

## THE ESSENTIALS OF PRAYER

### FOREWORD

The work of editing the Bounds Spiritual Life Books (of which the present volume is the sixth) has been a labour of love which has brought great profit and blessing to my own soul. After years of close study of the literary remains of this great Christian, together with the work of other mystics, I am fully persuaded that to but few of the sons of men has there been given such spiritual power as was vouchsafed to Edward McKendree Bounds. Truly he was a burning and a shining light, and as The Sunday School Times says, "he was a specialist in prayer and his books are for the quiet hour, for careful meditation and for all who wish to seek and find the treasures of God."

It was my great privilege to know the author well, and also to know that his intention, in everything he wrote, was for the salvation of his readers. The Essentials of Prayer is sent forth in this spirit. May God bless it to many hearts and use it for the upbuilding and strengthening of Christian character through the length and breadth of the land.

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### I. PRAYER TAKES IN THE WHOLE MAN

"Henry Clay Trumbull spoke forth the Infinite in the terms of our world, and the Eternal in the forms of our human life. Some years ago, on a ferry-boat, I met a gentleman who knew him, and I told him that when I had last seen Dr. Trumbull, a fortnight before, he had spoken of him. Oh, yes,' said my friend, he was a great Christian, so real, so intense. He was at my home years ago and we were talking about prayer.' 'Why, Trumbull,' I said, you don't mean to say if you lost a pencil you would pray about it, and ask God to help you find it' Of course I would; of course I would,' was his instant and excited reply. Of course he would. Was not his faith a real thing? Like the Saviour, he put his doctrine strongly by taking an extreme illustration to embody his principle, but the principle was fundamental. He did trust God in everything. And the Father honoured the trust of His child."--Robert E. Speer

Prayer has to do with the entire man. Prayer takes in man in his whole being, mind, soul and body. It takes the whole man to pray, and prayer affects the entire man in its gracious results. As the whole nature of man enters into prayer, so also all that belongs to man is the beneficiary of prayer. All of man receives benefits in prayer. The whole man must be given to God in praying. The largest results in praying come to him who gives himself, all of himself, all that belongs to himself, to God. This is the secret of full consecration, and this is a condition of successful praying, and the sort of praying which brings the largest fruits.

The men of olden times who wrought well in prayer, who brought the largest things to pass, who moved God to do great things, were those who were entirely given over to God in their praying. God wants, and

must have, all that there is in man in answering his prayers. He must have whole-hearted men through whom to work out His purposes and plans concerning men. God must have men in their entirety. No double-minded man need apply. No vacillating man can be used. No man with a divided allegiance to God, and the world and self, can do the praying that is needed.

Holiness is wholeness, and so God wants holy men, men whole-hearted and true, for his service and for the work of praying. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." These are the sort of men God wants for leaders of the hosts of Israel, and these are the kind out of which the praying class is formed. Man is a trinity in one, and yet man is neither a trinity nor a dual creature when he prays, but a unit. Man is one in all the essentials and acts and attitudes of piety. Soul, spirit and body are to unite in all things pertaining to life and godliness.

The body, first of all, engages in prayer, since it assumes the praying attitude in prayer. Prostration of the body becomes us in praying as well as prostration of the soul. The attitude of the body counts much in prayer, although it is true that the heart may be haughty and lifted up, and the mind listless and wandering, and the praying a mere form, even while the knees are bent in prayer.

Daniel kneeled three times a day in prayer. Solomon kneeled in prayer at the dedication of the temple. Our Lord in Gethsemane prostrated himself in that memorable season of praying just before his betrayal. Where there is earnest and faithful praying the body always takes on the form most suited to the state of the soul at the time. The body, that far, joins the soul in praying.

The entire man must pray. The whole man, life, heart, temper, mind, are in it. Each and all join in the prayer exercise. Doubt, double-mindedness, division of the affections, are all foreign to the closet. Character and conduct, undefiled, made whiter than snow, are mighty potencies, and are the most seemly beauties for the closet hour, and for the struggles of prayer.

A loyal intellect must conspire and add the energy and fire of its undoubting and undivided faith to that kind of an hour, the hour of prayer. Necessarily the mind enters into the praying. First of all, it takes thought to pray. The intellect teaches us we ought to pray. By serious thinking beforehand the mind prepares itself for approaching a throne of grace. Thought goes before entrance into the closet and prepares the way for true praying. It considers what will be asked for in the closet hour. True praying does not leave to the inspiration of the hour what will be the requests of that hour. As praying is asking for something definite of God, so, beforehand, the thought arises--"What shall I ask for at this hour?" All vain and evil and frivolous thoughts are eliminated, and the mind is given over entirely to God, thinking of him, of what is needed, and what has been received in the past. By every token, prayer, in taking hold of the entire man, does not leave out the mind. The very first step in prayer is a mental one. The disciples took that first step when they said unto Jesus at one time, "Lord, teach us to pray." We must be taught through the intellect, and just in so far as the intellect is given up to God in prayer, will we be able to learn well and readily the lesson of prayer.

Paul spreads the nature of prayer over the whole man. It must be so. It takes the whole man to embrace in its god-like sympathies the entire race of man--the sorrows, the sins and the death of Adam's fallen race. It takes the whole man to run parallel with God's high and sublime will in saving mankind. It takes the whole man to stand with our Lord Jesus Christ as the one mediator between God and sinful man. This is the doctrine Paul teaches in his prayer-directory in the second chapter of his first epistle to Timothy.

