

*The*  
Reality  
*of*  
*Prayer*

E. M. Bounds



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

*Publisher's note:*

This new edition from Whitaker House has been updated for the modern reader. Words, expressions, and sentence structure have been revised for clarity and readability. Although the more modern Bible translation quoted in this edition was not available to the author, the Bible versions used were carefully selected in order to make the language of the entire text readily understandable while maintaining the author's original premises and message.

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***THE REALITY OF PRAYER***

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# Contents

Introduction .....	5
1. A Sacred Privilege .....	7
2. Man's Poverty and God's Riches .....	15
3. The Essence of Earthly Worship.....	24
4. God's Part in Prayer .....	31
5. The Divine Teacher of Prayer .....	41
6. The Lesson of Prayer .....	51
7. Jesus, Our Example in Prayer.....	63
8. Insights from Prayers of Our Lord .....	73
9. Learning from the Prayers of Jesus .....	79
10. Our Lord's Model Prayer .....	89
11. Our Lord's High Priestly Prayer .....	93
12. The Gethsemane Prayer .....	101
13. The Holy Spirit and Prayer .....	110
14. The Holy Spirit, Our Helper in Prayer .....	120
15. The Two Comforters and Two Advocates .....	129
16. Prayer and the Holy Spirit Dispensation .....	135
About the Author .....	143



## Introduction

**E**dward McKendree Bounds was born in northeastern Missouri on August 15, 1835. As a young man, he practiced law for three years before he felt called to preach the gospel. He was ordained in the Methodist church in 1859.

He also served as a Confederate chaplain during the Civil War. For a short time, he was held as a prisoner of war in Nashville, Tennessee. After being released, he returned to Franklin, Tennessee, where he and the Confederate troops had suffered a great defeat in battle. He could not forget about the people of Franklin, so he sought out a half dozen men who believed in the power of prayer. For over a year, they met every Tuesday night to pray for revival, and God answered their prayers.

Bounds rose every day at 4 A.M. to pray. The Reverend Claude L. Chilton, musical composer, fellow minister, and a close friend of his, wrote:

As breathing is a physical reality to us, so prayer was a reality for Bounds. He took the command, “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) almost as literally as nature takes the law that controls our breathing. He did not merely pray well that he might write well about prayer. He prayed because the needs of the world were upon him. He prayed, for long years, upon subjects that the easygoing Christian rarely gives a thought, and

## *THE REALITY OF PRAYER*

for objects that men of less thought and faith are always ready to call impossible. From his solitary prayer vigils, year by year, there arose teaching equaled by few men in modern Christian history. He wrote transcendently about prayer, because he was himself transcendent in its practice.

Bounds was a man who ever lived on prayer ground. He walked and talked with the Lord. Until his death on August 24, 1913, prayer was the great weapon in his arsenal, his pathway to the throne of grace. No one who has read what Bounds has written can fail to realize that Edward McKendree Bounds talked with God as a man talks to his friend.

## One

# A Sacred Privilege

I am the creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God, just hovering over the great gulf, until a few moments hence I am seen no more; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing: the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this end He came from heaven. He has written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the Book of God! Lord, is it not Your word, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him”* (James 1:5)? You give liberally, and do not rebuke. You have said, if any are willing to do Your will, he will know it. I am willing to do; let me know Your will. —John Wesley

**T**he word *prayer* expresses the largest and most comprehensive approach to God. It gives prominence to the element of devotion. It is communion and communication with God. It is enjoyment of God and access to God.

## THE REALITY OF PRAYER

### SUPPLICATION

Supplication is a more restricted and more intense form of prayer, accompanied by a sense of personal need and limited to the urgent seeking of an answer to a pressing need. Supplication is the very soul of prayer in regard to an intense pleading for something that is greatly needed.

### INTERCESSION

Intercession is an enlargement in prayer, a going out in broadness and fullness from self to others. Primarily, it does not center on praying for others, but refers to the freeness, boldness, and childlike confidence of the praying. It is characterized by a complete comfort in the soul's approach to God, unlimited and unhesitating in its access and its demands. This influence and confident trust is to be used for others.

