

# PRAYER

by E. M. Bounds

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Editors note: E. M. Bounds' references to the "heathen" and "pagan" would likely be presented as "the lost" today. His challenge to prayer, however, is timeless.

## **The key of all missionary success is prayer.**

That key is in the hands of the home churches. The trophies won by our Lord in heathen lands will be won by praying missionaries, not by professional workers in foreign lands. More especially will this success be won by saintly praying in the churches at home. The home church, on her knees fasting and praying, is the great base of spiritual supplies. Prayer alone can do the deed. Aaron and Hur did not more surely give victory to Israel through Moses, than a praying church through Jesus Christ will give victory on every battlefield. It is as true in foreign fields as it is in home lands. The praying church wins the contest. The home church has done but a paltry thing when she has furnished the money to establish missions and support her missionaries. Money is important, but money without prayer is powerless in the face of the darkness, the wretchedness and the sin in unchristianized lands. Prayerless giving breeds barrenness and death. Poor praying at home is the solution of poor results in the foreign field.

## **Alive in Prayer, Generous in Giving**

This is peculiarly a missionary age. Nearly every church has caught the contagion, and the sails of their proposed missionary movements are spread wide to catch the favoring breezes. Herein is the danger just now, that the missionary movement will go ahead of the missionary spirit. This has always been the peril of the church, losing the substance in the shade, losing the spirit in the outward shell, and contenting itself in the mere parade of the movement, putting the force of effort in the movement and not in the spirit.

Not a few of us have heard many eloquent and earnest speeches stressing the imperative need of money for missions where we have heard only one stressing the imperative need of prayer. All our plans and devices drive to the one end of raising money, not to quicken faith and promote prayer. The common idea among church leaders is that if we get the money, prayer will come as a matter of course.

The very reverse is the truth. If we get the church at the business of praying, and thus secure the spirit of missions, money will more than likely come as a matter of course. Spiritual agencies and spiritual forces never come as a matter of course. Spiritual duties and spiritual factors, left to the "matter of course" law, will surely fall out and die. Only the things that are stressed live and rule in the spiritual realm. They who give, will not necessarily pray. Many in our churches are liberal givers who are noted for their prayerlessness.

One of the evils of the present-day missionary movement lies just there. Giving is entirely removed from prayer. Praying creates the giving spirit. The praying ones will give liberally and

self-denyingly. But perfunctory, grudging, assessment-giving kills the very spirit of prayer. Emphasizing the material to the neglect of the spiritual, by an inexorable law, retires and discounts the spiritual.

### **"Give Him No Rest" Praying**

The prophet Isaiah, looking down the centuries with the vision of a seer, thus expresses his purpose to continue in prayer and give God no rest till Christ's kingdom be established among men:

*For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest till the righteousness thereof goeth forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth* (Isa. 62:1 KJV).

Then the Lord, Himself, by the mouth of this evangelical prophet, declares as follows:

*I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night. Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth*(Isa. 62:6-7 KJV).

In the margin of our Bible it reads, Ye that are the Lord's remembrances. The idea is that these praying ones are those who are the Lord's remembrances, those who remind Him of what He has promised, and who give Him no rest till God's church is established in the earth.

The missionary movement in the apostolic church was born in an atmosphere of fasting and prayer. The very movement looking to offering the blessings of the Christian church to the Gentiles was on the housetop on the occasion when Peter went up there to pray, and God showed him His divine purpose to extend the privileges of the gospel to the Gentiles, and to break down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile.

But more specifically Paul and Barnabas were definitely called and set apart to the missionary field at Antioch when the church there had fasted and prayed. It was then the Holy Spirit answered from heaven: "*So then, separate both Barnabas and Saul to Me, for the work to which I have called them.*" (Acts 13:2)

knees in true prayer until he becomes preeminently a man of prayer.

The fortunes of the kingdom of Jesus Christ are not made by the feebleness of its foes. They are strong and bitter and have ever been strong, and ever will be. But mighty prayer - this is the one great spiritual force that will enable the Lord Jesus Christ to enter into full possession of His kingdom, and secure for Him the heathen as His inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for His possession.

It is prayer that will enable Him to break His foes with a rod of iron, that will make these foes tremble in their pride and power, who are but frail potter's vessels, to be broken in pieces by one stroke of His hand. A person who can pray is the mightiest instrument Christ has in this world. A praying church is stronger than all the gates of hell.

God's decree for the glory of His Son's kingdom is dependent on prayer for its fulfillment: "*Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth*

*for thy possession"* (Psalm 2:8 KJV). And the reason the church has not received more in the missionary work in which it is engaged is the lack of prayer. *"Ye have not, because ye ask not"* (James 4:2 KJV).

## **We Pray, God Calls!**

It is the business of the home church to do the praying. It is the Lord's business to call and send forth the laborers. The Lord does not do the praying. The church does not do the calling. And just as our Lord's compassions were aroused by the sight of multitudes, weary, hungry, and scattered, exposed to evils, as sheep having no shepherd, so whenever the church has eyes to see the vast multitudes of earth's inhabitants, descendants of Adam, weary in soul, living in darkness, and wretched and sinful, will it be moved to compassion, and begin to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest.

Missionaries, like ministers, are born of praying people. A praying church begets laborers in the harvest field of the world. The scarcity of missionaries argues a non-praying church. It is all right to send trained men to the foreign field, but first of all they must be God-sent. As praying men are the occasion of sending them, so in turn the workers must be praying men. Prayer is the proof of their calling, their divine credentials, and their work. God in His own way, in answer to the prayers of His church, calls men into His harvest fields.

Sad will be the day when Missionary Boards and churches overlook that fundamental fact, and send out their own chosen men independent of God. Is the harvest great? Are the laborers few? Then *"pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest"* (Matt. 9:38 ASV). Oh, that a great wave of prayer would sweep over the church, asking God to send out a great army of laborers into the needy harvest fields of the earth! No danger of the Lord of the harvest sending out too many laborers and crowding the fields. He who calls will most certainly provide the means for supporting those whom He calls and sends forth.

The one great need in the modern missionary movement is intercessors. They were scarce in the days of Isaiah. This was his complaint - *"And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor"* (Isa. 59:16 KJV). So today there is great need of intercessors, first for the needy harvest fields, born of a Christlike compassion for the thousands without the gospel; and then intercessors for laborers to be sent forth by God into the harvest fields of earth.

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Edward McKendree Bounds (1835-1913), admitted to the bar at age eighteen, surrendered to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church at age twenty-four. Early in the Civil War, the federal government imprisoned Bounds for refusing allegiance to the Union. Upon release, he served troops as a Confederate chaplain. After the Civil War, Edward Bounds served as pastor to churches in Tennessee and Alabama and spent the last seventeen years of his life writing his now classic books on prayer.

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