

The New Park Street Pulpit.

WEAK HANDS AND FEEBLE KNEES.

A Sermon

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REV. C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.

“Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees.”—Isaiah xxxv, 3.

It is the duty of all men to be careful of the sons of sorrow. There be some who from their very birth are marked by melancholy as her own. The silent shades of sorrow are their congenial haunts; the glades of the forest of grief are the only places where their leaf can flourish. Others there are who through some crushing misfortune are brought so low that they never hold up their heads again, but go from that time forth mourning to their graves. Some there be, again, who disappointed in their early youth, either in some fond object of their affections, or else in some project of their young ambition, never can dare to face the world, but shrink from contact with their fellows, even as the sensitive plant curls up its tendrils at the touch. In all flocks there must be lambs, and weak and wounded sheep; and among the flock of men, it seems that there must necessarily be some who should more than others prove the truth of Job's declaration, “man is born to trouble even as the sparks fly upwards.” It is the duty then of those of us who are more free than others from despondency of spirit, to be very tender to these weak ones. Far be it from the man of courageous disposition, of stern resolve, and of unbending purpose, to be hard towards those who are timid and despairing. If we have a lion-like spirit, let us not imitate the king of beasts in his cruelty to those timid fallow deer that fly before him, but let us place our strength at their service for their help and protection. Let us with downy fingers bind up the wounded heart; with oil and wine let us nourish their fainting spirits. In this battle of life, let the unwounded warriors bear their injured comrades to the rear, bathe their wounds, and cover them from the storm of war. Be gentle with those that are desponding. Alas, it is not every man that has learned this lesson. There are some who deal with others with rough-handed thoughtlessness. “Ah,” they say, “if such a one be so foolish as to be sensitive let him be.” O speak not thus; to be sensitive, timid, and desponding, is ill enough in itself, without our being hard and untender towards those who are so afflicted. Go ye forth, and do to others as ye would that they should do to you; and as ye would that others should in your hours of despondency deal with you tenderly and comfortably, so deal ye tenderly and comfortably with them.

But my text, especially commands the minister to deal tenderly with those of Christ's people who are in such a condition, and these are not a few, for although religion changes the moral temperament of men, it does not change the physical. A man who is weak in health before conversion will probably be as weak afterwards, and many a spirit that has a tendency to despondency, has exhibited that tendency after conversion. We do not profess that the religion of Christ will so thoroughly change a man as to take away from him all his natural tendencies; it will give the despairing something that will alleviate that despondency, but as long as that is caused by a low state of body, or a diseased mind, we do not profess

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that the religion of Christ will totally remove it. No, rather, we do see every day that amongst the best of God's servants, there are those who are always doubting, always looking to the dark side of every providence, who look at the threatening more than at the promise, are ready to write bitter things against themselves, and often put the bitter for sweet, and the sweet for bitter, erring against their own spirits and robbing themselves of comforts which they might enjoy. To those then, I shall have to speak this morning in the words of our text, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees."

There is a figure used in the text, and I shall keep to it. First, I shall attempt to show *the importance of hands and knees in going to heaven*. In the second place, I shall observe *the ill effect of having weak hands and feeble knees*; then note *the causes of those weak hands and feeble knees*; for in so doing I hope I shall be able to apply a cure.

I. And, now, first, we find in our text hands and knees mentioned. We may be quite sure that **THEY ARE VERY IMPORTANT IN GETTING TO HEAVEN**. The hands and knees, we must remember, are those parts of the body in which the effects of fear are the most easily seen. Of course the root of despondency and fear must lie in the heart; it is that which is first moved with terror. But afterwards these extremities, these limbs of action, these modes of expressing the will of the heart begin to feel the weakness also. The hands hang down in terror, and the knees begin to tremble. We are always accustomed to describe a man when he is in a great fright, when some overwhelming danger appals him, as hanging down his hands or wringing them in despair, and as feeling his knees knocking together in the moment of his terror. Just so the prophet means, that wherever the Christian displays most his timidity and his dismay there we must be careful to apply the remedy of comfort. Now, it is the fact that when the Christian's heart begins to tremble, his hands of action grow weak, and his knees of prayer begin to tremble also; he becomes unable to do and unable to pray. He is weak in active service, and he becomes weak also in wrestling with his God. Hands and knees are the exhibitors of inward power. Now, there are some men whose fears are so great that they have become visible, and can no longer be concealed. There was a time when these sons of mourning were able to mask their sorrow with an outward cheerfulness, but now they cannot. The fear of the heart has glided into their hands and descended into their knees; and we see them hiding from us, as the hind, when smitten by the arrow, retires from the herd to bleed alone. To such as these, ye sons of consolation, are ye sent with words of pity and deeds of love.

