

***S. D. GORDON***



***QUIET  
TALKS  
ON PRAYER***

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# **Quiet Talks on Prayer**

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# I. THE MEANING AND MISSION OF PRAYER

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## PRAYER THE GREATEST OUTLET OF POWER

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#### **Five Outlets of Power.**

A great sorrow has come into the heart of God. Let it be told only in hushed voice—one of His worlds is *a prodigal!* Hush your voice yet more—*ours* is that prodigal world. Let your voice soften down still more—*we* have *consented* to the prodigal part of the story. But, in softest tones yet, He has won some of us back with His strong tender love. And now let the voice ring out with great gladness—we won ones may be the pathway back to God for the others. That is His earnest desire. That should be our dominant ambition. For that purpose He has endowed us with peculiar power.

There is one inlet of power in the life—anybody's life—any kind of power: just one inlet—the Holy Spirit. He is power. He is in every one who opens his door to God. He eagerly

enters every open door. He comes in by our invitation and consent. His presence within is the vital thing.

But with many of us while He is in, He is not in control: in as guest; not as host. That is to say He is hindered in His natural movements; tied up, so that He cannot do what He would. And so we are not conscious or only partially conscious of His presence. And others are still less so. But to yield to His mastery, to cultivate His friendship, to give Him full swing—that will result in what is called power. One inlet of power—the Holy Spirit in control.

There are five outlets of power: five avenues through which this One within shows Himself, and reveals His power.

First: through the life, what we are. Just simply what we are. If we be right the power of God will be constantly flowing out, though we be not conscious of it. It throws the keenest kind of emphasis on a man being right in his life. There will be an eager desire to serve. Yet we may constantly do more in what we are than in what we do. We may serve better in the lives we live than in the best service we ever give. The memory of that should bring rest to your spirit when a bit tired, and may be disheartened because tired.

Second: through the lips, what we say. It may be said stammeringly and falteringly. But if said your best with the desire to please the Master it will be God-blest. I have heard a man talk. And he stuttered and blushed and got his grammar badly tangled, but my heart burned as I listened. And I have heard a man talk with smooth speech, and it rolled off me as easily as it rolled out of him. Do your best, and leave the rest. If we are in touch with God His fire burns whether the tongue stammer or has good control of its powers.

Third: through our service, what we do. It may be done bunglingly and blunderingly. Your best may not be the best, but if it be your best it will bring a harvest.

Fourth: through our money, what we do not keep, but loosen out for God. Money comes the nearest to omnipotence of anything we handle.

And, fifth: through our prayer, what we claim in Jesus' name.

And by all odds the greatest of these is the outlet through prayer. The power of a life touches just one spot, but the touch is tremendous. What is there we think to be compared with a pure, unselfish, gently strong life. Yet its power is limited to one spot where it is being lived. Power through the lips depends wholly upon the life back of the lips. Words that come brokenly are often made burning and eloquent by the life behind them. And words that are smooth and easy, often have all their meaning sapped by the life back of them. Power through service may be great, and may be touching many spots, yet it is always less than that of a life. Power through money depends wholly upon the motive back of the money. Begrudged money, stained money, soils the treasury. That which comes nearest to omnipotence also comes nearest to impotence. But the power loosened out through prayer is as tremendous, at the least, to say no more just now, is as tremendous as the power of a true fragrant life and, mark you, *and*, may touch not one spot but wherever in the whole round world you may choose to turn it.

The greatest thing any one can do for God and for man is to pray. It is not the only thing. But it is the chief thing. A correct balancing of the possible powers one may exert puts it first. For if a man is to pray right, he must first *be* right in his motives and life. And if a man *be* right, and put the

practice of praying in its right place, then his serving and giving and speaking will be fairly fragrant with the presence of God.

The great people of the earth to-day are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; but I mean these people who *take* time and *pray*. They have not time. It must be taken from something else. This something else is important. Very important, and pressing than prayer. There are people that put prayer first, and group the other items in life's schedule around and after prayer.

These are the people to-day who are doing the most for God; in winning souls; in solving problems; in awakening churches; in supplying both men and money for mission posts; in keeping fresh and strong these lives far off in sacrificial service on the foreign field where the thickest fighting is going on; in keeping the old earth sweet awhile longer.

