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THE  
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IN RESPONSE TO A CALL TO THE  
CHURCH, IN MRS. HEAD'S BOOK-  
LET, "THE FORGOTTEN FRIEND"

BY THE  
REV. ANDREW MURRAY, D.D., D.Litt.

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## THE SUPREME NEED

“THE FORGOTTEN FRIEND” is none other than our blessed Lord Jesus. And the thought is suggested in the booklet whether there are not many who in these days of sadness have not yet opened the door to welcome the Lord as the Great Comforter.

The question is then asked: “The Church of Christ should be the channel of comfort and encouragement in this time of suffering, but as one has said: Has it not in large measure been forgetting its great privilege of **continual fellowship with Him in prayer**, and thus been depriving itself and the world of rich and abundant blessing?

“Must we continue to see those who are in

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need of comfort and prayer-help, without these blessings? Surely not: **the prayerlessness of the Church should be taken upon the heart of all true intercessors**, and the burden of forgetfulness of its privilege be borne before the Throne of Grace till we see the little flames of prayer, which are already kindled, fanned into a mighty blaze . . . until there be such a breaking forth of intercession that revival will come to the whole Church of God. If it be true that ‘prayer changes things,’ then ‘the effectual fervent prayer’ of even the few may bring this about in the many, and the united intercession of the many could change or shorten the course of this war.”

The following sentence is quoted from a daily newspaper published early in the war: “The great probability is that factors which have nothing whatever to do with military principles will effectually determine the duration of the war.” Then it is remarked: “The writer had evidently no thought of spiritual factors. . . .

“Should not the determining factor in the

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spiritual or material warfare be the prayer-power in the Church? But is it so? Alas, there has seldom been a time when the impotence of the Church in prayer that prevails, has been more obvious than at present. . . .

“It has been often said that prayer is an instinct in man; the spirit of man needs God, and instinctively turns to Him in any time of crisis. **Ought not the Christian to be alive with this instinct of prayer, and a burning desire so to live for God as would lead to continual co-operation with God** in this greatest of all works, the work of prayer and intercession?

“How sad to think that many live so completely out of touch with Christ that they are comparatively impotent in this matter of prayer. . . . There is a terrible possibility of hindering the output of Divine power. . . .

“Only lately a leader in missionary work was heard to say: ‘The fact is that our mission stations are not only undermanned, but **undermined**, because there is not the support of the Church at home in prayer’ . . .

"How true, and how sad that it should be true! . . .

"Oh that we would turn to Him with deep penitence and strong desire and let the Spirit teach us how to become fitted for the work of intercession! . . . Life after life is now useless in this service, which could be brought into fellowship with Christ in prayer. . . .

"The world is expecting our help. Are we failing it? Are we failing our brethren and sisters in their fight against the powers of darkness, as they turn their eager gaze to the Church of God, as they expect to receive an upholding in prevailing prayer? Are we failing God in this matter?

"What is needed above all else is **an awakened conscience in the Christian community on this matter of prayer.** . . . We need to get low before God, to confess humbly this sin of prayerlessness. . . .

"It ought to be within the power of the Church to let loose forces of Divine and irresistible efficacy through prevailing prayer. . . . The prayer that He waits for, and to which

He will respond, ascends from hearts purged from all selfishness and unholy ambitions, freed from envy and lovelessness and bitterness; for no prevailing prayer can be offered by hearts in which un-Christlike things hold sway. . . .

"**Such prayer is costly**: it involves sacrifice of time. It often involves suffering, even unto the groanings which cannot be uttered. And some may ask: 'Is it worth while to give up time and work for this?' Yes, there is nothing so much worth while, for such prayer 'availeth much'—not only in the visible, but in the realms of the unseen. . . .

"Prayer is the determining factor which would bring the nations low before God. Intercession for our missionaries would encourage their hearts and strengthen their faith."