### CONFIDING IN THE FATHER

Prayer always, and everywhere, is an immediate confiding approach to, and a request of, God the Father. In the universal and perfect prayer, we see the pattern for all praying: "*Our Father in heaven*" (Matthew 6:9). At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "*Father*" (John 11:41). In His High Priestly Prayer, Jesus again lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, "*Father*" (John 17:1). His praying was personal, familiar, and paternal. It was also strong, touching, and tearful. Read these words of Paul written about Jesus:

*Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.* (Hebrews 5:7-8)



## A Sacred Privilege

### ASKING

In addition, we have asking set forth as prayer: *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him”* (James 1:5). Asking God and receiving from the Lord—direct application to God, immediate connection with God—that is prayer. In 1 John 5:14–15, we have this statement about prayer:

*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

In Philippians 4:6 we find these words about prayer: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”*

### WHAT IS GOD’S WILL ABOUT PRAYER?

First, it is God’s will that we pray. Jesus Christ *“spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart”* (Luke 18:1). Paul wrote to young Timothy about the things that God’s people are to do, and first among them, he listed prayer: *“I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men”* (1 Timothy 2:1).

In connection with these words Paul declared that the will of God and the redemption and mediation of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all men are all vitally concerned in this matter of prayer. His apostolic authority and solicitude of soul act in harmony with God’s will and Christ’s intercession to will that *“men pray everywhere”* (verse 8).

## THE REALITY OF PRAYER

Note how frequently prayer is brought forward in the New Testament: “*Continuing steadfastly in prayer*” (Romans 12:12). “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). “*Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving*” (Colossians 4:2). “*Be serious and watchful in your prayers*” (1 Peter 4:7). Christ’s clarion call was “*watch and pray*” (Matthew 26:41). What significance do these verses and others have if it is not the will of God that men should pray?

Prayer complements, makes efficient, and cooperates with God’s will, whose sovereign sway is to run parallel in extent and power with the atonement of Jesus Christ. Christ, through the eternal Spirit, by the grace of God, “*taste[d] death for everyone*” (Hebrews 2:9). We, through the eternal Spirit, by the grace of God, pray for every man.

### HOW CAN WE KNOW THAT WE ARE PRAYING IN THE WILL OF GOD?

Every true attempt to pray is in response to the will of God. Prayer may be awkward and inarticulate, but it is acceptable to God, because it is offered in obedience to His will. If I will give myself up to the inspiration of the Spirit of God, who commands me to pray, the details and the petitions of that praying will all fall into harmony with the will of Him who wills that I should pray.

### WHAT CAN PRAYER ACCOMPLISH?

Prayer is no little thing, no selfish and small matter. It does not concern the petty interests of the person. The slightest prayer expands by the will of God until it touches all words, conserves all interests, and enhances man’s greatest wealth and God’s greatest good. God is so concerned that men pray that He has promised to answer prayer. He has not promised to do something general if we pray, but He has promised to do the very thing for which we pray.

## A Sacred Privilege

Prayer, as taught by Jesus in its essential features, enters into all the relations of life. It sanctifies brotherliness. To the Jew, the altar was the symbol and place of prayer. The Jew devoted the altar to the worship of God. Jesus Christ takes the altar of prayer and devotes it to the honor of the brotherhood. How Christ purifies the altar and enlarges it! How He takes it out of the sphere of a mere performance and makes its virtue to consist, not in the mere act of praying, but in the spirit that inspires good actions toward men. Our spirit toward others is affected by a life of prayer. We must be at peace with men (Romans 12:18), and, if possible, have them at peace with us, before we can be at peace with God. Reconciliation with men is the forerunner of reconciliation with God. (See Matthew 5:22-24.) Our spirit and words must embrace men before they can embrace God. Unity with the brotherhood goes before unity with God.

*Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

(Matthew 5:23-24)

Not praying results in lawlessness, discord, and anarchy. Prayer, in the moral government of God, is as strong and far-reaching as the law of gravitation in the material world, and it is as necessary as gravitation to hold things in their proper sphere and in life.

### WHAT IS THE VALUE OF PRAYER?

The space occupied by prayer in the Sermon on the Mount indicates its value to Christ and the importance it holds in His system. Many important principles are discussed in a few verses. The Sermon consists of one

## THE REALITY OF PRAYER

hundred and eleven verses, and eighteen are about prayer directly, and others indirectly.

