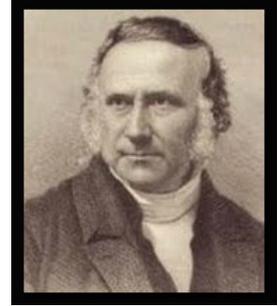


I Can't Pray



I happened to be seated in the library of a literary Institution with an intimate friend, when two young ladies entered the room, whom he introduced to me as sisters, who had come from a distant State to be pupils under his care. I had never heard of them before. The elder one appeared to be about twenty years of age, and the other, perhaps two years younger. My friend was soon called out of the room for a few moments, and I was left alone with them. I thought the opportunity too good to be lost, and felt it to be my duty to speak to them, on the subject of their salvation. In a brief conversation upon common topics, which I endeavored to shape in such a manner as to prepare the way for my design, I was much pleased with them. I thought they manifested more than an ordinary share of talent, and I was particularly pleased with the frankness and simplicity of their manners, and more than all with their manifest sisterly affection.

I inquired whether they were members of any church. They were not. "And do you think you are yet living without any religion?" said I. "We are not Christians," was the answer. Their mother was a member of the church, and they told me that they had themselves "studied religion," as they expressed it, "a great deal," and "thought about it very often," but they said, "we are not Christians." "And why not?" said I. The question appeared to confuse them a little, and I endeavored to relieve their embarrassment by some general remarks, such as demanded no specific reply. I asked permission to call and see them.

A little more than a week afterwards I had an interview with them. I was still more pleased with them than I had been before. They were frank, gentle, simple-hearted, and without affectation. But in respect to their religious inclinations I found little to please me, and still less in respect to their religious opinions. Their minds appeared to be stored with a species of metaphysical ideas on the subject of religion, which I could not reconcile to” the Bible or to common sense, but to which they tenaciously adhered, as being in accordance with the teachings which they had always heard from the pulpit. As I entreated them to give their attention to their salvation immediately, all I could say appeared to be warded off, or its truth rendered vain by a single idea. That idea would constantly come out in some such question as “how can we seek God with such hearts?” or, “how can we do anything without the Holy Spirit?” or, “what can we do if God does not give us the right motives?” This was their one difficulty. They maintained with true metaphysical courage and acumen, that they could do nothing, and any attempt to seek the Lord must be useless, because their hearts were wrong, and they could not therefore “seek Him with the right feelings,” as they expressed it. No act, no attempt, no thought of theirs, “could possibly be acceptable to Him,” or of “any avail” for themselves. They clung to this idea constantly and tenaciously.

I supposed at first, that this was only a casual thought which had occurred to them; but in a second interview, I found them just the same as in the first. The idea which hindered them from any serious attempt in religion, had become interwoven with all their religious thoughts and feelings,—had been entertained so long and employed so often, that now it came up spontaneously, and spread itself over every thought about personal religion. They presented it so naturally, so easily, and in such varied shapes and connections, that I began to despair of having any influence over them. However, I resolved to try. I took care to assure them of the deep interest I took in them already, which I certainly could do with entire sincerity, for they had won my esteem, and it made me sad of heart to see two such estimable girls entangled in the snares of such a deception. I aimed to win their confidence; and before I left them, having

now learned their cast of mind, and their peculiar religious difficulty, I assured them most affectionately that they were mistaken in many of their notions, and that they certainly might find the favor of God, if they would seek it in the Bible way. To give some practical point and direction to their thoughts, I desired them to read carefully and with prayer the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, as proof of the truth of what I told them, and especially as a specimen of the manner, in which their heavenly Father calls to them and counsels them in His infinite 'kindness and love.' They both promised to read it, but I noticed that they did not promise to pray over it, as I had requested them to do.

They were very much alike in all their ideas about religion. Their hindrance was the same. I resolved, therefore, to converse with each one separately after this, because I perceived that they mutually hindered each other;—for when one of them would say, "I can't seek the Lord with such a heart," the other would often reiterate the same idea in some other form, manifestly supported and confirmed in her strange notion. Urged separately to attend to their salvation, I hoped their error might be corrected. And as I had discovered a greater susceptibility, as I thought, in the younger sister, I determined to commence with her.

Consequently, I soon afterwards called upon her, and asked to see her alone. She met me very affectionately. But I had scarcely uttered a single sentence in respect to her duty, before she asked Suddenly, and with much animation,—

"Shall I call my sister?"

"Oh, no," said I, "I wish to see you alone. You may say some things which I should not wish your sister to hear."

