

C. H. Spurgeon on Spiritual Leadership
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In the introduction to *C. H. Spurgeon's Prayers*, Dinsdale T. Young observes that "prayer was the instinct of his soul, and the atmosphere of his life." (14) What made Spurgeon's prayers so luminous, so memorable? Those who observed his life up close commented on his perpetual private communion with God, and it was the intimate spiritual richness of these times alone with the Lord that overflowed into Spurgeon's public prayers and led people to feel as if he were taking them into the very portals of heaven through his petitions. (15) Biographer W. Y. Fullerton observed...he would arise early in the morning to pray and read the Bible. Spurgeon had this to say: *The minister who does not earnestly pray over his work must surely be a vain and conceited man. He acts as if he thought himself sufficient of himself, and therefore needed not to appeal to God.* (19) *All our libraries and studies are mere emptiness compared with our closets. You cannot pray too long in private. The more you are on your knees alone the better.* (23) *Neglect of private prayer is the locust which devours the strength of the church.* (24) *Your other engagements will run smoothly if you do not forget your engagement with God.* (27) "Faith is reason at rest with God." As Spurgeon noted: "Our faith deals with what God says, not with what learned men think." "The pith, the essence of faith, lies in this—a casting oneself on the promise." So if we ever doubt one of God's promises, we are, in essence, doubting one or more aspects of God's own character. (40)

Simply put, exercising faith in God means trusting Him. And when it comes to trusting God with our work of ministry, this was Spurgeon's attitude: "I make bold to assert that, in the service of God, nothing is impossible, and nothing is improbable. Go in for great things, brethren, in the name of God; risk everything on His promise, and according to your faith shall it be done unto you." (42) Yet Spurgeon had nothing to hide. In fact, near the end of his life, someone wrote a letter threatening to expose him in some way. Spurgeon responded, "You may write my life across the sky; I have nothing to conceal." (58) Spurgeon also pointed out that spiritual leaders are like public clocks by which onlookers set their watches... (65) There's more to maintaining holiness than simply avoiding sin. Rather than wait for temptation to strike and react accordingly, we can take proactive measures to nurture holiness in our lives. "They tell me there is as much of a tree under as above ground," Spurgeon said, "and certainly it is so with a believer, his visible life would soon wither if not for his secret life." (66) *Render Him homage by yielding yourself to His impulses, and by hating everything that grieves Him.* (67) An additional benefit observed by Spurgeon is that holiness, because it is so supremely important, can make up for certain deficiencies we might have: *You must have holiness; and, dear brethren, if you should fail in mental qualifications (though I hope you will not), and if you should have a slender measure of the oratorical faculty (though I trust you will not), yet, depend upon it, a holy life is, in itself, a wonderful power, and will make up for many deficiencies; it is, in fact, the best sermon the best man can ever deliver.* (70) *What a grand set of men some of the preachers of the past age thought themselves to*

be!...The proud divines never shook hands with anybody, except, indeed, with the deacons, and a little knot of evidently superior persons.

If ever I should affect the airs of a great man, and set myself up above you all, and by proud manners cease to have sympathy with you, I hope the Lord will speedily take me down, and make me right in spirit again. (77) My brethren, what is our relation to this church? What is our position in it? We are servants. May we always know our place, and keep it! The highest place in the church will always come to the man who willingly chooses the lowest; while he that aspires to be great among his brethren will sink to be least of all. Certain men might have been something if they had not thought themselves so. A consciously great man is an evidently little one. (80) Those who knew Spurgeon best knew his humility was real. It is often said that our true nature reveals itself most in the privacy of our own homes—those who see us at work or church see one side of us, while our family sees quite another. Yet this wasn't the case with Spurgeon. In Charles's autobiography, wife Susannah Spurgeon shared several poignant entries from her husband's personal diary, which dated to his very first days in ministry.

This entry is representative of many others like it: *Lord, keep Thy servant low and humble at Thy feet! How prone am I to pride and vain-glory! Keep me always mindful that I have nothing which I have not received; 'tis grace, free, sovereign grace that has made me to differ. Why should I be chosen an elect vessel? Not that I deserve it, I am sure; but it is rich love.* In relation to that excerpt and others, Susannah commented: How marked is his *humility*, even though he must have felt within him the stirrings and throes of the wonderful powers which were afterwards developed. "Forgive me, Lord," he says in one place, "if I have ever had high thoughts of myself,"—so early did the Master implant the precious seeds of that rare grace of meekness, (84) which adorned his after life.

After each youthful effort at public exhortation, whether it be engaging in prayer, or addressing Sunday-school children, he seems to be surprised at his own success, and intensely anxious to be kept from pride and self-glory, again and again confessing his own utter weakness, and pleading for God-given strength. (85) Yet he was entirely free from any feeling of pride in his work, for he attributed the success not to himself, but to the Holy Spirit. (87) *What kind of men does the Master mean to use? They must be labourers. The man who does not make hard work of his ministry will find it very hard to answer for his idleness at the last great day. Be consumed with love for Christ, and let the flame burn continuously; God deserves to be served with all the energy of which we are capable. If the service of God is worth anything, it is worth everything. (90) Spurgeon: We shall be exalted by the Lord if we humble ourselves. For us the way upward is downhill. When we are stripped of self we are clothed with humility, and this is the best of wear. (95)*

In relation to his preaching, Spurgeon said, “I take my text and make a bee-line to the cross.” (136) And on another occasion he said more succinctly: “Make Christ the diamond setting of every sermon.” (137) An anonymous biographer noted, In the art of sermon illustration he stood unrivalled among his contemporaries. He was an omnivorous reader and a keen observer, (142) What are the hallmarks of an effective preacher or teacher? Spurgeon strongly urged his students and fellow ministers to (1) begin with prayer, (2) have a humble attitude, (3) invest time in preparation, (4) saturate themselves in the Word, (5) offer substance in the message, and (6) keep the message simple, interesting, and attractive. (143)

It is a great mercy to be a minister. Preaching has often driven me to my knees and chained me to my Bible. (146) Yet Spurgeon also knew that the more he concentrated his energies toward a single goal—that of pleasing and glorifying God—the more God could do through him. When we scatter our energies and attention in several different directions, it’s difficult for us to have a very significant impact on any one area of our lives. It’s only when we elect to do a few things well that we are able to do each of those things better. (180) Excel also in one power, which is both mental and moral, namely, the power of concentrating all your forces upon the work to which you are called. Collect your thoughts, rally all your faculties, mass your energies, focus your capacities. Turn all the springs of your soul into one channel, causing it to flow onward in an undivided stream. Some men lack this quality. They scatter themselves, and therefore fail. Mass your battalions, and hurl them upon the enemy. Do not try to be great at this, and great at that—to be “everything by starts, and nothing long”; but suffer your entire nature to be led in captivity by Jesus Christ, and lay everything at His dear feet who bled and died for you. (182)