

The Essentials of Prayer
by E. M. Bounds

Chapter 3

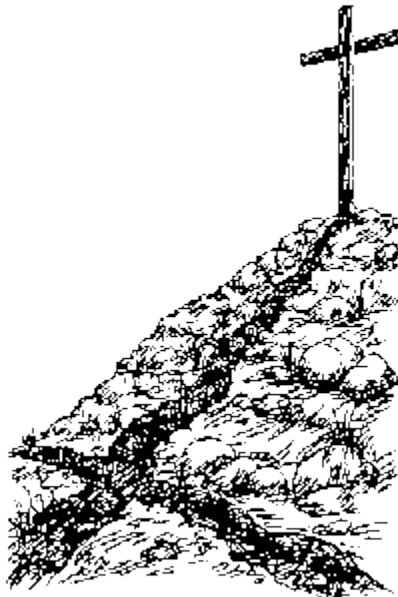
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Bounds

Essentials of Prayer

**Rock Hill
Baptist Church**

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Since the Lord Jesus called me into the ministry, prayer has been such a joy to me. Prayer reminds me that – ultimately – God is in control of everything in our lives. When a pastor enters a hospital room he enters prepared to pray. When he enters a home, he enters prepared to pray. No sermon has worth unless it is prayed over. No meeting of the church has Christ at its center unless it is bathed in prayer.

If we want to grow as a church we must be consistent in prayer. My prayers alone will not make Rock Hill a shining light in this community and in this world. We must pray together, and pray for one another. Without prayer and Bible study we are no more than a clubhouse – with prayer and ministry of the Word of God, we are the very Bride of Christ. Prayer transforms. Pray with Sherry and I as we grow at Rock Hill Baptist Church.

Throughout this study we will look at Dr. E.M. Bounds sixth book on prayer called “The Essentials of Prayer”. All comments that I make will be boxed to separate them from Dr. Bounds' original work. ... Brother David

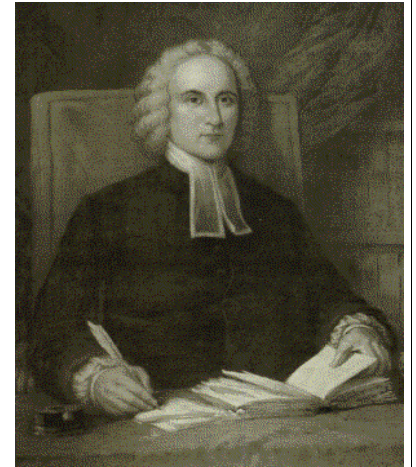
III. PRAYER AND DEVOTION

“Once as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly had been to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God. As near as I can judge, this continued about an hour; and kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud.. I felt an ardency of soul to be what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to love Him with a holy and pure love; to serve and follow Him; to be perfectly sanctified and made pure with a divine and heavenly purity.”—Jonathan Edwards

Devotion has a religious signification. The root of devotion is to devote to a sacred use. So that devotion in its true sense has to do with religious worship. It stands **intimately connected with true prayer**. Devotion is the particular frame of mind found in one entirely devoted to God. It is the **spirit of reverence, of awe, of godly fear**. It is a state of heart which appears before God in prayer and worship. It is foreign to everything like lightness of spirit, and is **opposed to levity and noise and bluster**. Devotion dwells in the realm of

quietness and is still before God. It is serious, thoughtful, meditative.

Who was Jonathan Edwards? Jonathan Edwards was one of the most significant religious thinkers in American history. Born October 5, 1703, in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony, Edwards was a child prodigy. At the age of ten he wrote an essay on the nature of the soul. At 13 he entered the Collegiate School of Connecticut (now Yale University) and he graduated in 1720 as valedictorian of his class. After two additional years of study in theology at Yale, he preached for eight months in a New York church and then returned to Yale as a college tutor, studying, at the same time, for his master's degree. He was ordained in 1727 and received a call to assist his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, pastor of the church at Northampton, Massachusetts Bay Colony, which had one of the largest and wealthiest congregations in the colony. In 1740 the British evangelist **George Whitefield** visited Edwards. Together, the two men started a revival movement that became known as **the Great Awakening** and developed into a religious frenzy engulfing all New England. One of Edwards's sermons, "**Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God**," caused his congregation to rise weeping and moaning from their seats.



