

The
KNEELING
CHRISTIAN

The
KNEELING
CHRISTIAN

AN UNKNOWN CHRISTIAN



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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The Kneeling Christian

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

A traveler in China visited a heathen temple on a great feast day. Many were the worshippers of the hideous idol enclosed in a sacred shrine. The visitor noticed that most of the devotees brought with them small pieces of paper on which prayers had been written or printed. These they would wrap up in little balls of stiff mud and fling at the idol. He enquired the reason for this strange proceeding and was told that if the mud ball stuck fast to the idol, then the prayer would assuredly be answered; but if the mud fell off, the prayer was rejected by the god.

We may smile at this peculiar way of testing the adequacy of a prayer. But is it not a fact that the majority of Christian men and women who pray to a living God know very little about real

prevailing prayer? Yet prayer is the key which unlocks the door of God's treasure house.

It is not too much to say that all real growth in the spiritual life—all victory over temptation, all confidence and peace in the presence of difficulties and dangers, all repose of spirit in times of great disappointment or loss, all habitual communion with God—depends upon the practice of secret prayer.

This book was written by request, and with much hesitancy. It goes forth with much prayer. May He who said, "*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint*" (Luke 18:1), and "*Teach us to pray*" (Luke 11:1), be pleased with its contents.

GOD'S GREAT NEED

God wondered.” This is a very striking thought! The very boldness of the idea surely ought to arrest the attention of every earnest Christian man, woman, and child. A wondering God! Why, how staggered we might well be if we knew the cause of God’s “wonder”! Yet we find it to be, apparently, a very little thing. But if we are willing to consider the matter carefully, we shall discover it to have great importance to every believer. Nothing else is so momentous, so vital, to our spiritual welfare.

God “wondered that there was no intercessor” (Isaiah 59:16)—“none to interpose.”¹ But this was in the days of long ago, before

1. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, New Modern Edition*, vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 274.

the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, “*full of grace and truth*” (1 John 1:14), and before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who is full of grace and power, helping our infirmity and making intercession for us (see Romans 8:26). This was even before the truly amazing promises of our Savior regarding prayer and before men knew very much about prayer. These were the days when sacrifices for sins loomed larger in their eyes than supplication for other sinners.

Oh, how great must God’s wonder be today! For how few there are among us who know what prevailing prayer really is! Every one of us would confess that we believe in prayer, yet how many of us truly believe in the power of prayer? Now, before we go a step further, may the writer most earnestly implore you not to read hurriedly what is contained in these chapters. Very much depends on the way in which every reader receives what is recorded here. For everything depends upon prayer.

Why are many Christians often defeated? Because they pray so little. Why are many church workers often discouraged and disheartened? Because they pray so little.

Why do most men see so few brought “out of darkness into light” by their ministry? Because they pray so little.

Why are our churches simply not on fire for God? Because there is so little real prayer.

The Lord Jesus is as powerful today as ever before. The Lord Jesus is as anxious for men to be saved as ever before. His arm is not shortened that it cannot save, but He cannot stretch forth His arm unless we pray more—a lot more.

We may be assured of this, that the secret of all failure is our failure to engage in secret prayer.

If God “wondered” in the days of Isaiah, we need not be surprised to find that in the days of His flesh our Lord

“marvelled” (Mark 6:6). He marveled at the unbelief of some—unbelief which actually prevented Him from doing any mighty work in their cities. (See Matthew 13:58.)

But we must remember that those who were guilty of unbelief saw no beauty in Him that they should desire or believe in Him. What, then, must His “*marvel*” be today, when He sees among us who truly love and adore Him so few who really “*stir themselves up to take hold of God.*” (See Isaiah 64:7.) Surely there is nothing as absolutely astonishing as a prayerless Christian. These are eventful and ominous days. In fact, there are many evidences that these are the “*last days*” in which God promised to pour out His Spirit—the Spirit of supplication—on all flesh. (See Zechariah 12:10; Joel 2:28.) Yet the vast majority of professing Christians scarcely know what “*supplication*” means. Not only do many of our churches not have prayer meetings, but they unblushingly condemn such meetings, even to the point of ridiculing them.

Recognizing the importance of prayer and worship, the Church of England expects her clergy to read prayers in church every morning and evening.

However, is it not often in an empty church when this is done? And are not the prayers frequently raced through at a pace which precludes real worship? As a result, “*Common Prayer*” also must be rather vague and indefinite.

And what of those churches where the old-fashioned weekly prayer meeting is retained? Would not “*weakly*” be the more appropriate word? C. H. Spurgeon joyfully said that he conducted a prayer meeting every Monday night, “*which scarcely ever numbers less than from a thousand to twelve hundred attendants.*”

My brothers, have we ceased to believe in prayer? If you still hold your weekly gathering for prayer, is it not a fact that the

majority of your church members never come near it? And never even think to come near it? Why is this? Whose fault is it?

“Only a prayer meeting”—how often have we heard this utterance! How many of those reading these words really enjoy prayer meetings? Is it a joy or a duty? Please forgive me for asking so many questions and pointing out what appears to be a perilous weakness and a lamentable shortcoming in our churches. We are not out to criticize—far less to condemn. Anybody can do that. Our desire is to stir up Christians “to take hold of” God as never before. (See Isaiah 64:7.) We wish to encourage, enhearten, and uplift.

We are never so high as when we are on our knees.

Criticize? Who dares to criticize another? When we look back on the past and remember how much prayerlessness there has been our lives, words of criticism wither away on the lips.

It is now time for a clarion call to the individual and the church—a call to prayer.