This reply appeared to give her some little confusion, mingled with sadness; but she made no objections to my proposal, and soon recovered her composure. I urged her to her religious duty, as faithfully and affectionately as I could. She listened to me apparently with candor and with some emotion, as in the language of Scripture I enjoined upon her repentance, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for justification unto life

eternal. But the old hindrance was still in her way. The following is a part of our conversation:

“I suppose you are convinced of the necessity of religion?”

“Oh, yes, sir! I know its necessity but I do not feel it,—I cannot feel it.”

“Do you feel, that you are a sinner,—without Christ, an undone sinner, and have a wicked heart opposed to God?”

“I know I am; but I don’t feel it as much as I ought to.”

“What do you mean by saying, ‘as much as you ought to?’”

“I mean, not enough to be able to seek the Lord, or repent.”

“Are you really giving any definite attention to your duty towards God, to your salvation?”

“At times, I have thought about it a great deal.”

“Are you willing to seek the Lord now, in obedience to His word, and as well as you know how?”

“I have felt for a long time, that I should like to be a Christian; but it is rather the conviction of my head than the feeling of my heart. My reason teaches me it is wise to make my peace with God; but I suppose such has not been the desire of my heart. My attention has been called to the subject very seriously, and I have felt it deeply at times; but the Spirit has forsaken me, and I have gone farther off than ever. Once I could have given my heart to God a great deal easier than I could now,” said she, with deep sadness.

“I have no doubt,” said I, “that is true, entirely true. It has become more difficult for you, and will be the more difficult still, the longer you delay. You ought to seek the Lord now.”

“If I could seek Him, sir, with an acceptable heart, I would not neglect it.”

“And so, becoming worse and worse, going farther and farther off, you let your life run on, living without God and without hope, making no attempt to gain eternal life. My dear girl, this is all wrong. Salvation is to be sought,—if there is an item of truth in the Bible, it is to be sought. You may obtain it, if you will. Salvation is offered to you,—it is free,—it is fully

within your reach; the gospel calls to you. If you will seek God with all your heart, I know you will not seek in vain. God has said this to you to induce you to seek Him: ‘Hear, and your soul shall live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts,’—(you think wrong, remember,)—‘and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.’ And all this, God says to you, and says it just in connection with his command, ‘Seek ye the Lord, call ye upon Him.’ You must seek Him. You must turn to Him with repentance and prayer. He gives you the fullest encouragement to do so. Let his word sink deep into your heart, my dear girl; ‘Then shall ye go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you; and ye shall seek me, and ye shall find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart, and I will be found of you.’ That is the way which the God of all love calls on you to take in order to be saved; and you do not obey Him; you are not trying to obey Him!”

“Why, sir, I have been taught, that I must submit to God first, or He will not hear any prayer I could make. I have heard my minister say so.”

“I am not teaching you, not to submit to God (as you call it). He commands you to seek Him, and tells you how to do it, and I want you to ‘submit’ to His command.”

“I think,” said she, “that praying before submitting to God, would only be hypocrisy.”

“Then you should do both. He certainly commands you to pray.”

“Not with such a heart as I have got,” said she, emphatically, and with an air of triumph.

“Yes, He does,” said 1. “Here is His command in the Bible,—it is addressed to you,—to every sinner on earth,—‘Call ye upon Him while He is near.’ He does, indeed, command you also to repent; but if you choose not to repent, that sin does not alter His command to you to pray. His command lies on just such a heart as you have this moment. Your impenitence and unbelief are no excuse for you.”

“How can I have any power to pray to Him, and seek Him rightly?”

“The Bible answers your question: ‘to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.’ The Bible offers Christ to you, a guilty sinner. You are to receive Him as your own Saviour, in order to have ‘power’ to become a child of God. You are to ‘deny yourself, and take up your cross and follow Christ.’”

“But,” said she, with much agitation, “I cannot ask God to receive me as His child. I cannot plead with my whole heart for His blessing, as I would ask my earthly father for a gift which he could bestow.”

“Do you never pray?”

“No, I never prayed. It seems to me it would be nothing but mockery for me to pray. I can’t pray.”

“You cannot be saved without prayer. If you will not ask God’s blessing, you cannot have it. ‘Ask, and ye shall receive,’ is God’s direction and promise. You foolishly invert the order, and thus ‘handle the word of God deceitfully,’ hoping to ‘receive’ first, and then ‘ask.’ If you would be saved, my dear girl, you must do as God bids you.”