But, note, the hands and knees are of the first importance because they represent active duty and supplication. The way to heaven is, through faith in Christ; but after we have believed in Christ the legitimate tendency of faith is active service. Although the Christian shall go to heaven through the blood of Christ, yet as a pilgrim he must walk there; and although he overcomes through the blood of the Lamb, yet as a warrior he must fight if he would reign. Active service is expected of every Christian. Christ does not put his children on a bed, and then carry them to heaven along a lazy road; but he gives them life and bids that life develope itself; he gives them strength, and commands them to use the strength in working out their own salvation. While he works in them, they are passive; but he then bids them be active and work out what he has beforehand wrought in. He is no Christian who does not seek to serve his God. The very motto of the Christian should be "I serve." Christ's people are Christ's servants, and as the angels in heaven delight to fly at God's behests, so do the children of God delight to run in the way of his commands. Hence, then, if the knees be weak and the hands be weak, it is little that we can do. We cannot run with the weak knee; we cannot labour with the weak hand. How can ye, the servants of Christ, how can ye lift the heavy burdens which ye have to carry, if your hands be weak and your knees totter? How can ye pull down the walls of your enemies if your hands tremble? How can ye smite your foemen with the sword of faith if your arm be weak? Look well, then, to this, for herein ye suffer exceeding loss; if in active service ye lose power and strength.

Again, the knees may signify prayer. When a man becomes timid and desponding, his closet very soon becomes the chamber of woe. Our closets are either Bethels or Bochim,—the house of God or else the house of weeping. Let a man become timid, distrustful, doubting, fearing, trembling—what little power has he when he comes before the mercy-seat! He would believe in God, but he cannot appropriate

the promise. He would lay hold of the angel, but all his sinews shrink, and he cannot wrestle. He would plead the promise, but his hand refuses to clutch it with an iron grasp. And he goes away crying, "Oh that I could pray! oh that I could believe in God! oh that I could succeed with God in prayer, and become as a prevailing prince. Alas! I am as weak as water, and I can do nothing." Herein lies the importance of having a strong hand that we may serve God, and of having a strong knee that we may wrestle with him in prayer, and get the blessing from him.

Note, again, that we may readily see what the prophet means by hands and knees, if we observe that a Christian, although his hopes are in heaven, stands upon the earth. It is with the hand of faith that the Christian lays hold upon that which is not seen, and endeavours to climb upwards to the skies; it is with his foot that he spurns the earth and all that it calls good or great. Let the Christian's foot be weak, and he cannot then despise the things that are seen: but he will be fixing his affection on things on earth and not on things above. Let his hand of faith, on the other hand, grow weak, and he cannot lay hold of the things that are in heaven. He will find it difficult to fix his hold above the stars, and feel that he is surely anchored; and very hard to climb the ladder Jacob saw. The foot represents the manner in which we deal with earth, we tread upon it boldly and courageously, despising its threats, contemning its riches, contemning its honours. The weak knee cannot do this; we are then apt to bend, and cringe, and fawn before a wicked world to be slaves, where we ought to be freemen, and vile where we ought to be noble. Here again we see the importance of the hands and the knees.

