be the authors of Scripture. What angel in heaven dares impersonate God, and say, “I am the Lord?”

Believe that the pedigree of Scripture is sacred, and that it comes from the Father of light. The antiquity of Scripture speaks its divinity. No extant human history reaches further than Noah’s flood; but the Scripture addresses things before time. Besides that, the majesty, profundity, purity and harmony of

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¹ In Greek and Roman mythology, Castor and Pollux were twin brothers, together known as the Dioscuri. Castor was the mortal son of Tyndareus, king of Sparta, and Pollux was the divine son of Zeus. In Latin the twins are known as the Gemini. When Castor was killed, Pollux asked Zeus to let him share his own immortality with his twin to keep them together, and they were transformed into the constellation Gemini.

² *Indite*: to produce, compose, or write.

Scripture, show it could be breathed from none but God himself. Add to this the *efficacy* that the written word has upon men's consciences. By reading Scripture, they have been turned into other men, as may be instanced in Austin, Junius, and others. If you were to set a seal upon a piece of marble, and it left a print behind, you would say there was a strange virtue in that seed; so that, when the written word leaves a heavenly print of grace upon the heart, it argues that it is of divine authority. If you were to profit by the word, you must believe it is of God.

Some skeptics question the verity of Scripture. Though they have the articles of religion in their creed, yet they do not have it in their belief. Unbelief enervates¹ the virtue of the word and makes it abortive.² Who will obey truths that he does not believe? Heb. 4.2: "The word did not profit them, not being mixed with faith."

11. Highly prize the Scriptures. Psalm 119.72: "The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver *pieces*." Can someone be proficient in any art if he slights and depreciates it? Prize this book of God above all other books. Gregory calls

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the Bible the heart and soul of God. The Rabbies say that there is a mountain of sense upon every point and tittle of Scripture. Psalm 19.7: "The law of the Lord is perfect." The Scripture is the library of the Holy Ghost; it is a code of divine knowledge, an exact model and platform of religion. The Scripture contains in it the *Credenda*, the things which we are to believe, and the *Agenda*, the things which we are to practise; it is able to make us wise unto salvation. 2Tim. 3.15. The Scripture is the standard of truth, the judge of controversy; it is the pole star to direct us to heaven. The Scripture is the compass by which the rudder of our will is to be steered; it is the field in which Christ, the pearl of price, is hidden; it is a rock of diamond; it is a sacred Collyrium, or eye-salve; it mends the eyes of those who look upon it; it is a spiritual optic glass in which the glory of God is resplendent; it is the panacea, or universal medicine for the soul. The leaves of Scripture are like "the leaves of the tree of life for the healing of the nations." Rev. 22.2. The Scripture is the breeder and feeder of grace. How is the convert born, but by

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"the word of truth?" James 1.18. How does he grow but by "the sincere milk of the word?" 1Peter 2.2. The written word is the book out of which our evidences for heaven are fetched; it is the sea-mark³ which shows us the rocks of sin; it is the antidote against error and apostasy; the two-edged sword which wounds the old serpent. It is our bulwark to withstand the force of lust, like the Capitol at Rome, which was a place of strength and ammunition. The Scripture is the tower of David on which the shields of our faith hang. Take away the word, and you deprive us of the sun, said Luther. The written word is above an angelical embassy, or a voice from heaven. 2 Peter 1.18: "We heard this voice which came from heaven; we also have a more sure word." If Caesar so valued his Commentaries, that in preserving them he lost his purple robe, how should we estimate the sacred oracles of God? Job 23.12: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." King Edward VI, on the day of his coronation, had three swords presented to him, signifying that he was monarch of three

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¹ *Enervate*: To reduce the strength or energy of something; debilitate.

² *Abortive*: Failing to accomplish an intended result.

³ *Seamark*: an elevated object serving as a beacon to mariners of rocky shoals.

kingdoms. The King said there was one sword missing; being asked what that was, he answered, “the Holy Bible, which is the sword of the spirit, and it is to be preferred before all these ensigns of royalty.” Robert, King of Sicily, so prized God’s word that, speaking to his friend Petrarch, he said, “I protest that the Scriptures are dearer to me than my kingdom, and if I must be deprived of one of them, I would rather lose my diadem than the Scriptures.”

12. *Get an ardent love for the word.* Prizing something relates to the judgment; love relates to the affections. Psalm 119.159: “Consider how I love your precepts.” He is likely to grow rich who delights in his trade; a lover of learning will be a scholar. Austin tells us that before his conversion he took no pleasure in the Scriptures, but afterwards they were his delights. David thought the word was sweeter than the honey which drips from the comb. Thomas `a Kempis used to say he found no contentment except in a corner, with the book of God in his hand. Did Alphonsus, King of Sicily, recover from a fit of sickness because of the great pleasure he took in reading Quintus Curtius? ¹ Then what infinite pleasure

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we should take in reading the book of life! There is enough in the word to breed holy satisfaction and delight; it is a specimen and demonstration of God’s holy love for us. The Spirit is God’s love-token; the word is his love letter; and how one rejoices to read over his friend’s letter! The written word is a divine treasury, or store-house. Truth is scattered in it like pearls to adorn the inner man of his heart. The written word is the true manna, which has all sorts of sweet taste in it. It is a sovereign elixir; it gives wine to those with a heavy heart. I have read of an ancient Rabbi, who, in a great concourse of people, proclaimed a sovereign cordial which he had to sell. Many resorted to him and asking him to show it, *he opened the Bible*, and directed them to several places of comfort in it. Holy David drank of this cordial; Psalm 119.50: “This is my comfort in my affliction; for your word has quickened me.” Chrysostom compares the Scripture to a garden; every line in it is a fragrant flower which we should not wear in our pocket but in our heart.

Delight in the word causes profit: and we must not love only the *comforts* of the word, but the *reproofs*. Myrrh is bitter to the palate, but good for the stomach.

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13. *Come to the reading of the word with honest hearts.* Christ speaks of the “honest heart.” Luke 8.15.

What is it to read the word with an honest heart?

1. To come with a heart willing to know the whole counsel of God. A good heart would not have any truth concealed, but says as Job did: “What I do not see, teach me.” When men pick and choose in religion, they will do some things that the word enjoins them from, but not others. These are unsound hearts, and they are not benefited by holy writ. These are like a patient, who having a bitter pill prescribed, and a mint julep, he will take the julep, but he refuses the pill.

2. To read the word with an honest heart is to read that we may be made better by it. The word is the medium and method of sanctification, and we come to it not only to *illuminate* but to *consecrate* ourselves. John 17.17: “Sanctify them through your truth.” Some go to the Bible as

¹ Probably Quintus Curtius Rufus, a 1st century Roman historian who wrote *the Life of Alexander the Great*.

one goes to the garden to pick flowers, i.e. for fine notions. Austin confesses that before his conversion

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he went to hear Ambrose, more for the elegant speech and quaint notions, than for the spirituality of the matter. This is like a woman that paints her face, but neglects her health. But this is to have an honest heart: when we come to the Scriptures as Naaman came to the waters of the Jordan, to be healed of our leprosy. “O,” says the soul, “that the sword of the spirit may pierce the rock of my heart; that this blessed word may have such a virtue in it as the water of jealousy, to kill and make fruitful, that it may kill my sin, and make me fruitful in grace.” Num. 5.27.¹

14. Learn to apply Scripture; take every word as spoken to yourselves. When the word thunders against sin, think this way: God means *my* sins; when it presses any duty, God intends *me* in this word. Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it only concerned those who lived in the time when it was written; but if you intend to profit by the word, then bring it home to yourselves. A medicine will do no good unless it is applied. The saints of old took the word as if it had been spoken to them by name. When king Josiah heard the threatening which was

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written in the book of God, he applied it to himself; he “rent his clothes and humbled his soul before the Lord.” 2 Kings 22.11.

15. Observe the preceptive part of the word, as well as the promissory. The precepts carry duty in them, like the veins which carry the blood; the promises carry comfort in them, like the arteries which carry the spirit. Make use of the *precepts* to direct you, and the *promises* to comfort you. Those who keep their eye on the promise, while neglecting the command, are not edified by Scripture; they look more for comfort than duty. They mistake their comforts, just as Apollo embraced the laurel tree instead of Daphne.² The body may be swelled with wind as well as flesh; a man may be filled with false comfort, as well as that which is genuine and real.

16. Let your thoughts dwell on the passages of Scripture that matter. The bee fastens on those flowers where she may suck the most sweetness. Though the whole context of Scripture is excellent, yet some parts of it may have a greater emphasis, and be more quick and pungent. Reading the names of the tribes, or the

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genealogies of the patriarchs, is not of the same importance as faith and the new creature. Mind the “great things of the law.” Hosea 8.12. Those who read only to satisfy their curiosity, busy themselves, rather than profit themselves. Searching too far into Christ’s *temporal* reign has weakened his *spiritual* reign in some men’s hearts.

¹ Num 5:27 `When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her *and become* bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people.

² In Greek mythology, Apollo insulted the young god Eros for playing with bow and arrows. Eros took two arrows, one gold to incite love, and other lead to incite hatred. He shot Daphne with the lead arrow, and Apollo with the gold. Apollo was seized with love for the beautiful Daphne, but she abhorred him. Apollo chased her everywhere but Daphne fled from him. She asked her father, the River God, to change her form so she could stop running. He transformed her into a laurel tree. Apollo still embraced her branches, but even the branches shrank from him.

17. Compare yourself with the word. See how the Scripture and your hearts agree; how your dial goes with this sun. Are your hearts, as it were, a transcript and a counterpart of Scripture? Is the word copied out into your hearts? The word calls for humility; are you not only *humbled*, but also *humble*? The word calls for regeneration: John 3.7; do you have a change of heart? Is there not only a moral and partial change, but a spiritual change? Is there such a change wrought in you, that it is as if another soul lived in the same body? 1 Cor. 6.11: “Such were some of you, but you are washed, you are sanctified.” The word calls for love toward the saints; 1Peter 1.22. Do you love grace where you see it? Do you love grace in a poor man as well as in a rich man? A son loves to see his father’s picture, though hung in a poor frame.

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Do you love grace even though it is mixed with some failings, just as we love gold even while it is in the ore? Bringing the rule of the word and our hearts together, to see how they agree, would prove very advantageous to us. By this we come to know the true complexion and state of our souls, and we see what evidences and certificates we have for heaven.

18. Take special notice of those Scriptures which speak to your particular case. If a person with consumption¹ were to read Galen or Hippocrates,² he would chiefly observe what they said about consumption. Great regard is to be had to those paragraphs of Scripture which are most appropriate to one’s present case.

I will note three cases: 1. Affliction. 2. Desertion. 3. Sin.

1. Affliction. Has God made your chain heavy? Consult these Scriptures. Heb. 12.7: “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons.” Isaiah 27.9: “By this the iniquity of Jacob shall be purged.” John 16.20: “Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.” 2Cor. 4.17: “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for

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us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” The limner³ lays his gold on dark colors; God first lays the dark color of affliction, and then the golden color of glory.

2. Desertion. Are your spiritual comforts eclipsed? See Isaiah 54.8: “In a little wrath I hid my face from you, for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you.” The sun may hide itself in a cloud, but it is not out of the firmament; God may hide his face, but he is not out of the covenant. Isaiah 57.16: “I will not be always angry, for the spirits would fail before me, and the souls which I have made.” God is like the musician; he will not stretch the strings of his lute too hard, lest they break. Psalm 97.11: “Light is sown for the righteous.” A saint’s comfort may be hidden as seed is hidden under the clods of dirt; but at last it will spring up into a harvest of joy.

3. Sin.

1. Are you drawn away with lust? Read Gal. 5.24; James 1.15; 1Peter 2.11: “Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” Lust kills with embracing. Prov. 7.10, 22, 23; Prov. 22.14: “Go to the waters of the sanctuary to quench the fire of lust.”

¹ That is, tuberculosis or other wasting lung disease.

² Famous physicians of Rome and Greece respectively.

³ An illuminator: a painter who overlays his artwork or portraiture with gold paint, thus gilding it.

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2. Are you under the power of unbelief? Read Isaiah 26.3: “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” Mr. Boltor speaks of a distressed soul who found much comfort from this Scripture on his sick bed. 2 Samuel 22.31: “The word of the Lord is tested; he is a buckler to all that trust in him.” John 3.15: “That whoever believes in him should not perish.” Unbelief is a God-affronting sin. 1John 5.10: “He that does not believe God has made him a liar.” It is a soul-murdering sin. John 3.36: “He that does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Thus, in reading, observe those Scriptures which touch upon your particular case. Although all of the Bible must be read, yet be sure to put a special star upon those texts which point most directly to your condition,.

