



# Day of Prayer 2022

Fulton Street prayer meeting,  
1858 (Harper's Weekly)

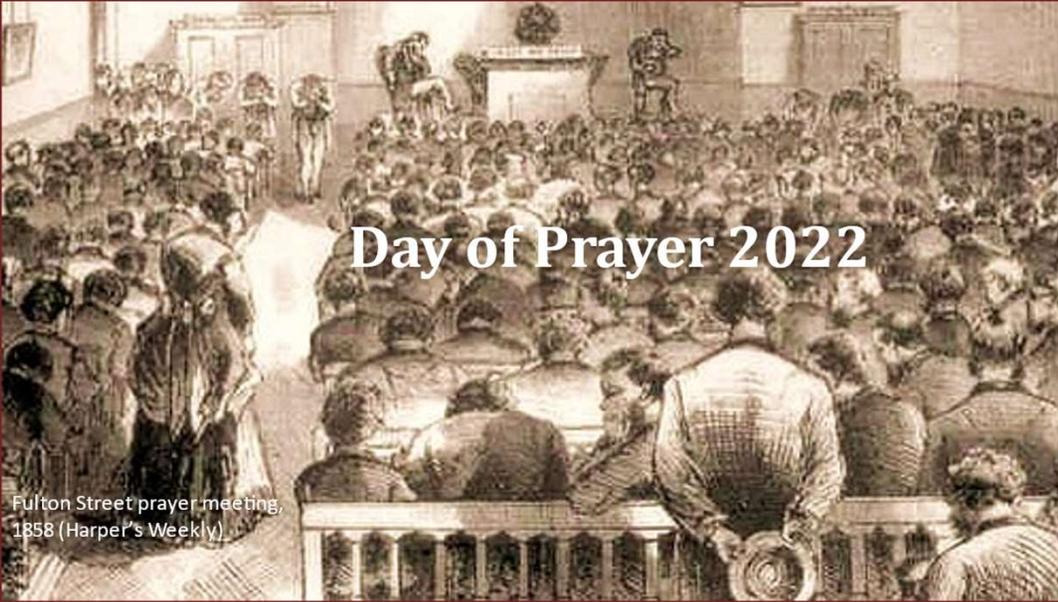
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Psalm 62:8

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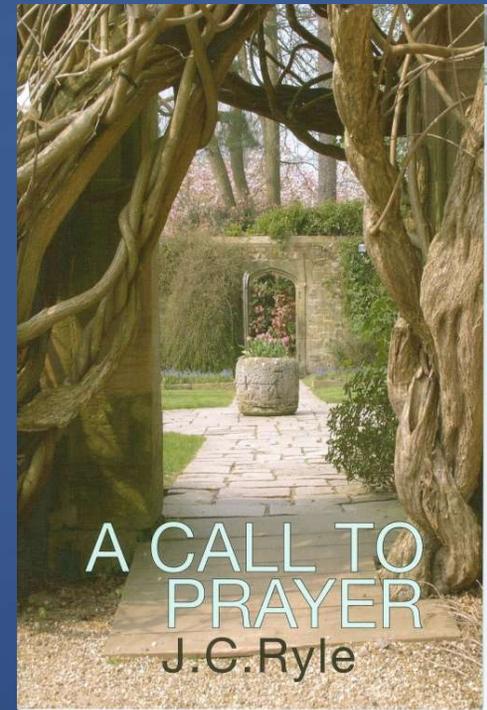
Recommendable Titles



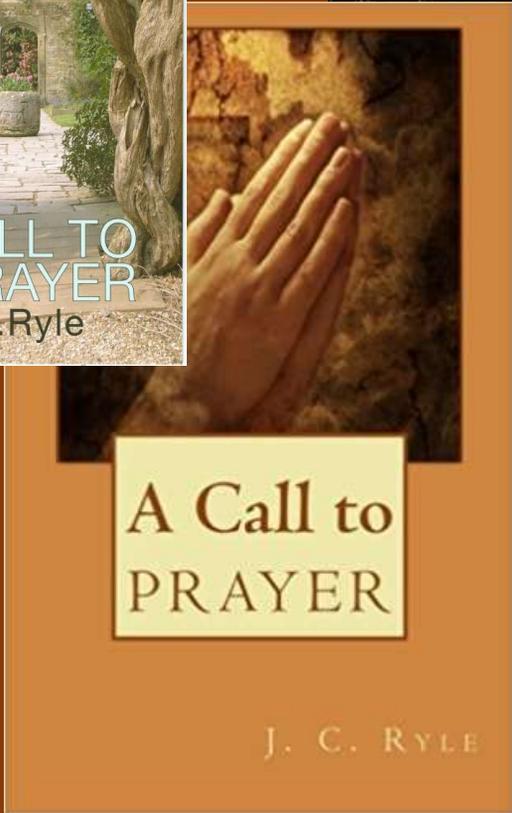
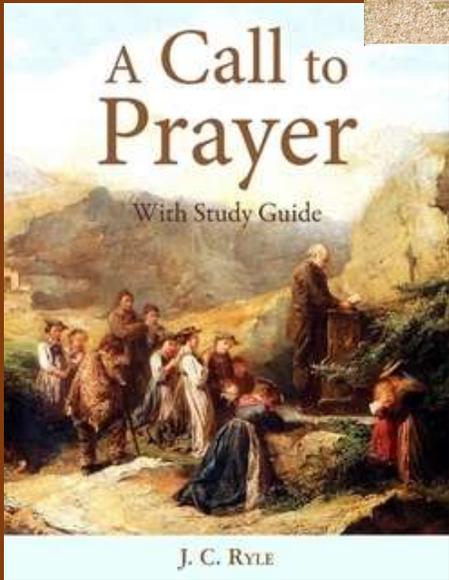
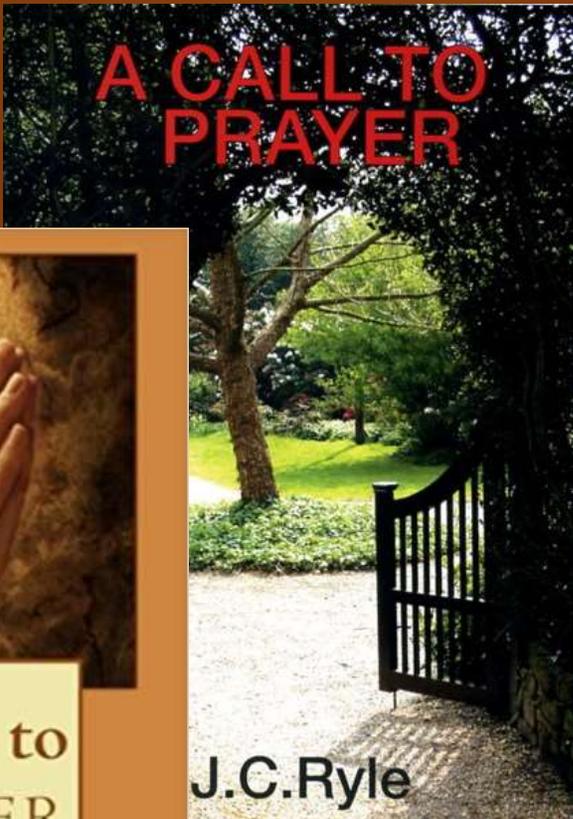
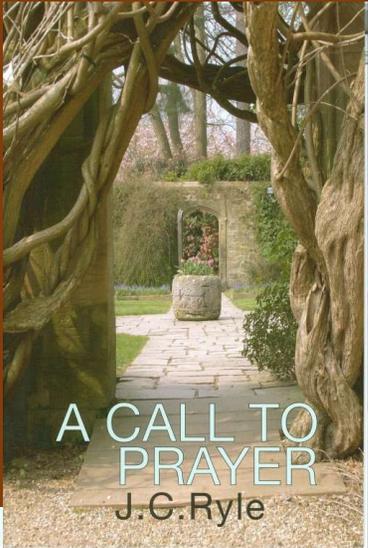
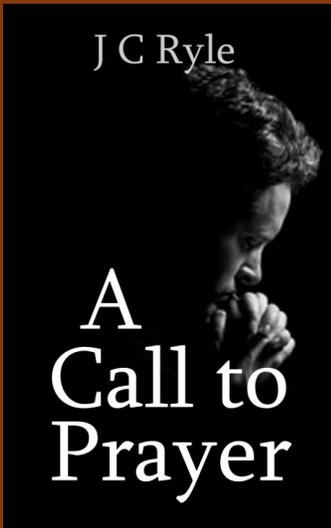
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J.C. Ryle





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# DO YOU PRAY?