But you will remember also that there are certain parts of the spiritual pilgrimage where hands and knees are absolutely required. John Bunyan represents Christian as coming to the foot of the hill Difficulty, and he says, "I looked then after Christian, to see him go up the hill, where I perceived he fell from running to going, and from going to clambering upon his hands and knees, because of the steepness of the place." Many such a place you and I have had to pass, brother Christians. Once we could run along the walls of salvation with triumphant faith; at other times we could walk even through the valley of the shadow of death with quiet confidence: but we have come to a place of trial and of extraordinary difficulty, where all speed failed us, and strength did not suffice. Then, always on our knees in agony of prayer, and always on our hands in simplicity of faith, we climbed our weary way, often fearing lest we should fall backward to our destruction, but crying out, "Lord, let my knee find a resting place, let my hand lay hold on some projecting crag of promise, that there I may get a fast hold, lest I totter and fall. I can but ascend slowly. My heart followeth hard after thee, my spirit crieth after thee; Lord, help me! help me to climb this weary way, for back I cannot go." Every Christian who knows much about divine experience will understand what this means. He will often be brought into such a position that he can make but little progress; and he must think it quite enough if he can hold his ground against the desperate difficulties of his path. Hands and knees, then, in many ways, are essential for a Christian's comfort, his help, and his advance in the road to heaven.

II. Now, I shall have in the second place to show THE ILL EFFECT OF WEAK HANDS AND KNEES.

And, first, we have already hinted that one ill fruit of a Christian having weak hands and knees is this, that he will not himself be able to make much progress in the divine life. Christian men have never attained to what they are to be. They have only started on their pilgrimage, and after they have gone their furthest, there is a yet-beyond towards which they must press with earnest heart, though with weary footsteps. How is it that some of you have made but little progress on the road to heaven? In looking back on your lives, some of you must acknowledge that you do not know much more about Christ now than you did six years ago. You do not enjoy greater nearness of access to him now than you did then. You are not more diligent in his service, or more fearless in his defence, than you were at a period which has long since elapsed. Perhaps you are compelled to feel that you have made no advance, or even have gone backward. Why is this? Is it not because your hands have become weak, your knees have become feeble? You have neglected prayer: you have forsaken your closets, you have not poured out your hearts before God with that frequency which once distinguished you, and you have not the faith you once possessed. You have not believed the promise as you ought to

have done. You have not taken God at his naked word, and trusted to him as he deserved. And do you expect ever to make any progress in the road to heaven if you doubt your God? Do you imagine that you shall ever go far along in the heavenly pilgrimage if you neglect prayer? As well could you expect a plant to grow without air and water as to expect your heart to grow without prayer and faith. A poor blanched thing may be produced in a dark cellar; and so may you maintain a poor, blanched miserable existence, if you live absent from your God, and apart from that strength which faith can give you, but you can never attain the healthy verdure of grace. Oh, man, if thou wouldst grow in grace, if thou wouldst comprehend with all saints what are the heights and depths, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, look well to thy knees that they be strong, look well to thy hands that they hang not down.

The Christians of this age seem to me to be content with themselves, though there is infinite reason for the reverse. When I sit down and read the biographies of saints who have gone to heaven, I am astonished at myself, and I can only weep to think how far I am behind these men, and then how much further I must be behind my divine Master. Surely the examples of eminent saints should spur us onward. If Henry Martin could unreservedly devote his life and energies to Christ's service, why may not we? If Martin Luther with holy boldness could face danger, why should not we? If Calvin with clear and eagle eye could read the doctrines of the gospel amid the mists of error, why should not we? If men of more modern times have been able to endure opprobrium and disgrace for Christ's sake, or if they in private have been able to reach to the seventh heaven of communion with God, and have lived on earth as if they were in paradise, why should not we? There is no reason why the least saint in God's family should not outrun the greatest. Why look upon the saints of olden time as if they were so far above us that we can never equal them? Oh, dream not so! What Abraham was you may be. What the mightiest saint of that former life was, that ought you to be. You should never rest satisfied until you labour to surpass them all; yea, not even then, for you have not yet attained to the perfection which is in Christ. I know this age is one which is always satisfied if it gets barely enough to carry it to heaven. Where is that holy ambition which ought to stir the Christian soul to noble deeds? But few of us have felt it. We are drivelling dwarfs, content with the small height to which we have attained, forgetful of the steeps which tower above our heads. Up! Christian, up! The mount of holiness may be steep to climb, but, man, the hill of God is a high hill, even as the hill of Bashan. Up! up! for it is only on its summit that the calm air of heaven can be breathed, and the mists of earth entirely swept away. But weak hands and feeble knees, I know, in this age, are the reasons why so few Christians attain to any eminence in the ways and works of God.