Prayer was one of the chief principles of piety in every dispensation and to every child of God. It did not pertain to the business of Christ to originate duties, but to recover, recast, spiritualize, and reinforce those duties that are essential and original.

With Moses, the great features of prayer were prominent. He never beat the air or fought a false battle. The most serious and strenuous business of his serious and strenuous life was prayer. He prayed often and with intense earnestness of his soul. Intimate as he was with God, his intimacy did not lessen the necessity of prayer. This intimacy only brought clearer insight into the nature and necessity of prayer. It led him to see the greater obligations to pray, and to discover the larger results of praying. In reviewing one of the crises through which Israel passed, when the very existence of the nation was endangered, he wrote: "*I prostrated myself before the LORD; forty days and forty nights I kept prostrating myself*" (Deuteronomy 9:25). Wonderful praying brought wonderful results! Moses knew how to do wonderful praying, and God knew how to give wonderful results.

### CAN PRAYER CHANGE GOD'S MIND?

The collective force of the truths in the Bible are to increase our faith in the doctrine that prayer affects God. It secures favors from God that can be secured in no other way, and which will not be bestowed by God if we do not pray. The whole canon of Bible teaching is to illustrate the great truth that God hears and answers prayer. One of the great purposes of God in His book is to impress upon us indelibly the great importance, the priceless value, and the absolute necessity of asking God for the things that we

## A Sacred Privilege

need. He urges us by every consideration and presses and warns us by every interest. He points us to His own Son as His pledge that prayer will be answered. He teaches us that God is our Father, able to do all things for us and to give all things to us, much more than earthly parents can do or are willing to do for their children. (See Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13.)

### HOW CAN WE PRAY WELL?

Let us thoroughly understand ourselves and this great business of prayer. Our one great business is prayer, and we will never do it well unless we fasten to it all binding force and arrange the best conditions for doing it well. Satan has suffered so much from good praying that all his wily, shrewd, and ensnaring devices will be used to cripple its performance.

We must, by all means, securely attach ourselves to prayer. To be careless in setting a time and place of prayer is to open the door to Satan. To be exact, prompt, unswerving, and careful in even the little things is to buttress ourselves against the Evil One.

### PRAYER ADVANCES GOD'S CAUSE

Prayer, by God's own oath (see Isaiah 56:7), is put in the stones of God's foundations, as eternal as its companion, "*Men always ought to pray*" (Luke 18:1). This is the eternal condition that advances His cause and makes it powerfully aggressive. Men are always to pray for the advance of God's plan. Its strength, beauty, and aggression lie in their prayers. Its power lies simply in the Christian's power to pray. No power is found elsewhere but in the ability to pray. "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations*" (Isaiah 56:7). The advance of His kingdom is based on prayer and carried on by the same means.

## *THE REALITY OF PRAYER*

### PRAYER IS MORE THAN A PRIVILEGE

Prayer is a privilege, a sacred, princely privilege. Prayer is a duty, an obligation most binding and most imperative, which should hold us to it. But prayer is more than a privilege, more than a duty. It is a means, an instrument, a condition. Not to pray is to lose much more than to fail in the exercise and enjoyment of a high, sweet privilege. Not to pray is to fail along lines far more important than even the violation of an obligation.

### PRAYER ACCESSES GOD'S HELP

Prayer is the appointed condition of receiving God's aid. This aid is as manifold and infinite as God's ability; it is as varied and inexhaustible as man's need. Prayer is the avenue through which God supplies man's needs. Prayer is the channel through which all good flows from God to man, and from men to men. God is the Christian's Father. Asking and giving are found in that relationship.

### PRAYER ENNOBLES THE ONE WHO PRAYS

Man is the one more immediately concerned in this great work of praying. It ennobles man's reason to employ it in prayer. The office and work of prayer is the divinest engagement of man's reason. Prayer makes man's reason to shine. Intelligence of the highest order approves prayer. He is the wisest man who prays the most and the best. Prayer is the school of wisdom as well as of piety.

Prayer is not a picture to handle, to admire, to look at. It is not beauty, coloring, shape, attitude, imagination, or genius. These things do not pertain to its character or conduct. It is not poetry or music. Its inspiration and melody come from heaven. Prayer belongs to the spirit, and at times it possesses the spirit and stirs the spirit with high and holy purposes and resolves.