

**TAKING HOLD OF GOD:  
STUDIES ON  
THE NATURE, NEED  
AND POWER OF PRAYER**

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Taking Hold of God: Studies on the Nature, Need and Power of Prayer by Samuel M. Zwemer

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# TAKING HOLD OF GOD

STUDIES ON THE NATURE, NEED AND POWER  
OF PRAYER

*By*

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To  
MY COLLEAGUES IN THE MISSION FIELD  
WHO HAVE BEEN AN INSPIRATION IN THE  
GOODLY FELLOWSHIP OF PRAYER





## FOREWORD

WE believe that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" and that He alone who taught his early disciples can also teach us how to pray. We believe that prayer is a great reality; that prayer changes things; that prayer, if a lost art, is lost only for those who have lost the consciousness of God. Therefore we begin with the Name which is above every name and in the chapters that follow, will strive to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Stradivarius at Cremona is said to have marked every violin he made with the name of Jesus, and his handiwork is still called *Stradivarius del Gesu*. Mozart wrote at the head of his music score, *In nomine Domini*. We cannot believe in prayer or write on prayer unless we believe in God. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

A recent writer in *The Christian Century* (March 13, 1935) under the sarcastic title, "Why Not Use a Prayer-Wheel?" makes light of family prayer and public prayer. He says, "We no longer pray, but go through gestures. There is a decided wane in real belief in the efficacy of prayer." And he accounts for this tragedy in light-hearted fashion as follows :

“Baldly stated: the views about God and the nature of the universe have changed. The element of petition in prayer, however carefully it may be phrased, is a relic of the day when people actually did believe that God intervened directly to aid his friends and discomfit his enemies. Prayer was a specific means to a specific end.

“Our changed ideas of God make it impossible for us to believe in the efficacy of our prayers as we once did. For a few elect souls there may be no difficulty. They may be able to adjust themselves to relationships with this nebulous personality, Eternal Goodness, Essence of Life, or however it may be designated; the majority of men, I believe, only fool themselves in thinking they can do it.

“Accordingly, as I see it, prayer in the conventional sense of the word is doomed as surely as burnt sacrifice and the Juggernaut car. Private meditation; a fresh taking stock of life; thanksgiving for the kindnesses we have received in not always reaping what we have sowed, moving us to a more charitable attitude toward those who have had few buffers between them and failure and disgrace—these, yes. But the expectation of getting something for nothing, or the readiness to request someone else to do what we know we ourselves ought to do—for this the knell has sounded.”

This is Liberalism at its worst. He that cometh to God must believe that *He is*. The saints of the Old and

New Testament lived in a different atmosphere. They had a unique sense of the presence of God. Heaven was not far from earth. Prayer is an attitude as well as a practice. It is impossible in a godless universe or to a Christless Christianity. As a French writer puts it, "The whole practice of the New Testament and the implications of the Old Testament are that the Christian life is a perpetual communion with God sustained by prayer as frequent as possible." There is a world view in which prayer is impossible or even absurd, but this is not the world view of humanity at large or down the ages. The universality of prayer, its antiquity, its nature, its mystery, and its history—all give proof that prayer, in the words of Gladstone, "is the highest expression of the human intellect."

There is no lack of literature on this fine art in the spiritual realm. Our great libraries give extensive bibliographies on prayer. Our hymnologies and liturgies enshrine the prayers of the ages. Our Bible concordances offer an index to the thousands of references to prayer and praise in Scripture. Yet the theme is inexhaustible and we offer these brief studies that follow in the hope that some may find them useful in the school of prayer in which we are all mere learners and there is only One Master. "Lord teach us to pray."

SAMUEL M. ZWEMER.

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