**I** TRUST that the extracts I have given will help to make plain to those who have not read the book, what its object is, and will lead to a careful perusal. It may also help those who have read it to realize more distinctly what the call to the Church is which it brings, and what it asks of every one to whom it comes. In what I am about to write, I would seek most urgently to press home the Call with which it concludes: "Oh that every true intercessor would ring out a call to prayer to his friends and neighbours, and those in other parts of the world, and by word or letter compel attention to **this most important of all service for God and the world.**"

A month ago I received a copy of the newly issued *Perpetual Prayer Calendar*.<sup>1</sup> I have been very deeply interested in finding that the request, "Pray for the Church of Christ, that she may be convinced of the sin of prayerlessness," is repeated every eighth day. For each of the eight days there are given as subjects of

<sup>1</sup> *Oliphants Ltd., Edinburgh and London.*

prayer the different classes of workers, or the different spheres of labour throughout the world. But there are only two days on which special request is made in connection with the whole Church.

The one is, "Let us pray for the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that God may be glorified." The other, what has already been quoted: "Let us pray for the Church of Christ that she may be convinced of the sin of prayerlessness."

It is as if we are called to remember that **the one outstanding petition** with which we are to draw nigh to God, is the coming of Christ's Kingdom that God may be glorified. And on the other hand, that **the one sin which above all needs confession**, the one sin that hinders the coming of that Kingdom, is—the prayerlessness of the Church.

**W**E are to pray that the Church may be convicted of sin in this matter. It is as if we are reminded that this sin is not felt or confessed, or striven against as it ought to be. And our petitions are to go up that it may please God, by a mighty interposition of the working of His grace, to bring His people to see what a great sin it is of which they are guilty, and how this is **the chief thing that hinders the Kingdom, and needs in deep humility to be confessed and forsaken.**

It is not an easy thing to pray such a prayer. It needs time and thought to realize wherein the great sin consists. Prayerlessness neglects and despises God's wonderful invitation, to come and have fellowship with Him in regard to our every need. It refuses His offer of being ready, in answer to prayer, to give what we need for ourselves or for others. It not only does dishonour to God, but causes infinite harm to ourselves. It neglects that blessed fellowship with God which would be **the**

**secret of holy, happy, fruitful God-glorifying lives.**

And yet even this is not the worst. It robs those around us, to whom our prayers were meant by God to bring blessing, of what they have a right to. They will suffer more than can be told through the loss of the grace that our prayer could have brought them, and was meant to bring them.

It is only as we allow these thoughts to enter and occupy our hearts that we shall begin to cry: What have I been doing, in grieving God, in robbing my own soul, and in leaving those to perish who, through my prayers, might have been blessed?

**I**N Daniel's prayer (chap. ix. 13) he makes confession: "All this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand Thy truth." The sin of restraining prayer is greater, much greater, than we have felt it to be.

As we think over this we shall ask: But what can be the reason that this sin has such power to prevail, and that we are so helpless to seek deliverance from it? It points us to **the deep lack of true spiritual religion**, as the great cause of the evil. It tells us of how much of our religion is the work of the flesh, how little there has been of the spirit of Christ and His Gospel. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh," as a thing at enmity with God and accursed.

Instead of yielding ourselves to the immediate and continual operation of the Holy Spirit, who would have made prayer a joy and a prevailing power, we have been content with the superficial religion of the average Christian. We have prayed, and have received answers;

there was grace enough for that. But there was not that fervent, continuous prayer for the whole Church of Christ which would have made the complaint of prayerlessness impossible.

A life of feeble fellowship with God is the one great secret of this terrible evil. It is as this is felt and confessed, and the surrender made to **a new life of consecration**, that we shall have the courage to pray for the power of the Spirit on the Church as a Spirit of supplication.

But let us above all things beware of the spirit of unbelief to which we can so easily be brought if we give way to the thought that a change cannot be expected. Let us take up the request, "that the Church may be convinced of the sin of prayerlessness," in a new surrender to that immediate and continual operation of the Holy Spirit which will give us courage to pray and not to faint.

Nothing will avail unless we take time to think seriously, as in God's presence, upon what prayer has been, and can be, and will be to us and the Church around us. This will

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bring us to the point of asking definitely whether we believe that our prayers will have a share in bringing about a change. Faith often calls for believing against all hope, and, **in the venture of despair**, claiming and expecting God's deliverance.

