

A PRACTICAL PRIMER ON PRAYER

by

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CHAPTER TWO -

THE KEY TO PRAYER

"We will give ourselves continually to prayer" (Acts 6:4)

HAVING REALIZED that the secret to public prayer is one's private prayer life, let us consider it. What does one do when alone with GOD? Do most Christians even have a quiet time with GOD each day?

No one will ever know the tremendous battles Christians fight to keep their quiet time. People seldom talk about these things. But oh, it is so easy to stop praying and to be too busy to read our Bibles! "What is the difference?" we think, "Who will know?"

As a matter of fact, others will know, because those who pray ask their questions of GOD, while those who neglect prayer are always asking others, "Why did this happen to me?" It takes only a half hour's conversation with a Christian for one with perception to sense that Christian's spiritual condition. **"Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh."**

Some people live a full, rich Christian life, while others who name His name have a meager Christian spirit.

Because keeping one's quiet time with GOD is a battle and is the place where Satan attacks the Christian most frequently, let us consider some reasons for its importance.

Suppose you don't keep your quiet time, what will happen to you? There are many such Christians. GOD doesn't strike them dead. They manage to go along in the same old rut. That's it - they go along in the same old rut. They become second-rate, third-rate, tenth-rate Christians.

They are Christians with no testimony, Christians who make the non-believer say, "If he's a Christian, I don't want to be one." Don't you want to be a better testimony than that for your Master?

This is a day and age when we hear a good deal about people who are frustrated and who have inferiority complexes. Unfortunately, there are Christians who are frustrated and who also have complexes. They are the ones who do not keep their quiet time, for if they faithfully knelt in His presence, He would give them an abundant life - not in things, nor in the world - but in Himself.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37, 38).

He would show them that having His love is alone sufficient to keep any of His children from feeling inferior. **"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"** (Philippians 4:13).

Nor is the Christian who neglects his quiet time prepared when trouble comes. It comes to all of us, and at best it is hard to endure; but the Christian without the devotional habit not only suffers but also is confused and bewildered. Martin Luther said, "Were it not for tribulation in my life, I should not understand Scripture"; but most of us feel, "Were it not for Scripture, I should not understand trouble."

Physical health and spiritual health are alike in many ways. It is easier to fight a cold if you are healthy, and it is easier to fight temptation if you are spiritually up to par. And the way to keep spiritually fit is by means of that daily dozen with the Bible and prayer.

It isn't easy for the Christian to live up to the highest. He has to look often into His Master's face to keep his aspirations up to the highest notch. Too many times when the desire of the flesh is strong, when the sacrifice of tithing seems very great, when the spirit rebels at being meek, only the daily reading of the Scripture will put steel into the Christian's consecration.

It is important to keep our quiet time, too, because GOD needs leaders. There is much work to be done by those who will serve Him, not only in the pulpit or on the mission field, but also in your block. Wherever you are, GOD placed you there, making you responsible for that portion of **"the field."**

We are to be privileged to throw our crowns at His feet; therefore, it would be wonderful to have some to throw. But how can we have any if we have not kept our quiet time and thus have not known what He would have us do and say to earn those crowns?

It is surprisingly easy to skip one's quiet time.

Just stay up a little later at night, press a dress you hadn't planned to wear, or spend your time on the telephone. GOD will not compel you to grow spiritually. Some children have to be taught to eat, and some Christians have to be taught to eat spiritual food. **"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts"** (Jeremiah 15:16).

Once you are convinced that it is a matter of spiritual life or death that you have your devotions - then your problem is time. Believe me, you will never find the time; you will have to take the time. It has been said: "If you are too busy to pray, you are too busy!"

You and I think that we are busy. Let us consider some men who were really busy and see if they had time to be quiet before GOD.

John Wesley preached 44,000 sermons in his lifetime. He traveled on horseback and by carriage

290,000 miles. He wrote an English dictionary; prepared grammars in Hebrew, Latin, Greek, French and English; wrote several volumes on theology, history, philosophy and medicine; and edited a fifty-volume set of books. Yet he had time for daily Bible study.

For two years while General Sir William Dobbie was Governor of Malta, he was under almost continuous bombing by a nearby powerful enemy with plenty of bombs; but though he was busy helping with the wounded, he also held Bible classes nightly for his officers and men.