Devotion belongs to the inner life and lives in the closet, but also appears in the public services of the sanctuary. It is a part of the very spirit of true

worship, and is of the nature of the spirit of prayer.

Devotion belongs to the devout man, whose thoughts and feelings are devoted to God. Such a man has a **mind given up wholly to religion, and possesses a strong affection for God** and an ardent love for His house. **Cornelius**^{next page} was “a devout man, one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed always.” “Devout men carried Stephen to his burial.” “One **Ananias**^{next page}, a devout man, according to the law,” was sent unto Saul when he was blind, to tell him what the Lord would have him do. God can wonderfully use such men, for devout men are His chosen agents in carrying forward His plans.

Prayer promotes the spirit of devotion, while devotion is favourable to the best praying. **Devotion furthers prayer and helps to drive prayer home to the object which it seeks.** Prayer thrives in the atmosphere of true devotion. It is easy to pray when in the spirit of devotion. The attitude of mind and the state of heart implied in devotion make prayer effectual in reaching the throne of grace. God dwells where the spirit of devotion resides. All the graces of the Spirit are nourished and grow well in the environment created by

devotion. Indeed, these graces grow nowhere else but here. The absence of a devotional spirit means death to the graces born in a renewed heart. True

Acts 10:1-4 (KJV) "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, {2} A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. {3} He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. {4} And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God."

Acts 22:12-14 (KJV) "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, {13} Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. {14} And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth."

worship finds congeniality in the atmosphere made by a spirit of devotion. While prayer is helpful to devotion, at the same time devotion reacts on prayer, and helps us to pray.

Devotion engages the heart in prayer. It is not an easy task for the lips to try to pray while the heart is absent from it. The charge which God at one time made against His ancient Israel was, that they

honoured Him with their lips while their hearts were far from Him.

Isaiah 29:13-15 (KJV) "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: {14} Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. {15} Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?"

The very essence of prayer is the spirit of devotion. Without devotion prayer is an empty form, a vain round of words. Sad to say, much of this kind of prayer prevails, today, in the Church. This is a busy age, bustling and active, and this bustling spirit has invaded the Church of God. Its religious performances are many. The Church works at religion with the order, precision and force of real machinery. But too often it works with the heartlessness of the machine. There is much of the treadmill movement in our ceaseless round and routine of religious doings. We pray without praying. We sing without singing with the Spirit and the understanding. We have music without the praise of God being in it, or near it. We go to Church by habit, and come home all too gladly when the benediction is pronounced. We

read our accustomed chapter in the Bible, and feel

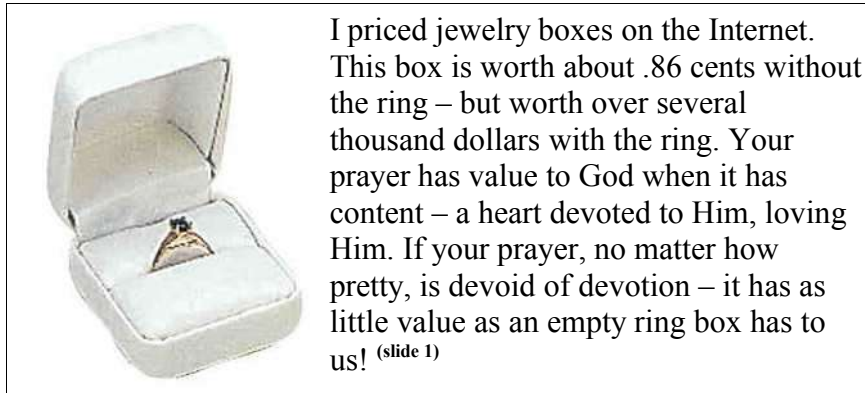
1 Corinthians 14:15 (KJV) "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also."

quite relieved when the task is done. We say our prayers by rote, as a schoolboy recites his lesson, and are not sorry when the Amen is uttered.

Religion has to do with everything but our hearts. It engages our hands and feet, it takes hold of our voices, it lays its hands on our money, it affects even the postures of our bodies, but it does not take hold of our affections, our desires, our zeal, and make us serious, desperately in earnest, and cause us to be quiet and worshipful in the presence of God. Social affinities attract us to the house of God, not the spirit of the occasion.