19. Take special notice of the examples in Scripture; make the examples of others living sermons to you.

1. Observe the examples of God’s judgments upon sinners. They have been hanged up in chains, as a terror. How severely God has punished proud men!

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Nebuchadnezzar was turned to eat grass; Herod was eaten up with vermin. How God has plagued idolaters! Numbers 25.3, 4, 9; 1Kings 14.9, 10. What a swift witness he has been against liars! Acts 5.5, 10. These examples are set up as sea-marks to avoid. 1Cor. 10.11; Jude 7.

2. Observe the examples of God’s mercy to saints. Jeremiah was preserved in the dungeon; the three children in the furnace; Daniel in the lion’s den. These examples are props to our faith, and spurs to holiness.

20. Do not stop reading in the Bible, till you find your hearts warmed. Psalm 119.93: “I will never forget your precepts, for you have made me alive with them.” Read the word not only as a history, but strive to be affected with it. Let it not only *inform* you, but *inflame* you. Jer. 23.29: “Is not my word like a fire?” says the Lord. Do not go from the word till you can say as those disciples said, Luke 24.32: “Did our hearts not burn within us?”

21. Begin the practice of what you read. Psalm 119.66: “I have done your commandments.” A student in medicine does

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not satisfy himself to read over a system or body of medicine, but he begins its practice. The life-blood of religion lies in the practical part. So it is in this text: “He shall read in the book of the law all the days of his life, so that he may learn to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them.” *Christians should be walking Bibles.* Xenophon said many read the laws of Lycurgus,¹ but few observed them. The written word is not only a rule of knowledge, but a rule of obedience; it is not only to mend our sight but to mend our pace. David calls God’s word a “lamp to his feet.” Psalm 119.105. It was not only a light to his eyes to *see* by, but to his feet to *walk* by; by practice we trade the talent of knowledge, and turn it to profit. This is a blessed reading of the Scriptures, when we fly from the sins which the word forbids, and espouse the

¹ Xenophon was a Greek historian of Athens ca. 400 B.C.; Lycurgus was the lawgiver of Sparta ca. 800 B.C., who established the military-oriented reformation of Spartan society. All his reforms were directed towards the three Spartan virtues: equality (among citizens), military fitness, and austerity.

duties which the word commands. *Reading without practice will be but a torch to light men to hell.*

22. Make use of Christ's prophetic office. He is the lion of the tribe of Judah, to whom it is given to open the book of God, and loose its seals. Rev. 5.5.

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Christ so teaches, as he enlivens. John 8.12.¹ The philosopher says, light and heat increase together. It is true here: where Christ comes into the soul with his light, there is the heat of spiritual life going along with it. Christ gives us a taste of his word: "You have taught me how sweet your words are to my taste." Psalm 119.102, 103. It is one thing to read a promise, and another to taste it. Those who would be proficient in Scripture, let them get Christ to be their teacher. Luke 24.45: "Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." Christ not only opened the Scriptures, but he opened their understanding.

23. Tread often upon the threshold of the sanctuary. Wait diligently upon a rightly constituted ministry. Prov 8.34: "Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates." Ministers are God's interpreters; it is their work to open and expound dark places in Scripture. We read of *pitchers* and *lamps* within those pitchers. Judges 7.16. Ministers are earthen pitchers. 2Cor. 4.7. But these pitchers have lamps within them to light souls in the dark.

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24. Pray that God will make you profit. Isaiah 48.17: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit." Make David's prayer: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Psalm 119.18. Pray to God to take the veil off the Scriptures, so that you may understand it; and the veil on your heart, so that you may believe it. Pray that God will not only give you his word as a *rule* of holiness, but his grace as a *principle* of holiness. Implore the guidance of God's Spirit. Neh. 9.20: "You gave them your good Spirit to instruct them." Though the ship has a compass to sail by, and a store of tackle, yet without a gale of wind it cannot sail. Though we have the written word as our compass to sail by, and we make use of our endeavors as the tackle, yet unless the Spirit of God blows on us, we cannot sail with profit. When the Almighty is like *dew* to us, then "we grow as the lily, and our beauty is like the olive tree." Hosea 14.5, 6: by the anointing of the Holy Ghost. One may see the figures on a sun-dial, but he cannot tell how

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the day goes unless the sun shines. We may read many truths in the Bible, but we cannot know them savingly till God's Spirit shines into our souls. 2Cor. 4.6. The Spirit is a Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Eph. 1.17. When Philip joined himself to the eunuch's chariot, then the eunuch understood the Scriptures. Acts 8.35. When God's Spirit joins himself to the word, then it will be effectual to salvation. These rules being observed, the written word would, through God's blessing, become an "engrafted word." James 1.21. A good shoot grafted into a bad stock, changes the nature of the stock, and makes it bear sweet and generous fruit. So when the word is grafted savingly into men's hearts, it sanctifies them, and makes them bring forth the sweet "fruits of righteousness." Phil. 1.11.

¹ **John 8:12** Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Thus I have answered this question, how we may read the Scriptures with the most spiritual profit. In conclusion,

1. Do not content yourselves with the bare reading of the Scriptures, but labor to find some spiritual improvement and profit from it. Get the word transcribed into your hearts. Psalm 37.31: “The law of his God is in his heart.”

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Those who profit by reading the book of God are the best Christians alive; they answer God’s cost, they credit religion, and they save their souls.

2. Those of you who have profited by reading the Holy Scriptures, adore God’s distinguishing grace. Bless God that he has not only brought the light to you, but opened your eyes to see it; that he has unlocked his *hidden treasure*, and enriched you with saving knowledge. Some perish by not *having* Scripture, and others by not *improving* it. Bless God that he should pass by millions, and the lot of his electing love should fall upon you; that the Scripture, like the *pillar of cloud*, should have a *dark side* to others, but a *light side* to you; that to others it is a *dead letter*, but to you it is the *savor of life*; that Christ should not only be revealed *to* you, but *in* you; Gal. 1.16. — You should be in an holy ecstasy of wonder, and wish that you had the hearts of seraphims burning in love toward God, and the voices of angels to make heaven ring with God’s praises!

But some of the godly may say they fear that they do not profit by the word they read. As in the body, when the vital spirits become faint,

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cordials¹ are employed. So let me apply a few divine cordials to those who are ready to faint under the fear of their non-proficiency [in the Scriptures].

1. You may profit by reading the word, even though you come short of others. The ground which brought forth thirty-fold was good ground. Matt. 13.8. Do not say you obtained no profit because you are not equal with other eminent saints; the others among David’s worthies were considered his strong men, even though they did not attain the honor of the first three. 2Sam. 23.19.

2. You may profit by reading the word, even though you are not quick to apprehend. Some impeach themselves because they are slow of understanding. When our blessed Saviour told of his sufferings to come, the apostles themselves did not understand, and it was *hidden from them*. Luke 9.45. The author to the Hebrews speaks of some who were dull of hearing. Heb. 5.11. Those who have weaker judgments may have stronger affections. A Christian with a little knowledge may be kept from sin, like a man with weak sight may be kept by a little knowledge from falling into the water.

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3. You may profit by reading Scripture, although you do not have *excellent memories*. Many complain that their memories leak. Christian, are you grieved that you can no longer remember? Then for your comfort,

1. You may have a good *heart*, even though you do not have so good a *memory*.

¹ *Cordial*: a strong highly flavored sweet liquor, usually drunk after a meal.

2. Though you cannot remember all you read, yet you remember what matters most, and what you most need; at a feast we do not eat every dish, but we take only so much as nourishes. It is with a good Christian's memory as it is with a lamp: though the lamp is not full of oil, yet it has enough oil to make the lamp burn; though your memory is not full of Scripture, yet you retain enough to make your love towards God burn.

So then, be of good comfort. You profit by what you read, and you take note of that encouraging Scripture, John 14.26: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, he shall bring all things to your remembrance." Amen.

SECRET PRAYER SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED

BY REV. SAMUEL LEE

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Rev. Samuel Lee, A. M., of Wadham
College, Oxford, minister of St.
Botolph, Bishopsgate.

The Rev. Samuel Lee was born in London, in 1627; his father was an eminent citizen, greatly esteemed for his private virtues, and lived to a good old age. He appears to have been a man of considerable property. Samuel was educated at St. Paul's School, under Dr. Gale, and then entered Wadham College, where he studied under the direction of Dr. Wilkins, afterwards the excellent Bishop of Chester. He made great attainments in knowledge and piety, and was so

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highly esteemed as to be chosen fellow of his college and proctor of the university. No doubt can be entertained respecting his religion or literature, when it is stated that he served as proctor in 1656, when Dr. Owen was Vice Chancellor.

In the following year he composed his Temple of Solomon, which he printed in folio, at the request and expense of the University. His reputation as a preacher led him to London, and he was inducted to the living of St. Botolph, the rectory of which was £355 per annum. Here he labored with usefulness and acceptance to his parish, till his ejection in 1662, by the Bartholomew Act. Mr. Lee was, in his view of Church discipline, a Congregationalist, but eminent for the display of charity and catholic spirit. After this trial we find him minister of an independent congregation, at Newington Green, near London. But the

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persecution of the Church party continuing, he determined to escape from the tender mercies of the cruel, and in 1686, he embarked for New England, where he was received with attention and respect, and soon became pastor of the Church at Bristol, R. I., where he labored for three years. Upon hearing of the glorious revolution of 1688, and wishing to enjoy its fruits, and obtain his valuable estate, he became so desirous to return, that he embarked with his family in midwinter. He sailed from Boston for England in the Dolphin, with Capt. John Foy. The passage was very tedious, owing to the prevalence of easterly winds; and at length, on the coast of Ireland, they fell in with a French privateer. After a severe resistance, and when in great danger of sinking, they were compelled to surrender; and the Dolphin was carried as a prize to St. Maloes, in France.

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After some detention, his wife and daughter and two servants were sent to England by the king's order, while he was retained a prisoner. Grief at the loss of his family, and his solitary condition in a strange land, brought on a fever of which he died in a few days, aged 64.

SECRET PRAYER SUCCESSFULLY MANAGED.

“But when you pray, enter into your closet,¹ and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret, shall reward you openly.” — Matt. 6.6.

We have here our blessed Lord’s instructions for the management of secret prayer, the crown and glory of a child of God.

I. The direction prescribes three things for our deportment in this secret duty:

1. Enter your closet; this word signifies a secret or recluse habitation, and sometimes it is rendered a hiding place for treasure.
2. “*Shut your door*” or *lock it*, as the word intimates. The Greek word furnishes the term “key,” as appears by Rev. 3.7, and 20.1, 3, implying that we must bar or bolt it.
3. “*Pray to your Father which is in secret.*” “Father.” Tertullian notes this name as intimating holy *piety* and *power*; “*your Father*” denoting *intimacy* and *propriety*.

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II. [It is] a gracious promise which may be branched into three parts:

1. Because your Father sees you in secret, his eye is upon you with a gracious aspect when you are withdrawn from all the world.
2. He will reward you. The word used here is sometimes translated as *rendering*, Matt. 22.21, Rom. 2.6; 13.7; as *delivering*, Matt, 27.53; Luke 9.42; as *yielding*, or *affording*, Heb. 12.11; Rev. 22.2. All of which comes to this: he will return your prayers or your requests, amply and abundantly into your bosom.²
3. He will do it openly and manifestly – before the world sometimes – and most plentifully and exuberantly before men and angels at the great day. Secret prayers shall have open and public answers.

III. Here is a demonstration of sincerity, from the *right* performance of the duty set forth by the antithesis in the fifth verse. “But you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, so that they may be seen by men.” Do not enter your house only, or your common room, but your closet – the most secret and retired privacy, so that others may neither discern you there, nor rush in

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suddenly upon you. God will answer you and perform your request, as a gracious response to your secret sincerity. God is pleased by his promise to make himself a debtor to secret prayer. Such prayer brings nothing to God but empty hands and naked hearts. This is to show that reward, in a Scriptural sense, does not flow in on the streams of merit, but it flows out of grace. It is monkish divinity to assert otherwise; for what merit, strictly taken, can there be in prayer? Merely asking for mercy cannot merit it at the hands of God. Malachi 2.3. Our most sincere petitions are impregnated with sinful mixtures. We halt, like Jacob, both in and after our best and strongest wrestlings. But such is the grace of our heavenly Father, who sees the sincerity of our

¹ “Closet” refers to an inner private room, or secluded chamber, that may be closed off from other rooms.

² The “heart;” the place where secret thoughts are kept; a close affectionate and protective acceptance.

hearts in secret, that he is pleased to accept us in his Beloved, and to smell a sweet savor in the fragrant perfumes and aromas of His intercession.