It is wholly a secret service. We do not know who these people are, though sometimes shrewd guesses may be made. I often think that sometimes we pass some plain-looking woman quietly slipping out of church; gown been turned two or three times; bonnet fixed over more than once; hands that have not known much of the softening of gloves; and we hardly give her a passing thought, and do not know, nor guess, that perhaps *she* is the one who is doing far more for her church, and for the world, and for God than a hundred who would claim more attention and thought, *because she prays*; truly prays as the Spirit of God inspires and guides.



Let me put it this way: God will do as a result of the praying of the humblest one here what otherwise He *would* not do. Yes, I can make it stronger than that, and I must make it stronger, for the Book does. Listen: God will do in answer to the prayer of the weakest one here what otherwise he *could* not do. "Oh!" someone thinks, "you are getting that too strong now." Well, you listen to Jesus' own words in that last long quiet talk He had with the eleven men between the upper room and the olive-green. John preserves much of that talk for us. Listen: "Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide: that"—listen, a part of the purpose why we have been chosen—"that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He *may* give it you."<sup>1</sup> Mark that word "may"; not "shall" this time but *may*. "Shall" throws the matter over on God—His purpose. "May" throws it over upon us—our cooperation. That is to say our praying makes it possible for God to do what otherwise He could not do.

And if you think into it a bit, this fits in with the true conception of prayer. In its simplest analysis prayer—all prayer—has, must have, two parts. First, a God to give. "Yes," you say, "certainly, a God wealthy, willing, all of that." And, just as certainly, there must be a second factor, *a man to receive*. Man's willingness is God's channel to the earth. God never crowds nor coerces. Everything God does for man and through man He does with man's consent, always. With due reverence, but very plainly, let it be said that God can do nothing for the man with shut hand and shut life. There must be an open hand and heart and life *through* which God can give what He longs to. An open life, an open hand, open upward, is the pipe line of communication between the heart of God and this poor befooled old world. Our prayer is God's opportunity to get into the world that would shut Him out.

## **In touch with a planet.**

Prayer opens a whole planet to a man's activities. I can as really be touching hearts for God in far away India or China through prayer, as though I were there. Not in as many ways as though there, but as truly. Understand me, I think the highest possible *privilege* of service is in those far off lands. There the need is greatest, the darkness densest, and the pleading call most eloquently pathetic. And if one *may* go there—happy man!--if one be *privileged* to go to the honoured place of service he may then use all five outlets direct in the spot where he is.

Yet this is only one spot. But his relationship is as wide as his Master's and his sympathies should be. A man may be in Africa, but if his heart be in touch with Jesus it will be burning for *a world*. Prayer puts us into direct dynamic touch with a world.

A man may go aside to-day, and shut his door, and as really spend a half-hour in India—I am thinking of my words as I say them, it seems so much to say, and yet it is true—as really spend a half hour of his life in India for God as though he were there in person. *Is that true?* If it be true, surely you and I must get more half-hours for this secret service. Without any doubt he may turn his key and be for a bit of time as potentially in China by the power of prayer, as though there in actual bodily form. I say *potentially* present. Of course not consciously present. But in the *power exerted upon men* he may be truly present at the objective point of his prayer. He may give a new meaning to the printed page being read by some native down in Africa. He may give a new tongue of flame to the preacher or teacher. He may make it easier for men to accept the story of Jesus, and then to yield themselves to Jesus—yonder men swept and swayed by evil spirits, and by prejudices for generations—

make it easier for them to accept the story, and, if need be, to cut with loved ones, and step out and up into a new life.

Some earnest heart enters an objection here, perhaps. You are thinking that if you were there you could influence men by your personal contact, by the living voice. So you could. And there must be the personal touch. Would that there were many times more going for that blessed personal touch. But this is the thing to mark keenly both for those who may go, and for those who must stay: no matter where you are you do more through your praying than through your personality. If you were in India you could *add your personality to your prayer*. That would be a great thing to do. But whether there or here, you must first win the victory, every step, every life, every foot of the way, in secret, in the spirit-realm, and then add the mighty touch of your personality in service. You can do *more* than pray, *after* you have prayed. But you can *not* do more than pray *until* you have prayed. And just there is where we have all seemed to make a slip at times, and many of us are yet making it—a bad slip. We think we can do more where we are through our service: then prayer to give power to service. *No*—with the blackest underscoring of emphasis, let it be said—NO. We can do no thing of real power until we have done the prayer thing.

Here is a man by my side. I can talk to him. I can bring my personality to bear upon him, that I may win him. But before I can influence his will a jot for God, I must first have won the victory in the secret place. Intercession is winning the victory over the chief, and service is taking the field after the chief is driven off. Such service is limited by the limitation of personality to one place. This spirit-telegraphy called prayer puts a man into direct dynamic touch with a planet.

There are some of our friends who think themselves of the practical sort who say, "the great thing is work: prayer is good, and right, but the great need is to be doing something practical." The truth is that when one understands about prayer, and puts prayer in its right place in his life, he finds a new motive power burning in his bones to be *doing*; and further he finds that it is the doing that grows out of praying that is mightiest in touching human hearts. And he finds further yet with a great joy that he may be *doing* something for an entire world. His service becomes as broad as his Master's thought.

### **Intercession is Service.**

It helps greatly to remember that intercession is service: the chief service of a life on God's plan. It is unlike all other forms of service, and superior to them in this: that it has fewer limitations. In all other service we are constantly limited by space, bodily strength, equipment, material obstacles, difficulties involved in the peculiar differences of personality. Prayer knows no such limitations. It ignores space. It may be free of expenditure of bodily strength, where rightly practiced, and one's powers are under proper control. It goes directly, by the telegraphy of spirit, into men's hearts, quietly passes through walls, and past locks unhindered, and comes into most direct touch with the inner heart and will to be affected.

In service, as ordinarily understood, one is limited to the space where his body is, the distance his voice can reach, the length of time he can keep going before he must quit to eat, or rest, or sleep. He is limited by walls, and locks, by the prejudices of men's minds, and by those peculiar differences of temperament which must be studied in laying siege to men's hearts.

The whole circle of endeavour in winning men includes such an infinite variety. There is speaking the truth to a number of persons, and to one at a time; the doing of needed kindly acts of helpfulness, supplying food, and the like; there is teaching; the almost omnipotent ministry of money; the constant contact with a pure unselfish life; letter writing; printer's ink in endless variety. All these are in God's plan for winning men. But the intensely fascinating fact to mark is this:—that the real victory in all of this service is won in secret, beforehand, by prayer, and these other indispensable things are the moving upon the works of the enemy, and claiming the victory already won. And when these things are put in their proper order, prayer first, and the other things second; *second*, I say, not omitted, not slurred over; done with all the earnestness and power of brain and hand and heart possible; but done *after* the victory has been won in secret, against the real foe, and done *while* the winner is still claiming the victory already assured—then will come far greater achievements in this outer open service.

Then we go into this service with that fine spirit of expectancy that sweeps the field at the start, and steadily sticks on the stubbornly contested spots until the whipped foe turns tail, and goes. Prayer is striking the winning blow at the concealed enemy. Service is gathering up the results of that blow among the men we see and touch. Great patience and tact and persistence are needed in the service because each man must be influenced in his own will. But the shrewd strategy that wins puts the keen stiff secret fighting first.

### **The Spirit Switchboard.**

Electricity is a strange element. It is catalogued in the study of physics. It is supposed to be properly classed among the forces of nature. Yet it seems to have many properties of the spirit world. Those who know most of it say they know least of what it is. Some of the laws of its being have been learned, and so its marvellous power harnessed for man's use, but in much ignorance of what it is. It seems almost to belong somewhere in between the physical and spirit realms. It furnishes many similes of graphic helpfulness in understanding more nearly much truth of the Spirit life.

In the power-house where the electricity is being wooed into man's harnessing, or generated, as the experts say, is found a switchboard, or switch-room with a number of boards. Here in a large city plant a man may go and turn a switch, that is, move a little handle, a very short distance. It is a very simple act, easily performed, involving almost no strength. But that act has loosened the power in the house back of the switchboard out along the wires, and perhaps lighted a whole section of the city. He goes in again at another hour, and turns *this* set of switches, and *this*, and sets in motion maybe scores of cars, carrying swiftly, hundreds of passengers. Again he goes in, and moves the little handles and sets in motion the wheels in some factory employing hundreds of operatives.

It is a secret service, usually as far as any observers are concerned. It is a very quiet, matter of fact service. But the power influenced is unmeasured and immeasurable. And no one, seemingly, thus far, can explain the mysterious but tremendous agent involved. Does the fluid—it a fluid? or, what?—pass *through* the wire? or, *around* the wire? The experts say they do not know. But the laws which it obeys are known. And as men comply with them its almost omnipotence is manifested.