## A QUESTION FOR 1852.

BY THE

REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

RECTOR OF HELMINGHAM, SUFFOLK.

AUTHOR OF "LIVING OR DEAD," ETC.

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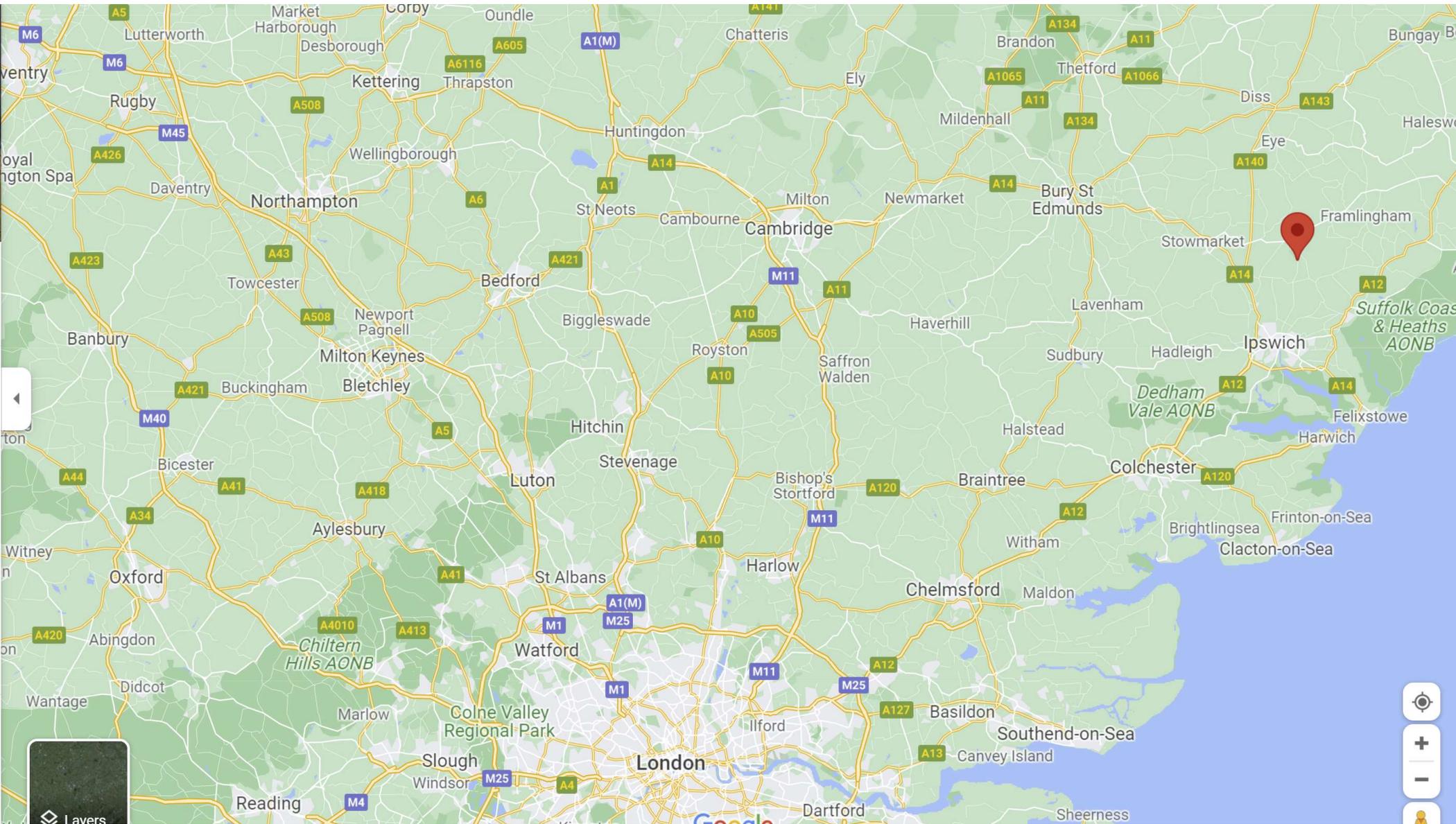