Though I might draw many notes from this, I will treat only one, containing the marrow and nerves of the text: that secret prayer, duly managed, is the mark of a sincere heart, and it has the promise of a gracious return.

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Prayer is the soul's colloquy¹ with God, and secret prayer is a conference with God upon admission into the privy chamber of heaven. When you have shut your own closet, when God and your soul are alone, with this key you open the chambers of paradise, and enter the closet of divine love. When you are immured² as in a curious labyrinth, apart from the tumultuous world, and entered into that garden of Lebanon in the midst of your closet; your soul, like a spiritual Daedalus,³ takes to itself the wings of faith and prayer, and flies into the midst of heaven, among the cherubims. I may call secret prayer the invisible flight of the soul into the bosom of God; out of this heavenly closet rises Jacob's ladder, whose rounds are all of light; its foot stands upon the basis of the Covenant in your heart, its top reaches the throne of grace. When your inner self has instructed you in the night season with holy petitions, when your soul has desired God in the night, then you will you seek him early with your spirit within. When the door of your heart is shut, and the windows of your eyes are sealed up from all vain and worldly objects, then up you mount; and

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you have a place given you to walk among the angels that stand by the throne of God. Zech. 3.7. In secret prayer, the soul, like Moses, is in the back-side of the desert, and it talks with the angel of the covenant in the fiery bush. Ex. 3. Here's Isaac in the field at dusk,⁴ meditating and praying to the God of his father Abraham. Gen. 24.63. Here's Elijah under the juniper tree at Rithmah in the wilderness, and shortly after in the cave, hearkening to the still small voice of God. 1Kings 19.4, 12. Here's Christ and the spouse alone in the wine-cellar, and the banner of love over her, and she utters but half-words, having drunk of the sober excess of the spirit. Cant. 2.4. Eph. 5.18. Here we find Nathaniel under the fig-tree, though it may be at secret prayer, yet it is under a beam of the eye of Christ. John 1.48. There sits Austin in the garden alone, sighing with the Psalmist, "How long, O Lord," and listening to the voice of God, take up the Bible and read. (Confessions, 1st book, 8th chapter.) It is true, hypocrites may pray, and pray alone, and pray long, and receive their reward from whichever observations they desire; but a hypocrite takes no sincere delight in secret devotion;

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he has no spring of affection toward God. But O my dove that is in the clefts of the rock, says Christ, let me hear your voice, for its melody is sweet. A weeping countenance and a wounded spirit are most beautiful prospects to the eye of heaven – when a broken heart pours out repentant tears like streams from the rock struck by the rod of Moses' law, held in the hand of a mediator.

¹ *Colloquy*: a formal conversation.

² Confined or locked away; here it may also suggest *lost*, in a good sense – or *mesmerized*.

³ Greek mythology: Daedalus was an Athenian inventor who built the labyrinth of Minos; to escape the labyrinth he fashioned wings for himself and his son Icarus (whose wings melted when he flew too close to the sun).

⁴ Originally, 'eventide.'

O how amiable in the sight of God is the cry, “Out of the depths have I cried unto you;” which Chrysostom glosses thus: to “draw sighs from the furrows of the heart.” Let your prayer become a hidden mystery of divine secrets, like good Hezekiah upon the bed with his face to the wall so that none might observe him; or like our blessed Lord, that grand example, who retired into mountains and solitudes apart, and saw by night the illustrious face of his heavenly Father in prayer.

The reasons why secret prayer is the mark of a sincere heart, are as follows:

1. Because a sincere heart busies itself about heart work, to mortify sin, to quicken grace, to observe and resist temptation, to secure and advance his evidences; therefore it is very

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conversant with secret prayer. The glory of the king’s daughter shines within, arrayed with clothes of gold,^{Ps 45.11-13} but they are the spangled and glittering hangings of the closet of her heart when she entertains communion with her Lord. The more a saint converses with his own heart, the more he searches his spiritual wants, and feels his spiritual joys.

2. Because a sincere heart aims at the eye of God, he knows that God, being a spirit, loves to converse with our spirits, and to speak to the heart more than to the outward ear. He labors to walk before God as always in his sight, but especially when he presents himself at the footstool of mercy. An invisible God is delighted with invisible prayers, when no eye sees but his. He takes most pleasure in the secret glances of a holy heart.

But no more of this; let us descend to the question deducible from the text, a question of no less importance than daily use, and of particular concern *to the growth of every Christian*. How to manage secret prayer so that it may be prevalent with God, to the comfort and satisfaction of the soul?

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For method’s sake, I shall divide it into two branches.

I. How to manage secret prayer, so that it may prevail with God.

II. How to discern and discover answers to secret prayer, so that the soul may acquiesce and be satisfied that it has prevailed with God.

Before I handle these, I would briefly prove the DUTY AND ITS USEFULNESS, leaving some cases about its attendants and circumstances towards the close.

As to the DUTY itself, the text is plain and distinct in the point; yet further observe in Solomon’s prayer, that if any man apart from the community of the people of Israel presents his supplication to God, he prays there for a gracious and particular answer; and we know Solomon’s prayer was answered by fire,¹ and so we learn there is a promise given to personal prayer. 1Kings 8.38, 39. 2Chr. 6.29, 30. 2Chr. 7.1. And that is besides the many special and particular injunctions to individual persons, such as Job 22.27, and 33.26. Psalm 32.6.² Wives as well as husbands are to pray apart, Zech. 12.14, solitary, by themselves. James 5.13.

¹ i.e. The Scripture is clear that Solomon’s prayer was acceptable to God because the sacrifice was accepted.

² **Job 22:27** You will make your prayer to Him, He will hear you, And you will pay your vows. **Job 33:26** He shall pray to God, and He will delight in him, He shall see His face with joy, For He restores to man His

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We may argue this point from the constant practice of the holy saints of God in all ages, but especially of our blessed Lord; and it is our wisdom to walk in the way of good men, and to keep the paths of the righteous, such as Abraham, Eliezer, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Hannah, Hezekiah, David, and Daniel. The time would fail me to bring in the cloud of witnesses. We sometimes find our Lord at prayer in a desert, in a mountain, in a garden; Cornelius was in his house, and Peter was upon the house-top, in secret supplication to God.

There is the experience of God's gracious presence, and answers that are sent upon secret prayer, as in the stories of Eliezer, Jabez, Nehemiah, Zechariah, Cornelius and Paul. For *this reason*, because David was heard, everyone that is godly will pray to him.

I might urge the USEFULNESS, no, in some cases the necessities, of secret applications to God.

1. Are we not guilty of secret sins in the light of God's countenance, that cannot, and ought not to be confessed before others, because near relations are exhorted to

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secret and solitary duties? Zech. 12.12. 1Cor. 7.4. ¹

2. Are there not personal wants that we would prefer to [express to] God alone?

3. Are there not some special mercies and deliverances that concern our own persons more peculiarly, which should engage us to commune with our own hearts, and offer the sacrifices of righteousness to God?

4. May there not be found some requests to be poured out more particularly in secret, as to other persons, and as to the affairs of the church of God, which may not be conveniently insisted upon in common?

5. Do not sudden and urgent passions spring out of the soul in secret, that would be unbecoming in social prayer?

6. To argue from the text, may not the soul's secret addresses about inward sorrows and joys be a sweet testimony of the sincerity and integrity of the heart, when the heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not interfere with his joy? Perhaps a man has an Ishmael, an Absalom, a Rehoboam, to weep for, and therefore he gets into an inward chamber, where behold his witness is in heaven, and his record is on high, and when others may scorn or pity – his eye pours out tears to God.

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To end this, when a holy soul is close in secret, what satisfaction it takes when it has bolted out the world, and retired to a place that none knows of, to be free from the disturbances and distractions that often violate family communion. When the soul is in the secret place of the Most High, and in the shadow of the Almighty, O how safe, and how comfortable it is!

righteousness. **Psalm 32:6** For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters They shall not come near him.

¹ **Zech 12:12** "And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; **1Cor 7:4** The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

Nor can I now insist upon secret prayer under the variety of mental and vocal [restrictions], or enlarge upon it as sudden, occasional, or ejaculatory prayer, referring some of this to the end.

I must remark that there are some things which aptly belong to secret prayer, yet they are coincident with *all* prayer, whether public, social, or secret. It is proper to address those types which are important to our present duty; and I must therefore refer to a double head.

I. HOW WILL WE MANAGE SECRET PRAYER, AS IT IS COINCIDENT WITH PRAYER IN GENERAL, SO THAT IT MAY PREVAIL?

1. Use some preparation before it; do not rush suddenly into the awful presence of God. Sanctuary preparation is necessary to sanctuary communion. Such suitable preparatory frames of mind come down from God.

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It was a good saying of one, "*He never prays ardently that does not premeditate devoutly.*" It is said of Daniel, when he made that famous prayer, "he set his face to seek the Lord." Dan. 9.3. Jehoshaphat also set himself to seek the Lord. 2Chr. 20.3. The church in her soul desires the Lord in the night, and then in the morning she seeks him early. Desires blown by meditation are the sparks that set prayer alight in flame. The work of preparation may be cast under five heads, when we apply to solemn, set prayer.

1. The consideration of some attributes in God that are proper to the intended petitions.
2. A digestion of some peculiar and special promises that concern the affair.
3. Meditation on suitable arguments [to be made].
4. Emotional exclamations for assistance.
5. Engaging the heart to a holy frame of reverence, and keeping to the point in hand.

This was good advice from Cyprian: "Let the soul think upon nothing but what it is to pray for," and he adds that therefore the ministers of old prepared the minds of the people with "let your hearts be above." For how can we expect to be heard by God when we do not hear ourselves, and when the heart does not watch while the tongue utters?

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The tongue must be like the pen of a ready writer, to set down the good matter which the heart indites. Take heed of ramblings. To preach or tell pious stories, while praying to the great and holy God, is a branch of irreverence and a careless frame of spirit. Heb. 12.22-23.

2. Humbly confess those sins which concern and refer principally to the work in hand. Our filthy garments must be put away when we appear before the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem. Zech. 3.4. "Look upon my afflictions," says David, and "forgive all my sins." There are certain sins that often relate to afflictions. First "deliver me from transgression, then hear my prayer, O Lord." This is the heavenly method; he first forgives all our iniquities, and then heals all our diseases. Psalm 103.3. A forgiven soul is a healed soul. While a man is sick at heart with the qualms of sin unpardoned, it keeps the soul in dismay that it cannot cry strongly to God; and therefore he must discharge himself of particular sins in holy groans. This is what David did in that great penitential psalm, Psalm 51. Sin, like a thick cloud, hides the face of God, so that our

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prayers cannot enter. Isaiah 59.2. We must blush with Ezra, and our faces look red with the flushings of conscience, if we expect any smiles of mercy. Ezra 9.6. Our crimson sins must dye our confessions, and the blood of our sacrifices must sprinkle the horns of the golden altar,^{Lev 8.15} before we receive an answer of peace from the golden mercy seat. When our persons are pardoned, our suits are accepted, and our petitions are crowned with the olive branch of peace.

3. *Have an arguing and pleading spirit in prayer.* This is properly wrestling with God; humble yet earnest expostulations about his mind toward us. “Why have you cast us off forever; why does your anger smoke? Do not be sorely angry, O Lord; do not remember our iniquity forever; see, we beseech you, we are your people.” Psalm 74.1; Isaiah 64.9. If so, then why is it thus, as affrighted Rebekah flees out into prayer? Gen. 25.22.¹ An arguing frame in prayer, cures and appeases the frights of spirit, and then inquires of God. The temple of prayer is called the soul’s inquiring place. I must refer you to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses; Joshua, David, and Daniel, and how they used arguments with God. Sometimes [they argued]:

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- from the multitudes of God’s mercies; Psalm 5.7, and 6.4, and 31.16.
- from the experience of former answers; Psalm 4.1, and 6.9, and 22.4.
- from their trust and reliance upon him; Psalm 9.10, and 16.1 .
- from the equity of God; Psalm 17.1.
- from the shame and confusion that God will put his people to if not answered, and that others will be driven away from God; Psalm 31.17, and 34.1; and lastly,
- from the promise of peace; Psalm 20.5, and 35.18.