“But I can’t ask with all my heart, and anything short of that would be as bad as sacrilege.”

“You are wrong, my child,—all wrong. It is true you ought to seek the Lord with all your heart, as he requires: but it is not true, that your praying is worse than neglecting prayer, and it is not true, that you have any ground to expect His blessing before you ask it. You think wrong. ‘Let the wicked forsake his THOUGHTS.’ You and God do not think alike. Your false notions hinder you from becoming a Christian. God commands you to seek Him by prayer. You may think what you will about ‘mockery,’ still He tells you to pray, in order to your being saved; and while you do not pray, you do not take the way which His mercy points out to you.”

“I can’t pray,” says she, with an accent of vexation and despair.

“You say you can’t pray,” said I. “God thinks you can. Just as soon as He has said to you, ‘Seek ye the Lord,’ He goes on to tell you how to seek Him,—‘call ye upon Him.’ He thinks you can pray. In that passage He tells you to pray even before He tells you to repent. ‘Call ye upon Him’

comes first: it stands before the command to repent,—‘let the wicked forsake his way.’ God knows that if you do not pray, you will not repent. I do not say that you ought to pray with an impenitent heart, but I say you ought to pray, be your heart what it may. And what an awfully wicked heart you must have, if you cannot even pray.”

“Oh, I can’t pray, I have such a heart!”

“You refuse to pray, because you have such an evil heart. That evil heart is the very reason why you have need to pray the more earnestly. Your evil heart, instead of being an argument against prayer, is the strongest of all possible reasons why you should pray. You infinitely need God’s help, and you should ask for it.”

“I can’t pray! It would be hypocrisy!”

“Perhaps it would; but it is rebellion to neglect it.”

“Well, hypocrisy is worse, sir.”

“I do not know that; in such a case as this,” said I, “if you pray with such a heart as you have now, you will at least try to obey God in the form; but if you do not pray at all, you are a rebel both in heart and outward conduct. Which is the worst—to try and come short, or to stand here before God and say you will not try at all?”

With vexation of spirit she replied, “I can’t pray; my heart is all wrong.”

“How do you expect to get a better one?”

“I know God must give me a new heart, if I ever have it.”

“Do you want Him to give you a new heart?”

“Oh sir, I wish he would,” said she, weeping.

“Why then don’t you tell Him so, in earnest prayer?”

“I can’t pray, it would be insincere.”

“Are you insincere to me, when you tell me with so much emotion, you ‘wish God could give you a new heart?’ Do you tell me what is not true?”

“Oh, no sir I” said she earnestly, “I hope you don’t think I would utter a falsehood to you?”

“Not at all, my friend; but if you spoke the truth, you do sincerely wish God would give you a new heart. “Where then would be the insincerity of telling Him so; of asking Him for what you sincerely desire?”

She paused a long time, pondering this question, apparently with mingled thoughtfulness and vexation; at length she replied,—

“I can’t pray, I have not the right motives.”

“How do you expect to get the right motives?”

“I never shall have, if God does not put them into my heart!”

“Do you want Him to put them into your heart?”

“Yes, I do, above all things,” said she, earnestly.

“Why then don’t you ask Him? If you are sincere in wanting Him to do so, you can sincerely ask Him to do so.”

“But I can’t pray, sir; the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord.”

“So you say,” said I.

“Does not the Bible say so, sir?”

“No, my child, nowhere.”

“Why, sir, I thought it did.”

“It does not. It says, ‘the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,’ but the meaning of that is, that when the wicked offer sacrifice, and at the same time do not intend to abandon their wickedness, it is an abomination.”

“Well, sir, the Bible requires good motives.”

“Certainly it does; and it requires you to pray to God, ‘create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.’ You need good motives, and for that very reason you should pray.”

“But I can’t pray. It is not prayer, such as the Bible demands, if I should ask God for another heart.”

Said I, “The common complaint of the Bible against sinners is not, that they pray with bad motives; but that they do not pray at all. It censures the wicked, because they ‘cast off fear, and restrain prayer,’ as you do; while it makes promises to those who seek God by prayer.”

“I never prayed,” said she, with manifest fear and vexation of spirit. “I can’t pray, till I have the right feelings.”

“You must pray, my dear girl, in order to get the right feelings. So the Bible teaches you, and you pervert it. You say you must have the right feelings first. The Bible tells you to pray for them, if you would ever have them. In Jeremiah, xxix. 12, 13, God says, ‘Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you; and ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart, and I will be found of you, saith the Lord.’ The praying, the seeking, is first. The finding comes afterwards. ‘Ask, and ye shall receive,’ says God. ‘Give to me, and then I will ask,’ is your answer.”