Church membership keeps us after a fashion decent in outward conduct and with some shadow of loyalty to our baptismal vows, but the heart is not in the thing. It remains cold, formal, and unimpressed amid all this outward performance, while we give ourselves over to self-congratulation that we are doing wonderfully well religiously.

Why all these sad defects in our piety? Why this modern perversion of the true nature of the religion of Jesus Christ? Why is the modern type of religion so much like a jewel-case, with the precious jewels gone? Why so much of this handling religion with the hands, often not too



clean or unsoiled, and so little of it felt in the heart and witnessed in the life?

The great lack of modern religion is the spirit of devotion. We hear sermons in the same spirit with which we listen to a lecture or hear a speech. We visit the house of God just as if it were a common place, on a level with the theatre, the lecture-room or the forum. We look upon the minister of God not as the divinely-called man of God, but merely as a sort of public speaker, on a plane with the politician, the lawyer, or the average speech maker, or the lecturer. Oh, how the spirit of true

and genuine devotion would radically change all this for the better! We handle sacred things just as if they were the things of the world. Even the sacrament of the Lord's Supper becomes a mere religious performance, no preparation for it before-hand, and no meditation and prayer afterward. Even the sacrament of Baptism has lost much of its solemnity, and degenerated into a mere form, with nothing specially in it.

We need the spirit of devotion, not only to salt our secularities, but to make praying real prayers. We need to put the spirit of devotion into Monday's business as well as in Sunday's worship. We need the spirit of devotion, to recollect always the presence of God, to be always doing the will of God, to direct all things always to the glory of God.

The spirit of devotion puts God in all things. It puts God not merely in our praying and Church going, but in all the concerns of life. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The spirit of devotion makes the common things of earth sacred, and the little things great. With this spirit of devotion, we go to business on Monday directed by the very same influence, and inspired by the same

2 Samuel 6:3-15 (KJV) "And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. {4} And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. {5} And David and all the house

Handle
The
Things Of
God
Right!



of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. {6} And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, **Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.** {7} And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. {8} And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah to this day. {9} And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and said, How shall the ark of the LORD come to me? {10} So David would not remove the ark of the LORD unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obbedom the Gittite. {11} And the ark of the LORD continued in the house of Obbedom the Gittite three months: and the LORD blessed Obbedom, and all his household. {12} And it was told king David, saying, The LORD hath blessed the house of Obbedom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the (next page)

house of Obbedom into the city of David with gladness. {13} And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings. {14} And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. {15} So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet."

Does it matter if we treat sacred things like we treat worldly things? Ask King David, who sought to move the Ark of the Covenant in an improper way. The ark was designed to be moved by four men, each holding the end of a pole. This way the Ark was never touched by soiled or undedicated hands. Improper handling caused the death of Uzzah. How does improper handling of God's things – like prayer – effect a Church? (slide 1)

influences by which we went to Church on Sunday. The spirit of devotion makes a Sabbath out of Saturday, and transforms the shop and the office into a temple of God.

The spirit of devotion removes religion from being a thin veneer, and puts it into the very life and being of our souls. With it **religion** ceases to be doing a mere work, and **becomes a heart, sending its rich blood through every artery and beating with the pulsations of vigorous and radiant life.**

The spirit of devotion is not merely the aroma of religion, but the stalk and stem on which religion
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grows. It is the salt which penetrates and makes savoury all religious acts. It is the sugar which sweetens duty, self-denial and sacrifice. It is the bright colouring which relieves the dullness of religious performances. It dispels frivolity and drives away all skin-deep forms of worship, and

Ephesians 5:14-17 (NASB) "For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on

Redeeming The Time

you." {15} **Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, {16} making the most of your time, because the days are evil. {17} So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."**

One of the greatest of all hindrances to prayer and worship is **time**. We sit in front of a television without a care in the world. We go out to eat and enjoy a leisurely meal. We visit and talk for hours. We play games and watch hours of children and grandchildren playing after school sports. Is there anything wrong with this? No, absolutely not. God wants us to enjoy ourselves. Where the error comes in is when we devote large volumes of time to all areas of our lives *except to God*. Worshipers come to Church and watch the clock, just as we used to watch the clock when we were kids in school. Some worshipers drift, focusing on what they will be doing after worship services. Other worshipers have allotted little time to God's activities, many times devoting only an hour or less to God each week. What will God say to us when we reach eternity about how we redeemed our time?

makes worship a serious and deep-seated service, impregnating body, soul and spirit with its

heavenly infusion. Let us ask in all seriousness, has this highest angel of heaven, this heavenly spirit of devotion, this brightest and best angel of earth, left us? When the angel of devotion has gone, the angel of prayer has lost its wings, and it becomes a deformed and loveless thing.