We find these and many similar pleadings in Scripture as patterns in prayer. Being suggested by the Spirit, kindled from the altar, and perfumed with Christ’s incense, they rise up like memorial pillars before the oracle. Let us observe in one or two particular prayers, what ready arguments holy men have used and pressed in their perplexities. What an effective prayer Jehoshaphat made, taking pleas from Gods covenant, dominion, and powerful strength; from his gift of the land of Canaan, and driving out the old inhabitants (*ancient mercies!*); from his sanctuary, and his promise to Solomon; from the ingratitude and ill requital of his enemies, with an

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appeal to God’s equity in the case, and a humble confession of their own impotency; and yet that in their anxiety, their eyes were fixed upon God. 2Chr. 20.10-12.² You know how gloriously it prevailed when he set ambushes around the court of heaven, and the Lord turned his arguments into ambushes against the children of Edom. Yes, this is set as an instance of how God will deal with the enemies of his church in the latter days, Joel 3.2 ff. Another instance is that admirable

¹ **Gen 25:22** But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If *all is well*, why *am I like this?*” So she went to inquire of the LORD.

² **2Ch 20:10-12** “And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir-- whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them – ¹¹ “here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit. ¹² “O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes *are* upon You.”

prayer of the angel about the covenant to God for the restoration of Jerusalem, Zech. 1.12,¹ in which he pleads from the length of time and the duration of his indignation for seventy years; from promised mercies and the expiration of prophecies – and behold an answer of good and comfortable words from the Lord. And I ask you to observe that when arguments in prayer are very cogent from a sanctified heart, being drawn from the divine attributes, from precious promises, and the sweet experiences of God’s former love, then it is a rare sign of a prevailing prayer. It was an ingenious remark of Chrysostom concerning the woman of Canaan: the poor distressed creature was

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turned into an acute philosopher with Christ, and disputed for mercy from him. O it is a blessed thing to aspire to this heavenly philosophy of prayer, to argue blessings out of the hand of God. Here is a spacious field. I have given but a small prospect, where the soul, like Jacob, enters the inclination with omnipotency, and by holy force obtains the blessing.

4. *Ardent affections in prayer, evidencing a deeply sensitive heart, are greatly prevalent [in Scripture].* A crying prayer pierces the depths of heaven. We do not read a word that Moses spoke, that God was not moved by his cry. Ex. 14.15. I do not mean an obstreperous noise,² but melting moans of the heart. Yet sometimes the sore and pinching necessities and distresses of spirit extort even vocal cries from us, that are not unpleasant to the ear of God. “I cried to the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill.” ^{Ps 3.4} And this encourages David to a fresh onset: “Hearken to the voice of my cry, my King and my God; ^{Ps 5.2} give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears.” ^{Ps 39.12} Another time he makes the cave echo with his cries: “I cried, attend to my cry, for I am brought very low.” ^{Ps 142.6} And what is the issue? Faith gets courage by crying;

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his tears watered his faith so that it grew into confidence; and so he concludes, “you shall deal bountifully with me, and the righteous shall crown me as conqueror.” Psalm 142.1, 5, 6, 7. Plentiful tears bring bountiful mercies, and a crying suitor proves a triumphant praiser. Holy Jacob was such a suitor at the fords of Jabbok; he wept and made supplication, and prevailed with the angel. ^{Gen 32.22-28} The Lord told Hezekiah he had heard his prayer, for he had seen his tears. ^{Isa 38.3-5} Such precedents may well encourage backsliding Ephraim to return and deplore himself, and then the heart of God will be concerned for him. Indeed, we have a holy woman also weeping sorely before the Lord in Shiloh, and then rejoicing in his salvation. 1Sam. 1.9-10, 2.1.³ The cries of the saints are like vocal music joined with the instrumental of prayer; they make heavenly melody in the ears of God. The bridegroom calls to his mourning dove, “let me hear your voice, for it is pleasant.” What Gerson⁴ says about the sores of Lazarus, we may say

¹ **Zec 1:12-13** Then the Angel of the LORD answered and said, “O LORD of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?” ¹³ And the LORD answered the angel who talked to me, *with good and comforting words.*

² *Obstreperous noise:* Noisily and stubbornly defiant.

³ **1Sam 1:9-10** So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle of the LORD. ¹⁰ And she *was* in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish... **1Sam 2:1** And Hannah prayed and said: “My heart rejoices in the LORD; My horn¹ is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation.”

⁴ Probably Jean Gerson (1363-1429), a theologian and mystical writer of the Middle Ages. Chancellor of the University of Paris from 1395, widely known for his efforts toward church unity after the western Schism of 1378.

about sighs: “as many wounds, so many tongues.” Cries and groans in prayer are so many eloquent orators at the throne of God.

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5. *Insistence and diligence in prayer are highly prevalent.* It is not that we should lengthen our prayer with tedious and vain repetitions, as the heathen did of old, but we should be frequent and constant in prayer: as Christ bids us to pray always, and the apostle Paul to pray without ceasing, we learn the duty of constancy in prayer. As the morning and evening sacrifice at the temple is called the *continual* burnt offering; Numb, 28.4, 6; as Mephibosheth is said to eat bread *continually* at David’s table, and Solomon’s servants are said to stand *continually* before him, that is, at the set and appointed times – so it is required of us to be constant and diligent at prayer, and to offer our prayers with perseverance. When the soul perseveres in prayer, it is a sign of persevering faith; and those may have what they want at the hand of God when they are praying according to divine direction. John 16.23.¹ Indeed, urgent prayer is a token of a mercy at hand. When Elijah prayed seven times for rain, one after another, the clouds presently marched up out of the sea at the command of prayer. 1Kings 18.43. “Ask of me things to come, and command me concerning the works of my hands,” says the Lord. Isaiah 45.11.²

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When we put forth our utmost strength in prayer, and do not, as it were, receive any “no” from Heaven, then our prayers must be like the continual blowing of the silver trumpets over the sacrifices, for a memorial before the Lord. Numbers 10.10. Like the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem who never held their peace day or night, we are commanded not to keep silence, nor give him rest. Isaiah 62.6-7. Indeed, God seems offended at another time when they did not lay hands on him, so that they would not be consumed in their iniquities. Such prayers are, as it were, a holy molestation of the throne of grace. Isaiah 64.7. It is said of the man that rose at midnight to give out three loaves to his friend, that he did not do it for friendship’s sake, but because he was pressing, and so importunate as to trouble him at such a time as twelve o’clock at night. Luke 11.8. Our Lord applies the parable to insistent prayer. It was the same with the success of the widow and the unjust judge, because she troubled and molested him with her solicitations. Luke 18.5. But of all these, the pattern of the woman of Canaan

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is the most admirable. Although the disciples wanted her to be dismissed because she troubled them by crying after them, she persisted. Matt. 15.23. May I say it reverently, Christ delights in such a troublesome person. Augustine observes, by comparing both evangelists,³ that first she cried after Christ in the streets. But our Lord taking to a house, she follows him there and falls down at his feet; but as yet he did not answer her a word. Then when our Lord left the house again, she followed with even stronger importunity, and argued in her heart for mercy. Christ ascribed it to the greatness of her faith. To knock at midnight is not considered an incivility at the gate of heaven. An energetic prayer is likely to be an efficacious prayer. Cold petitioners must have cold answers. If the matter of prayer is right, and the promise of God is fervently urged,

¹ **John 16:23** “And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.” Also **1Joh 5.14**, “if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”

² That is, of things to come that have been *promised* by God, we may in a sense “command” their fulfillment in our prayers, because God has already chosen to fulfill them according to His will.

³ That is, the account in Matthew with the account in Luke.

then you are likely to prevail like princely Israel, who held the angel and would not let him go until he had blessed him.

Query. But can God be moved by our arguments, or affected with our troubles? He is the unchangeable God and he dwells in the inaccessible light; with him there is no variableness or shadow of turning.

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Reply. These holy motions upon the hearts of saints in prayer are the fruits of his love toward them, and the appointed ushering in of mercy. God graciously determines to give a praying, arguing, warm, affectionate frame as the forerunner of a decreed mercy. That is the reason that carnal men can enjoy no such mercies, because they pour out no such prayers. The spirit of prayer prognosticates mercy near at hand. When the Lord by Jeremiah foretold the end of the captivity, he also predicted the prayers that would open the gates of Babylon. Cyrus was prophesied to do God's work for his servant Jacob's sake, and Israel his elect. Yet they must *ask* him concerning those things to come; and they would not seek him in vain. Isa. 45.1, 2, 4, 19. The glory of the latter days in the return of Israel, is foretold by Ezekiel; but then "the Lord will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Ezek. 36.24, 37. The coming of Christ is promised by God; yet "the spirit and bride say *come*, and he that hears must say *come*;" and when *Christ* says he will "come quickly," *we* must add, "even so, come Lord Jesus." [Rev 22.20](#)

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Divine grace kindles these ardent affections when the mercies promised are upon the wing. Prayer is that chain, as Dionysius calls it, that draws the soul up to God, and the mercy down to us; or like the cable that draws the ship to land, though the shore itself remains unmovable. Prayer has its kindling from heaven, like the ancient sacrifices that were inflamed with celestial fire.

6. *Submission to the all-wise and holy will of God.* This is the great benefit of a saint's communion with the Spirit, that he makes intercession for them according to the will of God. When we pray for holiness, there is a concurrence with the divine will; for "this is the will of God, even your sanctification." 1Thess. 4.3. When we pray that our bodies may be presented a living sacrifice, acceptable to God, we then prove "what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God." Rom. 12.1-2. In the covenant of grace, God does his part and ours too. As when God commands us to pray in one place, he promises in another place "to pour out upon us a spirit of grace and supplication." Zech. 12.10.

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God commands us to repent and turn to him. Ezek. 14.6. In another place, Jer. 31.18, "turn me and I shall be turned, for you are the Lord my God." And again, "turn us to you, O Lord, and we shall be turned." Lament. 5.21. And again, "I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Ezek. 36.26-27. And Paul says, "for this cause I do not cease to pray for you, that he would work in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight." Col. 1.9-10. Heb. 13.21. "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that works in you, to will and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. 2.12-13. Precepts, promises and prayer are connected like so many golden links, to excite, encourage and assist the soul in spiritual duties. But in other cases, as to temporal and temporary mercies, let all your desires in prayer be formed with submission, guided by his counsel and prostrate at his feet, and acted by a faith suited to the

promises of outward blessings; and then it shall be to you even as you will. Gerson said it well: “Let all your desires as to temporals turn upon the hinge of the divine good pleasure.”

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The man that resolves to make God’s will his, shall have his own will. God will certainly bestow what is good for his people. One great point of our mortification lies in this: to have our wills melted into God’s; and it is a great token of spiritual growth, when we are not only content but joyful to see our wills crossed, so that his will may be done. When our wills are a sacrifice of holy prayer, we many times receive choicer things than we expressly ask for. It was a good saying, “God many times grants not what we would have in our present prayers, so that he may bestow what we would rather have, when we have the prayer more graciously answered than we petitioned.” We know not how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit helps us out with groans that secretly hint a correction of our wills and spirits in prayer. In great anxieties and pinching troubles, nature dictates strong groans for relief. But sustaining grace and participation of divine holiness dictate mortification from earthly comforts, excitation of the soul to long for heaven; they dictate being gradually weaned from the wormwood breasts of their sublunary, transient and unsatisfying

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pleasures, and from the timing of our hearts for the seasons in which God will time his deliverances – these are sweeter mercies than the immediate return of a prayer for an outward good. What truly holy person would lose that light of God’s countenance which he enjoyed by glimpses in a cloudy day, for a little corn and wine? Indeed, in many cases open denials of prayer prove the most excellent answers; and God’s not hearing us is the most signal audience. Therefore at the foot of every prayer subscribe “your will be done,” and you shall enjoy preventing mercies that you never sought, and converting mercies to change all for the best. Rest confident in this, that having asked according to his will he hears you.

7. *And lastly, place it all into the hands of Christ.* This was signified of old by praying toward the temple, because the golden mercy seat typifying Christ was there. 1Kings 8.33. Heb. 8.3. Christ is ordained by God to offer gifts and sacrifices, and therefore it is necessary that he should have something from us to offer, being the high priest over the house of God. Heb. 10.21.

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What does Christ do on our behalf at the throne of grace? Put some petition into the hands of Christ; he waits for our offerings at the door of the oracle; leave the sighs and groans of your heart with this compassionate intercessor who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, who sympathizes with our weaknesses. He that lies in the Father’s bosom, and has expounded the will of God to us, John 1.18, adds much incense to the prayers of all saints before the throne of God, and explains our wills to God, so that our prayers, perfumed by his, are set forth as incense before him. Rev. 8.3. Ps. 141.2. He is the day’s-man¹ the heaven’s-man² between God and us. Job 9.23. Whatever we ask in his name he puts into his golden censer, so that the Father may give it to us. John 15.16, and 16.23. When the sweet smoke of the incense of Christ’s prayer ascends before the Father, our prayers become sweet and amiable, and cause a savor of rest with

¹ An umpire, arbiter, or judge. From the Latin *diem dicere*, i.e., to fix a **day** for hearing a cause.