Nowhere does it appear so clearly that it requires the entire man in all departments of his being, to pray than in this teaching of Paul. It takes the whole man to pray till all the storms which agitate his soul are calmed to a great calm, till the stormy winds and waves cease as by a Godlike spell. It takes the whole man to pray till cruel tyrants and unjust rulers are changed in their natures and lives, as well as in their governing qualities, or till they cease to rule. It requires the entire man in praying till high and proud and unspiritual ecclesiastics become gentle, lowly and religious, till godliness and gravity bear rule in church and in state, in home and in business, in public as well as in private life.

It is man's business to pray; and it takes manly men to do it. It is godly business to pray and it takes godly men to do it. And it is godly men who give over themselves entirely to prayer. Prayer is far-reaching in its influence and in its gracious effects. It is intense and profound business which deals with God and His plans and purposes, and it takes whole-hearted men to do it. No half-hearted, half-brained, half-spirited effort will do for this serious, all-important, heavenly business. The whole heart, the whole brain, the whole spirit, must be in the matter of praying, which is so mightily to affect the characters and destinies of men. The answer of Jesus to the scribe as to what was the first and greatest commandment was as follows:

The Lord our God is one Lord; And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.

In one word, the entire man without reservation must love God. So it takes the same entire man to do the praying which God requires of men. All the powers of man must be engaged in it. God cannot tolerate a divided heart in the love He requires of men, neither can He bear with a divided man in praying.

In the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm the Psalmist teaches this very truth in these words:

Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

It takes whole-hearted men to keep God's commandments and it demands the same sort of men to seek God. These are they who are counted "blessed." Upon these whole-hearted ones God's approval rests.

Bringing the case closer home to himself the psalmist makes this declaration as to his practice: "With my whole heart have I sought thee; O let me not wander from thy commandments."

And further on, giving us his prayer for a wise and understanding heart, he tells us his purposes concerning the keeping of God's law:

Give me understanding and I shall keep thy law; Yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

Just as it requires a whole heart given to God to gladly and fully obey God's commandments, so it takes a whole heart to do effectual praying.

Because it requires the whole man to pray, praying is no easy task. Praying is far more than simply bending the knee and saying a few words by rote.

'Tis not enough to bend the knee,  
And words of prayer to say;  
The heart must with the lips agree,  
Or else we do not pray.

Praying is no light and trifling exercise. While children should be taught early to pray, praying is no child's task. Prayer draws upon the whole nature of man. Prayer engages all the powers of man's moral and spiritual nature. It is this which explains somewhat the praying of our Lord described as in Hebrews 5:7:

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.

It takes only a moment's thought to see how such praying of our Lord drew mightily upon all the powers of his being, and called into exercise every part of his nature. This is the praying which brings the soul close to God and which brings God down to earth.

Body, soul and spirit are taxed and brought under tribute to prayer. David Brainerd makes this record of his praying:

God enabled me to agonise in prayer till I was wet with perspiration, though in the shade and in a cool place.

The Son of God in Gethsemane was in an agony of prayer, which engaged His whole being:

And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray ye that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him, from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Luke 22:40-44.

Here was praying which laid its hands on every part of our Lord's nature, which called forth all the powers of his soul, his mind and his body. This was praying which took in the entire man.

Paul was acquainted with this kind of praying. In writing to the Roman Christians, he urges them to pray with him after this fashion:

Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for

the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.

The words, "strive together with me," tells of Paul's praying, and how much he put into it. It is not a docile request, not a little thing, this sort of praying, this "striving with me." It is of the nature of a great battle, a conflict to win, a great battle to be fought. The praying Christian, as the soldier, fights a life-and-death struggle. His honour, his immortality, and eternal life are all in it. This is praying as the athlete struggles for the mastery, and for the crown, and as he wrestles or runs a race. Everything depends on the strength he puts in it. Energy, ardour, swiftness, every power of his nature is in it. Every power is quickened and strained to its very utmost. Littleness, half-heartedness, weakness and laziness are all absent.

Just as it takes the whole man to pray successfully, so in turn the whole man receives the benefits of such praying. As every part of man's complex being enters into true praying, so every part of that same nature receives blessings from God in answer to such praying. This kind of praying engages our undivided hearts, our full consent to be the Lord's, our whole desires.

God sees to it that when the whole man prays, in turn the whole man shall be blessed. His body takes in the good of praying, for much praying is done specifically for the body. Food and raiment, health and bodily vigour, come in answer to praying. Clear mental action, right thinking, an enlightened understanding, and safe reasoning powers, come from praying. Divine guidance means God so moving and impressing the mind, that we shall make wise and safe decisions. "The meek will he guide in judgment."

Many a praying preacher has been greatly helped just at this point. The unction of the Holy One which comes upon the preacher invigorates the mind, loosens up thought and gives utterance. This is the explanation of former days when men of very limited education had such wonderful liberty of the Spirit in praying and in preaching. Their thoughts flowed as a stream of water. Their entire intellectual machinery felt the impulse of the divine Spirit's gracious influences.

And, of course, the soul receives large benefits in this sort of praying. Thousands can testify to this statement. So we repeat, that as the entire man comes into play in true, earnest effectual praying, so the entire man, soul, mind and body, receives the benefits of prayer.