

ANSWERING OUR OWN PRAYERS.

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We use this expression, not too literally, but simply for want of a better one. The idea we aim at is, that every Christian is bound to do his utmost for the fulfilment of his own prayers. He is never to ask God to give what he is not trying his utmost to obtain; he is never to ask God to make him what he is not faithfully trying to become.

This is our idea. It is partially illustrated by the familiar fable of Hercules and the waggoner. When the overloaded waggon sunk into the mire, instead of labouring to pry out the imbedded vehicle, the waggoner fell to praying Hercules to interpose his brawny arm for his relief. The god of muscle thus appealed to, reminded the luckless teamster that, while he prayed for help, he had better put his own shoulder to the wheel, and help himself.

In one sense this heathen fable illustrates the true relation between the sovereign God and the child of prayer. On our side is complete dependence. On the side of Omnipotence is infinite mercy. From HIM cometh down every good and every perfect gift. And because we are so dependent upon our heavenly Father, and owe him so much of submission, obedience, and trust, therefore we are to "pray without ceasing." But while we pray we are to *work*: first, as a proof of the sincerity of our desires; and next, in order to obey God, who commands us to become the very men that we ask him to make us by his grace.

Does every child of God do his utmost to secure the answers to his own uttered requests? Most emphatically we reply, No! With even the best men there is a sad disparity between prayer and practice—between the askings of the lips and the actings of the heart—between their *life* and their *liturgy*.

1. Take, for example, the oft-repeated prayer for *growth in grace*. This is a vital request, and the most formal Christian professor will utter it nearly every day of his life. If he would resist the continual gravitation of inward sin and surrounding worldliness, he must cry as continually for heart-grace. But just imagine the owner of a vast field of weeds kneeling down among "johnswort" and Canada thistles, and praying God to give him from that field a plentiful corn harvest! Not a furrow has been turned. Not a kernel planted. But the insane husbandman implores from heaven a crop, toward the growing of which his sluggish fingers have not been lifted. My Christian brother, you never are guilty of such folly in the management of your secular interests. You never expect cargoes without sending ships seaward; you never count on crops without ploughing, manuring and seeding your acres. No school-girl would expect to see her pet flower grow in the conservatory without water and fresh earth. She sprinkles the azalea leaves until they drip, and feeds the delicate tuberose with new earth as often as its wasting leaves telegraph its hunger. God takes care of her plants; but she takes care of them too, and does not expect him to work miracles for the benefit of lazy people. Her prayer for her flowers is in the brim-