² That is, the representative of heaven to us, who stands between heaven and earth to reconcile us to God.

God. This I take to be one reason why the prevalence of prayer is so often assigned to the time of the evening sacrifice, pointing at the death of Christ about the ninth hour of the day,

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near the time of the evening oblation. Matt, 27.46. Acts 3.1; 10.30. Hence it was too, that Abraham's sacrifice received a gracious answer, being offered about sunset. Gen. 15.12, and 24.63. Isaac went out to pray at even tide. Elijah at Mount Carmel prays and offers at the time of the evening sacrifice. 1Kings 18.36. Ezra fell upon his knees and spread out his hands at the evening sacrifice. Ezra 9.5. David prays that his prayer may be virtual in the power of the evening sacrifice. Ps. 141.2. Daniel at prayer was touched by the angel about the time of the evening sacrifice. Dan. 9.21. These are all to show the prevalence of our access to the throne of grace by the merit of the intercession of Christ, who is the acceptable evening sacrifice. Yes, and therefore we are taught in our Lord's prayer to begin with the title of a father; in him we are adopted to be children, and to use that prevalent relation as an argument in prayer. There are some other particulars in respect to prayer in general, as it may be connected and coincident with secret prayer, such as stability of spirit; freedom from distraction by wandering thoughts; the acting of faith; the aids of the Spirit; all of which I will pass by, and come now to,

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DIRECTIONS, SPECIAL AND PECULIAR,¹ TO SECRET PRAYER.

1. Be sure of an intimate acquaintance with God. Can we presume, who are but dust and ashes, to go up into heaven and boldly enter the presence chamber, and have no fellowship with the Father or with the Son? "Acquaint yourself with him and be at peace; then you shall have your delight in the Almighty, and lift up your face to God. You shall make your prayer to him, and he shall hear you. The decrees of your heart shall be established for you, and the light shall shine upon your ways." Job 22.21, 26-28. First shining *acquaintance*, and then shining *answers*. Can you set your face toward the Lord God? Then you may seek him by prayer; first Daniel sets and shows his face to God, and then he seeks him by prayer and supplication. Daniel 9.3. Does God know your face in prayer? Do you often converse in your closets with him? Believe it: to meet him in secret and with delight must be the fruit of intimate acquaintance with God. Can you come to God as a child comes familiarly to its father,

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considering your own vileness, meanness, or unworthiness compared to God's divine love, the love and affections of a heavenly father? Such a father, the father of fathers, and the father of mercies – how sweetly the apostle links it! 2Cor. 1.2-3. God is our father because he is the father of our Lord; and because he is his father, so he is our father; and therefore he is the father of mercies. O what generations of mercies flow from this paternity! But we must plead for this access *to the Father through Christ by the Spirit*. Eph. 2.18. We must be gradually acquainted with all three; first with the Spirit, then with Christ, and last with the Father. First God sends the spirit of his Son into our hearts, and then through the Son we cry Abba Father. Gal. 4.6; Eph. 1.4. The depths of mercy first being wrought in the Father toward us, he chose us in Christ, and then he sends his Spirit to draw us to Christ, and by Christ he draws us to himself. Do you have this access to God by the Spirit? Bosom communion flows from bosom affections. If your souls are

¹ *Peculiar*: specific or unique.

truly in love with God, he will graciously say to your petitions, ‘let it be to you according to your love.’ [paraph. Mat 9.29](#)

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2. *The times of finding God.* A godly man prays in seasons of finding. When God’s heart and ear are inclined to an audience, then God is said to bow down his ear. There are special seasons of drawing near to him, and when he draws near to us – times when he may be found. When your “beloved looks out at the window, and shows himself through the lattice.” Ps. 31.2. Isa. 55.6. Ps. 32.6. Cant. 2.9. That is a time of grace when God knocks at the door of your heart by his Spirit. Motions upon the heart are like the doves of the East, sent with letters around their necks. It is said of Bernard, that he knew when the Holy Spirit was present with him by the motions of his heart. When God reveals himself to the heart, he opens the ears of his servants for some gracious message. When God bids us to seek his face, then the soul must answer, “One thing have I desired, that will I seek after.” [Ps 27.4](#) Holy desires warm the heart, and set the soul on seeking; they are like messengers sent from heaven to bring us into God’s presence. Take heed then of quenching the Spirit of God. He that is born of the Spirit knows the voice of the Spirit. John 3.8.

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When the soul is melted by the word, or softened by affliction, or feels some holy groans and sighs excited by the Spirit, that is a warm time for prayer. Then we enjoy the intimacies of the presence of God. Romans 8.27. Or when prophecies are near to expire, that is when the hearts Daniel, Zechariah, Simeon and Anna were greatly working and searching; or when some promise comes with the power to apply it, “therefore your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to you, for you have promised this goodness to your servant.” 2Sam. 7.27-28. When we find promises dropped into the soul like wine, it causes the lips of those who are asleep to speak. Cant. 9.9.

3. *Keep your conscience clear and clean from secret sins.* How can we go to a friend to whom we have given any secret affront? And will you be so bold as to come before the God of heaven when he knows that you maintain some secret sin in your hearts? Do you dare bring a Delilah with you into this sacred closet? That remark of Tertullian is true: “Those that turn their ear from God’s precepts, if God turns his holy ears from their cry, must shut their mouth in the dust.”

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When our secret sins are in the light of his countenance, we may instead expect to be consumed by his anger and terrified by his wrath. Ps. 90.7- 8.

But perhaps it is objected, ‘Then who may presume and venture into secret communion [with God]?’ True; if God were to strictly mark what we do wrong, then who could stand? David was sensible of this objection, but he answers it humbly: “There is forgiveness with you, so that you may be feared.” Ps. 130.4. If we come with holy purposes, God has promised to pardon abundantly. Isa. 55.7. His thoughts and ways are not like our ways; guilt makes us flee his presence. But proclaiming pardoning grace to a wounded soul that comes for strength from heaven to subdue its iniquities, sweetly draws that soul to lie at God’s feet for mercy. While we are still under the wounding sense of guilt, we cannot be as free as formerly; yet when he “restores to us the joy of his salvation, he will again uphold us with his free spirit.” Ps. 51.12. Yet beware of scars upon the soul. God knows our foolishness; and our guiltiness is not hidden from him; yet we come [to him] for purging and cleansing mercy.

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A godly man may sense the divine displeasure for some iniquity he himself knows, as the Lord spoke of Eli;¹^{Sam 3.13} yet the way to be cured is not to run from God, but like the distressed woman, come fearing and trembling, and fall at his feet, and tell him all the truth. But if prayer has cured you, then sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you. Matt. 5.33. For if we “regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us;” but the guilt may stare conscience in the face with great amazement. Ps. 66.18. There is a story of someone who had secretly stolen a sheep; it ran before his eyes in prayer, so that he could have no rest. How strangely memory will ring the bell in the ears of Conscience if we have any secret sin, or if (after our peace-offering) we but glance with desires and secret thoughts to obtain our beloved lusts again. This is dangerous. God may justly allow such persons to throw away what is good, and to cleave to their idols, and let them alone. But if the face of the heart is not knowingly and willingly spotted with any sin and lust (excepting infirmities which you mourn under), then your countenance through Christ

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will be attractive in the eye of God, and your voice will be sweet in his ears. [Augustine] said, “he who prays well, lives well;” so a holy life will be walking in continual prayer; such a life is a constant petition before God.

4. *Own your personal interest with God, and plead it humbly.* Consider whom you go to in secret; “pray to your Father who sees in secret.” Can you prove you are in covenant? What you can prove, you may plead, and you may have it successfully issued. In prayer we take God’s covenant into our mouths. But the Lord challenges those without a real interest, asking what they have to do with it. Ps. 50.15-16.¹ God never graciously hears, unless it is based upon an interest. Solomon presses this argument in prayer: “for they are your people and your inheritance.” 1Kings 8.51. David pleads: “You are my God; hear the voice of my supplication.” Ps. 140.6. “I am yours, save me.” Ps. 119.94. “Truly I am your servant,” Ps. 116.16. Asa turns the contest heavenwards: “O Lord, you are our God; do not let mortal man prevail against you; you take me for the sheep of your fold, and the servant of your household; therefore seek me.” 2Chr. 14.11.²

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When Israel is refined as silver and tried as gold, “they shall call on his name and he will hear them. I will say it is my people, my tried, refined, golden people, and they shall say the Lord is my God.” Ps. 119.176, and Zech. 13.9. When you can discern the print of the broad seal of the covenant upon your heart, and the hidden seal of the Spirit upon your prayers, and can look upon the Son of God in a priestly relation to you, then you may come boldly to “the throne of grace in time of need.” Heb. 4.16.

5. *Be very particular in secret prayer, as to sins, wants, and mercies.* If you expect a pardon, then hide none of your transgressions. Do not be ashamed to expose all your necessities. David argues that he is poor and needy. Ps. 40.17; 70.5; 86.1 109.22. Four separate times he presses his

¹ **Psalm 50:15-16** “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” ¹⁶ But to the wicked God says: “What *right* have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth?”

² Notice the different wording: **2 Chr 14:11** And Asa cried out to the LORD his God, and said, “LORD, *it is* nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, You *are* our God; do not let man prevail against You!”

wants and exigencies before God, like an earnest but holy beggar. And before God, David showed his trouble, and presented his ragged condition and secret wounds; just as Job said he would “order his cause before him.” Job 23.4. There we may speak our minds fully, and name the persons that afflict, affront, and trouble us;

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and woe to those whom a child of God, upon a mature judgment, names in prayer. I do not find that such a prayer in Scripture returned empty. Jacob in a great strait¹ said, “Deliver me from the hand of my brother, Esau.” Gen. 32.11. David in the ascent of the Mount Olives said, “O Lord, I pray you, turn the counsel of Ahitophel into foolishness.” 2 Sam. 15.31. Prayer twisted the rope for him at Giloh. Thus Jehoshaphat in his prayer names Ammon, Moab and Edom conspiring against him. 2Chr. 20.10. Thus Hezekiah spreads the bitter letter before the Lord. Isa. 37.14. And the Psalmist takes them all into a round catalogue that counselled against Israel. Ps. 83.6, etc. Thus the church in her prayer names Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate, of which the first was sent into perpetual banishment, and the latter killed himself. Josephus, L.18. c.9. Euseb. Chr. L. 2, p. 159. It is of great use in prayer to accompany some special case or single request with suitable arguments and affections. “For this cause,” says Paul, “I bow the knee.” Eph. 3.14. Suppose a grace is deficient in its strength;

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“Lord, increase our faith.” Luke 17.5. Or suppose a temptation is urgent; “For this I prayed to the Lord three times.” 2Cor. 12.8. A great reason why we reap so little benefit by prayer is because we rest too much in generals; and if we have success, it is but dark, so that often we cannot tell what to make of the outcomes of prayer. Besides, to be particular in our petitions would keep the spirit from wandering much when we are intent upon a weighty case; and the progress of the soul in grace would manifest its gradual success in prayer.

6. Make holy and humble appeals before the Lord in secret, when the soul can submissively and thankfully expose itself to divine searching. The soul cannot dwell in the presence of God under the flashing of defilement, nor will the Holy Spirit own a defiled soul. But when a person can humbly, modestly and reverently say, “Search me and try my heart, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting,” Psalm 139.23, it will be the means of the expressions and outpourings of joyful affections and meek confidence at the footstool of grace, especially in pleas of deliverance from wicked and proud enemies.

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When David can plead in the case stated, between his enemies and himself, “for I am holy,” Ps. 86.2, 14, 17, it is a token of his goodness. Or when we plead against the assaults of Satan, are we conscious that we have watched and prayed against entering into temptation? When in the main we can wash our hands in innocence, then we may comfortably encompass God’s altar. In case of opposition and injustice: “He rewarded me (says David in the case of Saul) according to my righteousness and the cleanness of my hands before him.” Ps. 18.20. Or about the truth of the love that is in the heart to God: “You that know all things know that I love you.” John 21.17. As to zeal for the worship and ordinances of God, Nehemiah so prayed: Neh. 13.14, 22. As to the integrity of a life well-spent, Hezekiah so prayed: Isa. 38.3. Or if *we* cannot rise so high, yet as

¹ *Strait*: a narrow way; “in a bind.”

the *church* did: “The desire of our soul is for your name and for the remembrance of you.” Isa. 26.8. Or lastly, when we can unfeignedly plead the usefulness of a mercy that is entreated for the divine glory;

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such as, when a minister, or the church of Christ on his behalf, prays for gifts and graces – for such knowledge and utterance – that he may win souls to Christ, and they can appeal that this is his principal aim, then this is glorious! Eph. 6.19. Col. 4.3.