Yet, again, weak hands and feeble knees have another ill effect. They prevent our doing any great wonder for the good of the world. Oh! what work there is to do in this poor world of ours. Imagine the first colonist landing in Australia. If it had been revealed to him in a vision that, in process of time, the whole of that huge island should be ploughed, and sown, and built upon, and inhabited, he would have said, "How is this to be done? how can it ever be effected?" And, even now, great as has been the progress in that country, if we were assured that in a few short years the whole of it would be brought under tillage, we should be apt to ask, but how shall it be done? We should, however, very readily perceive that there must be strong knees to dig, and strong hands to delve and plough, or else the work never could be accomplished. Many there must be, and the many must be strong, else the work cannot be done. And now, lift up your eyes, this day! behold, the whole world lies before you like one huge untilled country. Who is to drive the ploughshare of divine grace through all the continents of this world? Who is to make this desert blossom like the rose? Who shall sow it with the good seed-corn of the kingdom of God? Where are the labourers who shall afterwards reap the whitening fields? Not weak hands and feeble knees; they cannot do it. Our knees must be strong and our sinews must be well braced, or else so great a work can never be accomplished. I believe one reason why the religion of Christ makes such little progress at this time, is because most of us are so weak. We find, a few centuries after Christ's death, his name was preached in every land; there was not one region of the known globe which had not heard the marvellous story of the cross. But, then, the followers of Christ were men who knew not what

it was to tremble. They counted not their lives dear unto them; but leaving houses, and land, and families, for his name's sake, they went everywhere preaching the Word. But at this day we are not strong. We must all be assured of a livelihood before we will go forth to preach the Word; and, even then, if no one shall smile on us, how soon we cease the work. We commence an enterprise, but little difficulties appal us. How many does the pastor have to see, of little men and little women who come creeping to him, and whining because they find difficulties in serving Christ. Is not this because ye have weak hands and feeble knees? If ye had the strong knees of the apostles, and the mighty hands of the ancient martyrs, nothing could stand against you. Let God's children once become strong, and woe unto thee, Babylon, woe unto thee, O Rome; down must ye fall, ye castles of the enemy. The weakness of God's children is your hope, but their strength is your despair. Let them once believe firmly, let them pray earnestly, and behold Victory waits upon their banners, and dismay will seize your hearts ye enemies of Christ. We are at this time blessing God that great doors have been opened for the spread of the gospel. Hindostan, China, Japan, many lands we hope shall soon be visited by the Christian missionary. But are we not conscious that our opportunities are greater than our strength? Must not the Christian church confess that she has now a greater field, but she has, perhaps, fewer labourers than ever? The harvest is greater, but the labourers are fewer. Whence comes it? It comes from this fact, that through the church of Christ the weak hand and the feeble knee have become the general rule. "Oh," says one, "but surely there might be found some men to go out." And so say others as well as you, why are *you* not the man to go? You say others should be thrust into the vineyard, and why stand back yourself? That torpor which seizes upon us, has seized upon others too. Let us not be hasty in condemning the rest of the church, till we have first tested ourselves. Do *we* not owe our all to Christ? Are we not *personally* his debtors? If we felt this debt, if we felt the value of souls, should not each of us give more towards the spread of this gospel? should we not pray more agonisingly? and would there not be found many of us who would be ready to labour more indefatigably. If the minister of Christ be weak, rest assured it is because the church itself is not strong. The ministry is but the index of the church. If we often fail in our pulpits, because they are not filled with fervent men, we may reply to you, if the pews were fervent, the pulpit would catch the flame. I am not speaking of water; I know that water runs down hill; but I am now speaking of fire, and fire ascends. Let the fire begin with you, be you in earnest, supplicating, striving, and wrestling with God in prayer, and the fire shall ascend to the pulpit, and we too, shall become as earnest as yourselves. Let us use no mutual recriminations. The whole church is alike at this present moment; it is all weak. There are but few and noble exceptions; but few who are strong in prayer, who are mighty in serving their God. And hence it is that Satan still retains his throne, still darkness broods over the nations, and still men are not saved. May God strengthen us, or what shall become of the world we wot not.