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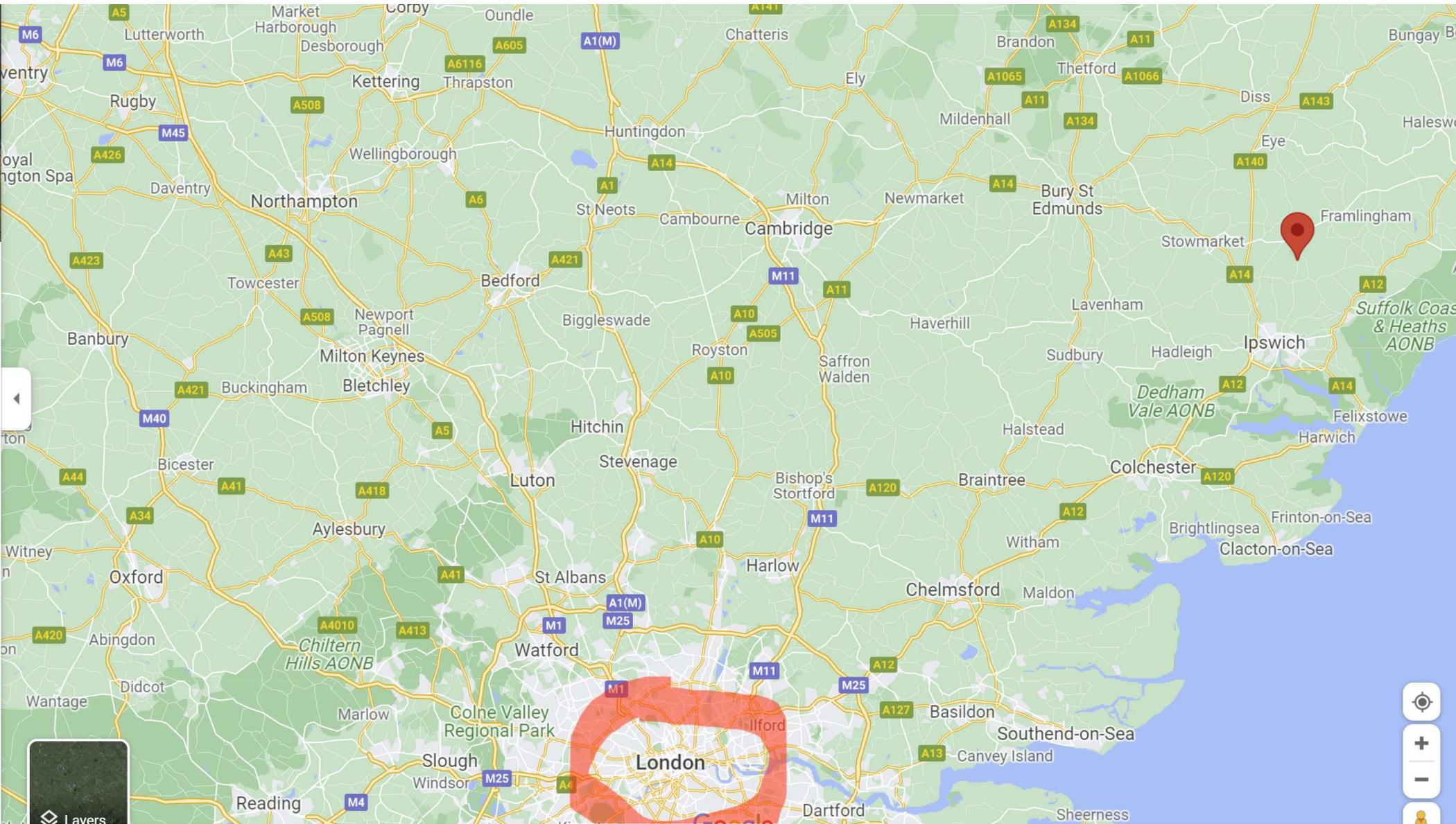
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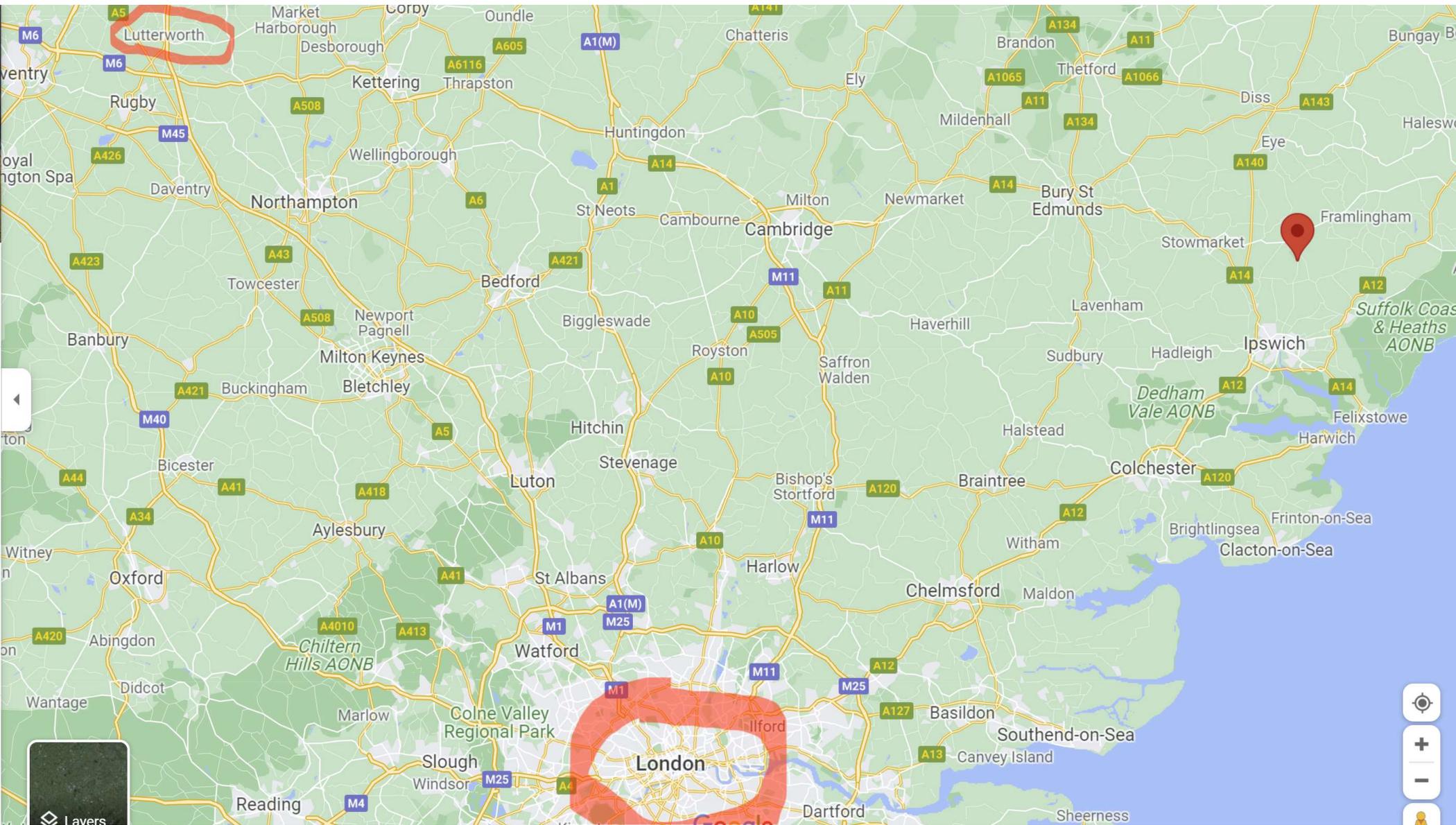