7. *Pray for the Spirit, that you may pray in and by the Spirit.* “Awaken the north wind and the south, to blow upon your garden, so that its spices may flow forth.” Cant. 4.16. Then you may invite Christ: “Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruit,” that the soul may enjoy him and hold sweet communion with him. All successful prayer is from the breathing of the Spirit of God, when he inspires and indites, when he directs the heart as to matter, and governs the tongue as to utterance. God graciously hears the sighs of his own Spirit formed in us. He sends forth his Spirit, and “the waters flow.” Ps. 147.13. The waters of contrition flow upon the breathing of the Spirit, and the soul is, as it were, all afloat before the throne of grace, when these living waters issue from under the threshold of the sanctuary. Ezek. 47.1. Devout tears drop down from the Spirit’s influences.

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Melting supplications follow the infusions of grace by the Spirit. “Then they shall mourn for the piercing of Christ,” says the prophet, “and be in bitterness as for a first-born,” like the mourning at the town of Hadad-Rimmon, where Josiah was slain. Zech. 12.11. Then, in that day, Zech. 13.1, 2, 4, and 14.8, what inundations of mercy shall refresh the church, when the Lord will extend her peace like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream – great things to the church, and gracious things to the soul! Holy sighs in prayer give intelligence about great mercies to follow. One means to powerfully withstand all the wiles of Satan is to consecrate every part of the spiritual armor by prayer in the Spirit. Eph. 6.18.

8. *Apply special promises to special cases in prayer.* For God has and will magnify his word of promise, above all his *name*. When we are under the word of *command* for a duty, we must look for a word of *promise*, and unite them in prayer. John 12.28.¹ When a promise of aid is suited to the precept, then it renders prayer victorious, and obedience pleasant. When we come into God’s presence with his own words,

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when we take his words with us, that he would “take away all iniquity,” then he will “receive us graciously.” Hosea 14.2. Jacob urges God to bid him to return from his country and kindred. Gen. 32.9.² Solomon urges the word of promise to David. 1Kings 8.24. Jehoshaphat urges the word of promise to Solomon. 2Chr. 20.8-9. Daniel fills his mouth with the promise given to Jeremiah; he reads, and then applies it in prayer. Dan. 9.2-3. First search the Bible and look for a

¹ **John 12:28** “Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, *saying*, “I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again.”

² **Genesis 32:9** Then Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you’: ...” *Spoken as Jacob is about to cross the Jordan to return home, which is Esau’s home. Jacob prays for protection against Esau based on God’s precept to return home – if God commanded it, then surely He will provide everything necessary to fulfill it.*

promise, and when found, open it before the Lord. Paul teaches us to take the promise given to Joshua, and then to say boldly ‘the Lord is our helper.’ Heb. 13.5-6. The special ground of the answer of prayer lies in the performance of a promise. Ps. 50.15, and 65.24. Simeon lived upon a promise, and expired sweetly in the arms of a promise, in the breathings of a prayer. Luke 2.29. Sometimes the soul depends on an answer by virtue of the covenant in general; such as, “I will be your God.” Gen. 17.7. Sometimes it is by the great Remembrancer drawing water out of some well of salvation; John 14.26;¹ but in both cases, God’s faithfulness is the soul’s surety.

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Hence it is that David in prayer so often argues upon the veracity and truth of God; and the church in Micah is so confident that the mercy promised to Abraham and confirmed in truth to Jacob, should be plentifully performed to his people Israel. Micah 7.20.²

9. Sober and serious resolutions before God in prayer. The 119th Psalm is full of these. “I will keep your statutes. I will run the way of your testimonies. I will speak of your testimonies before kings. I have sworn and will perform it, that I will keep your righteous judgments.” And elsewhere: “quicken us and we will call upon your name.” Ps. 80.18. “O when will you come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.” Ps. 101.2. Thus the soul makes holy stipulations and compacts of obedience to God. Thus Jacob says, “if God will be with me, then the Lord shall be my God,” and he resolves upon a house for God, and to reserve a tenth of all his estate for his service and worship. Gen. 28.22.³ And this conjunction “if” is not to be taken as a condition, as though if God did not bestow what he asked for, then God would not be his God.

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That would be a great wickedness. Rather, it is a rational setting forth of order and time. *Because, or since,* God is graciously pleased to promise, I will acknowledge him to be the God whom I adore, by erecting a temple and paying tithes to maintain his worship. But whatever it is that the soul in distress offers to God in promise, do not be slack to perform it, for many times answers of prayer may be delayed till we have performed our promises. Ps. 96.13, 19. David professes to pay what his lips had uttered in trouble, for God had heard him. If we break our words to God, then it is no wonder that we feel what the Lord threatened to Israel, that they would know his breach of promise. Numb. 14.34.⁴

10. A waiting frame of spirit in prayer. “I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.” Ps. 40.1. The Hebrew word signifies, “I expected with expectation.” — He walked up and down in the gallery of prayer. This is set forth in hope till God hears: “In you, O Lord, do I hope; you will hear, O Lord my God.” Ps. 38.15. Say with Micah: “I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation.” Micah 7.7.

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¹ **John 14:26** "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

² **Micah 7:20** You will give truth to Jacob *and* mercy to Abraham, Which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.

³ **Genesis 28:22** “And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”

⁴ **Numbers 14:34** `According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, *namely* forty years, and you shall know My rejection.

Hoping, expecting, trusting, living upon the promise and looking for an answer of peace, as when an archer shoots an arrow he looks after it with his glass to see how it hits the mark; so says the soul, 'I will pay attention and watch how my prayer flies toward the bosom of God, and what messages return from heaven.' The seaman when he has set sail, goes to the helm and the compass, and he stands and observes the sun or the pole-star, and sees how the ship works, and how the landmarks form themselves according to his chart. So you should do: when you have been at prayer, mark your ship, how it makes the port, and what rich goods are loaded back again from heaven. Most men lose their prayers in the mists and fogs of non-observation or forgetfulness. And thus we arrive at the second question.

II. HOW TO DISCOVER AND DISCERN ANSWERS TO SECRET PRAYER, SO THAT THE SOUL MAY BE SATISFIED THAT IT HAS PREVAILED WITH GOD.

Let us now consider the condition to prayer in the text. He will return it into your bosoms; this is so when the mercy that is sought is speedily and particularly thrown into your arms. Ps. 104.28;¹ 147.9. This is like the irrational creatures which, in their natural cries,

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seek their food from God, and gather what he gives them, and are filled with God. When God openly returns to his children, there is no further dispute; for the worst of men will acknowledge the divine bounty when he fills their hearts with food and gladness. Acts 14.17.²

I. But when cases are dubious, observe the frame and temper of your spirit in prayer; how the heart works and steers its course in several particulars.

1. A holy liberty of spirit is usually an excellent sign of answers – a copious³ spirit of fluentness⁴ to pour out requests, as out of a fountain. 2Cor. 1.17. As God shuts up opportunities, so he shuts up hearts when he is not inclined to hear. The heart is sometimes locked up so that it *cannot* pray, or if it does, and it presses on, then it finds a straitness,⁵ as if the Lord had spoken as he once did to Moses; “Speak no more to me of this matter.” Deut. 3.26. Or as God spoke to Ezekiel, Ez. 14.14, 7.2, and 7.11. Even though Noah, Daniel and Job entreated for a nation, when the time of alarm had come, there was no salvation but for their souls. When God intends to take away near relations, or any of his saints to himself, it often happens

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that neither the church of God nor dear friends have apt reasons or hearts to enlarge. The bow of prayer does not abide in strength. God took away gracious Josiah suddenly. 2Chr. 35.25. The church had time to write a book of lamentation, and to make it an ordinance in Israel, but there was no time for deprecation⁶ of the divine displeasure in it. In Hezekiah’s case, there was both a reason and a heart enlarged in prayer, and the prophet cried for a sign of mercy. 2Kings 20.11. Holy James might be quickly dispatched by the word of Herod Agrippa, but the church had time for supplication in behalf of Peter, Acts 12.2, 12. When the Lord is graciously pleased to grant a space of time and an enlargement of heart, it is a notable sign of success. “You have enlarged me when I was in distress,” says David, Psalm 4.1, though it meant deliverance, it may be applied to prayer, as the holy prophet seems to do. Indeed, though the soul may be under some sense of displeasure and in extremities, yet it lifts up a cry. Psalm 18.6. When conscience shuts the mouths of hypocrites, they shun and flee the presence of God.

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¹ Psa 104:25-28 This great and wide sea, in which there *are* innumerable teeming things... *There is* that Leviathan which You have made to play there. ²⁷ These all wait for You, that You may give *them* their food in due season. ²⁸ *What* You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, and they are filled with good.

² **Acts 14:17** “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

³ *Copious*: abundant.

⁴ *Fluentness*: an unconstrained and smooth flowing.

⁵ *Straitness*: a restriction, binding, or restraint.

⁶ *Deprecation*: A prayer to avert or remove some evil or disaster.

2. *A blessed serenity and quiet calmness of spirit in time of prayer* – especially when the soul comes to the Lord troubled and clouded at first, while it pours out its complaints before him; but at length, the sun shines forth brightly. It is said about Hannah that she was no longer sad; her countenance was no longer in the old hue, cast down and sorrowful because of her rival. Thus the Lord dealt with David, though not fully answered, yet filled with holy fortitude of spirit, and revived in the midst of his trouble. 1Sam. 1.18. Prayer dispels anxious solicitude, and chases away black thoughts from the heart. Psalm 138.3, 7. It eases the conscience, and fills the soul with the peace of God. Phil. 4.6-7.

3. *A joyful frame of spirit.* God sometimes makes his people not only peaceful, but joyful in his house of prayer. Thus it was with Hezekiah, Isaiah 56.7, when his crane-like chatterings were turned into swan-like songs, and his mournful elegies¹ were turned into glorious praises upon ten-stringed instruments in the house of the Lord.² The lips of Habbakuk quivered and his belly trembled; but before he finished, his voice was voluble in holy songs and his

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fingers were nimble on the harp. Hab. 3.16. Thus at Solomon's prayer; when the fire came down, the people were warmed at worship, and went away glad and merry at heart. 2Chr. 7.1, 10. David's experience of this sent him often to the house of God for comfort; and thus he chides his soul when it is cast down at any time; "I am going to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; why are you disquieted within me?" Psalm 43.4-5. His old harp that had cured Saul of his malignant dumps, on which temple songs are played, now cures his own spiritual sadness. When we look upon God with an eye of faith in prayer, it enlightens our faces with heavenly joy. When Moses came down off the mount from communion with God, how illustrious his face was from that heavenly vision. This is why prayer for divine mercy and comfort sometimes exhibits itself in this language: "Make your face to shine upon us, and we shall be saved," Psalm 83.3; and in this way the priests of old were to bless the children of Israel: "The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you." Numbers 6.25. These and similar expressions in Scripture,

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import³ that sometimes the Lord was pleased to give forth a shining glory from the oracle, and thereby made known his presence to his people, and filled them with awful impressions of his majesty and mercy. Ex. 40.34. Lev. 9.23. Numb. 16.19. This joyful light of God's countenance is like the sun rising upon the face of the earth. It chases away the dark fears and discouragements of the night. Such heavenly joy shows the strength of faith in prayer, and the radiant appearances of God; indeed, all prayer should be directed to this end, that our joy may be full. John 16.24.

4. *A sweetness of affection for God* – when the soul has gracious sentiments of God in prayer. Clouds of jealousy, and suspicions of divine mercy, as if God were a hard master, are marvellously unbecoming a soul that would go to God as a father. And hence, to restrain prayer because of such unsuitable thoughts of his infinite mercy, is greatly provoking [to God]. Whereas the apprehension of God's excellent goodness should work the heart into lovely thoughts of God.

¹ A mournful poem; a lament for the dead.

² **Isa 56:7** Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *will be* accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.

³ *Import*: carry with it a secondary meaning or implication.

Man, but especially a saint, is an accumulated heap of divine favors, and the gifts of divine mercy should attract our hearts.

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When the soul comes to perceive that everything flows from the fountain of his eternal love, it fills prayer with holy delight and joy; the ecstasies of love often rise upon the soul in secret, and with such divine affection that it carries the soul beyond itself. Let the profane world say what they will when spiritual ardors, like so many fragrant spices, flow out of the soul. “I love the Lord, for he has heard my supplication.” Psalms 116.1. As answers to prayer flow from the love of the father, so suitable workings of holy affections flow from the hearts of children. John 16.27. When the soul is filled with gracious intimations, like those of the angelic voice to Daniel, “O Daniel, greatly beloved,” or like that to the Holy Virgin, “Hail, you that are highly favored,” how greatly it inflames the heart toward God. Dan. 10.11; Luke 1.23.