Just such a switch-room in the spirit realm is one's prayer-room. Every one who will may have such a spirit switching-board in his life. There he may go and in compliance with the laws of the power used loosen out the gracious persuasive irresistible power of God *where he wills to*; now in Japan; now in China; among the hungry human hearts of India's plains and mountains; again in Africa which is full as near to where Jesus sits as is England or America; and now into the house across the alley from your home; and down in the slum district; and now into your preacher's heart for next Sunday's work; and now again unto the hearts of those you will be meeting in the settlement house, or the mission school.

Children are not allowed at the electrical switchboard, nor any unskilled hand. For misuse means possibility of great damage to property and life. And the spirit switchboard does not yield to the unskilled touch. Though sometimes there seems to be much tampering by those with crude fingers, and with selfish desire to turn this current to personal advantage merely.

It takes skill here. Yet such is our winsome God's wondrous plan that skill may come to any one who is willing; simply that—who is willing; and it comes *very simply* too.

Strange too, as with the electrical counterpart, the thing is beyond full or satisfying explanation.

How does it come to pass that a man turns a few handles, and miles away great wheels begin to revolve, and enormous power is manifested? Will some one kindly explain? Yet we know it is so, and men govern their actions by that knowledge.

How does it come to pass that a woman in Iowa prays for the conversion of her skeptical husband, and he, down in the thick of the most absorbing congress Washington has known since the civil war, and in full ignorance of her purpose becomes conscious and repeatedly conscious of the presence and power of the God in whose existence he does not believe; and months afterwards with his keen, legally trained mind, finds the calendar to fit together the beginning of her praying with the beginning of his unwelcome consciousness? Will some one kindly explain? Ah! who can, adequately! Yet the facts, easy ascertainable, are there, and evidenced in the complete change in the life and calling of the man.

How comes it to pass that a woman in Missouri praying for a friend of keen intellectual skepticism in Glasgow, who can skillfully measure and parry argument, yet finds afterwards that the time of her praying is the time of his, at first decidedly unwelcome, but finally radical change of convictions! Yet groups of thoughtful men and women know these two instances to be even so though unable to explain how.

And as the mysterious electrical power is being used by obedience to its laws, even so is the power of prayer being used by many who understand simply enough of its laws to obey, and to bring the stupendous results.

### **The Broad Inner Horizon.**

This suggests at once that the rightly rounded Christian life has two sides; the *out*-side, and the *inner* side. To most of us the outer side seems the greater. The living, the serving, the giving, the doing, the absorption in life's work, the contact with men, with the great majority the sheer struggle for existence—these take the greater thought and time of us



all. They seem to be the great business of life even to those of us who thoroughly believe in the inner life.

But when the real eyes open, the inner eyes that see the unseen, the change of perspective is first ludicrous, then terrific, then pathetic. Ludicrous, because of the change of proportions; terrific, because of the issues at stake; pathetic, because of strong men that see not, and push on spending splendid strength whittling sticks. The outer side is narrow in its limits. It has to do with food and clothing, bricks and lumber, time and the passing hour, the culture of the mind, the joys of social contact, the smoothing of the way for the suffering. And it needs not to be said, that these are right; they belong in the picture; they are its physical background.

The inner side *includes all of these*, and stretches infinitely beyond. Its limits are broad; broad as the home of man; with its enswathing atmosphere added. It touches the inner spirit. It moves in upon the motives, the loves, the heart. It moves out upon the myriad spirit-beings and forces that swarm ceaselessly about the earth staining and sliming men's souls and lives. It moves up to the arm of God in cooperation with His great love-plan for a world.

Shall we follow for a day one who has gotten the true perspective? Here is the outer side: a humble home, a narrow circle, tending the baby, patching, sewing, cooking, calling; *or*, measuring dry goods, chopping a typewriter, checking up a ledger, feeding the swift machinery, endless stitching, gripping a locomotive lever, pushing the plow, tending the stock, doing the chores, tiresome examination papers; and all the rest of the endless, endless, doing, day by day, of the commonplace treadmill things, that must be done, that fill out the day of the great majority of human lives. This one whom we are following unseen is doing quietly, cheerily his daily round, with a bit of sunshine in his