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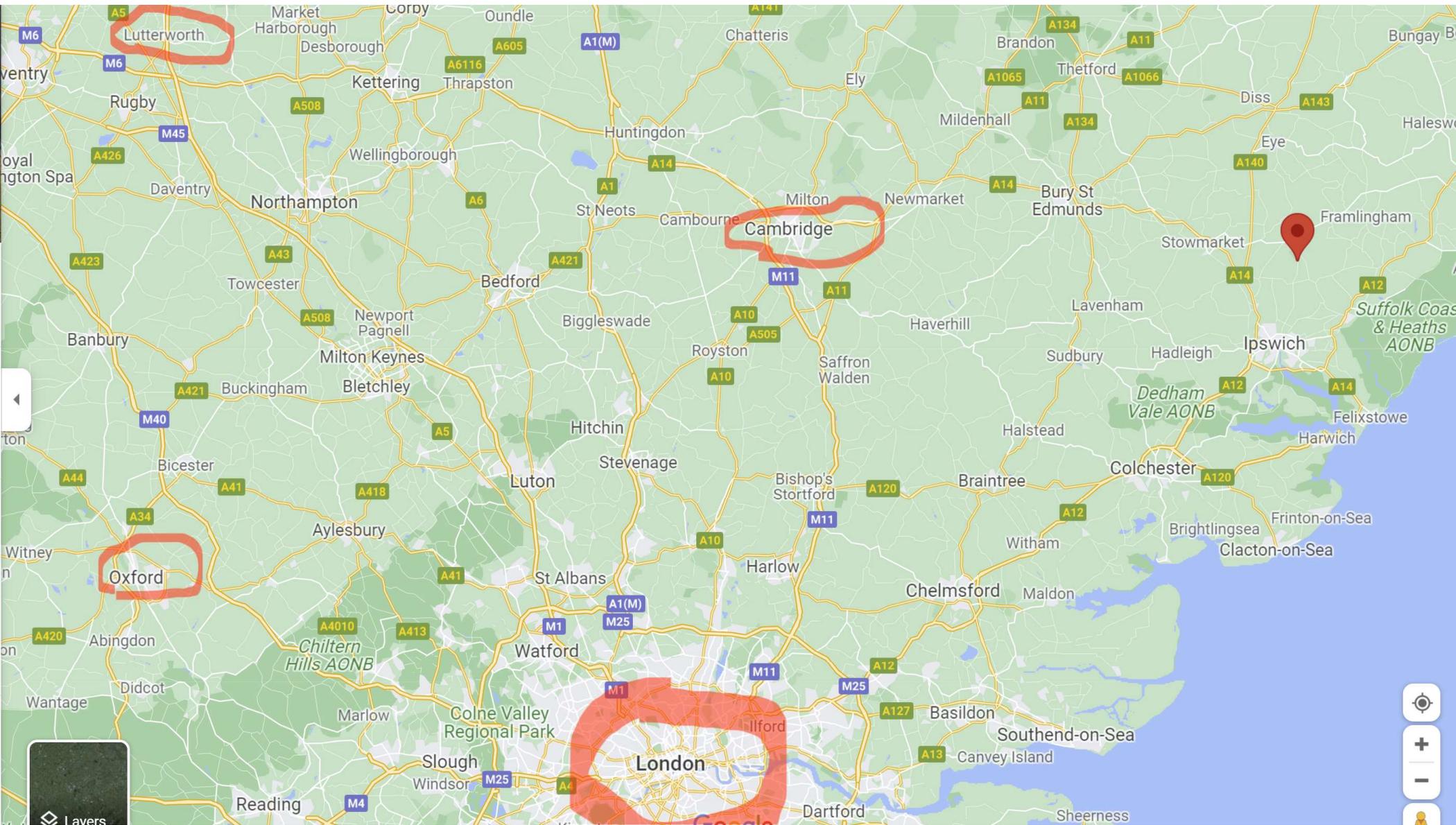
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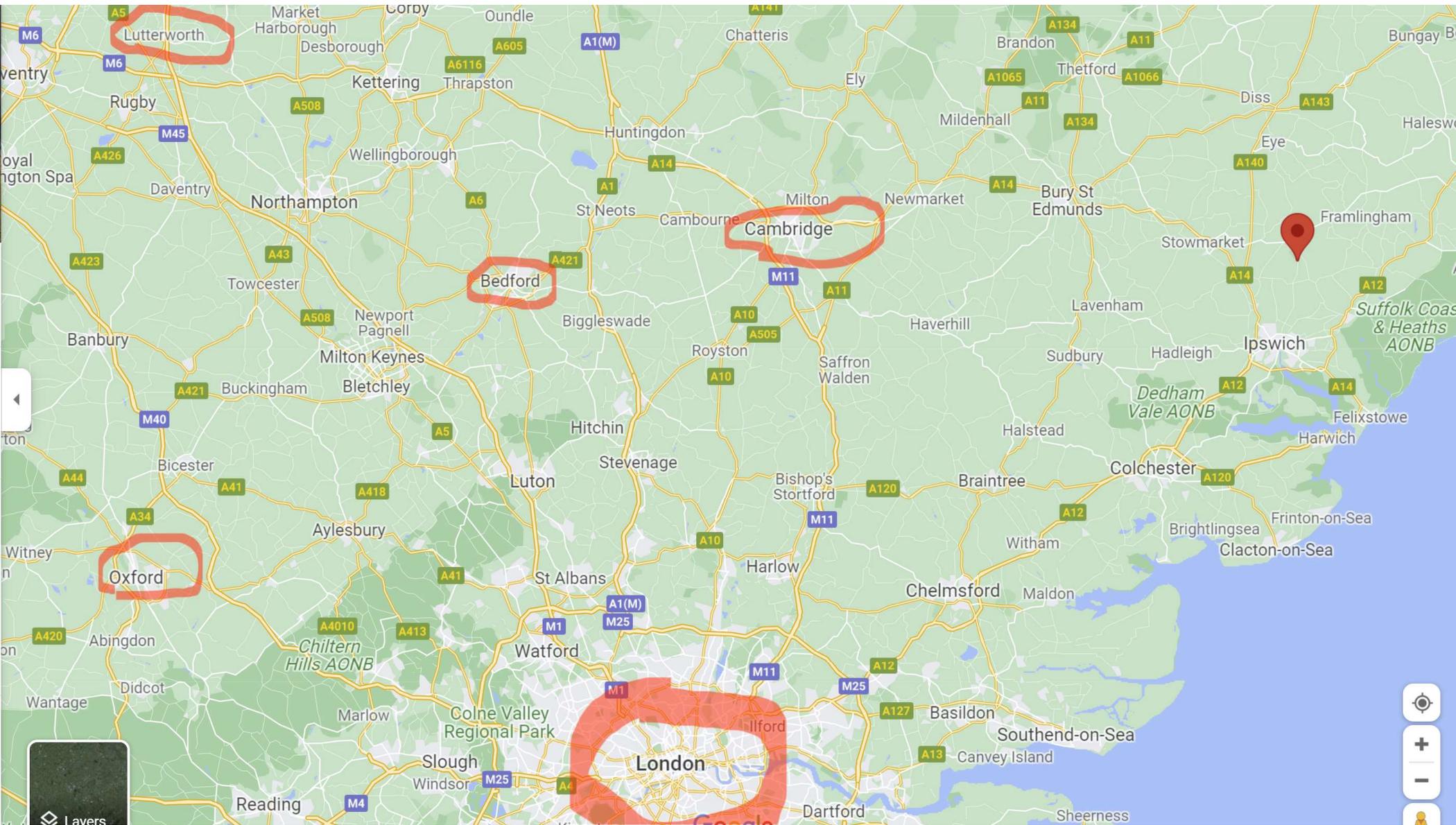
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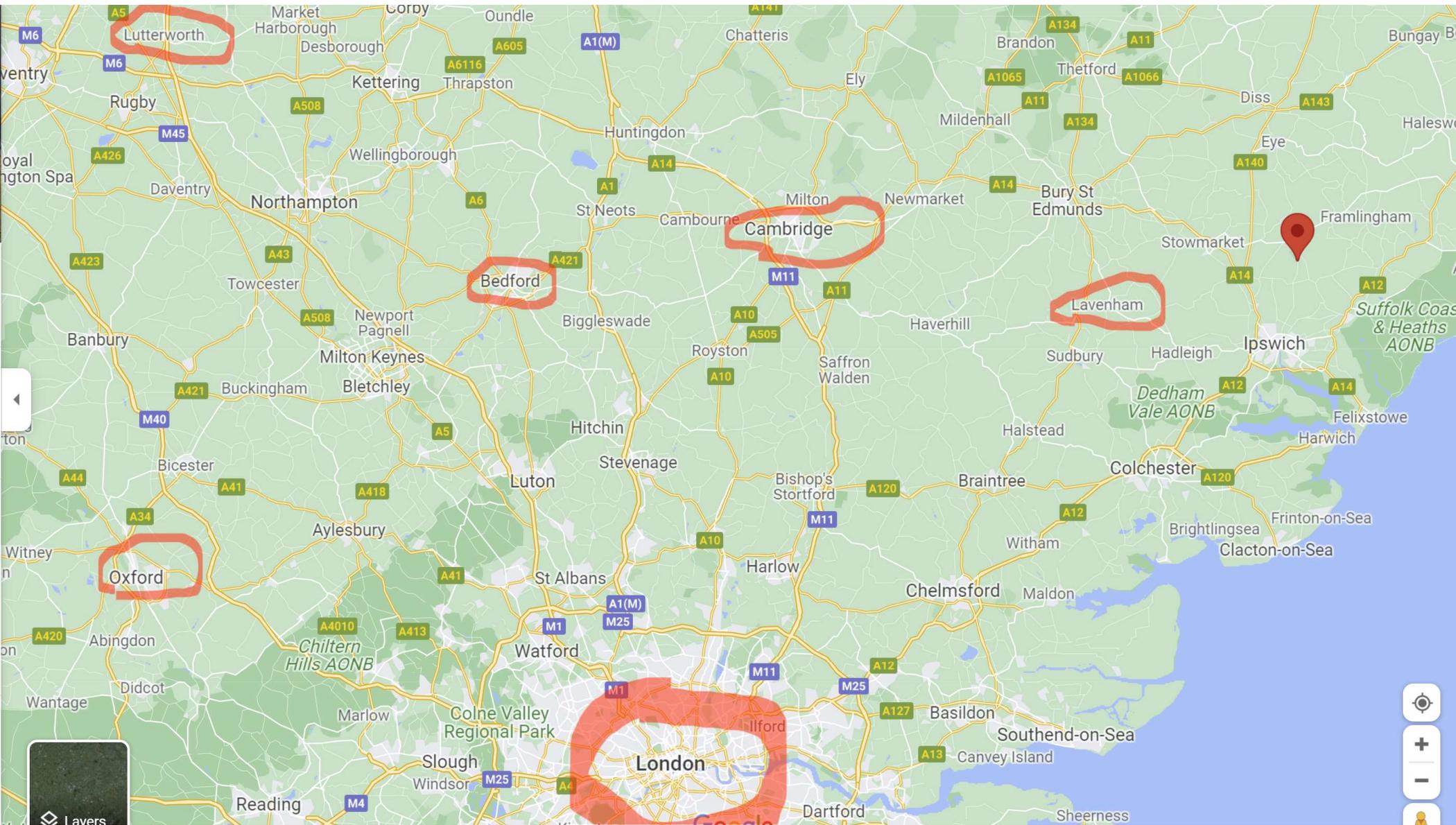