5. Inward encouragements sometimes spring in upon the heart in prayer, from the remembrance of former experiences which mightily animate the soul with fervency. When Moses calls to mind that God had forgiven and delivered them from Egypt, there follows

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immediately a sweet intimation of God’s mercy. Numb. 14.19-20.¹ When the soul considers the days of old, the years of ancient times, and calls to remembrance its former songs in the night, he draws an argument out of the quiver of his experience: “Will God be favorable no more? Can he forget to be gracious to me? Can he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” Psalm 77.5-6, 7, 9-10.

6. A ready heart for thankfulness and service. The heart is brimful and ready to flow over in grateful memorials of God’s mercy. “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?” Psalm 116.12. As of old at temple sacrifices there was music, so it ought to be now: while the mercy is being prayed for, the heart must be wound up and tuned for praise. Rev. 5.8. Psalm 107.1. The vials full of the aromas of prayer are joined with harps for a heavenly melody. When the heart is fixed or prepared, then songs and praise follow. This streams from a sense of divine love; and love is the fountain of thankfulness, and of all sprightly and vigorous services. Any prayer that does not end in cheerful obedience is called by Cyprian,

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“barren and unfruitful, naked and without ornament.” And so we may glance at the expression in James 5.16, “the effectual, fervent prayer.” A prayer working within, will be working without, and demonstrate the labor of love.

II. Observe the principal subject matter of prayer; mark that while the arrow of prayer is shot at the target it aims for, there is usually some special sin that remains unconquered, some untamed corruption, some defect, some pressing strait that drives the soul to prayer; and *this* is the main burden of the spirit. Take notice how such a sin withers, or such a grace flourishes, or such a need is supplied upon the opening our hearts in prayer. Watch for prayer, watch to perform it,

¹ **Num 14:19** “Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.” ²⁰ Then the LORD said: “I have pardoned, according to your word;”

1Peter 4.7, and then expound the voice of the divine oracle, to know that you are successful. Cry to your soul, by way of holy soliloquy,¹ “Watchman! What of the night?” Is. 21.11.

III. Observe ensuing providences. Set a vigilant eye upon succeeding circumstances; examine them as they pass before you; set a wakeful sentinel at the ports of wisdom. “His name is near, his wondrous works declare.” Psa 75.1; his name of *truth*; ^{Joh 14.6} his glorious title of *hearing prayer*. ^{Psa 65.2}

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When prayer has gone up by the help of the Spirit, mark how “all things work together for good.” Rom. 8.28. Note the connexion there; working things together follows the intercession of the Spirit for all saints. Rom. 8.27. God is often pleased to speak so clearly by his works, as if he said, “Here I am, I will guide you continually, and you shall be like a watered garden, whose waters do not fail.” Is. 58.9, 11. Secret promises animate prayer, and often providentially expound it. Cyrus was promised to come against Babylon for the church’s sake. Is. 45.4, 11, 19.² But Israel must *ask it* of God, and they were told that they would not ask his face in vain; then follows Babylon’s fall in the succeeding chapter. When we cry to the Lord in trouble, he sends his word of command, and heals us. Psalm 107.19-20. There is a set time of mercy, a time of life. When Abraham had prayed for a son, the Lord told him “at the time appointed I will return.” Gen. 15.2; 18.14. In a great extremity, after the solemn fast of three days by the Jews in Shusan, and the queen was in her palace, on the *fourth* day,

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at night the king could not sleep, and he must hear the Chronicles of Persia; *then* follows Haman’s ruin. Est. 4.16, and 6.1. Prayer has a strange virtue to give quiet sleep sometimes, as to David. Psalm 3.4-5. And sometimes he gives a waking pillow for the good of the church. Mat. 24.42³ When Jacob had finished wrestling, and the angel had gone at dawn, then the good man saw the angel of God’s presence in the face of Esau. Sometimes Providence is not so quick; the martyr’s prayer, as to a complete answer, is deferred for a season, Rev. 6.11, but long white robes are given to everyone – a triumphant frame of spirit; and they are told they should wait but a little season till divine justice would work out the issue of prayer. The thunder upon God’s enemies comes out of the temple; the judgments roar out of Zion, the place of divine audience. Rev. 11.19. Joel 3.16. But the means, methods, and times of God’s working are various; we give them little forethought. Submit everything to his infinite wisdom; do not prescribe, but observe the embroidery of Providence; it is difficult to spell its characters sometimes,

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but it is a rare employment. Isa. 64.5. Psalm 111.2. Eccl. 3.11. His works are searched into by those who delight in his providences, for all things are beautiful in his season.

¹ A speech you make to yourself.

² For Jacob My servant’s sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me... ¹¹ Thus says the LORD, The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: “*Ask Me* of things to come concerning My sons; And concerning the work of My hands, you command Me... ¹⁹ *I have not spoken in secret*, In a dark place of the earth; **I did not say** to the seed of Jacob, ‘*Seek Me in vain*’; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

³ The citation in the source text was Gen. 24.15, which seems inappropriate.

IV. Observe your following communion with God. Inward answers make the soul vegetative and lively, like plants that after a rain, when the sun shines, 2Sam. 23.4, lift up their heads and shoot forth their flowers. A saint in God's favor does everything with delight. Answered prayer is like oil to the spirits, and beauty for ashes; the sackcloth of mournful fasting is turned to a wedding garment. He grows more free, and yet is humbly familiar with heaven. This is someone I would wish you to pick an acquaintance with, who can come and have what he will at court. John 16.23. The Lord once told a king by night that Abraham was a prophet and would pray for him – that he was acquainted with the King of heaven. Gen. 20.7. O blessed person! I hope there are many such persons among you, whose life is a perpetual prayer, as David gave himself to prayer. Psalm 109.4. (The literal Hebrew expression, “but I prayer,”¹ is very forcible). He *is* prayer *all over*: he prays at rising and prays at lying down; he prays as he walks;

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and he is always ready for prayer. He is like a prime favorite at court that has the golden key to the private stairs, and can wake his prince by night. There are such (whatever the drunken and profane world dreams), who are ready for spiritual ascents at all seasons, besides the frequency of set communions. His wings never weary, his willing spirit is flying continually, and he makes God the rock of his dwelling into which he may, upon all assaults, have holy retirements.

But enough for the main question with its branches. There are many particular queries of some weight that may attend the subject. To these I shall briefly reply.

Query 1. What is the proper time for secret prayer?

Various providences, different temperaments and frames of spirit, motions from heaven, and opportunities, variously dictate the proper time. Some find it best at evening; others in the night when all is silent; others at morning when the spirits are freshest. I think with respect to others, that conscientious prudence must guide them in such cases, but it should be when others are retired,² and the spirit is in the best frame for communion.

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Query 2. How often should we pray in secret?

If we consult scriptural precedent, we find David at prayer in the morning. Psalm 5.3. Our blessed Lord, early, before day, in the morning. Mark 1.35. Chrysostom advises, “Wash your soul before your body, for as the face and hands are cleansed by water, so the soul is cleansed by prayer.” At another time our Lord went to secret prayer in the evening, Matt. 14.23, and Isaac went out at dusk to meditate. Gen. 24.63. David and Daniel prayed three times a day, Psalm 55.17; Dan. 6.10; and once it is mentioned that David said, seven times a day I will praise you; that is, “I will do it *often*.” Psalm 119.164. Such cases may happen that require frequent accesses to the throne of grace in a day. But I humbly think we should go there *at least* once a day, which seems to be imported by that passage in our Lord's prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread;” for after our Lord's appointment of secret prayer in the text, he gives this prayer as a pattern to his disciples.

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¹ This is variously translated: I am a man of prayer, I continue to pray, I give myself to prayer, I am in prayer.

² Not asleep necessarily, but withdrawn (retired) from your presence so they will not be a distraction.

Query 3. When persons are under temptations or disturbance by passions, is it expedient to pray then?

Since we are enjoined to “lift up holy hands without wrath,” 1Tim. 2.8, I judge that it is not so proper to run immediately to prayer, but with some praying ejaculations for pardon and strength against such excesses, and when cooled and composed in some measure, then speed to prayer. Take heed the sun does not go down on your anger without holy purging by prayer. Eph. 4.26. Though I must confess that a Christian should always endeavor to keep his course and heart in such a frame as not to be unfit for prayer upon small warnings. The very consideration of our frequent communion with God should be a great bar to immoderate and exuberant passions.

Query 4. Whether we may pray in secret when others must take notice of our retirement?

I must confess, in a small house, and when a person can many times find no occasions except those that will be observed, I think he ought not to neglect secret duty for fear of the notice of others; we must

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prevent it as much as may be, and especially watch our hearts against spiritual pride, and God may graciously turn it to a testimony and example to others.

Query 5. Whether we may be vocal in secret prayer, if we can't raise or keep up our affection so well, or preserve the heart from wandering without it?

No doubt; yet a great deal of wise caution must be used about extending the voice. Tertullian advises that hands, countenance, and voice should be ordered with great reverence and humility. What difference would there be in revealing our prayers by this, than if we prayed in public? Yet if we can obtain some very private place, or when others are away from home, such may lawfully increase it to their private benefit.

Query 6. How to keep the heart from wandering thoughts in prayer?

Although it is exceedingly difficult to attain so excellent a frame, yet by frequently remembering and reflecting upon the eye of God in secret; by endeavoring to fix the heart with all possible watchfulness upon the main scope of the prayer in hand; by being very sensible of our wants and

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indigences;¹ by not studying² an impertinent length of time, but rather being more frequent and short in prayer; by considering that God is in heaven and we are on earth; and also by the exercise of holy communion; we may, through the implored assistance of the Spirit, attain some sweetness and freedom, and also more of a fixed spirit in our addresses before the Lord.

Query 7. What if present answers do not seem to correspond to our petitions?

We must not conclude by and by that it is a token of displeasure, and say with Job, “Why do you contend with me?” Job 10.2; but we should acknowledge the sovereignty of divine wisdom and love in things which seem contrary to us in our petitions for temporal mercies; and submit to the

¹ *Indigence*: A state of extreme poverty or destitution.

² *Studying*: thinking intently and at length, as for spiritual purposes.

counsel of Elihu (Job 33.13),¹ since God gives no account of any of his matters. Nor can we find out the unsearchable methods of his holy ways to any satisfaction.

There are other cases and scruples² that might be addressed; such as prescribed forms of prayer in secret prayer, to which I need say little, since those who are truly converted, Gal. 4.6; they have the promise of the Spirit of God to assist and enable men.

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Those that have the fountain do not need to drink from another man's bucket, nor use stilts and crutches that have spiritual strength; nor are words and phrases the nerves of prayer – faith and holy groans are. Rom. 8.26. Zech. 12.10. Acts 9.11. Yet, for some help to young beginners, it is of use to observe the style of the spirit, as well as the heavenly matter of several prayers in the Holy Scriptures.

Nor do I need to press frequency to a holy heart that has fallen in love with spiritual communion, for he delights to be with God continually; the thoughts of God are so precious to him that his soul is sick from affection, and it prays to be stayed with more of “the flagons,” and comforted with “the apples” in even greater abundance. Cant. 2.5. To some, but I fear very few, it may be necessary to say how far it may be expedient to withdraw from prayer for the needs of their frail body in this vale of tears. It may be said to them, that the Lord is very pitying and gracious toward our frailties; he would rather have mercy than sacrifice in some cases. Though I doubt these phoenixes,³ which are very rare, are in danger of expiring in prayer, as martyrs of holy love, as Gerson expresses it.

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Having now finished the foregoing queries with what brevity I could, I should address short, sudden, occasional prayers, commonly called *ejaculations*; but indeed that requires a set discourse. Yet because of a promise recited earlier, I shall give a few hints, and then conclude with some application.

¹ **Job 33:12-14** “Look, *in* this you are not righteous. I will answer you, For God is greater than man. ¹³ Why do you contend with Him? For He does not give an accounting of any of His words. ¹⁴ For God may speak in one way, or in another, *yet man* does not perceive it.”

² *Scruple*: An ethical or moral principle that governs or inhibits action.

³ *Phoenix* – A bird in Egyptian mythology that lived in the desert for 500 years and then consumed itself by fire, later to rise from its ashes, renewed.

EJACULATORY PRAYER.

