

Of two things one: either the child of God has this fellowship, or he longs for it, he prays for it, he waits for it all the day long (Ps. 25:5 Dutch version). In conversion it is a seeking for what was not as yet possessed. Afterward it is a seeking back what has been lost. And here also it applies: "He that seeks, shall find; he that knocks, it shall be opened unto him."

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### "O GOD, MY GOD."

The flower-bud of prayer unfolds slowly in the soul of a child. Not that there is no certain sacred inclination to pray in the heart at a very early age. But while the bud is early set, the question is when it will blossom. For many months the young child was present when mother prayed, but had no understanding of it, and not infrequently disturbed mother's prayer by crying. But at last the moment arrives when for the first time in prayer it undergoes a peculiar sensation and is impressed by what is holy. Tender mother piety tries to confirm this impression. And before long the child kneels down when mother kneels, and when he is put to bed the first efforts are made to teach him to pray himself. Then mother folds the little hands, closes the eyes and says a simple prayer. Ten, twelve words. And the dear little one brokenly repeats them after her.

Here the form is ahead of the reality. The impression of reverence and awe before the Divine Majesty is there. A young child loves that first prayer. But the Eternal has not yet revealed himself in a clearly conscious form to the heart.

Hence a young child learns prayer to Jesus more quickly than direct prayer to the Most High God. He does not express in his little prayer anything original. He only repeats something, and when he first weaves something into his prayer himself, it is not worship, but the request for something that employs his childish attention. It is all, however, a speaking into an unknown Holy sphere that is above or around his little bed. It is all along the line of a steady but slow development, and prayer from his own impulse to a God who is to be personally addressed, and who, at least in a limited way, is personally known, is little seen, as a rule, before the tenth year. There are exceptions with children of five, six or seven years of age, especially when they die young. Ordinarily, however, the fuller unfolding of the flower-bud into an own, personal and conscious prayer, does not come much before the twelfth year. Such is more apt to be the case, when back of the tenth and twelfth year there was a period of three or more unfavorable years, in which the child was obliged to sit still during long devotions, and when motherly tenderness of teaching prayer involuntarily turned into a purely formal compulsion of keeping eyes closed and hands folded.

What God himself performed in the child's soul during those early years the holy angels know, but we do not. Only in the end the result becomes evident to us. And this begins to show itself about the twelfth year. At that age it becomes evident whether a spiritual sense is awakened in the heart, or whether indifference, if not aversion to holy things has risen. If a spiritual

disposition of heart shows itself, it is about at this age that God himself takes mother's task in hand, and allures the lad or the young girl into a first personal prayer, which is born from an own impulse.

But from this on to the moment in which the soul cries out: "O God, my God," the way is long. Generally the kindly, tender brightness of childhood prayer is not a little darkened when the years of maturity are reached. From all sorts of books and conversations an entirely different world of thoughts has entered into the consciousness, which, compared with the poetry of the life of prayer, either appears bitterly prosaic, or if it glistens in a choice collection of ideals, which may encourage the cultivation of plans and intentions and expectations, it does not focus them in the worship of an Eternal, glorious Being.

These two currents, the current of the practical and ideal life in its multiplicity, and the unity of our life as it is focussed in prayer, antagonize one another, and in this antagonism sometimes prayer is forever lost. There are those, alas, who were spiritual in childhood, and who in adult years have entirely unlearned the art of prayer. It also happens that prayer continues to be made and increases in seriousness and depth, but that the world is not brought into allignment with it, and the life of the world remains unreconciled by the side of it, until the soul is more and more overcome by an oftentimes sickly mysticism or by an overexcited spiritualism. But in the ordinary way of piety this period of struggle is followed by a period of spiritual fixedness. The

relation between the life of the soul and life in the world has then been regulated. The little boat no longer drifts with the caprice of wind and wave-beat. A rudder has been provided, a compass has been taken aboard, the lee-boards can be let down sideways. And thus the soul can direct its own course as it rides the waters of the sea of life. Heroic devotion to one's task in life goes hand in hand with an ever richer development of the life of prayer.