In his last book, *The Present World Situation*, Dr. Mott has, in the closing chapter, dealt with the question where to place the chief emphasis in the missionary enterprise. In an argument of great power he has especially directed the attention to the spiritual life and activity of the workers. And of that spiritual activity he, at the close, makes prayer the chief factor. He tells "how, in every Conference throughout Asia, he was charged, by those who have penetrated most deeply into the heart of the problems, to press upon the missionary societies the imperative need of more intercession, above all, of united intercession. The Church has not yet discovered, still less begun to realize, the limitless possibilities of intercession. The most alarming fact is that there are so few Christians who are devoting them-

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selves with conviction and faithfulness to prayer on behalf of the extension of Christ's Kingdom."

Dr. Mott concludes the chapter with the following appeal: "In no way can those of us who are responsibly related to the missionary forces, better serve the interests of the Church than by **multiplying the number of real intercessors**, and by focusing the prayers of Christendom upon those great situations and wonderful openings which demand the almighty working of the Spirit of God. This is fundamental and central to everything else we are called upon to do. Far more important and vital than any service we may render in promoting the efficiency and unification of the vast missionary enterprise, is that of helping to release the superhuman energy of prayer, through **uniting in this holy ministry true intercessors of all communions**, so as to usher in a new era abounding in signs and wonders, characteristic of the working of the Living Christ. We should be on our guard lest we devote a disproportionate amount of

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time and thought to plans for the utilization of available human forces, to what is immeasurably more important—the relating of what we do personally and corporately to the fountain of Divine life and energy."

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**I** HAVE taken the liberty of giving these extracts with a special object in view.

In what I have said about the prayer for the conviction of the Church of the sin of prayerlessness, I had more in view the **negative** side. But in the words above quoted, we learn to look at things from the **positive** side. It is as we are brought under the deep impression of the intense meaning and the absolute necessity of the summons, that we shall feel the urgency of the call to cry to God, that He may give us and all His people light to see and a heart to realize the position. In very deed the chief, the essential, the fundamental need of our mission work is to find and to train the intercessors who will see to it that the work is not going to suffer from the lack of that holy power of prayer which God has put into our hands.

If one is to pray with his whole heart and soul, it is not enough that we listen to the appeals or the pleadings of others. Intercession is **an intensely personal matter**; it is only by earnest thought and hearty prayer



that a man can take upon himself in very truth the burden he wishes to bring before God, and to prove that he is indeed ready to pour out his soul as an offering on its behalf. Let me ask every reader to think what this prayer, that the Church may be convinced of the sin of prayerlessness, will imply.

**I**F I am to prescribe for, or to remove an evil, I need to know something of its cause. With the sin we are dealing with, it is of importance to consider what can be the reason of its having such terrible prevalence, not, mind you, with the world, but with those who are counted honest, earnest Christians. What can be the cause of the power and the spread of this disease?

Let me consider how it is nothing less than the indication of a superficial religion, in which the selfish thought of having grace enough to be saved is the ruling power, while there is very little idea of **yielding the whole life to the service of God and our fellow-men.** And yet it is just this that alone can inspire us with the devotion that can plead with God on behalf of what is lacking in our fellow-Christians around us. It needs a consecrated life to have the love, and the faith, and the fervency that can pray the prayer that avails much.

But there are some Christians who have a claim to be called consecrated, devoted men,

who yet suffer from this lack of love and of power to pray. What does this mean? It is just their consecration that hinders their prayer. They have consecrated themselves to God's service, and seek so heartily to do His work that they have no time or heart for giving themselves to much prayer.

They have never thought that work is much easier than prayer. Work rouses a man's energies, gives him the consciousness of helping and influencing others, creates a sense of satisfaction, apart from anything like pride, in the blessing he brings to others. His life may be **a daily influence for good.**

Prayer, on the contrary, calls for a sense of weakness and emptiness. Its deepest root is the denial of self, the confession of impotence, and the humble, patient waiting upon God, till, in His way and His time, He clothes us with the power to do efficient work, and to bring true spiritual blessing to those for whom we labour.

Men often spend a great deal of time and effort on preparing themselves to speak effec-

tively to men. To speak effectively to God on behalf of men needs more time and more intense effort. The deeper we enter into the inquiry as to the cause of this great evil of prayerlessness, the more will our hearts come under the solemn influence of what it means to take hold of God, to plead with Him, and to have **the confidence that our prayers will avail.**

**I**N the course of this inquiry into the meaning of the call to pray, with the causes and cure of prayerlessness, we shall be led to the question, whether an evil of such tremendous and universal power can be affected by the prayer of those who feel themselves so feeble and helpless. Nothing will then avail us but a new study of that which lies at the foundation of all prayer—the wonderful condescension of God in inviting us to intercession, and giving us His Word and His oath that our prayer will not be in vain.