Ejaculatory Prayer is a sudden, short breathing of the soul toward heaven upon an instant and surprising emergency. In holy persons it is quick and lively, rising from a vehement ardor of spirit, swifter than the flight of eagles, and it keeps pace with a flash of lightning. It flies upon the wings of a holy thought into the third heavens in the twinkling of an eye, and it fetches auxiliary forces in time of need.

There are many precedents recorded in the sacred page on great and notable occasions, with unusual success. When good magistrates are busy in the work of reformation, let them imitate Nehemiah when redressing the profaning of the Sabbath: "Remember me, O my God, concerning this thing." Neh. 13.14, 22. When captains and generals go to war, observe Israel's appeal to God rather than acclamations to men:

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"The Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses." Josh. 1.17. In times of battle, or in pursuit of the enemy, valiant Joshua darts up such a prayer as this: "O that the Lord would lengthen this triumphant day," Josh. 10.12; and the Lord heard his voice. The tribes beyond Jordan in a battle with the Hagarites: 1Chr. 5.10, 20. When Jehoshaphat was in a sore strait, 2Chr. 18.31. Samson, ready to perish at Lehi with thirst, and when blind and exposed to contempt in the temple of Dagon, Judges 15.18; 16.28. Elisha at Dothan surrounded by a Syrian host, prayed, "Lord, open this young man's eyes." 2 Kings 6.17. David nearly being stoned at Ziklag, 1Sam. 30.6, and when flying from Absalom in the ascent of Mount Olivet. 2Sam. 15.31. In the midst of lawful and laborious callings, Boaz said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you." Ruth 2.4. It sanctifies the plough, as Jerome said of the fields of Bethlehem: "The tillers of the fields and the dressers of the vineyards sang David's psalms." It keeps the shop, and it inclines the hearts of customers; it bars the doors; it quenches fires; it blesses your children within you; it preserves your going out and coming in.

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Jacob found it to rest upon, as his children went on a journey to Egypt. Gen. 43.14. It closes the eye with sweet sleep, Psalm 3.5, gives songs in the night, and wakens the soul in the arms of mercy. Job 35.10. Psalm 139.18. It sits at the helm when the storm rises at sea; it gives strength to anchors in roads, and prosperous gales to the venturous merchant. Psalm 107.28. Jonah 1.6. When Nehemiah presents the cup to his prince in the palace at dinner, he also presents a Michtam, a golden prayer to the King of Heaven. Neh. 2.4. At the reading of the law, Josiah was heard in secret cries to Heaven. 2Chr. 34.27. At a holy conference on a journey, the disciples prayed, "Lord, increase our faith." Luke 17.5. Jacob, on his dying pillow, predicting future events to his children, falls into a holy rapture: "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord." Gen. 49.18. At his sacred death in martyrdom, Zechariah cries out, "the Lord look upon it and require it." 2Chr. 2.4. And Stephen under a shower of stones melts into prayer for the stony hearts that flung them. "Lord, do not lay this sin to their charge." Acts 7.60.

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And our blessed Saviour in his greatest agonies, makes a tender-hearted prayer: "Father, forgive them," etc. Luke 23.34. And lastly, in the distresses of others, Eli puts up a sudden prayer for Hannah: "The God of Israel grant your petition." 1Sam. 1.17.

In these and many similar cases, the Holy Word supplies us with patterns for ejaculation in all extremities, which I cannot now digest and improve. Only in a few words, let us take a view of the usefulness of such a sudden flight of the soul to heaven.

1. It helps us to a speedy preparation for all our duties; with such an ejaculation let us lift up our hands to God in the heavens. Lam. 3.41.
2. It is a guard against secret sins in their first rising, and in the first assaults of temptation.
3. It does not allow divine mercies to slip by unobserved in a wakeful Christian, and it proves a fruitful mother of gratitude and praise.
4. It sanctifies all our worldly employments; it fastens the stakes in the hedge of divine protection; and it turns everything to a blessing. 1Tim. 4.4-5.
5. It is a saint's buckler¹ against sudden accidents, a present antidote against frights and evil tidings. It is good at all occasions, and it consecrates to us not only our meals, but every gasp of air, etc.

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6. It is a sweet companion that the severest enemies cannot abridge.² They may cut off our outward ordinances and even our closet duties; they may pluck out the little nail in the holy place. Ezra 9.8.³ But no labyrinth, no prison, not the worst of company can hinder this; in the very face of adversaries we may lift our souls to God.

Let us conclude with some uses:

Use 1. To convince others of their dangerous state if they neglect their secret duties, or have no heart for communion, and who draw no water out of the sealed fountain. But everything they do is only in public. This is a suspicious token of hypocrisy, since the kernel and soul of religion lies so much in the heart and in the closet. Mark the phrase in the text. God's eye is open upon you in the closet, and if your eye is open upon his eye, you may see a glorious beauty. The excellence of grace lies in making us conscious of secret sins and secret duties.

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Use 2. To examine those who perform their secret duty, but not from a sincere principle, like Amaziah. He prays, but not with a perfect heart. 2Chr. 25.2. Like Ahab, they mourn only with crocodile tears; those who do it only because they find a precept or an example for it, and therefore to quiet their conscience, they converse only in the shell and trunk of a duty; they rest in the naked performance. But it does not matter whether they taste of the sweet streams that flow in from heaven in the golden pipe of an ordinance. What account can they render when they flow into their closet, but like Domitian, it is only to catch flies – and when the doors are shut to the world, their hearts are shut to heaven and to communion with God? He that sees in secret beholds the evil frame of such a heart; and one day he will openly punish it.

¹ *Buckler*: armor carried on the arm to intercept blows; a shield.

² *Abridge*: to lessen, diminish, or curtail.

³ [Ezr 9.8](#) And now for a little while grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.

Use 3. To excite and awaken everyone to this excellent duty, and to manage it in an excellent manner. Would you live delightfully? Would you translate heaven to earth? Then keep up communion in secret prayer, to know God, to discern his face, to behold the lustre of his eye that shines in secret. Remember the glorious person that meets in your closet. All the world yields no such glittering beauty

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as a gracious person sees when he is in a happy frame at secret prayer. Shut your eyes when you come out, for all other objects are but vile and sordid, and not worth the glances of a noble soul. O the sweetness of the hidden manna that the soul tastes when in lively communion with God! It is a part of what is laid up for the saints in glory; let us relish our souls with it a little.

1. Consider what affectionate agonies the soul delights to conflict with in secret; fears that raise confidence, humility that exalts, tremblings that embolden, bright clouds that shine upon the Israelites in the night, and darkness that enlightens, solitudes full of heavenly company, and tears brimful of joy, and holy sighs, like a cooling wind in harvest, sick fits that are symptoms of health, and holy faintings that are the soul's cordials, a weariness to the flesh that is the healthful exercise of it, and vigor to the spirit, and a continual motion that never tires. As Austin said of divine love: "It is the weight of my soul, it carries me up and down in all that I speak and act."

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2. Consider its ecstasies and heavenly raptures, which allure and draw the heart from earthly vanities. The soul shuts its eyes to worldly delights, and with Solomon it says of laughter, It is mad, and of mirth, what are you doing? The soul can't warm its thoughts at the crackling of thorns under a pot, or be joyful in the house of a fool. Ecc. 2.2; 7.64. It is the soul's pleasure to loath pleasure itself; there is none so beautiful to him as Christ, the chiefest of ten thousand;^{Sol 5.10} there is no sweetness like that of the tree in the midst of the wood, the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. He sits under it with great delight, while it drips sweeter than honey into his closet. Rev. 2.7. 1Sam. 14.26.

3. Consider its admirable prophecies: prayer stands upon Mount Zion with a divining, presaging¹ spirit. It foretells great things to the church's joy, and to its enemies' terror. Elijah at prayer in Horeb receives an answer of the ruin of the house of Ahab, and he is bid to go and anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi king over Israel. 2 Kings 9.2-3. The two witnesses under the Roman defection have the power to strike the earth with plagues as often as they will, Rev. 11, consonant² with what Tertullian said of old, "The prayers of Christians confounded the nations," and so it will shortly prove;

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the doom of Babylon comes out of the temple. When the sanctuary is full of the smoke of the incense of prayer, the seven angels come out with the seven last vials full of the wrath of God to pour them out upon the anti-Christian world. Rev. 15.7-8; 16.1. Prayer calculates and hastens the ruin of Rome. Once the spirit of prayer is poured out, it brings deliverance to Mount Zion, and gathers the nations into the valley of Jehoshaphat for judgment. Joel 2.23,

¹ *Presaging*: seeing signs of something to come, esp. something important, whether good or bad.

² *Consonant*: in keeping with, or in agreement with.

32, and 3.1-2. Let us never be discouraged; if prayer falls to work and awakens Christ in the ship of the church, then her storms will cease in a halcyon¹ calm. Luke 8.24.²

4. Consider its comforting evidences: secret prayer which is duly managed is a notable evidence of our adoption. Pray to your Father who is in secret, and sees in secret, and knows the secrets of your heart. Your groanings are not hidden from him; none but a child of promise has this sweet freedom with God as a Father.

5. Consider its rewards and reverences: nothing revives and cheers the spirit so much as answers of love and mercy from heaven. As it feasts the conscience with the royal delicacies

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of sincerity, so it sets a lustre upon every mercy, such as being the child of prayer; our closets exert an influence upon our shops, our ships, our fields, and all that we enjoy, so that they smell of the divine blessing. As David said of the precepts, the soul may say, "This I have because I urged the promises." Psalm 119.56.

Use 4. To pity the miserable blind world that does not know where true comfort, joy and strength are to be found, that sees no beauty in the ways of God, and feels no sweetness in communion with him, that finds no pleasure in closets but in play-houses (which Tertullian called the devil's churches), that cry out with Esau that they have enough. Gen. 33.9. Alas! What can be enough in the creature unless it is enough of noise, rattle, and vanity! O how ignorant they are of heavenly treasures, of that fountain of mercies from which prayer drinks and refreshes the spirit of a saint; who do not know that blessed "enough" of which Jacob speaks, that ocean of all those things that are to be found in God! Gen. 33.11. Now let Europe be in flames, and the very ark be in danger, a prayerless man does not care, though the one is burnt and the other is in ashes, so long as

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he is safe. And if his concerns catch fire, then he can only repair to Endor or Ekron. 1Sam. 28.7;³ 2Kings 1.2.⁴ They have no acquaintance with God, no hope from God, no interest in the keeper of their souls. The world is a deplorable hospital, the great Lazar house⁵ of sick, lame and impotent persons, as Gerson terms it. They have no face or heart to go to the physician of souls.

But ah! most lamentable is the state of some profligate wretches of our age that are, I fear, almost incurably gone with spiritual ulcers in their lungs, and putrid cancers on their tongues, that breathe nothing but venom, and openly spit out their rotten atheistic jeers against the spirit of prayer, and mock at communion with God. They scoff at what God has promised as one of the choicest tokens of his love for the church, and at the symptoms of the glory of the latter times, Zech. 12.10. Joel 2.23, 32. Rom. 10.13. This is when God will turn such Ishmaels into the desert, and their drunken songs shall expire in dreadful howlings. They are more profane than many

¹ Idyllically calm and peaceful.

² **Luke 8:24** And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm.

³ **1Sam 28:7** Then Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "In fact, *there is* a woman who is a medium at En Dor."

⁴ **2Kings 1:2** Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured; so he sent messengers and said to them, Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.

⁵ A leper colony, leprosarium, or **lazar house** is a place to quarantine leprous people.

heathen in primitive times who had some reverence for Christian worship, though they persecuted [the church]. Amos 8.10; Job 30.31.

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But those of this adulterous Roman age, like brute beasts, speak evil of what they are ignorant, and are in danger of perishing in their corruption. 2Peter 2.12. Pity such persons if there is yet hope, and commend their condition to God's mercy, and to penitent sorrow, that they may weep *here* where tears smart, not in *hell* where they scald and burn and swell that river of brimstone.

In the meantime, O you that fear the Lord, be diligent to observe and interpret messages after secret prayer, for the life and joy of a Christian is improved by it. God has declared that he is graciously pleased with secret prayer, so as to send an angel, that glorious creature, to fly into Daniel's chamber, and being weary with flying, he moved so swiftly, as the original text expresses it. Dan. 9.21. What a high expression this is, that even angels are represented as weary with hasty flights to bring saints their answers! And of what great account does the Lord esteem his praying people, that angels are said to be tired in bringing tidings of mercy!

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6. Meditate on the glory of heaven, where all our prayers shall be turned into praises, when every sigh below shall be an accent to the heavenly music above, and the tears of the valley shall be turned into orient gems in the diadem of glory. *Here* we live in wants and desires, but *there* shall be palms in the hand; white robes and everlasting joy are upon the heads and hearts of the saints.