

5 Books to Recover the Priority of Prayer in an Age of Pragmatism

by Virginia Orton

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In an age of distraction, governed by the pragmatic principle 'whatever works is right', what place does prayer have in our personal and church life? Is it really that important? Shouldn't we just get on with the 'real' work of the church; whether in personal and familial living, church equipping and programming, or cultural engagement and transformation?

Luther once said: "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." Clearly 'busyness' is not unique to our time nor is it an excuse for prayerlessness. It is also clear that prayer is not a retreat from our responsibilities in the affairs of life, rather it is necessary for our effective engagement in them. As Rushdoony taught, "Prayer is not a substitute for action but its accompaniment." Prayer, in accord with God's revealed will, is the divinely appointed means that releases God to work in human affairs, overturning obstacles and changing circumstances to advance his earth purpose.

As the recognition that all power and authority belongs to God, prayer runs counter to the wisdom of the world – with its proud exaltation of human strength and ingenuity – to instead acknowledge creaturely dependence upon God in all things, giving him his proper place. Prayerlessness, then, is not ultimately a problem of busyness. It is a problem of the heart: a denial of God's ultimacy and an assertion, whether consciously or unconsciously, of our self-sufficiency.

However, our weapons to advance the kingdom of God are not of this world (2 Cor 10:4-5). Thus E. M. Bounds avers "When prayer fails, the world prevails." Today worldly wisdom not only prevails in the culture, with its faith in man's ultimacy, but it also prevails in the church. A self-sufficient church, enamoured more with the expediency of its growth-oriented methodologies than faithful obedience to God's Word in prayer, has led to its consequent ineffectuality and irrelevance. No amount of church equipping, programming or cultural engagement will be effectual in terms of God and his kingdom without the church first turning from its self-sufficiency to surrender to the Sovereign Lord, discovering its power on its knees.

If we want to see spiritual renewal and reformation in our personal, familial, ecclesial and cultural lives, unremitting faith-enlivened prayer needs to be recovered as the priority and privilege of God's people, rendering to God his proper place in the life of the church. These 5 books serve this end.

The Weapon of Prayer: A Study In Christian Warfare & Purpose in Prayer, E. M. Bounds

E. M. Bounds offered perhaps a more profound understanding of prayer than any other contemporary Christian thinker. His classic books on the personal communication with God explore how prayer must come from the whole being and strengthens faith in Christian lives. It is through prayer that we share our thoughts and desires our father God. Doing good works, communion, church activities and the like, do not and should not replace prayer.

Prayer must be a priority in our lives. Bounds encourages every believer to open infinite resources and possibilities by living a life of purposeful prayer.

Prayer Changes Things: Curing Timid Piety, Andrew Sandlin

One striking difference between our Christian forebears and us is their repeated emphasis on prayer and our comparative de-emphasis of it. They prayed frequently and fervently. We pray infrequently and languidly. They called prayer meetings. We call staff meetings. They had revival and reformation. We have apathy and apostasy.

A leading reason for these distinctions is that they were inclined to believe what God said about prayer. We are often less

confident in God's word when it comes to his promises about prayer. A blunter way to say this is: we commit the sin of unbelief. Prayer changes things. When we pray, we are asking God to change things. And when he answers our prayer, he does change things. This brings us to a most telling fact that we don't often consider: if we are perfectly willing to accept the way things are as God's unchangeable will, we will never be people of prayer.

A Guide to Fervent Prayer, Arthur Pink

At one time or another we all get the feeling that our prayer time has lost its edge...become uninspired and burdensome. Arthur Pink's *A Guide to Fervent Prayer* will help revitalize your prayer life through reflections of the prayers of the apostles. "How blessed it is to hear some aged saint, who has long walked with God and enjoyed intimate communion with Him, pouring out his heart before Him in adoration and supplication. But how much more blessed should we esteem it could we have listened to the utterances of those who accompanied with Christ in person during the days when He tabernacled in this scene. And if one of the apostles were still here upon earth what a high privilege we should deem it to hear him engage in prayer!"

The Power of Prayer in a Believer's Life, Charles Spurgeon

Considered by his peers then and now as "The Prince of Preachers," Charles Spurgeon built London's Metropolitan Tabernacle into the world's largest independent congregation during the nineteenth century. While many factors have been highlighted that help explain the effectiveness of Spurgeon's preaching, the foremost secret that empowered Charles Spurgeon was his devotion to prayer. When people would walk through the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Spurgeon would take them to the basement prayer room where people were always on their knees interceding for the church. Then Spurgeon would declare, "Here is the powerhouse of this church." That statement is backed by the amazing number of sermons that Spurgeon preached on prayer.

Spurgeon was a great believer and teacher in passionate, Holy Spirit-directed prayer. His word pictures of the majestic throne of grace that God calls believers to be privileged to come before is well worth the price of the book alone. You will be inspired and challenged in your prayer life, especially if you experience struggles in prayer.

The Ministry of Intercession: A Plea for More Prayer, Andrew Murray

In this follow-up to his earlier book on prayer, [With Christ In the School of Prayer](#), Andrew Murray explores the idea that Christ actually meant prayer to be the great power by which His Church should do its work, and that the neglect of prayer is the great reason the Church does not have greater power over the masses in so-called Christian and non-Christian countries. Murray is convinced that, "A life abiding in Christ and filled with the Spirit, a life entirely given up as a branch for the work of the vine, has the power to claim these promises and to pray the effectual prayer that availeth much."

If you need any reason why you should pray more, or if you want reassurance that your prayers will be answered accordingly, this is the book for you. Complete with Christian truths and an accompanying 31-day prayer guide, Murray hits another home-run with this book on prayer that will cultivate a deeper desire for communion with God.

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