



POSSIBILITIES OF PRAYER

By E. M. Bounds

The neglect of prayer is a grand hindrance to holiness. "We have not because we ask not." Oh, how meek and gentle, how lowly in heart, how full of love both to God and to man, might you have been at this day, if you had only asked! If you had continued instant in prayer! Ask, that you may thoroughly experience and perfectly practice the whole of that religion which our Lord has so beautifully described in the Sermon on the Mount. —JOHN WESLEY

IT is to the closet Paul directs us to go. The unfailing remedy for all carking, distressing care is prayer. The place where the Lord is at hand is the closet of prayer. There He is always found, and there He is at hand to bless, to deliver and to help. The one place where the Lord's presence and power will be more fully realized than any other place is the closet of prayer.

Paul gives the various terms of prayer, supplication and giving of thanks as the complement of true praying. The soul must be in all of these spiritual exercises.

There must be no half-hearted praying, no abridging its nature, and no abating its force, if we would be freed from this undue anxiety which causes friction and internal distress, and if we would receive the rich fruit of that peace which passeth all understanding. He who prays must be an earnest soul, all round in spiritual attributes.

“In everything, let your requests be made known unto God,” says Paul. Nothing is too great to be handled in prayer, or to be sought in prayer. Nothing is too small to be weighed in the secret councils of the closet, and nothing is too little for its final arbitrament. As care comes from every source, so prayer goes to every source. As there are no small things in prayer, so there are no small things with God. He who counts the hairs of our head, and who is not too lofty and high to notice the little sparrow which falls to the ground, is not too great and high to note everything which concerns the happiness, the needs and the safety of His children.

Prayer brings God into what men are pleased to term the little affairs of life. The lives of people are made up of these small matters, and yet how often do great consequences come from small beginnings?

*“There is no sorrow, Lord, too light
To bring in prayer to Thee;
There is no anxious care too slight
To wake Thy sympathy.
“There is no secret sigh we breathe,
But meets Thine ear Divine,
And every cross grows light beneath
The shadow, Lord, of Thine.”*

As everything by prayer is to be brought to the notice of Almighty God, so we are assured that whatever affects us concerns Him. How comprehensive is this direction about prayer! “In everything by prayer.” There is no distinction here between temporal and spiritual things. Such a distinction is against faith, wisdom and reverence. God rules everything in nature and in grace.

Man is affected for time and eternity by things secular as well as by things spiritual. Man’s salvation hangs on his business as well as on his prayers. A man’s business hangs on his prayers just as it hangs on his diligence.

The chief hindrances to piety, the wiliest and the deadliest temptations of the devil, are in business, and lie alongside the things of time. The heaviest, the most

confusing and the most stupefying cares lie beside secular and worldly matters. So in everything which comes to us and which concerns us, in everything which we want to come to us, and in everything which we do not want to come to us, prayer is to be made for all.

Prayer blesses all things, brings all things, relieves all things and prevents all things. Everything as well as every place and every hour is to be ordered by prayer. Prayer has in it the possibility to affect everything which affects us. Here are the vast possibilities of prayer.

How much is the bitter of life sweetened by prayer! How are the feeble made strong by prayer! Sickness flees before the health of prayer. Doubts, misgivings, and trembling fears retire before prayer. Wisdom, knowledge, holiness and heaven are at the command of prayer. Nothing is outside of prayer. It has the power to gain all things in the provision of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul covers all departments and sweeps the entire field of human concernment, conditions, and happenings by saying, "In everything by prayer."

Supplications and thanksgiving are to be joined with prayer. It is not the dignity of worship, the gorgeousness of ceremonials, the magnificence of its ritual, nor the plainness of its sacraments, which avail. It is not simply the soul's hallowed and lowly abasement before God, neither the speechless awe, which benefits in this prayer service, but the intensity of supplication, the looking and the lifting of the soul in ardent plea to God for the things desired and for which request is made.

The radiance and gratitude and utterance of thanksgiving must be there. This is not simply the poetry of praise, but the deep-toned words and the prose of thanks. There must be hearty thanks, which remembers the past, sees God in it, and voices that recognition in sincere thanksgiving. The hidden depths within must have utterance. The lips must speak the music of the soul. A heart enthused of God, a heart illumined by His presence, a life guided by His right hand, must have something to say for God in gratitude. Such is to recognize God in the events of past life, to exalt God for His goodness, and to honor God who has honored it.

"Make known your requests unto God." The "requests" must be made known unto God. Silence is not prayer. Prayer is asking God for something which we have not, which we desire, and which He has promised to give in answer to prayer. Prayer is really verbal asking. Words are in prayer. Strong words and true words are found in prayer. Desires in prayer are put in words. The praying one is a pleader. He urges his prayer by arguments, promises, and needs.

Sometimes loud words are in prayer. The Psalmist said, "Evening, morning and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud." The praying one wants something which he has not got. He wants something which God has in His possession, and which he can get by praying. He is beggared, bewildered, oppressed and confused. He is before God in supplication, in prayer, and in thanksgiving. These are the attitudes, the incense, the paraphernalia, and the fashion of this hour, the court attendance of his soul before God.

"Requests" mean to ask for one's self. The man is in a strait. He needs something, and he needs it badly. Other help has failed. It means a plea for something to be given which has not been done. The request is for the Giver,—not alone His gifts but Himself. The requests of the praying one are to be made known unto God. The requests are to be brought to the knowledge of God. It is then that cares fly away, anxieties disappear, worries depart, and the soul gets at ease. Then it is there steals into the heart "the peace of God that passeth all understanding."

*"Peace! doubting heart, my God's I am,
Who formed me man, forbids my fear;
The Lord hath called me by my name;
The Lord protects, forever near;
His blood for me did once atone,
And still He loves and guards His own."*

In [James, chapter five](#), we have another marvelous description of prayer and its possibilities. It has to do with sickness and health, sin and forgiveness, and rain and drought. Here we have James' directory for praying:

"Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.

"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

"And the prayer of faith shall save the sick; and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

"And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Here is prayer for one's own needs and intercessory prayer for others; prayer for physical needs and prayer for spiritual needs; prayer for drought and prayer for rain; prayer for temporal matters and prayer for spiritual things. How vast the reach of prayer! How wonderful under these words its possibilities!

Here is the remedy for affliction and depression of every sort, and here we find the remedy for sickness and for rain in the time of drought. Here is the way to obtain forgiveness of sins. A stroke of prayer paralyzes the energies of nature, stays its clouds, rain and dew, and blasts field and farm like the simoon. Prayer brings clouds, and rain and fertility to the famished and wasted earth.

The general statement, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," is a statement of prayer as an energetic force. Two words are used. One signifies power in exercise, operative power, while the other is power as an endowment. Prayer is power and strength, a power and strength which influences God, and is most salutary, widespread and marvelous in its gracious benefits to man. Prayer influences God. The ability of God to do for man is the measure of the possibility of prayer.

*"Thou art coming to a king,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much."*

The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds.