

Prayer and Importunity

by E.M. Bounds

Importunate prayer is a persistent, urgent, and persevering movement of the soul toward God, characterized by faith and a willingness to wait for an answer.

Scripture: Luke 18:1

Topics: "Importunity in Prayer", "Persistence in Faith"

Description

E.M. Bounds emphasizes the necessity of importunate prayer, urging believers to persistently seek God without losing heart. He illustrates that true prayer is a passionate movement of the soul towards God, characterized by tenacity and urgency, rather than mere physical effort. Bounds highlights biblical examples, such as the importunate widow and the Syrophenician woman, to demonstrate that fervent prayer can overcome obstacles and lead to divine intervention. He asserts that prayer is essential for a genuine relationship with God and that a lack of prayer signifies a lack of faith. Ultimately, he encourages Christians to cultivate a spirit of importunity in their prayers, as it is through such fervent requests that they can experience God's grace and blessings.

Transcript

OUR Lord Jesus declared that "men ought always to pray and not to faint," and the parable in which his words occur, was taught with the intention of saving men from faintheartedness and weakness in prayer. Our Lord was seeking to teach that laxity must be guarded against, and persistence fostered and encouraged. There can be no two opinions regarding the importance of the exercise of this indispensable quality in our praying.

Importunate prayer is a mighty movement of the soul toward God. It is a stirring of the deepest forces of the soul, toward the throne of heavenly grace. It is the ability to hold on, press on, and wait. Restless desire, restful patience, and strength of grasp are all embraced in it. It is not an incident, or a performance, but a passion of soul. It is not a want, half-needed, but a sheer necessity.

The wrestling quality in importunate prayer, does not spring from physical vehemence or fleshly energy. It is not an impulse of energy, not a mere earnestness of soul; it is an inwrought force, a faculty implanted and aroused by the Holy Spirit. Virtually, it is the intercession of the Spirit of God, in us; it is, moreover, "the effectual, fervent prayer, which availeth much." The divine Spirit informing every element within us, with the energy of his own striving, is the essence of the importunity which urges our praying at the mercy seat, to continue until the fire falls and the blessing descends. This wrestling in prayer may not be

boisterous nor vehement, but quiet, tenacious, and urgent. Silent, it may be, when there are no visible outlets for its mighty forces.

Nothing distinguishes the children of God so clearly and strongly as prayer. It is the one infallible mark and test of being a Christian. Christian people are prayerful, the worldly-minded, prayerless. Christians call on God; worldlings ignore God, and call not on his name. But even the Christian had need to cultivate continual prayer. Prayer must be habitual, but much more than a habit. It is duty, yet one which rises far above, and goes beyond the ordinary implications of the term. It is the expression of a relation to God, a yearning for divine communion. It is the outward and upward flow of the inward life toward its original fountain. It is an assertion of the soul's paternity, a claiming of the sonship, which links man to the eternal.

Prayer has everything to do with molding the soul into the image of God, and has everything to do with enhancing and enlarging the measure of divine grace. It has everything to do with bringing the soul into complete communion with God. It has everything to do with enriching, broadening and maturing the soul's experience of God. That man cannot possibly be called a Christian, who does not pray. By no possible pretext can he claim any right to the term, nor its implied significance. If he does not pray, he is a sinner, pure and simple, for prayer is the only way in which the soul of man can enter into fellowship and communion with the source of all Christlike spirit and energy. Hence, if he prays not, he is not of the household of faith.

In this study however, we turn our thought to one phase of prayer-that of importunity; the pressing of our desires upon God with urgency and perseverance; the praying with that tenacity and tension which neither relaxes nor ceases until its plea is heard, and its cause is won.

He who has clear views of God, and scriptural conceptions of the divine character; who appreciates his privilege of approach unto God; who understands his inward need of all that God has for him-that man will be solicitous, outspoken, and importunate. In Scripture the duty of prayer, itself, is advocated in terms which are only barely stronger than those in which the necessity for its importunity is set forth. The praying which influences God is declared to be that of the fervent, effectual outpouring of a righteous man. That is to say, it is prayer on fire, having no feeble, flickering flame, no momentary flash, but shining with a vigorous and steady glow.

The repeated intercessions of Abraham for the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah present an early example of the necessity for, and benefit deriving from importunate praying. Jacob, wrestling all night with the angel, gives significant emphasis to the power of a dogged perseverance in praying, and shows how, in things spiritual, importunity succeeds, just as effectively as it does in matters relating to time and sense.

As we have noted, elsewhere, Moses prayed forty days and forty nights, seeking to stay the wrath of God against Israel, and his example and success are a stimulus to present-day faith in its darkest hour. Elijah repeated and urged his prayer seven times ere the raincloud appeared above the horizon, heralding the success of his prayer and the victory of his faith. On one occasion Daniel though faint and weak, pressed his case three weeks, ere the answer and the blessing came.

