

THE
NECESSITY_{OF}
PRAYER

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E. M.
BOUNDS



WHITAKER
HOUSE

All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

Boldface type in the Scripture quotations indicates the author's emphasis.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

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FOREWORD

Edward McKendree Bounds did not merely pray well so that he could write well about prayer. He prayed because the needs of the world were on his heart. He prayed for many years about subjects that the easygoing Christian rarely thinks about and for objects that men of lesser faith are always ready to call impossible. His teachings arose from his yearly solitary prayer vigils that can be equaled by few men in modern Christian history. He

wrote divinely about prayer because he himself was divine in its practice.

As breathing is a physical fact to us, so prayer was a reality for Bounds. He took the command "*Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) as literally as nature takes the law of the reflex nervous system that controls our breathing.

Real textbooks about prayer were the fruit of this daily spiritual exercise. Brief articles for the religious press did not come from his pen, though he had been experienced in that field for years. Books, not pamphlets, were the product and result. He was hindered by poverty, humility, and loss of his reputation, yet his success was not entirely kept until his death. In 1907, he gave the world two small editions. One of them was widely circulated in Great Britain. The years leading up to his death in 1913 were filled with constant labor, and he went home to be with the Lord, leaving a collection of manuscripts.

These books are unfailing wells for a lifetime of spiritual water drawing. They are hidden treasures, formed in the darkness of dawn and the noonday heat. They were shaped on the anvil of experience and beaten into wondrous form by the mighty hand of God. They are living voices whereby he, being dead, yet speaks.

—*Claude Chilton*

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PRAYER AND FAITH

A dear friend of mine who was quite a lover of the hunt, told me the following story. "Rising early one morning," he said, "I heard the barking of a number of dogs chasing deer. Looking at a large open field in front of me, I saw a young fawn making its way across the field and giving signs that its race was almost run. It leaped over the rails of the enclosed place and crouched within ten feet of where I stood. A moment later two of the hounds came over, and the fawn ran in my direction and pushed its head between my legs. I lifted the little thing to my breast, and, swinging round and round, fought off the dogs. Just then I felt that all the dogs in the West could not and would not capture that fawn after its weakness had appealed to my strength." So is it, when

human helplessness appeals to almighty God.
I remember well when the hounds of sin were
after my soul, that at last, I ran into the arms of
almighty God. —A. C. Dixon

Whenever a study of the principles of prayer is made, lessons concerning faith must accompany it. Faith is the essential quality in the heart of any man who desires to communicate with God. He must believe and stretch out the hands of faith for that which he cannot see or prove. Prayer is actually faith claiming and taking hold of its natural, immeasurable inheritance. True godliness is just as important in the realm of faith as it is in the area of prayer. Moreover, when faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live.

Faith does the impossible because it lets God undertake for us, and nothing is impossible with God. How great—without qualification or limitation—the power of faith is! If doubt can be banished from the heart and unbelief is made a stranger there, what we ask God will surely come to pass. A believer has granted to him “*whatsoever he saith*” (Mark 11:23).

Prayer throws faith on God and God on the world. Only God can move mountains, but faith and prayer move God. In the cursing of the fig tree, our Lord demonstrated His power. (See Matthew 21:19–22.) Following that, He went on to say that large powers were committed to faith and prayer, not to kill but to make alive, not to blast but to bless.

At this point in our study, we need to emphasize some words of Jesus that are the very keystone of the arch of faith and prayer. The first is found in Mark 11:24: *"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."* We should think about that statement: *"Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."* A faith that realizes, appropriates, and takes is described here. This faith is an awareness of God, an experienced communion, a real fact.

Is faith growing or declining as the years go by? Does faith stand strong and firm as sin abounds and the love of many grows cold? Does faith keep its hold, as religion becomes a mere formality and worldliness becomes victorious? The question our Lord asked may appropriately be ours. *"When the Son of man cometh,"* He asked, *"shall he find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:8). We believe that He will, and it is our job today to see to it that the lamp of faith is trimmed and burning, until He comes.

Faith is the foundation of Christian character and the security of the soul. When Jesus was looking toward Peter's denial and cautioning him against it, He said to His disciple: *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"* (Luke 22:31-32).

Our Lord was stating a central truth. It was Peter's faith He was seeking to guard. He knew that when faith breaks down, the foundations of spiritual life give way, and the entire structure of religious experience falls. It was Peter's faith that needed guarding. That is why Christ

was concerned for the welfare of His disciple's soul and was determined to strengthen Peter's faith by His own victorious prayer.

Peter, in his second epistle, had this same idea in mind when he wrote of growing in grace as a measure of safety in the Christian life and as fruitfulness. "*And beside this,*" he declared, "*giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness*" (2 Peter 1:5–6).

In this addition process, faith was the starting point, the basis of the other graces of the Spirit. Faith was the foundation on which other things were built. Peter did not urge his readers to add to works or gifts or virtues but to *faith*. In this business of growing in grace, much depends on starting right. There is a divine order. Peter was aware of it. He went on to say that we are to give constant care to making our calling and election secure. (See 2 Peter 1:10.) This election is made sure by adding to faith that which is done by constant, earnest praying. Faith is kept alive by prayer. Every step in this adding of grace to grace is accompanied by prayer.

Faith that creates powerful praying is the faith that centers itself on a powerful Person. Faith in Christ's ability to *do* and to *do greatly* is the faith that prays greatly. In this way the leper lay hold of the power of Christ. "*Lord, if thou wilt,*" he cried, "*thou canst make me clean*" (Matthew 8:2). In this instance, we are shown how a faith centered in Christ's ability to *do* obtained the healing power.

It was concerning this very point that Jesus questioned the blind men who came to Him for healing: *"Believe ye that I am able to do this?"* He asked. *"They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you"* (Matthew 9:28–29).