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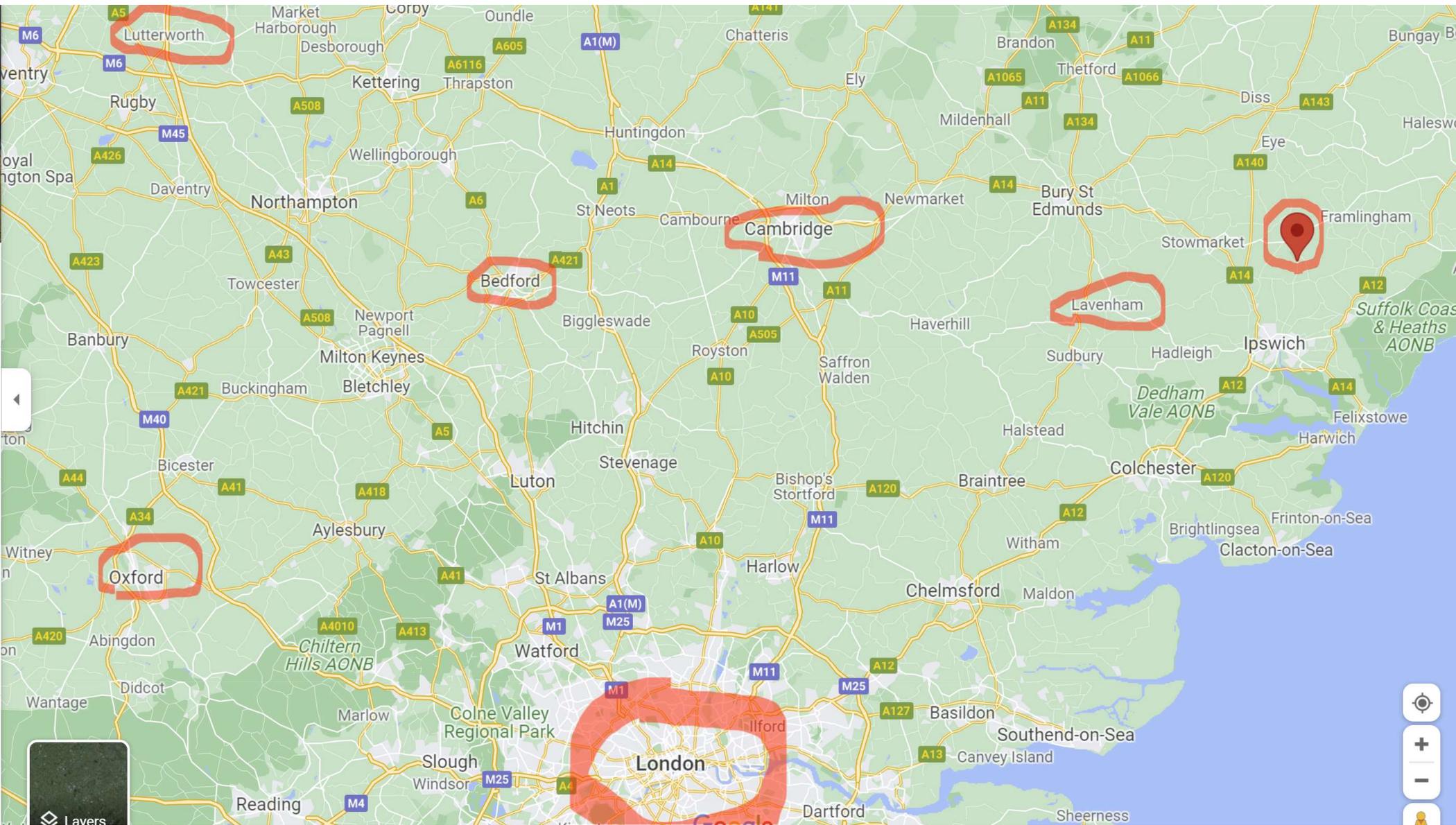
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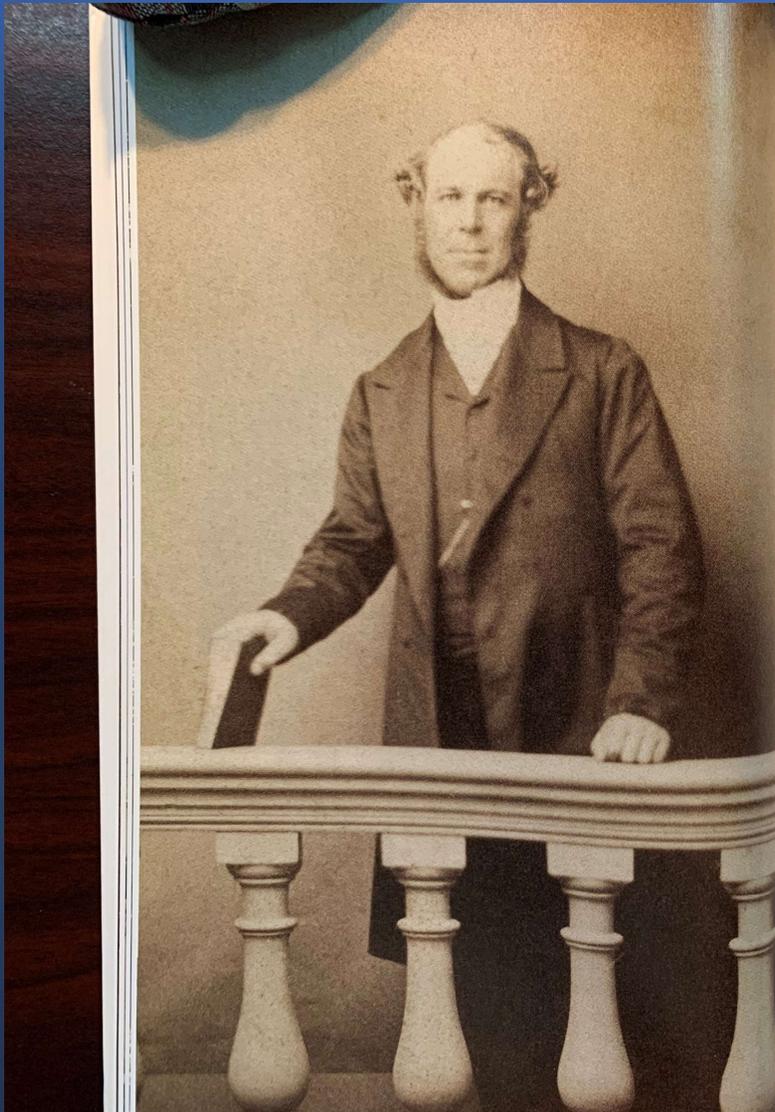
Layers