“But, sir, I certainly have no heart to pray. I can’t pray! God would frown on any prayer I could offer.”

“So you say, but He has not said so. He will frown upon your refusing to pray. It seems to me perfectly clear, that God is far more kind to you than you think Him, more kind than you are to yourself. He says to you, in your weakness and all your want, ‘In me is thy help.’ You demand of your poor heart to be holy first, before it can have any encouragement at all, even to pray for help. Your cold heart does him an injustice. He is more kind than that. He encourages you to come to Him, and call upon Him, with just such a needy and imperfect heart, as you have this moment, to come to Him by Christ in all your unworthiness and fear, and tell Him your wants, and beg for mercy and Divine assistance. He stands ready to hear you, to forgive and love you, and bestow upon you that better heart you long for, if you will ask. And you abuse His kindness by your unbelief. He is far better than you think Him. He invites you to come to Him in Christ Jesus, and ask Him what you will. You demand of your poor heart more (in one sense,) than God demands of it. You demand of it faith and holiness aside from any Divine help, and without prayer; while he offers you help, to aid you to holiness and faith. I do not understand him, as inviting you to Christ, only after you have a good heart, but as inviting you now, just as you are.”

“Oh!” said she, quite overcome with her emotions, “I wish I had a right to come.”

“What do you mean, my dear girl? You talk inconsistently, absurdly. You want a right heart first, and then you will consent to pray for a right heart.”

“I know, sir, my mind is wrong; but it does seem to me, I cannot pray with such a heart.”

“That is only a deceitful excuse. If you do not love to have such a heart, you will pray God to give you a better one.”

“Oh, I am such a sinner! How can such a creature pray?”

“Others just like you have prayed, and God has answered them. You can do the same thing, if you will.”

“But my very heart is too wicked!”

“You do not more than half believe what you say. If you really believed you had such a wicked heart, you would cry for mercy with all your might.”

“I would pray,” said she, “if I had such motives that God would hear me.”

“That is the very essence of self-righteousness,” said I. “You expect to be answered, not because you shall have cried, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’ but because you shall have gone to God with such good motives, with a heart so much better, that he will hear and answer you on that account. You wish to be able to stand up and offer the Pharisee’s prayer, ‘God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.’ You are unwilling to be the poor publican, and smite on your breast, despairing of your wicked heart, and cry, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ You won’t consent to be a beggar. Your heart is too full of pride and self-righteousness to consent to let you be an infinite debtor to Divine mercy, as an undone and helpless sinner.”

“Why, sir,” said she with amazement, “do you think I am self-righteous?”

“I know you are. You have shown it in almost every sentence you have uttered for the last half hour. You justify yourself. You justify your

prayerlessness even. You think to pray with such good motives, some time or other, as to meet acceptance. Rejecting Christ, you rely on the good motives you hope to have, as the ground of your acceptance. And that is all self-righteousness.”

After a solemn pause she asked,—

“What shall I do? I am undone!”

“Seek the Lord,” said I, “call upon Him; fly to Christ, as you are—remember, as you are.”

“Will He hear me?”

“Yes; He says He will. ‘Ask, and ye shall receive.’ Believe His promise of the ‘Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.’ You have no need to be hindered, my dear child, for an hour. Give God your heart as it is. Go to Him as you are, a poor, undone sinner, and beg for mercy. And believe He will not cast you off. God loves you, and waits to save you. He offers you all the benefits of the blood of atonement and of the aids of the Holy Spirit—‘the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him,’ remember. And what more can your wicked heart need?”

She seemed to be melted into tenderness.

“And now, my dear girl, will you pray? Will you begin this night?”

“I ought to,” said she trembling.

“Then, will you?”

“Yes, sir, I will,” said she emphatically.

“Good-bye,” said I, and instantly left her.

During this interview she became greatly troubled. Evidently she was tost with conflicting emotions. She began to perceive that her excuse of a wicked heart would not answer her purpose; and at times I thought her affectionate disposition on the very point of yielding to the kindness of God.

I now had some hope that she would seek the Lord. She had promised to pray, and thus had yielded the very point in which all her opposition practically centered. But on considering the whole matter more carefully that evening at home, I came to the conclusion that she would not pray as she had promised; but that when she was alone, the

influence of her old difficulty would return upon her and overthrow the urgency of all that I had said.