The ardour of devotion is in prayer. In **Revelation 4:8**, we read: **"And they rest not day nor night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."** The inspiration and centre of their rapturous devotion is the holiness of God. That holiness of God claims their attention, inflames their devotion. There is nothing cold, nothing dull, nothing wearisome about them or their heavenly worship. **"They rest not day nor night."** What zeal! What unfainting ardour and ceaseless rapture! The ministry of prayer, if it be anything worthy of the name, is a ministry of ardour, a ministry of unwearied and intense longing after God and after His holiness.

The spirit of devotion pervades the saints in heaven and characterizes the worship of heaven's angelic intelligences. No devotionless creatures are in that heavenly world God is there, and His very presence begets the spirit of reverence, of

awe, and of filial fear. If we would be partakers with them after death, we must first learn the spirit of devotion on earth before we get there.

These living creatures in their restless, tireless, attitude after God, and their rapt devotion to His holiness, are the perfect symbols and illustrations of true prayer and its ardour. **Prayer must be aflame. Its ardour must consume.** Prayer without fervour is as a sun without light or heat, or as a flower without beauty or fragrance. A soul devoted to God is a fervent soul, and prayer is the creature of that flame. He only can truly pray who is all aglow for holiness, for God, and for heaven.

Activity is not strength. Work is not zeal. Moving about is not devotion. Activity often is the unrecognised symptom of spiritual weakness. It may be hurtful to piety when made the substitute for real devotion in worship. The colt is much more active than its mother, but she is the wheel-horse of the team, pulling the load without noise or bluster or show. **The child is more active than the father, who may be bearing the rule and burdens of an empire on his heart and shoulders. Enthusiasm is more active than faith, though it cannot remove mountains** nor call into action any of the omnipotent forces which faith can command.

A **feeble, lively, showy religious activity may spring from many causes.** There is much running around, much stirring about, much going here and there, in present-day Church life, but sad to say, the **spirit of genuine, heartfelt devotion is strangely lacking.** If there be real spiritual life, a deep-toned activity will spring from it. But it is an activity springing from strength and not from weakness. It is an activity which has deep roots, many and strong.

In the nature of things, religion must show much of its growth above ground. Much will be seen and be evident to the eye. The flower and fruit of a holy life, abounding in good works, must be seen. It cannot be otherwise. But the surface growth must be based on a vigorous growth of unseen life and hidden roots. Deep down in the renewed nature must the roots of religion go which is seen on the outside. The external must have a deep internal groundwork. There must be much of the invisible and the underground growth, or else the life will be feeble and short-lived and the external growth sickly and fruitless.

In the Book of the prophet Isaiah these words are written:

“They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.” Isaiah 40:31.

My son Michael preached a sermon on this noting the *natural* progression of the text. When you are young you fly about everything. As you age you run, and finally, as you reach an older age, you walk. In all stages of life God gives renewed strength.

This is the genesis of the whole matter of activity and strength of the most energetic, exhaustless and untiring nature. All this is the result of waiting on God.

There may be much of activity induced by drill, created by enthusiasm, the product of the weakness of the flesh, the inspiration of volatile, short-lived forces. Activity is often at the expense of more solid, useful elements, and generally to the total neglect of prayer. **To be too busy with God’s work to commune with God, to be busy with doing Church work without taking time to talk to God about His work, is the highway to backsliding, and many people have walked therein to the hurt of their immortal souls.**

Notwithstanding great activity, great enthusiasm, and much hurrah for the work, the work and the activity will be but blindness without the cultivation and the maturity of the graces of

prayer.



Rock Hill Baptist Church is located between Parsons and Lexington, Tennessee, on Highway 412. Look for our sign! We have services on Wednesdays (Adult, Youth, and children's Bible studies) at 7:00 PM, Sundays at 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM. Rock Hill is a family oriented Bible believing Church - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever! Our Pastor, Brother

David Buffaloe, will answer any questions you have about our Church if you contact him at 731-845-6104, or through his website at bibleteacher.org; or e-mail him by writing: webmaster@bibleteacher.org