Many nights during his earthly life did the blessed Savior spend in prayer. In Gethsemane he presented the same petition, three times, with unabated, urgent, yet submissive importunity, which involved every element of his soul, and issued in tears and bloody sweat. His life crises were distinctly marked, his life victories all won, in hours of importunate prayer. And the servant is not greater than his Lord.

The Parable of the Importunate Widow is a classic of insistent prayer. We shall do well to refresh our remembrance of it, at this point in our study:

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man; and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, "Avenge me of my adversary" And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily

This parable stresses the central truth of importunate prayer. The widow presses her case till the unjust judge yields. If this parable does not teach the necessity for importunity, it has neither point nor instruction in it. Take this one thought away, and you have nothing left worth recording. Beyond all cavil, Christ intended it to stand as an evidence of the need that exists, for insistent prayer.

We have the same teaching emphasized in the incident of the Syrophenician woman, who came to Jesus on behalf of her daughter. Here, importunity is demonstrated, not as a stark impertinence, but as with the persuasive characteristics of humility, sincerity, and fervency. We are given a glimpse of a woman's clinging faith a woman's bitter grief, and a woman's spiritual insight. The master went over into that Sidonian country in order that this truth might be mirrored for all time-there is no plea so efficacious as importunate prayer, and none to which God surrenders himself so fully and so freely.

The importunity of this distressed mother, won her the victory, and materialized her request. Yet instead of being an offense to the Savior, it drew from him a word of wonder, and glad surprise. "O woman, great is thy faith! Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt."

He prays not at all, who does not press his plea. Cold prayers have no claim on heaven, and no hearing in the courts above. Fire is the life of prayer, and heaven is reached by flaming importunity rising in an ascending scale.

Reverting to the case of the importunate widow, we see that her widowhood, her friendlessness, and her weakness counted for nothing with the unjust judge. Importunity was everything. "Because this widow troubleth me," he said, "I will avenge her speedily, lest she weary me." Solely because the widow imposed upon the time and attention of the unjust judge, her case was won.

God waits patiently as, day and night, his elect cry unto him. He is moved by their requests a thousand times more than was this unjust judge. A limit is set to his tarrying, by the importunate praying of his people, and the answer richly given. God finds faith in his praying child-the faith which stays and cries-and he honors it by permitting its further exercise, to the end that it is strengthened and enriched. Then he rewards it by granting the burden of its plea, in plenitude and finality.

The case of the Syrophenician woman previously referred to is a notable instance of successful importunity, one which is eminently encouraging to all who would pray successfully. It was a remarkable instance of insistence and perseverance to ultimate victory, in the face of almost insuperable obstacles and hindrances. But the woman surmounted them all by heroic faith and persistent spirit that were as remarkable as they were successful. Jesus had gone over into her country, "and would have no man know it." But she breaks through his purpose, violates his privacy, attracts his attention, and pours out to him a

poignant appeal of need and faith. Her heart was in her prayer.

At first, Jesus appears to pay no attention to her agony, and ignores her cry for relief. He gives her neither eye, nor ear, nor word. Silence, deep and chilling, greets her impassioned cry. But she is not turned aside, nor disheartened. She holds on. The disciples, offended at her unseemly clamor, intercede for her, but are silenced by the Lord's declaring that the woman is entirely outside the scope of his mission and his ministry.

But neither the failure of the disciples to gain her a hearing nor the knowledge despairing in its very nature—that she is barred from the benefits of his mission, daunt her, and serve only to lend intensity and increased boldness to her approach to Christ. She came closer, cutting her prayer in twain, and falling at his feet, worshiping him, and making her daughter's case her own cries, with pointed brevity "Lord, help me!" This last cry won her case; her daughter was healed in the selfsame hour. Hopeful, urgent, and unwearied, she stays near the master, insisting and praying until the answer is given. What a study in importunity, in earnestness, in persistence, promoted and propelled under conditions which would have disheartened any but an heroic, a constant soul.

In these parables of importunate praying, our Lord sets forth, for our information and encouragement, the serious difficulties which stand in the way of prayer. At the same time he teaches that importunity conquers all untoward circumstances and gets to itself a victory over a whole host of hindrances. He teaches, moreover, that an answer to prayer is conditional upon the amount of faith that goes to the petition. To test this, he delays the answer. The superficial prayer subsides into silence, when the answer is delayed. But the man of prayer hangs on, and on. The Lord recognizes and honors his faith, and gives him a rich and abundant answer to his faith-evidencing, importunate prayer.

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