Again, weak hands and feeble knees very much dishonour Christ. I would say nothing to grieve the heart of any weak believer here present this morning, but still we must speak the truth. Want of faith and weakness in prayer dishonour Christ. Suppose you have a friend, and you say to him, "My friend, I have such confidence in you, that I will trust you with the title-deeds of my estate, and with all I have. Nay, more; I will trust you with my health, I will trust you with my life. Do what you will with me; I have such faith in your goodness and your wisdom that I am sure you will not be unkind, and will not err. I trust you." There is something honourable in faith to the object in whom it is reposed. Now, if you are able, with the strong hand of faith, to bring all you have and give it entire unto God, and say, "There, Lord, I surrender all to thee; do with me as thou wilt, and with mine too; take what thou wilt away; give me what thou pleasest, or withhold what thou choosest; I leave all in thy hand; I can trust thee entirely; I know thou wilt make no mistake; I know thou wilt not treat me harshly; I leave all to thee; without word, or thought, or wish, I surrender all." If you can do this, then Christ is glorified; but if your hand is weak, and you are hiding away some choice thing that you cannot give up to him, if you do not stand fully to the surrender, but keep back something from him, then that weak hand brings dishonour upon God. So also does the feeble knee. Some one has given you a promise, that if you are in need and go to him, he will give whatever you want. You go up to

his door, you knock timidly; and when he comes to meet you, you rush into the street and hide yourself, for you are ashamed that he should see you. Driven by necessity, however, you knock again; at last he comes, and you stand trembling before him. "Well," says he, "what do you want?" "You have given me a promise, sir, that when I am in need you will do so-and-so for me, and I really do not believe it: I have no confidence in you, and I do not like to ask." There would be nothing honorable in that to any man. How far different was the example of Alexander's courtier. The king said to him, "I will give to thee whatever thou requesteth;" and the man asked such a gift as almost emptied Alexander's coffers. "Ay," says the monarch, "it was a great thing for him to ask, but it is only a little thing for Alexander to give. I like the man's confidence in me, in using my word to its fullest extent." Now when the believer goes to his closet and bows there with his feeble knee, and asks God to bless him and does not half believe that he will, he dishonours God. But, when a man goes up to his chamber, saying in his heart, "There is something that I want, and I am going to get it;" and he falls on his knees, and cries, "Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that such a thing is necessary to me; there is thy promise; 'do as thou hast said,' Lord; I know thou wilt give it me." And when he rises from his knees, and goes down and says to his friend, "The blessing will come; I have asked for it; I have prayed the prayer of faith, and God will hear me;" why, such a man honours God. I would remind you again of a great proof of all this. Look at Mr. Müller, at Ashleydown, near Bristol. Could he have built that house for orphans if he had a weak hand and a feeble knee? No. But he had a strong hand; he meant to serve his God by feeding and clothing orphans. On the other hand he had a strong knee. "Lord," he said, "I will do this enterprise—give me the means to do it." And he went to God, and did not doubt that he would do it. And, lo! thousands have rolled into his treasury, and he has never known lack; and now, seven hundred children live under his care, and are fed and clothed to the honour of God. Let us also seek to have strong hands and mighty knees, and so shall we honour God. If we do not build an orphan house to his name, yet shall we raise our Ebenezer, and leave some trophy to the honour of his grace. These are some reasons why we should look well to hands and knees.

III. And, now, the last point was this: THERE ARE CERTAIN CAUSES OF WEAK HANDS AND FEEBLE KNEES, and in mentioning them, I shall endeavour to correct them.

Some Christians have weak hands and feeble knees because they are only infants. They are young Christians, they have not been converted long. God's family is like every other family; we do not expect the new-born convert to run alone at first. Perhaps, it will be months, say sometimes years, before he will be able to feel his feet. We thank God that there is a very comfortable promise for those who are babes in Christ, and cannot run alone:—"He shall carry the lambs in his bosom." "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms," says God, by the prophet Hosea. So ye, just born to God, must not despair because ye cannot as yet play the man with the promise; if ye cannot now wrestle with the angel, remember, God does not require wrestling from infants. He will not overdrive his lambs. He does not expect long marches from feeble feet. As you are but weak, you shall have lighter duties. As you are at present but tender, and young, you shall not have heavy labours to perform. But seek to grow in grace. Feed upon the unadulterated milk of the Word of God, and pray that he would bring you up from babes into young men, and from young men into perfect men in Christ Jesus.