Early the next morning, therefore, I called upon her. She was taken by surprise. Said I,—

“Did you pray last night, my dear girl?”

Her eyes filled with tears. She was silent. (She told me some days afterwards, “I felt my very heart sick within me, the moment you asked me if I had prayed.”) I repeated the question,—

“My child, did you keep your promise? Did you pray last night?”

Her whole frame was agitated. The question seemed to pierce her heart.

“No sir, I did not!” said she faintly, and covered her face in her handkerchief, in convulsive agony.

“And why not? Why didn’t you pray? You make my very heart sorry, when you tell me you neglected it!”

“I did try,” said she weeping; “I did try. I kneeled down, but I could not open my lips to utter one word! My heart was so cold and wicked, I did not dare to speak one word to my heavenly Father.”

“Your heart is far more wicked than you think; and if you wait to make it better, you will wait forever! But God is a thousand-fold more merciful and kind than you think. Give yourself to Him. Just trust to Christ, bad as your heart is.”

“Oh, sir, it is hard to learn to trust! I have tried to trust myself in Christ’s hands. How can I trust?”

“Suppose,” said I, “you were here on this island, and you knew the island was going to sink under you, and you must get off or sink with it, and you could do nothing at all to save yourself, and then a boat should come to save you, and you had every reason to believe it would hold you up from sinking and take you off safely, and land you where you wanted to go,—would it be ‘hard to trust’ to it? No, no; you would instantly go on board and stay on it, and take care not to fall off. You would trust it willingly, fully, joyfully. Just so commit yourself, a helpless sinner, to

Christ, and not sink into perdition. He will take you, and land you safe in heaven, if you will ask Him and trust Him.”

“I am afraid I have not such a sense of my sin, as to seek God earnestly.”

“What, then, will you do?”

“I don’t know, unless I wait for it.”

“And will you get it by waiting?”

“I suppose,” said she, “a just sense of sin is the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

“I suppose so, too; and therefore you must pray for the Holy Spirit. It is promised as a gift to them that ask. You are not to wait. ‘Behold, now is the day of salvation.’ Give your bad heart to God.”

I left her more solemn and docile than ever before. Her stout heart trembled.

The next day but one, I called upon her. She was in her class. I sent for her to meet me in a private room. I asked her,—

“Have you trusted yourself to Christ yet?”

She shook her head. Her eyes filled with tears.

“What have you been waiting for?”

“Oh, my dear friend, I don’t know. It seems as if I cannot offer myself to God in such a manner that He will accept me. I try with all my power. But my thoughts wander when I try to pray. My heart is all unbelief and sin!”

“You must pray for God’s help, and trust Him to help you.”

“Oh, sir, if I go to God I am afraid He will not accept me. There never was such a sinner.”

“You need not fear an item, my dear friend. He has promised to accept you. Go to Him by faith in his Son for all you want. His very throne shall crumble, sooner than you shall be cast off.”

I left her in tears, apparently in a subdued and tender agitation.

Four days afterwards I saw her again. She met me with a smile of gladness.

“Oh, I am glad you have come. I have wanted to see you very much.” Grasping my hand, she began to speak to me of her feelings,—“I want to tell you a great many things about myself,” but her emotions choked her utterance. I asked her,—

“Can you pray now, my dear girl?”

“Oh, yes, I can pray now with my whole heart. But, sir, it seems to me I do not come fully to Christ, though I know I want to.”

“Do you still love sin and the world too much to give them up for Christ?”

“No, sir, I think not,” said she, solemnly.

“There may be some darling sin you do not renounce. Perhaps you love the world too well. Weigh well the matter. Count the cost. ‘Choose this day whom you will serve.’ If you choose the world, it will cheat you. If you choose the God of love, He will save you.”

“I do want to be a Christian,” said she, tenderly. “I pray my God for this with all my heart.”

“And what has made you so much more earnest?”

“I have felt so ever since I heard your sermons on the text, ‘Go thy way for this time.’ I was afraid I was like Felix, to tremble and yet delay.”

“Do you intend to delay?”

“No sir, indeed, I do not intend to,” said she, the tears gushing from her eyes.

The next morning I found her in deep solemnity. Her weeping eyes told of her agitated heart. I asked,—

“Are you willing now to give up all and follow Christ?”

“Oh, sir,” said she, with the utmost earnestness, I do not think there is any other desire in my heart, except that I may be a Christian.”

“Do you now love God?”

With some thoughtful hesitation she replied,—

“I am afraid, sir, to venture an answer to that question.”

