

## PRAYER AND TRUST

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By E.M.Bounds

“One evening I left my office in New York, with a bitterly cold wind in my face. I had with me, (as I thought) my thick, warm muffler, but when I proceeded to button-up against the storm, I found that it was gone. I turned back, looked along the streets, searched my office, but in vain. I realized, then, that I must have dropped it, and prayed God that I might find it; for such was the state of the weather, that it would be running a great risk to proceed without it. I looked, again, up and down the surrounding streets, but without success. Suddenly, I saw a man on the opposite side of the road holding out something in his hand. I crossed over and asked him if that were my muffler? He handed it to me saying, ‘It was blown to me by the wind.’ He who rides upon the storm, had used the wind as a means of answering prayer.” WILLIAM HORST.

Prayer does not stand alone. It is not an isolated duty and independent principle. It lives in association with other Christian duties, is wedded to other principles, is a partner with other graces. But to faith, prayer is indissolubly joined. Faith gives it colour and tone, shapes its character, and secures its results.

Trust is faith become absolute, ratified, consummated. There is, when all is said and done, a sort of venture in faith and its exercise. But trust is firm belief, it is faith in full flower. Trust is a conscious act, a fact of which we are sensible. According to the Scriptural concept it is the eye of the new-born soul, and the ear of the renewed soul. It is the feeling of the soul, the spiritual eye, the ear, the taste, the feeling—these one and all have to do with trust. How luminous, how distinct, how conscious, how powerful, and more than all, how Scriptural is such a trust! How different from many forms of modern belief, so feeble, dry, and cold! These new phases of belief bring no consciousness of their presence, no “Joy unspeakable and full of glory” results from their exercise. They are, for the most part, adventures in the peradventures of the soul. There is no safe, sure trust in anything. The whole transaction takes place in the realm of Maybe and Perhaps.

Trust like life, is feeling, though much more than feeling. An unfelt life is a contradiction; an unfelt trust is a misnomer, a delusion, a contradiction. Trust is the most felt of all attributes. It is all feeling, and it works only by love. An unfelt love is as impossible as an unfelt trust. The trust of which we are now speaking is a conviction. An unfelt conviction? How absurd!

Trust sees God doing things here and now. Yea, more. It rises to a lofty eminence, and looking into the invisible and the eternal, realizes that God has done things, and regards them as being already done. Trust brings eternity into the annals and happenings of time, transmutes the substance of hope into the reality of fruition, and changes promise into present possession. We know when we trust just as we know when we see, just as we are conscious of our sense of touch. Trust sees, receives, holds. Trust is its own witness. Yet, quite often, faith is too weak to obtain God’s greatest good, immediately; so it has to wait in loving, strong, prayerful, pressing obedience, until it grows in strength, and is able to bring down the eternal, into the realms of experience and time.

To this point, trust masses all its forces. Here it holds. And in the struggle, trust’s grasp becomes mightier, and grasps, for itself, all that God has done for it in His eternal wisdom and plenitude of grace. In the matter of waiting in prayer, mightiest prayer, faith rises to its highest plane and becomes indeed the gift of God. It becomes the blessed disposition and expression of the soul which is secured by a constant intercourse with, and unwearied application to God. Jesus Christ clearly taught that faith was the condition on which prayer was answered. When our Lord had cursed the fig-tree, the disciples were much surprised that its withering had actually taken place, and their remarks indicated their incredulity. It was then that Jesus said to them, “Have faith in God.”

“For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore, I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Trust grows nowhere so readily and richly as in the prayer-chamber. It’s unfolding and development is rapid and wholesome when they are regularly and well kept. When these engagements are hearty and full and free, trust flourishes exceedingly. The eye and presence of God give vigorous life to trust, just as the eye and the presence of the sun make fruit and flower to grow, and all things glad and bright with fuller life.

“Have faith in God,” “Trust in the Lord” form the keynote and foundation of prayer. Primarily, it is not trust in the Word of God, but rather trust in the Person of God. For trust in the Person of God must precede trust in the Word of God. “Ye believe in God, believe also in Me,” is the demand our Lord makes on the personal trust of His disciples. The person of Jesus Christ must be central, to the eye of trust. This great truth Jesus sought to impress upon Martha, when her brother lay dead, in the home at Bethany. Martha asserted her belief in the fact of the resurrection of her brother: “Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus lifts her trust clear above the mere fact of the resurrection, to His own Person, by saying: “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me, shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” Trust, in an historical fact or in a mere record may be a very passive thing, but trust in a person vitalizes the quality, fructifies it, informs it with love. The trust which informs prayer centres in a Person.

Trust goes even further than this. The trust which inspires our prayer must be not only trust in the Person of God, and of Christ, but in their ability and willingness to grant the thing prayed for. It is not only, “Trust, ye, in the Lord,” but, also, “for in the Lord Jehovah, is everlasting strength.” The trust which our Lord taught as a condition of effectual prayer, is not of the head, but of the heart. It is trust which “doubteth not in his heart.” Such trust has the Divine assurance that it shall be honoured with large and satisfying answers. The strong promise of our Lord brings faith down to the present, and counts on a present answer.

