

*“Learning to Pray, and Doing It”!**The Power of Prayer and Thoughts from E.M. Bounds**May 20, 2018*

Key Texts: Matthew 7:7-8

(Most of today’s sermon comes from excerpts from E.M. Bounds book On Prayer.)**I. Introduction: Prayer is the way...**

It amazes me how little time God’s people spend in prayer. Not only are we told by our Lord Jesus Christ to ask, seek, and knock, we are told when we do we will receive, find and doors will be opened. Why do we give so little time to prayer? Do we not know that when we work, we work, but when we pray, God works?

Prayer is the way we let go and let God.

Prayer is the way we take our hands off and let God put His hands on.

Prayer is the difference between you fighting for God and God fighting for you!

Even our founding fathers prayed like it depended on God because they knew it did.

If you are on God’s side, then God is on your side.

Our history is shrouded in prayer. And it is not that we in America are always right and never wrong. Like every nation’s history, ours is dotted with grievous, horrible sins. I knew slavery was one of them, as did all good Methodist clergy who were pulled into chaplain duty in the Confederate army. I, like many, knew many of our members who fought in those horrible, bloody battles, would never return home but to soon go to their eternal home and we Methodist clergy had our sheep to tend and in too many cases send to their Creator in heaven.

The prayers of many during war time seem to be more regular. I suppose because matters seem more urgent?

II. We Can’t Accomplish Much Without Much Prayer

The truth is, we cannot accomplish much without much prayer. As individuals, families, or churches. In fact, “the prayers of God’s saints are the capital stock in heaven by which Christ carries out His great work upon the earth. Great throes and mighty convulsions in the world have come about as result of these prayers. The earth is changed, revolutionized; angels move in more powerful, more rapid wings; and God’s policy is shaped when the prayers of His people are more numerous and more efficient.” (Prayerless Christians, pg 555f)

Praying people and praying churches are the one commanding need of this day, as of all other days, if God is to intervene in the world. People of prayer are the only people who can represent God in the world. No cold, irreligious, prayerless person can claim that right. He or she misrepresents God in all God’s work and plans.

Praying people are the only people who have influence with God, the only people to who God commits Himself and His Gospel. Praying people are the only people in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, for the Holy Spirit and prayer go hand in hand, and that is why talking about prayer on this 1,985th year since that first day of Pentecost, when God poured out the Holy Spirit and birthed the church, is so important.

The Holy Spirit never descends upon prayerless people or a prayerless church. He never fills them. He never empowers them. There is nothing whatsoever in common between the Spirit of God and people, or churches, or nations that do not pray. The Spirit dwells only in an atmosphere of prayer.

III. There is No Substitute for Praying

“In doing God’s work, there is no substitute for praying. People of prayer cannot be replaced with other kinds of people. People of financial skill, people of education, people of worldly influence—people with seminary and Bible degrees—none of these can possibly substitute for people of prayer. The life, the vigor, the strategies, and the motive power of God’s work is formed by praying people. A diseased heart is not a more fearful symptom of approaching death than non-praying people are of a spiritual atrophy. There is much to be said about your prayer focus of “Learning to Pray, Then Doing It”.

For the people to whom Jesus Christ committed the fortunes and destiny of His church were people of prayer. To no other kind of people has God ever committed Himself. The apostles were preeminently men of prayer. They gave themselves to prayer. To be sure when the Holy Spirit was poured out early in the morning at 9AM the disciples had been together and spending time in prayer, waiting on the promise of Jesus Christ. They made prayer their chief business. It was first in importance and first in results. God never has, and God never will, commit the weighty interests of His Kingdom to people who do not make prayer a conspicuous and controlling factor in their lives.

The apostles allowed no duty, however sacred, to so busy them that infringed on their time and prevented them from making prayer their main thing. I heard word from last Sunday “busyness” has become an idol even in your day. And I fear we have lost the sacred value of prayer. The Word of God was ministered with apostolic fidelity and zeal. It was spoken by people with apostolic commissions, people who had been baptized by the fiery tongues of Pentecost. The Word was pointless and powerless unless people were freshly clothed with power by continuous and mighty prayer. The seed of God’s Word must be saturated in prayer to make it germinate. It grows more readily and anchors more deeply when it is soaked in prayer.”

IV. Praise, Prayer, and Thanksgiving

And on Praise and Prayer and Thanksgiving, “the heart of prayer must have in it the grace of prayer to sing the praises of God. Spiritual singing is not to be done by musical taste or talent, but by the grace of God in the heart. Nothing helps praise so mightily as a gracious revival of true religion in the church. The conscious presence of God inspires song. The angels and the glorified ones in heaven do not need artistic presenters to lead them, nor do they care for paid choirs to chime in with their heavenly doxologies of praise and worship. They are not dependent on singing schools to teach them notes and the scale of singing. Their singing involuntarily breaks forth from the heart. And where grace abounds, it is my experience, songs abound. When God is in the heart, heaven is present and melody is there and the lips overflow out of the abundance of the heart.”