Now, dare we face this question of prayer? It seems a foolish query, for is not prayer a part and parcel of all religions? Yet we venture to ask our readers to look at this matter fair and square. Do I really believe that prayer is a power? Is prayer the greatest power on earth, or is it not? Is it indeed true that prayer “moves the hand that moves the world”²?

Do God’s commands for prayer really concern me? Are the promises of God concerning prayer still relevant? We have all been muttering “Yes—yes—yes” to these questions. In fact, we dare not say “No” to any one of them. But yet, what do our lives tell us?

Has it ever occurred to you that our Lord never gave an unnecessary or optional command? Do we really believe that our Lord

2. See E. M. Bounds, *E. M. Bounds: The Possibilities of Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1994), 47.

never made a promise which He could not, or would not, fulfill? Our Savior's three commands for definite action were:

Pray ye...

Do this...

Go ye!

Are we obeying Him? How often is His command "Do this" reiterated by our preachers today! One might think it was His only command! How seldom are we reminded of His bidding to "Pray" and "Go." Yet, without obedience to the "Pray ye," it is of little or no use to "Do this" or to "Go."

In fact, it can easily be shown that all want of success, as well as failure in the spiritual life and in Christian work, is due to defective or insufficient prayer. Unless we pray aright, we cannot live aright or serve aright. At first sight, this may appear to be gross exaggeration, but the more we think it over in the light of Scripture, the more convinced we are of the truth behind this statement.

Now, as we begin to see what the Bible has to say about this mysterious and wonderful subject, shall we look at some of our Lord's promises as though we had never heard them before? What will be the effect?

Some twenty years ago, the writer was studying in a theological college. Early one morning, a fellow student—who is today one of England's foremost missionaries—burst into the room holding an open Bible. Although he was preparing for Holy Orders, he was only a young convert at the time.

He had gone to the college "[caring] for none of these things" (Acts 18:17). Popular, clever, and athletic, he had already won a place among the smart set of his college when Christ claimed him. He accepted the Lord Jesus as his personal Savior and became a

very keen follower of his Master. The Bible was, comparatively, a new book to him, and as a result, he was constantly making discoveries. On that memorable day on which he invaded my quietude, he cried excitedly—his face aglow with mingled joy and surprise—“Do you believe this? Is it really true?”

“Believe what?” I asked, glancing at the open Bible with astonishment.

“Why, this—” and he read in eager tones Matthew 21:21–22: *“If ye have faith, and doubt not, . . . all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”*

“Do you believe it? Is it true?”

“Yes,” I replied, with much surprise at his excitement, “of course it’s true—of course I believe it.” Yet all manner of thoughts flashed through my mind!

“Well, that’s a very wonderful promise,” he said. “It seems to me to be absolutely limitless! Why don’t we pray more?”

He walked away, leaving me alone with my thoughts. I had never looked at those verses that way. As the door closed on that eager young follower, I had a vision of my Savior and His love and power such as I never had before. I had a vision of a life of prayer—a “limitless” power which depended on two things: faith and prayer. I was thrilled for the moment and fell on my knees. What thoughts surged through my mind as I bowed before my Lord—what hopes and aspirations flooded my soul! God was speaking to me in an extraordinary way. This was a great call to prayer. But—to my shame—I did not heed that call.

Where did I fail? True, I prayed a little more than before, but nothing much seemed to happen. Why not? Was it because I did not see what a high standard the Savior required in the inner life of those who pray successfully?

Was it because I had failed to measure up to the “perfect love” standard so beautifully described in 1 Corinthians 13?

For, after all, prayer is not just putting into action good resolutions “to pray.” Like David, we need to cry, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God*” (Psalm 51:10) before we can pray aright. And the inspired words of the “Apostle of Love” need to be heeded as much today as ever before: “*Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God. And [then] whatsoever we ask, we receive of him*” (1 John 3:21–22).

“Of course I believe it.” Indeed, it is a limitless promise, and yet how little we realize it; how little we claim from Christ. Our Lord “marvels” at our unbelief. But if we could only read the Gospels for the first time, what an amazing book it would seem! Should we not “marvel” and “wonder”? So today I pass on that great call to you. Will you observe it? Will you profit by it? Or shall it fall on deaf ears and leave you prayerless?

Fellow Christians, let us awaken! The Devil is blinding our eyes. He is endeavoring to prevent us from facing this question of prayer. These pages are written by special request. But it has been many months since that request came.

Every attempt to begin writing has been frustrated, and even now there is a strange reluctance to do so. There seems to be some mysterious power restraining the hand. Do we realize that there is nothing the Devil dreads so much as prayer? His great concern is to keep us from praying. He loves to see us “up to our eyes” in work—provided we do not pray. He does not fear that we are eager and earnest Bible students—provided we are little in prayer. Samuel Chadwick, an English pastor from the late 1800s, once said, “Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.” All this is so familiar to us—but do we really pray? If not, then failure must dog our footsteps, whatever signs of apparent success there may be.

Let us never forget that the greatest thing we can do for God or for man is to pray. We can accomplish far more by our prayers than by our work. Prayer is omnipotent; it can do anything that God can do! When we pray, God works. All fruitfulness in service is the outcome of prayer—of the worker’s prayers, or of those who are holding up holy hands on his behalf. We all know how to pray, but perhaps many of us need to cry, as the disciples of old did, “*Lord, teach us to pray*” (Luke 11:1).

O Thou, by Whom ye come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way;
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod:
Lord, teach us now to pray!³

3. James Montgomery, “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” 1818.