Such prayer will call us to a life of closer intercourse and more entire self-sacrifice. It is not an easy thing, it is not a little thing, to be a priest of the Most High God, one of His remembrancers, a man who can stand in the breach and keep back the judgment that was coming. But the high honour is surely **worth any sacrifice.**

In the course of our inquiry the thought will often come up that though God might hear a united body of His children, the prayer of one or two can hardly avail much. Let us beware

of limiting God. Let us hold fast the confidence that the real prayer of faith, even of only one, will be heard, however little we know where the answer may be seen. But let us also set ourselves to stir up others to take part in this sacred work. The fellowship will be a blessing to ourselves and to them.

Dr. Mott writes: "In view of the alarmingly small number of intercessors, and the insistent need for the work which they can do, the most important question of all to consider is, how to multiply the number of intercessors. We often say that one of the most far-reaching things Christ ever did was to train a little band of men, but we do not act as though we believed what we say. If we did believe it, more of us would be sharing our thoughts and experiences with others, and associating ourselves with them in actual intercession. This would multiply the number of intercessors **in a truly Christlike way.** We must, above all, be ourselves burdened with a sense of the transcendent importance of increasing the number of men who will seek to release the power of God by prayer."

**H**OW many men and women there are who, as leaders of Bible-classes, try to help those around them to the study and the knowledge of God's Word! What an opportunity this gives for making their meetings a training school for intercessors, and leading the scholars on to understand that **prayer is the chief thing in the Christian life, and intercessory prayer its highest power.** How many Christians there are who have Christian fellowship with each other, in which prayer is indeed not forgotten, but in which there is nothing done to bind them together in the daily supplication to God for each other and for all saints! And how many ministers there are who, while they are faithful in their work, have never yet rightly apprehended the supreme privilege of leading their charge into the holiest of all, and teaching them to count communion with God as the highest exercise of the Christian life!

It is as we study, in the desire for united prayer, what we can do, that the inventiveness of love will lead us into new paths for helping

our fellow-Christians into a life which shall give them such real power with God and man as they have never known. Many might thus be helped to respond to the call of Mrs. Head in her words: "Oh that every true intercessor would ring out a call to prayer to his friends and neighbours, and those in other parts of the world, and by word or letter **compel attention to this most important of all service for God and the world.**"

I have read with the deepest interest what Rev. Cyril Bardsley has said of the work that is being done in the Church Missionary Society for preparing the way, and stirring up expectation of that deep spiritual Revival of which the Church stands so much in need. May God grant that, if once the path be opened, other Churches may follow in it, and find the blessing waiting for them. What the whole Church needs, and what every believer needs, is nothing less than this: the Holy Spirit trusted and honoured in His immediate and continual operation in the heart of each of God's children!

**T**HIS is indeed **THE SUPREME NEED**. From the side of God it is guaranteed by His Divine promise, and by that infinite love and goodness which longs, oh so heartily, to bestow this gift of gifts, by which the Three in One can dwell in the hearts of His people. And on the part of God's Church and people the supreme need is **the prayer that gives everything else a secondary place**, and yields itself a living sacrifice to receive, and to obey, and to bear witness, and to minister that blessed gift of the Spirit to all around.

When we pray, God often asks, even as Christ did, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" Let us thoughtfully and humbly say what we really do desire. Let our heart set itself upon nothing less than this. For ourselves, for God's praying children, for His whole Church, its ministers and its missionaries. "Oh, my God, we plead the promise of the Father. Give, oh give, what Thy children so need—the immediate, continual inspiration and operation of the ever-blessed Spirit in their

hearts. And fulfil the blessed promise. 'I will pour out a Spirit of grace and of supplication, and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced (the Lamb on the Throne), and mourn.'

God Himself will fulfil to us the one supreme need of His Church in the world.

For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth.—ISA. lxii. 1.

I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.—ISA. lxii. 6, 7.

Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down!

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Thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at Thy presence. For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen a God beside Thee, which worketh for him that waiteth for Him.—ISA. lxiv. 1, 4.

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