A more frequent cause, however, of weak hands and feeble knees, is starvation, absolute starvation. Is there such a thing known in England as starvation? Yes, there is of a spiritual kind. There are many houses which are dedicated to the worship of God, that certainly never were dedicated to the profit of man. There are places into which a Christian might enter all the year round, without ever getting any understanding of the doctrines of God at all. Many a minister, in these days, of fine language, and of polished rounded periods, resembles Nero, who when the city of Rome was starving, sent his galleys to Alexandria to bring back sand for the wrestlers, but not corn for hungry mouths. We have heard many a discourse that has been very fine indeed, as a moral essay, but it has had no food in it for the poor hungry mouths of God's people. One has but very little opinion of the

present race of professing Christians when you see their frequent changes. I know men at this day who hear an Arminian with the greatest possible delight—"Such a dear, good, earnest man!" And if a Calvinist preaches the next Sunday, who contradicts every word the other man said—"Oh, he is such a precious creature!" because he happens to have a great flow of words. And then comes another who happens to be a hyper-Calvinist, and who says most extraordinary things—"He is a precious child of God, he preaches admirably!" And then there comes afterwards a Pelagian, or almost an Arian, and it is just the same—they take it all in, and delight in it. The reason is, because these people never taste the word of God at all. They look at it, but so long as they do not taste it and feed on it they know nothing of it. If they fed on the Word, they would have their senses exercised by reason of the use, and they would be able to discern between the good and the evil, the precious and the vile. Many of our Calvinistic preachers do not feed God's people. They believe in election, but they do not preach it. They think particular redemption true, but they lock it up in the chest of their creed, and never bring it out in their ministry. They hold final perseverance, but they persevere in keeping quiet about it. They think there is such a thing as effectual calling, but they do not think they are called effectually to preach it. The great fault we find with many is, that they do not speak right out what they do believe. You could not know if you heard them fifty times what were the doctrines of the gospel, or what was their system of salvation. And hence God's people get starved. And all the while the only remedy they have for the poor, weak, starving child of God, is a long whip. They are always cracking this whip with the loud sound of "do this! do that! and do the other!" If they would put the whip in the manger and feed God's people, then they would be able run the heavenly race. But now it is all whip and no corn, and no creature can subsist upon that. No child of God can ever grow strong in grace with mere exhortation, if it be not associated with good old-fashioned doctrine. I should like to hear all our pulpits sounding with the old-fashioned doctrine of John Owen, and of such men as Bunyan, and Charnock, and Goodwin, and those men of olden time who knew the truth and dared to preach it fully. There were giants in those days. In every parish church in the city of London, and in this borough, too, you might have found men who were no children in divinity, but masterly men, each of them able to declare the word of God with the authority of a master in Israel. Now where find we such? We labour and we strive, we dig, we toil, we seek to be something, and we end in being nothing. And so it must be as long as hands are weak and knees are feeble; and so also must this be as long as good doctrine is denied us, and truth is kept back in the ministry. Feed God's children well; give them comfort; give them much to feed upon of the sweet things of the kingdom of God; and then they will grow strong, then they will begin to work.