The sphere of the life of prayer and the sphere of one's calling in life begin more and more to cover one another. Moments of true prayer multiply themselves, by as much as in the work itself, the elevation of soul to God becomes more frequent, and ejaculatory prayer occurs more often, until at length a prayerful disposition of the soul becomes more and more habitual. On the other hand, secret prayer is more and more introduced into the daily task, and it is felt that prayer is not bound to single holy utterances, but that our whole existence with all its needs may be committed to God and may be sanctified in him. Thus prayer grows in significance and begins to cast its benign shade over our entire life, and so increasingly becomes the strength of our life. "Fervent prayer is half the work," is first mechanically quoted, but afterwards becomes blessed experience. And the moment draws nigh when finally the "O God, my God" becomes the clear, pure expression of what the inner life of the soul experiences and enjoys in its innermost and holy emotions.

If it should come to the lips too readily, this "O God my God" (Ps. 43:4) would be gross

egotism, and covetous selfishness. A presumptuous claim of God for oneself. "My God" with no thought of others. This sin in prayer is wondrously overcome in the "Our Father." This alway prays: Not give me, but give us our daily bread; not forgive me, but forgive us our debts; not deliver me, but deliver us from evil. We never stand before God alone, but always in the fellowship of love with all God's saints. Hence we must pray as a member of the Body of Christ, and not as one who stands by himself alone. But the "O God my God" does not antagonize this in any particular. It aims at something entirely different. It springs from the altogether different idea that God cares not merely for all his children, as a king watches over his million subjects, but that the King of Kings has this advantage over all the princes of the earth, that he knows all his children personally, that he understands them thoroughly, that he sustains a peculiar relation to each of them, that he has given each a calling of his own, that he has apportioned each a separate task, that he trains each for a particular destiny in eternity, and that therefore he not merely sustains a general relation to all, but that in addition to this, he stands in a particular relation with each of them. This relation is so personal, that it is never the same with any one else. He is Our Father, but as a father of seven children is the father of all, and yet distinguishes between them, and adapts himself to each one, according to his nature, disposition and character, so the Lord our God is Father of all, and yet Father in a special sense of each of us, in a special manner, drawing near to us in a mystical

way, and revealing himself to us in mystical sensations which have a character of their own and bear an original stamp. He knows us and we are known of him, such as is not possible with another person who is differently constituted than ourselves. He is the "One Sun," which glistens differently in every dew-drop. Only this, the dew-drop does not know it. God's child can know it. And when this knowledge comes to him, he kneels down before "God his God."

Distinguish carefully. From God's side this peculiar relation, which is different with each of his children, existed from the moment of conception and of birth; yea, already before conception in the calling of the elect from eternity. The difference lies only on our side. Years of our life pass by when we indeed know God, and lead a prayer-life before his face, but only in a general sense, which is still weaned from the particular. We pray as others pray. We are one of God's children, but we are not yet discovered to ourselves as one such, in whom something special of the Father is expressed. But from the general gradually the particular separates itself. That which imparts to us a character of our own, which gives us our own 'calling and makes us to be a particular person, begins to enter into special fellowship with the Lord our God. And now it is the unsearchable riches of our God, that he, who created and elected every one of his children with a particular disposition and with a proper calling, will be and can be that special God to every one of them as belongs to their nature and condition. Not a general fulfilment for all alike, but for every one of them that special fulfilment which

he needs. Not only the most-special Providence, but also the most special self-revelation of his Divine Majesty in the mirror of the life of each soul. And when it comes to this, but also only then, there rises from the heart of itself spontaneously the jubilant exclamation of worship: "O God my God."

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### "THE LORD IS THY SHADE."

Not only the child, but also he who is older, would rather look at pictures and prints, than read; or in reading, at least, would like assistance for his representation. Hence the preference of our fathers for illustrated Bibles, and the new demand for books and periodicals with illustrations. For a long time there was little love for illustrated books, partly because the plates were poor and partly because the readers were over-wise. But since we have become a little more natural, and photography and photo-engraving in less than a quarter of a century have improved the illustration to unknown fineness and beauty, the old love for seeing is revived again, and by looking at pictures, our representation has been uncommonly enriched. And now everything is embellished with illustrations in a good way and in a sinful way. The power in letting things be seen is recognized again. Even newspapers seek strength in this. At present it is still the picture with the Word. Gradually it will become ever more picture and ever less Word, until in the end exaggeration will avenge itself and the more just relation will return.