“You need not answer it. I will not embarrass you. But see to it, that you trust all to the sovereign mercy of God, offered to you in his Son. I can say no more than I have said already. I have told you all. My work is

finished. I leave you with God. See to it, that you make an entire commitment of yourself, for time and eternity, to your Lord and Redeemer.”

On the evening of the next day I had a long interview with her. It was delightful to hear her expressions. Among other things she said to me,—

“I feel that I am now at peace. I trust my God. I love to trust Him. The Saviour is everything to me. I know He will fulfil all His promises. Oh, my dear friend, I have had a dreadful struggle! but I have had strength given me to persevere. Now the love of God is very precious to my soul. I never expected this happiness.”

“Do you love to pray?”

“Oh yes; prayer is sweet to me now. I can tell all my wants to my heavenly Father.”

After some farther conversation, I said to her,—

“You seem to have come into a different state of mind within a few days. You do not talk as you did. How have you brought yourself to this? to feel so differently?”

“Oh, sir; it is nothing that I have done! I just prayed to God with all my heart and in full faith, and he did every thing for me.”

She appeared to be a very happy Christian. Her joy was full. Her life was prayer.

The elder sister, who so much resembled the younger in her difficulty about prayer, I visited generally at the same times and as often as the younger. I had almost precisely the same things to say to her; and a few days afterwards she also entertained “just a little hope,” as she expressed it.

These sisters were deeply interested for each other. Each would say to me frequently, “I want you to see my sister.” Their anxiety for one another was beneficial to them, and their thoughts of their absent mother, whom they often mentioned, appeared to me to constrain them to more earnest endeavors to lay hold on eternal life. They both have hope in Christ, and I trust will both have heaven. I first saw them in the

month of May, and on the seventh day of the following September, having returned to their distant home, their native place, they both came for the first time to the table of the Lord, happy Christians in the dew of their youth.

I have given this sketch, in this extended form, as illustrating the propriety of continued solicitation at the door of a sinner's heart. Here were two young ladies without any special seriousness, worldly, presenting no hopeful appearance, but presenting a cold discouragement, calculated to damp every hope, and stop every effort to do them good, and coming out so sadly in the words, "I never prayed in my life."

But one conversation was followed up by another; they were scarcely left a day to themselves, and the influences of the world, their strange hindrance of speculative error was assailed in every form, and overthrown again and again by declarations of Scripture and arguments of reason;—and their whole history shows, that vigorous and persevering attempts to convert sinners, have as much prospect of success, as any well-directed attempts in any ordinary matter. Not that man can reach sinners' hearts, but that God may be expected to reach them, when minister or any other man shall diligently knock at their door, with the voice of God's urgent and affectionate truth.

The reluctance of these young women to pray may have been fostered, (I suppose it was,) by the fogs of a metaphysical theology, in which they had been educated, and which they probably misunderstood. But it originated in a consciousness of a home-bred depravity. "I can't ask God to make me his child," said one of them; "I know my heart does not want it." But there was a propriety in urging them to prayer, because God commands men to pray, and because I expected they would be rendered more sensible of their opposition to God, and their need of his aid, when they should attempt its performance. And so it turned out. Their conviction, which had been superficial and speculative only, became more deep, more practical. While superficial and speculative, their depravity was an excuse to them. When rendered deep and thorough by a sincere attempt to pray, it became experimental, it was no longer an excuse, but

only made them cry for mercy with all their might: “I prayed to God in full faith, and with all my heart, and He did everything for me.” A just conviction of sin makes no excuse; but it will pray.

I might have avoided this girl’s excuse by urging her to repentance and faith: I chose to meet it by urging her to prayer. It was her inability to pray in any manner to meet her own approval, which had contributed more than anything else to convince her of her deep-seated depravity, and alienation from God; and I did not wish to diminish this conviction, by leading her thoughts from the thing that caused it. It would have been dangerous to turn her thoughts into a new channel. I aimed to conspire with the Holy Spirit. It was important that she should realize the necessity of the direct help of the Divine Spirit personally, practically, and therefore more deeply, than by her speculation she ever could; and she was more likely to have such a realization through endeavors to pray rightly, than by any other means. In her speculation she thought she knew full well her wickedness and helplessness; but these were the very things she did not know. She found them out just when she endeavored to pray. When, a full sense of her undone and helpless condition burst upon her. She could do nothing but cry: “I just prayed to God with all my heart, and in full faith.” And then, as she expressed it, “He did everything for me.” “Go thou, and do likewise.”