#### 4 'My little parish of three hundred parishioners'

J C Ryle's small Suffolk parish was dominated by the all-powerful John Tollemache. Ryle was twice married at Helmingham, and after Matilda and Jessie died he became a single parent responsible for five young children. While he was the rector of Helmingham Ryle wrote about eighty of his tracts

In February 1844 Ryle became the rector of St Mary, Helmingham, nine miles north of Ipswich, where he remained until 1861. The area was an isolated rural community and the main crops were wheat, barley and beans. There is no village as such, and the parish consists mostly of the Helmingham estate. In 1841 there were forty-eight houses and a population of 284; twenty years later there were sixty-two houses and a population of 320. Apart from John Tollemache and the rector there were no professional people living in the locality—the rest were tenant farmers, agricultural labourers and domestic servants.

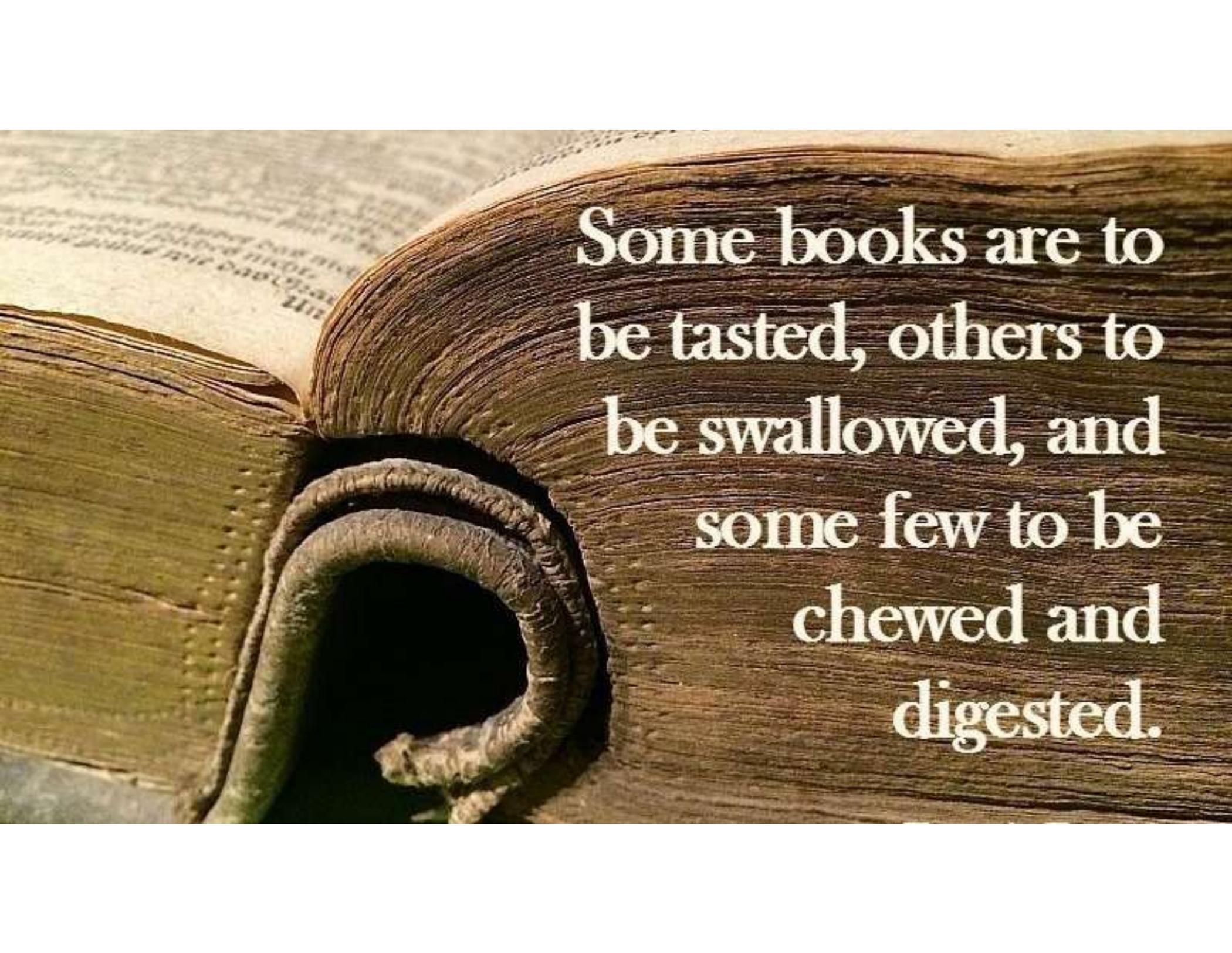
#### Helmingham Hall and the parish church

The rectory was adjacent to the extensive deer park around Helmingham Hall. When Ryle arrived, the rectory needed to be improved, and he stayed at the Hall while the work took place. The Tollemache family

and evening Ryle led prayers for the household and Sunday was strictly observed at the Hall. Given Ryle's own social background he would have been quite at home with the Tollemache family and their numerous visitors, and the contacts he made were to become invaluable to him.

Since the Norman Conquest generations of the Tollemache family have lived in Suffolk, and they moved to Helmingham in the late 15th century. In 1829 John Tollemache inherited the Hall from his aunt and carried out an extensive restoration programme. From 1841 he was the MP for South Cheshire, then from 1868 for West Cheshire, and in 1876 he was created Baron Tollemache of Helmingham. Though politically he was a liberal-conservative, he was known as 'the labourer's Lord'. Yet Ryle observed that his parishioners 'were not interesting, living in fact in a state of servile subjection to Mr Tollemache.'

In August 1826 John Tollemache married his first

An open antique book with a thick, worn, brown leather cover. The pages are aged and yellowed, with some text visible on the left page. A metal clasp is visible on the right side of the book. The text is overlaid on the right page.

Some books are to  
be tasted, others to  
be swallowed, and  
some few to be  
chewed and  
digested.

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## A CALL TO PRAYER

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The question is one that none but you can answer. Whether you attend public worship or not, your minister knows. Whether you have family prayers in your house or not, your relations know. But whether you pray in private or not, is a matter between yourself and God.

I beseech you in all affection to attend to the subject I bring before you. Do not say that my question is too close. If your heart is right in the sight of God, there is nothing in it to make you afraid. Do not turn off my question by replying that you say your prayers. It is one thing to say your prayers and another to pray. Do not tell me that my question is unnecessary. Listen to me for a few minutes, and I will show you *good reasons for asking it.*

*I ask whether you pray, because prayer is absolutely needful to a man's salvation.*

I say, absolutely needful, and I say so advisedly. I am not speaking now of infants or idiots. I am not settling the state of the heathen. I know that where little is given, there little will be required. I speak especially of those who call themselves Christians, in a land like our own. And of such I say, no man or woman can expect to be saved who does not pray.

I.  
II. p. 40  
III. P. 23

in the wilderness, blind to the well of living waters close beside them.