Do we believe, without a doubt? When we pray, do we believe, not that we shall receive the things for which we ask on a future day, but that we receive them, then and there? Such is the teaching of this inspiring Scripture. How we need to pray, “Lord, increase our faith,” until doubt be gone, and implicit trust claims the promised blessings, as its very own. This is no easy condition. It is reached only after many a failure, after much praying, after many waitings, after much trial of faith. May our faith so increase until we realize and receive all the fulness there is in that Name which guarantees to do so much.

Our Lord puts trust as the very foundation of praying. The background of prayer is trust. The whole issuance of Christ’s ministry and work was dependent on implicit trust in His Father. The centre of trust is God. Mountains of difficulties, and all other hindrances to prayer are moved out of the way by trust and his virile henchman, faith. When trust is perfect and without doubt, prayer is simply the outstretched hand, ready to receive. Trust perfected, is prayer perfected. Trust looks to receive the thing asked for—and gets it. Trust is not a belief that God can bless, that He will bless, but that He does bless, here and now. Trust always operates in the present tense. Hope looks toward the future. Trust looks to the present. Hope expects. Trust possesses. Trust receives what prayer acquires. So that what prayer needs, at all times, is abiding and abundant trust.

Their lamentable lack of trust and resultant failure of the disciples to do what they were sent out to do, is seen in the case of the lunatic son, who was brought by his father to nine of them while their Master was on the Mount of Transfiguration. A boy, sadly afflicted, was brought to these men to be cured of his malady. They had been commissioned to do this very kind of work. This was a part of their mission. They attempted to cast out the devil from the boy, but had signally failed. The devil was too much for them. They were humiliated at their failure, and filled with shame, while their enemies were

in triumph. Amid the confusion incident to failure Jesus draws near. He is informed of the circumstances, and told of the conditions connected therewith.

Here is the succeeding account: "Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him and the child was cured from that very hour. And when He was come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And He said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting."

Wherein lay the difficulty with these men? They had been lax in cultivating their faith by prayer and, as a consequence, their trust utterly failed. They trusted not God, nor Christ, nor the authenticity of His mission, or their own. So has it been many a time since, in many a crisis in the Church of God. Failure has resulted from a lack of trust, or from a weakness of faith, and this, in turn, from a lack of prayerfulness. Many a failure in revival efforts has been traceable to the same cause. Faith had not been nurtured and made powerful by prayer. Neglect of the inner chamber is the solution of most spiritual failure. And this is as true of our personal struggles with the devil as was the case when we went forth to attempt to cast out devils. To be much on our knees in private communion with God is the only surety that we shall have Him with us either in our personal struggles, or in our efforts to convert sinners.

Everywhere, in the approaches of the people to Him, our Lord put trust in Him, and the divinity of His mission, in the forefront. He gave no definition of trust, and He furnishes no theological discussion of, or analysis of it; for He knew that men would see what faith was by what faith did; and from its free exercise trust grew up, spontaneously, in His presence. It was the product of His work, His power and His Person. These furnished and created an atmosphere most favourable for its exercise and development. Trust is altogether too splendidly simple for verbal definition; too hearty and spontaneous for theological terminology. The very simplicity of trust is that which staggers many people. They look away for some great thing to come to pass, while all the time "the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart."

When the saddening news of his daughter's death was brought to Jairus our Lord interposed: "Be not afraid," He said calmly, "only believe." To the woman with the issue of blood, who stood tremblingly before Him, He said: "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague." As the two blind men followed Him, pressing their way into the house, He said: "According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened." When the paralytic was let down through the roof of the house, where Jesus was teaching, and placed before Him by four of his friends, it is recorded after this fashion: "And Jesus seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy: Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."

When Jesus dismissed the centurion whose servant was seriously ill, and who had come to Jesus with the prayer that He speak the healing word, without even going to his house, He did it in the manner following: "And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour." When the poor leper fell at the feet of Jesus and cried out for relief, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," Jesus immediately granted his request, and the man glorified Him with a loud voice. Then Jesus said unto him, "Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole."

The Syrophenician woman came to Jesus with the case of her afflicted daughter, making the case her own, with the prayer, "Lord, help me," making a fearful and heroic struggle. Jesus honours her faith and prayer, saying: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." After the disciples had utterly failed to cast the devil out of the epileptic boy, the father of the stricken lad came to Jesus with the plaintive and almost despairing cry, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us." But Jesus replied, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

Blind Bartimaeus sitting by the wayside, hears our Lord as He passes by, and cries out pitifully and almost despairingly, “Jesus, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.” The keen ears of our Lord immediately catch the sound of prayer, and He says to the beggar: “Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.” To the weeping, penitent woman, washing His feet with her tears and wiping them with the hair of her head, Jesus speaks cheering, soul-comforting words: “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” One day Jesus healed ten lepers at one time, in answer to their united prayer, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us,” and He told them to go and show themselves to the priests. “And it came to pass as they went, they were cleansed.”