“The main purposes for all singing are for God’s ear, to attract God’s attention and to please God” (page 309).

V. Prayer and Faith

And concerning prayer and faith? “The possibilities of prayer are gauged by faith in God’s ability to do. Faith is the one prime condition by which God works. Faith is the one prime condition by which we pray. Faith draws on God to its full extent. Faith gives character to prayer. A feeble faith has always brought forth feeble praying. Vigorous faith creates vigorous praying. At the close of a parable in which Jesus asked this pointed question as it related to vigorous prayer he asks, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)

The only condition that restrains God’s power and disables God to act, is lack of faith. If people would pray as the they ought to pray, the marvels of the past would be more than reproduced. The Gospel would advance with a facility and power it has never known. Doors would be thrown open to the Gospel, and the Word of God would have a conquering force like the world has rarely ever known before—if God’s people

would truly learn to ask, to seek, and to knock in persistent, vigorous prayer. “Let us therefore pray without ceasing!” (I Thess 5:17)

May you pray faith-filled prayers in your day as I did in mine. (page 107f)

VI. Prayer and Revival

The great revival preacher, George Whitefield, once prayed, “O Lord, give me souls or take my soul.” It’s been said that, after much closet pleading, “he went to the Devil’s fair and took more than a thousand souls out of the paw of the lion in a single day.” (page 99)

In my coming to you on this Pentecost and Wesleyan Heritage Sunday I earnestly pray for a revival. A revival in your heart, your home, your church and community. The Methodists have long been strong in faith, prayer, praise, and mission in Culpeper. May it remain so for your day.

So you can know the power of prayer I close with this true story from back in 1872 with a preacher named D.L. Moody from Chicago. (page 95-97):

“When D.L. Moody’s church in Chicago lay in ashes, he went over to England, in 1872, not to preach, but to listen to others preach while his new church was being built. One Sunday morning he was prevailed upon to preach in a London pulpit. But, somehow, the spiritual atmosphere was lacking. He confessed afterwards that he had never had such a hard time preaching in his life; everything was perfectly dead, and, as he vainly tried to preach, he said to himself, “What a fool I was to consent to preach! I came here to listen, and here I am preaching.”

Then the awful thought came to him that he had to preach again that night, and only the fact that he had given the promise to do so kept him faithful to the engagement. But when Mr. Moody entered the pulpit at night, and faced the crowded congregation, he was conscious of a new atmosphere. “The powers of an unseen world seemed to have fallen upon the audience,” he said. As he drew near the close of his sermon, he became emboldened to give out an invitation, and as he concluded he said, “If there is a man or woman here who will tonight accept Jesus Christ, please stand up.”

At once about five hundred people rose to their feet. Thinking that there must be some mistake, he asked the people to be seated, and then, in order that there might be no possible misunderstanding, he repeated the invitation, couching it in even more definite and difficult terms. Again the same number rose. Still thinking that something must be wrong, Mr. Moody, for the second time, asked the standing men and women to be seated, and then he invited all who really meant to accept Christ to pass into the vestry. Fully five hundred people did as requested, and that was the beginning of a revival in that church and neighborhood, which brought Mr. Moody back from Dublin, a few days later, that he might assist the wonderful work of God.

The sequel, however, must be given, or my purpose in relating the incident will be defeated. When Mr. Moody preached at the morning service, there was a woman in the congregation who had an invalid sister. On her return home, she told the invalid that the preacher had been a Mr. Moody from Chicago, and on hearing this she turned pale.

“What,” she said, “Mr. Moody from Chicago! I read about him some time ago in an American paper, and I have been praying that God would send him to London, and to our church. If I had known he was going to preach this morning, I would have eaten no breakfast. I would have spent the whole time in prayer. Now, sister, go out of the room, lock the door, send me no dinner; no matter who comes, don’t let them see me. I am going to spend the whole afternoon and evening in prayer.”

And so, while Mr. Moody stood in the pulpit that had been like an ice chamber in the morning, the bedridden saint was holding him up before God; and God, who ever delights to answer prayer poured out His Spirit in mighty power.

VII. Closing Prayer

Let us Unite Our Hearts in Prayer:

Holy Spirit, you are welcome in this place today. Come and once again fill each heart in this place afresh with power from above. Holy Spirit, inspire us to be a people of prayer. Remove prayerlessness from our lives. Show us the power of prayer and help us see You as a big God so we can pray big prayers! And indeed, as You hear and respond to our prayers for revival, may Your Gospel in the 21st century—this very day—be a conquering force like the world has rarely seen.

Dear God, help the Methodists in Culpeper in 2018 value the importance of prayer in all they say and do.

In Jesus' name, Amen.