I want you to be happy. I know I cannot ask you a more useful question than this: *Do you pray?*

And now it is high time for me to bring this tract to an end. I trust I have brought before you things that will be seriously considered. I heartily pray God that this consideration may be blessed to your soul.

*Let me speak a parting word to those who do not pray.* I dare not suppose that all who read these pages are praying people. If you are a prayerless person, suffer me to speak to you this day on God's behalf.

Prayerless reader, I can only warn you, but I do warn you most solemnly. I warn you that you are in a position of fearful danger. If you die in your present state, you are a lost soul. You will only rise again to be eternally miserable. I warn you that of all professing Christians you are most utterly without excuse. There is not a single good reason that you can show for living without prayer.

*It is useless to say you know not how to pray.* Prayer is the simplest act in all religion. It is simply speaking to God. It needs neither learning nor wisdom nor book knowledge to begin it. It needs nothing but heart and will. The weakest infant can cry when he is hungry. The poorest beggar can hold out his hand for alms, and does not wait to find fine words. The most ignorant man will find something to say to God, if he has only a mind.

*It is useless to say you have no convenient place to pray in.* Any man can find a place private enough, if he is disposed. Our Lord prayed on a mountain; Peter on the housetop; Isaac in the field; Nathanael under the fig tree; Jonah in the fish's belly. Any place may become a closet, an oratory, and a Bethel, and be to us the presence of God.

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*It is useless to say you cannot pray till you have faith and a new heart,* and that you must sit still and wait for them. This is to add sin to sin. It is bad enough to be unconverted and going to hell. It is even worse to say, 'I know it, but will not cry for mercy.' This is a kind of argument for which there is no warrant in Scripture. 'Call ye upon the Lord,' saith Isaiah, 'while he is near' (*Isa. 55:6*). 'Take with you words, and turn unto the LORD', says Hosea (*Hos. 14:1*). 'Repent and pray,' says Peter to Simon Magus (*Acts 8:22*). If you want faith and a new heart, go and cry to the Lord for them. The very attempt to pray has often been the quickening of a dead soul.

Oh, prayerless reader, who and what are you that you will not ask anything of God? Have you made a covenant with death and hell? Are you at peace with the worm and the fire? Have you no sins to be pardoned? Have you no fear of eternal torment? Have you no desire after heaven? Oh that you would awake from your present folly. Oh that you would consider your latter end. Oh that you would arise and call upon God.

Alas, there is a day coming when many shall pray loudly, 'Lord, Lord, open to us', but all too late; when many shall cry to the rocks to fall on them and the hills to cover them, who would never cry to God. In all affection, I warn you, beware lest this be the end of your soul. Salvation is very near you. Do not lose heaven for want of asking.

Let me speak to those who have real desires for salvation, but know not what steps to take, or where to begin. I cannot but hope that some readers may be in this state of mind, and if there be but one such I must offer him affectionate counsel.

In every journey there must be a first step. There must be a change from sitting still to moving forward. The journeyings of Israel from Egypt to Canaan were long and wearisome. Forty years pass away before they crossed Jordan. Yet there was some one who moved first when they marched from Ramah to Succoth. When does a man really take his first step in coming out from sin and the world? He does it in the day when he first prays with his heart.

In every building the first stone must be laid, and the first blow must be struck. The ark was one hundred and twenty years in building. Yet there was a day when Noah laid his axe to the first tree he cut down to form it. The temple of Solomon was a glorious building. But there was a day when the first huge stone was laid deep in mount Moriah. When does the building of the Spirit really begin to appear in a man's heart? It begins, so far as we can judge, when he first pours out his heart to God in prayer.

If you desire salvation, and want to know what to do, I advise you to go this very day to the Lord Jesus Christ, in the first private place you can find, and earnestly and heartily entreat him in prayer to save your soul.

Tell him that you have heard that he receives sinners, and has said, 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.' Tell him that you are a poor vile sinner, and that you come to him on the faith of his own invitation. Tell him you put yourself wholly and entirely in his hands; that you feel vile and helpless, and hopeless in yourself: and that except he saves you, you have no hope of being saved at all. Beseech him to deliver you from the guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin. Beseech him to pardon you, and wash you in his own blood. Beseech him to give you a new heart, and plant the Holy Spirit in your soul. Beseech him to give you grace and faith and will and power to be his disciple and servant from this day for ever. Oh, reader, go this very day, and tell

these things to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you really are in earnest about your soul.

Tell him in your own way, and your own words. If a doctor came to see you when sick you could tell him where you felt pain. If your soul feels its disease indeed, you can surely find something to tell Christ.

Doubt not his willingness to save you, because you are a sinner. It is Christ's office to save sinners. He says himself, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (*Luke 5:32*).

Wait not because you feel unworthy. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Waiting comes from the devil. Just as you are, go to Christ. The worse you are, the more need you have to apply to him. You will never mend yourself by staying away.

Fear not because your prayer is stammering, your words feeble, and your language poor. Jesus can understand you. Just as a mother understands the first lisping of her infant, so does the blessed Saviour understand sinners. He can read a sigh, and see a meaning in a groan.

Despair not because you do not get an answer immediately. While you are speaking, Jesus is listening. If he delays an answer, it is only for wise reasons, and to try if you are in earnest. The answer will surely come. Though it tarry, wait for it. It will surely come.

Oh, reader, if you have any desire to be saved, remember the advice I have given you this day. Act upon it honestly and heartily, and you shall be saved.

*Let me speak, lastly, to those who do pray.* I trust that some who read this tract know well what prayer is, and have the Spirit of adoption. To all such, I offer a few words of brotherly counsel and exhortation. The incense offered in the tabernacle was ordered to be made in a particular way. Not every kind of incense would do. Let us remember this, and be careful about the matter and manner of our prayers.

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I hold salvation by grace as strongly as any one. I would gladly offer a free and full pardon to the greatest sinner that ever lived. I would not hesitate to stand by his dying bed, and say, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ even now, and you shall be saved.' But that a man can have salvation without asking for it, I cannot see in the Bible. That a man will receive pardon of his sins, who will not so much as lift up his heart inwardly, and say, 'Lord Jesus, give it to me', this I cannot find. I can find that nobody will be saved by his prayers, but I cannot find that without prayer anybody will be saved.

It is not absolutely needful to salvation that a man should read the Bible. A man may have no learning, or be blind, and yet have Christ in his heart. It is not absolutely needful that a man should hear public preaching of the gospel. He may live where the gospel is not preached, or he may be bedridden, or deaf. But the same thing cannot be said about prayer. It is absolutely needful to salvation that a man should pray.

There is no royal road either to health or learning. Princes and kings, poor men and peasants, all alike must attend to the wants of their own bodies and their own minds. No man can eat, drink, or sleep by proxy. No man can get the alphabet learned for him by another. All these are things which everybody must do for himself, or they will not be done at all.

Just as it is with the mind and body, so it is with the soul. There are certain things absolutely needful to the soul's health and well-being. Each must attend to these things for himself. Each must repent for himself. Each must apply to Christ for himself. And for himself each must speak to God and pray. You must do it for yourself, for by nobody else can it be done.

To be prayerless is to be without God, without Christ, without grace, without hope, and without heaven. It is to be on the road to hell. Now can you wonder that I ask the question, *Do you pray?*

*I ask again whether you pray, because a habit of prayer is one of the surest marks of a true Christian.*

All the children of God on earth are alike in this respect. From the moment there is any life and reality about their religion, they pray. Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again is praying. This is one of the common marks of all the elect of God, they 'cry day and night unto him' (Luke 18:7). The Holy Spirit, who makes them new creatures, works in them the feeling of adoption, and makes them cry, 'Abba, Father' (Rom. 8:15). The Lord Jesus, when he quickens them, gives them a voice and a tongue, and says to them, 'Be dumb no more.' God has no dumb children. It is as much a part of their new nature to pray, as it is of a child to cry. They see their need of mercy and grace. They feel their emptiness and weakness. They cannot do otherwise than they do. They must pray.