But, again, fear is the great weakness of men's knees; doubt and distrust are the great relaxers of the strength of men's hands. He that hath faith in God is almost omnipotent; he that hath might in prayer (through the Holy Spirit), is quite so. He that believeth God with all his heart, there is none in the world that can match with him; and he that prayeth to God with all fervency of soul, may overcome the divine omnipotence itself, and move the arm that moves the world. Give a man faith, and he is in the midst of his enemies, like a lion amid a herd of dogs, he sweeps them away. With what an easy motion of his gigantic strength he rips them open and lays them dead. Nothing can stand against the man who believes. He plants his standard in the midst of rocks: he stands up to it and draws his sword, and cries, "Come one, come all; this rock shall fly from its firm base as soon as I; I am a match for you; I believe, and therefore have I spoken; I believe still, and therefore do I speak again; and I will not move though hell and earth come against me." But when a man becomes doubting and timid, where is his strength? The moment you doubt away goes your might. Strong feet make a man mighty, but a strong knee makes him mightier still. Christ's soldiers always win their battles on their knees. On their feet they may be conquered, but on their knees they are invincible. The praying legion is the thundering legion. Napoleon sent out his old guard in the last extremity of the battle of Waterloo. They had always carried victory with them, but they were at last defeated. But the old guard of the church of Christ is the legion of prayer. The men that are mighty on their knees, these never have been defeated. When they march on in steady phalanx, they are mightier than the push of bayonet, though British

arms and British hearts should drive the bayonet home. Nothing can stand against the men that pray. Let the church but once fall on its knees, and it shall have might to make the enemy fall on its knees—not in prayer, but in terror and dismay. Other warriors cry, “Up guards and at them!” Our cry is, “Down, guards, on your knees, and at them!” There, on your knees you become mighty; you draw near to the great seat of God, and then you draw near to the fountain of your strength and of your triumph. Fear, then, must be got rid of. We must labour with God, that he would be pleased to give us strong faith; that we may not doubt the word of God, nor doubt our interest, nor doubt his love, nor doubt our perseverance, but may believe and become mighty, having no longer weak hands and feeble knees.

Let me add one more thought only; namely this, that sloth may make a man weak in his hands and in his feet. Arms become strong by using them. The blacksmith gets a brawny hand by constantly using his hammer. He who climbs the mountain, or walks many a mile a day, becomes strong in his feet. Those who sit still and walk but a little while are wearied with a few miles; but those who have tramped through continents are not speedily to be wearied. Use makes us strong, but sloth enfeebles us. There are many of you who might be stronger if you laboured more. What a lazy corporation the church of Christ is! Taking it all round there must be, I think, more lazy people in the church of Christ than there is to be found in any other body of men. There are some that do valiantly and serve God, but how many of you there are who are quite content to occupy your seats and hear sermons without doing anything for God’s cause. I do not hesitate to say that I believe there are many of you here who never won a soul to Christ in your lives, and scarcely ever tried to do so. You never lay poor souls to heart; you never go to God in heart and prayer for your poor perishing neighbours. Now and then, if you see a drunken man, you say “it is a great pity;” and if you hear of a murder, you say “it is a dreadful thing.” But very little you care about it. You do not agonize and cry for the iniquity of this land. What do you do? You put a sixpence in the plate now and then, and that is your gift to God’s cause; you sing a hymn or join in prayer, and that is your service to God. The custom with our religious people is, they pay their seat-rent, they attend the chapel, and then they have done their duty. And even in the ministry itself, you hear of a clergyman speaks of doing his duty, when he reads his prayer and when he has done his preaching. But we want to have warmer hearts, and more active lives, or else, surely, the church must die of sloth. Oh that every one of you would think you had something to do for Christ in this life, and that you must do it. If your knees are feeble, serve God the best you can with them; if your hands hang down, then do the best you can with the hands hanging down, and pray God to strengthen them, until you become mighty, and then you will be able to do more. But do something every one of you. If England expects every one to do his duty, how much more may the church demand of every professor that he should be doing something for his Master. Do not think it is enough to get good; *do good*. The candle must soon be extinguished that is shut up without fresh air. Give your light plenty of air, and it will burn all the brighter; and others seeing your light will be able to rejoice in it. You are not to eat your morsel alone; if you do you will become weak, for God hath so ordained it; that if we keep our religion to ourselves it will become feeble. The man who hoards his gold grows no richer, but he who puts it out to usury, will grow richer himself and help to enrich other men. Do so with your religion; put it out to usury, and you will grow richer, water men’s souls, and you shall be watered. The most practical way for religious people is to do something; visit the sick, help the poor, teach the ignorant, succour the distressed; and in all these ways you will find that God will bless you, and your hands shall become strong, and your knees shall not totter. Above all, cry for the Holy Spirit to strengthen you, for without him all is vain.