

Classics: Time-tested Truths

The Benefits of Time in Prayer

By E.M. (Edward) Bounds

Our devotions are not measured by the clock, but time is of their essence. Short devotions deplete spiritual vigor, arrest spiritual progress, sap spiritual foundations, blight the root and bloom of spiritual life. They are the prolific source of backsliding, the sure indication of a superficial piety; they deceive, blight, rot the seed, and impoverish the soil.

It is true that Bible prayers in word and print are short, but the praying men of the Bible were with God through many a sweet and holy wrestling hour. They won by few words but long waiting. The prayers Moses records may be short, but Moses prayed to God with fastings and mighty cryings forty days and nights.

The statement of Elijah's praying may be condensed to a few brief paragraphs, but doubtless Elijah, who when "praying he prayed," spent many hours of fiery struggle and lofty intercourse with God before he could, with assured boldness, say to Ahab, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

The man Christ Jesus prayed many an all-night ere His work was done. His all-night and long-sustained devotions gave to His

work its finish and perfection, and to His character the fullness and glory of its divinity.

True Praying Costs Something

Praying, true praying, costs an outlay of serious attention and of time, which flesh and blood do not relish. Few persons are made of such strong fiber that they will make a costly outlay when surface work will pass as well in the market. Hurried devotions make weak faith, feeble convictions, questionable piety. To be little *with* God is to be little *for* God.

It takes good time for the full flow of God into the spirit. *It takes time in the secret places to get the full revelation of God.* More time and early hours for prayer would act like magic to revive and invigorate many a decayed spiritual life. A holy life would not be so rare or so difficult a thing if our devotions were not so short and hurried.

Our ability to stay with God in our closet measures our ability to stay with God out of the closet. Hasty closet visits are deceptive, defaulting. We are not only deluded by them, but we are losers by them in many ways and in many rich legacies. Tarrying in the closet instructs and wins. The greatest victories are often the results of great waiting—waiting till words and plans are exhausted. Silent and patient waiting gains the crown.

To pray is the greatest thing we can do. To do it well there must be calmness, time, and deliberation; otherwise it is degraded into the littlest and meanest of things. We cannot do too much of real praying.

We must learn anew the worth of prayer, enter anew the school of prayer. There is nothing which takes more time to learn. And if we would learn the wondrous art, we must not give a

fragment here and there. We must demand and hold with iron grasp the best hours of the day for God and prayer, or there will be no praying worth the name.

Who Truly Prays?

Few men there are who pray. In these days of hurry and bustle, of electricity and steam, men will not take time to pray. Preachers there are who “say prayers” as a part of their program, on regular or state occasions; but who “stirs himself up to take hold upon God”? Who prays as Jacob prayed—till he is crowned as a prevailing, princely intercessor? Who prays as Elijah prayed—till all the locked-up forces of nature were unsealed and a famine-stricken land bloomed as the garden of God?

Who [prays] as Jesus Christ prayed as out upon the mountain He “continued all night in prayer to God”? The apostles “gave themselves to prayer”—the most difficult thing to get men or even the preachers to do. Laymen there are who will give their money—some of them in rich abundance—but they will not “give themselves” to prayer, without which their money is but a curse.

Prayer Is a Lost Art

There are plenty of preachers who will preach and deliver great and eloquent addresses on the need of revival and the spread of the Kingdom of God, but not many there are who will do that without which all preaching and organizing are worse than vain—pray.

It is out of date, almost a lost art, and the greatest benefactor this age could have is the man who will bring the preachers and the Church back to prayer.

E.M. Bounds (1835-1913) was a pastor and a Civil War chaplain known for his strong pietistic convictions. He was also known for his writings and his travels as an itinerant revivalist. This article is taken from his work *Power through Prayer*, which is available through prayershop.org.