I have looked carefully over the lives of God's saints in the Bible, I cannot find one of whose history much is told us, from Genesis to Revelation, who was not a man of prayer. I find it mentioned as a characteristic of the godly, that they 'call on the Father' (1 Pet. 1:17), or 'on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord' (1 Cor. 1:2). Recorded as a characteristic of the wicked is the fact that they 'call not upon the LORD' (Psa. 14:4).

I have read the lives of many eminent Christians who have been on earth since the Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, and some poor. Some were learned, and some unlearned. Some of them were Episcopalians, and some Christians of other names. Some were Calvinists, and some were Arminians. Some have loved to use a liturgy, and some to use none. But one thing, I see, they all had in common. They have all been men of prayer.

I study the reports of missionary societies in our own times. I see with joy that heathen men and women are receiving the gospel

in various parts of the globe. There are conversions in Africa, in New Zealand, in Hindustan, in China. The people converted are naturally unlike one another in every respect. But one striking thing I observe at all the missionary stations: the converted people *always pray*.

I do not deny that a man may pray without heart and without sincerity. I do not for a moment pretend to say that the mere fact of a person's praying proves everything about his soul. As in every other part of religion, so also in this, there may be deception and hypocrisy.

But this I do say, that not praying is a clear proof that a man is not yet a true Christian. He cannot really feel his sins. He cannot love God. He cannot feel himself a debtor to Christ. He cannot long after holiness. He cannot desire heaven. He has yet to be born again. He has yet to be made a new creature. He may boast confidently of election, grace, faith, hope, and knowledge, and deceive ignorant people. But you may rest assured it is all vain talk *if he does not pray*.

And I say, furthermore, that of all the evidences of the real work of the Spirit, a habit of hearty private prayer is one of the most satisfactory that can be named. A man may preach from false motives. A man may write books and make fine speeches and seem diligent in good works, and yet be a Judas Iscariot. But a man seldom goes into his closet, and pours out his soul before God in secret, unless he is in earnest. The Lord himself has set his stamp on prayer as the best proof of a true conversion. When he sent Ananias to Saul in Damascus, he gave him no other evidence of his change of heart than this, 'Behold, he prayeth' (*Acts 9:11*).

I know that much may go on in a man's mind before he is brought to pray. He may have many convictions, desires, wishes, feelings, intentions, resolutions, hopes, and fears. But all these things are very uncertain evidences. They are to be found in ungodly people, and often come to nothing. In many a case they are

not more lasting than the morning cloud, and the dew that passeth away. A real, hearty prayer, coming from a broken and contrite spirit, is worth all these things put together.

I know that the Holy Spirit, who calls sinners from their evil ways, does in many instances lead them by very slow degrees to acquaintance with Christ. But the eye of man can only judge by what it sees. I cannot call any one justified until he believes. I dare not say that any one believes until he prays. I cannot understand a dumb faith. The first act of faith will be to speak to God. Faith is to the soul what life is to the body. Prayer is to faith what breath is to life. How a man can live and not breathe is past my comprehension, and how a man can believe and not pray is past my comprehension too.

Never be surprised if you hear ministers of the gospel dwelling much on the importance of prayer. This is the point we want to bring you to; we want to know that you pray. Your views of doctrine may be correct. Your love of Protestantism may be warm and unmistakable. But still this may be nothing more than head knowledge and party spirit. We want to know whether you are actually acquainted with the throne of grace, and whether you can speak to God as well as speak *about* God. Do you wish to find out whether you are a true Christian? Then rest assured that my question is of the very first importance – *Do you pray?*

I ask whether you pray, because *there is no duty in religion so neglected as private prayer*.

We live in days of abounding religious profession. There are more places of public worship now than there ever were before. There are more persons attending them than there ever were before. And yet in spite of all this public religion, I believe there is a vast neglect of private prayer. It is one of those private transactions between God and our souls which no eye sees, and therefore one which men are tempted to pass over and leave undone. I believe that thousands never utter a word of prayer at all. They eat

*Faith is to the soul what life is to the body.  
Prayer is to faith what breath is to life.*

I ask whether you pray, because *neglect of prayer is one great cause of backsliding.*

There is such a thing as going back in religion after making a good profession. Men may run well for a season, like the Galatians, and then turn aside after false teachers. Men may profess loudly while their feelings are warm, as Peter did, and then in the hour of trial deny their Lord. Men may lose their first love as the Ephesians did. Men may cool down in their zeal to do good, like Mark the companion of Paul. Men may follow an apostle for a season, and like Demas go back to the world. All these things men may do.

It is a miserable thing to be a backslider. Of all unhappy things that can befall a man, I suppose it is the worst. A stranded ship, a broken-winged eagle, a garden overrun with weeds, a harp without strings, a church in ruins, all these are sad sights, but a backslider is a sadder sight still. A wounded conscience – a mind sick of itself – a memory full of self-reproach – a heart pierced through with the Lord's arrows – a spirit broken with a load of inward accusation – all this is a *taste of hell*. It is a hell on earth. Truly that saying of the wise man is solemn and weighty, 'The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways' (*Prov. 14:14*).

Now what is the cause of most backslidings? I believe, as a general rule, one of the chief causes is neglect of private prayer. Of course the secret history of falls will not be known till the last day. I can only give my opinion as a minister of Christ and a student of the heart. That opinion is, I repeat distinctly, that backsliding generally first begins with *neglect of private prayer*.

Bibles read without prayer; sermons heard without prayer; marriages contracted without prayer; journeys undertaken without prayer; residences chosen without prayer; friendships formed without prayer; the daily act of private prayer itself hurried over, or gone through without heart: these are the kind of downward steps by which many a Christian descends to a condition of spiritual

palsy, or reaches the point where God allows him to have a tremendous fall. This is the process which forms the lingering Lots, the unstable Samsons, the wife-idolizing Solomons, the inconsistent Asas, the pliable Jehoshaphats, the over-careful Marthas, of whom so many are to be found in the church of Christ. Often the simple history of such cases is this: they became *careless about private prayer*.

You may be very sure men fall in private long before they fall in public. They are backsliders on their knees long before they backslide openly in the eyes of the world. Like Peter, they first disregard the Lord's warning to watch and pray, and then like Peter, their strength is gone, and in the hour of temptation they deny their Lord.

The world takes notice of their fall, and scoffs loudly. But the world knows nothing of the real reason. The heathen succeeded in making a well-known Christian offer incense to an idol, by threatening him with a punishment worse than death. They then triumphed greatly at the sight of his cowardice and apostasy. But the heathen did not know the fact of which history informs us, that on that very morning he had left his bed chamber hastily, and without finishing his usual prayers.

If you are a Christian indeed, I trust you will never be a backslider. But if you do not wish to be a backsliding Christian, remember the question I ask you: *Do you pray?*

I ask, lastly, whether you pray, because *prayer is one of the best means of happiness and contentment.*

We live in a world where sorrow abounds. This has always been its state since sin came in. There cannot be sin without sorrow. And until sin is driven out from the world, it is vain for any one to suppose he can escape sorrow.

Some without doubt have a larger cup of sorrow to drink than others. But few are to be found who live long without sorrows or cares of one sort or another. Our bodies, our property, our