It was because He wanted to inspire faith in His ability to do that Jesus left behind Him that last, great statement, which, in the final analysis, is a ringing challenge to faith. *"All power,"* He declared, *"is given unto me in heaven and in earth"* (Matthew 28:18).

Again, faith is obedient. It goes when commanded, just like the nobleman whose son was grievously sick came to Jesus. (See John 4:46–53.)

Likewise, such faith acts. Like the man who was born blind, it goes to wash in the pool of Siloam when *told* to wash. Like Peter on the Sea of Galilee, it instantly casts the net where Jesus commands, without question or doubt. Such faith promptly takes away the stone from the grave of Lazarus. A praying faith keeps the commandments of God and does those things that are pleasing in His sight. It asks, *"Lord, what will you have me to do?"* and answers quickly, *"Speak, Lord, your servant hears."* Obedience helps faith, and faith helps obedience. To do God's will is essential to true faith, and faith is necessary to absolute obedience.

Yet faith is often called upon to wait patiently before God and is prepared for God's seeming delays in answering prayer. Faith does not grow disheartened because prayer is not immediately honored. It takes God at His

Word and lets Him take what time He chooses in fulfilling His purposes and in carrying on His work. There is bound to be delay and long days of waiting for true faith, but faith accepts the conditions. It knows there will be delays in answering prayer and regards such delays as times of testing where it is privileged to show that it is made of courage and stern stuff.

The case of Lazarus was an instance where there was delay and where the faith of two good women was sorely tried. Lazarus was critically ill, and his sisters sent for Jesus. But, without any known reason, our Lord delayed going to the relief of His sick friend. The plea was urgent and touching: *"Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick"* (John 11:3). But the Master was not moved by it, and the women's earnest request seemed to fall on deaf ears. What a trial of faith! Furthermore, our Lord's delay appeared to bring about hopeless disaster. While Jesus tarried, Lazarus died.

But the delay of Jesus was used in the interest of a greater good. Finally, He made His way to the home in Bethany. *"Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes, that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him"* (John 11:14–15).

Fear not, O tempted and tried believer, Jesus will come, if patience is exercised and faith holds fast. His delay will serve to make His coming more richly blessed. Pray on. Wait on. You cannot fail. If Christ delays, wait for Him. In His own good time, He will come and will not be late.

Delay is often the test and the strength of faith. How much patience is required when these times of testing come! Yet faith gathers strength by waiting and praying. Patience has its perfect work in the school of delay. In some instances, delay is of the very nature of the prayer. God has to do many things before He gives the final answer. They are things that are essential to the lasting good of the person who is requesting the favor from Him.

Jacob prayed with purpose and eagerness to be delivered from Esau. But, before that prayer could be answered, there was much to be done with and for Jacob. He had to be changed as well as Esau. Jacob had to be made into a new man before Esau could be. Jacob had to be converted to God before Esau could be converted to Jacob.

Among the brilliant sayings of Jesus concerning prayer, none is more interesting than this:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.
(John 14:12-14)

How wonderful these statements are of what God will do in answer to prayer! What great importance these ringing words have when prefaced with solemn truth! Faith in Christ is the basis of all working and all praying. All wonderful works depend on wonderful praying, and all praying is done in the name of Jesus Christ. The amazing,

simple lesson is this praying in the name of the Lord Jesus! All other conditions are of little value. Everything else is given up except Jesus. The name of Christ—the Person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—must be supremely sovereign in the hour of prayer.

If Jesus dwells at the source of my life—if the flow of His life has replaced all of my life—then He can safely commit the praying to my will. If absolute obedience to Him is the inspiration and force of every movement of my life, then He will pledge Himself, by a duty as deep as His own nature, that whatever is asked will be granted. Nothing can be clearer, more distinct, more unlimited both in application and extent, than the plea and urgency of Christ, *“Have faith in God”* (Mark 11:22).

Faith covers worldly as well as spiritual needs. Faith scatters excessive anxiety and needless care about what will be eaten, what will be drunk, what will be worn. Faith lives in the present and regards the day as being sufficient unto the evil thereof. (See Matthew 6:34.) It lives day by day and scatters all fears for tomorrow. Faith brings great peace of mind and perfect peace of heart.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

(Isaiah 26:3)

When we pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matthew 6:11), we are, in a measure, shutting tomorrow out of our prayer. We do not live for tomorrow, but for today. We do not look for tomorrow’s grace or tomorrow’s bread. Those who live in the present thrive best and get

the most out of life. Those who pray best pray for today's not tomorrow's needs. Our prayer for tomorrow's needs may be unnecessary because they do not exist at all!

True prayers are born out of present trials and present needs. Bread for today is enough. Bread given for today is the strongest pledge that there also will be bread tomorrow. Victory today is the assurance of victory tomorrow. Our prayers need to be focused on the present. We must trust God today and leave tomorrow entirely with Him. The present is ours; the future belongs to God. Prayer is the task and duty of each new day—daily prayer for daily needs.

As every day demands its bread, so every day demands its prayer. No amount of praying done today will be sufficient for tomorrow's praying. On the other hand, no praying for tomorrow is of any great value to us today. Today's manna is what we need; tomorrow God will see that our needs are supplied. This is the faith that God seeks to inspire.

So leave tomorrow, with its cares, needs, and troubles, in God's hands. There is no storing up of tomorrow's grace or tomorrow's praying. We cannot lay hold of today's grace to meet tomorrow's needs. We cannot have tomorrow's grace; we cannot eat tomorrow's bread; we cannot do tomorrow's praying. "*Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*" (Matthew 6:34). And, certainly, if we possess faith, sufficient also will be the good.