Surely there was no one busier than General Douglas MacArthur, head of the army of occupation in Japan; yet he said: "However tired I may be, I never go to bed without reading a portion of this book - the Bible."

Luther is said to have spent three hours a day in prayer. The busier he was, the more time he felt he had to spend with GOD.

We human beings do the things which we think are important. If we think it important that we look attractive to others, we devote time to our bodies. If we think it is important to spend time with GOD, we will do it. JESUS said, "**Seek ye first the kingdom of God.**" If we truly want to obey Him, we will find time to pray first.

Those who are not Christians but who have succeeded in other lines have learned the necessity of putting first things first. A noted young concert artist was asked the secret of her mastery of the violin.

"Planned neglect," she replied and then explained: "There were many things which used to demand my time. When I went to my room after breakfast, I made my bed, straightened the room, I dusted, and did whatever seemed necessary. When I finished my work, I turned to my violin practice. That system failed, however, to accomplish what I should on the violin, so I reversed things. I deliberately planned to neglect everything else until my practice period was complete. And that program of planned neglect is the secret of my success."

The best time - truly, the only time for me - to have our worship period is in the morning. Can you give less than the freshest, brightest moments to GOD? Shouldn't we all say with the psalmist, "**My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up**" (Psalm 5:3)?

I think the custom of saying our prayers at night arose from the fact that as children most of us were taught to say the "Now I lay me" prayer before we went to sleep. It has become a habit to many people. I know several worldly, sinful people who still repeat the Lord's prayer or some childhood prayer before they go to sleep.

Let me tell you of Kohila, a young Hindu nurse who worked in an orphanage. "Beware of saying 'I have no time to read my Bible and pray'; but rather say, 'I have not bothered to discipline myself to do those things,'" was what she wrote on a piece of paper and hung over the sink where she washed bottles for the nursery. She had to rise at five-thirty in the morning to read her Bible and pray. If she could do that, so, can we! "Whatever is your best time in the day, give that to communion with GOD," was the advice of Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission,

to one of the first women missionaries to China. No one ever woke up in a Chinese inn where Hudson Taylor was but that he was already awake and praying.

The men GOD has used have always given their first moments to Him. Sunrise always found David Livingstone on his knees before GOD. He even died on his knees while praying in the heart of Africa.

Jewelers say that the best time to wind a watch is in the morning. It is certainly the best time to wind one's life by prayer. In the morning we ask the Lord's blessing before we do things instead of after. We then face the problems of the day with a quieter, more peaceful spirit if we rise early enough to have our devotion first.

If you find, however, that when you tumble out of bed and on your knees, you go back to sleep, then you might pray standing up until you are sure you are fully awake.

Or try George Mueller's system. He dressed before he had his devotions. You will remember George Mueller as the Englishman from the last century who supported hundreds of orphans and many missionaries on faith.

The housewife may not be free to have her devotions until the door has closed behind the last person leaving the house; but then, despite the household tasks which clamor for her attention, she can with practice shut her eyes to them and seek God first.

Small children can be placed in a play-pen or, if older, can be trained to play quietly at this time. One woman used to put her apron over her head when she prayed so that the children would understand not to disturb her.

Frankly, the easiest way to get up in the morning is to go to bed early at night.

When Howard Guinness, missionary to China, decided, "From today the central thing in my life shall be prayer," he realized he would have to go to bed earlier than was his custom. He was a student at that time and often stayed up late studying. To solve his problem, he first decided upon a rising hour. Then, working back counterclockwise to allow for the required hours of sleep, he determined the hour when he must close his books and go to bed. That schedule became the habit of his life.

What keeps you up late, anyway? A boy friend? A book? Whatever it is, you have unconsciously put that thing ahead of the Lord. Could you stay up late if you knew that by so doing you would miss seeing someone you loved greatly? No. Then pray that GOD will give you a great love for Himself.

Meanwhile, if you have trouble getting up, here is a sure cure. Promise yourself, as did Leland Wang, noted and loved Chinese evangelist, "No Bible, no breakfast!" After you have gone without breakfast a couple of times, you will get up in time for both.

And on that morning when you have to get up exceptionally early to meet a train, or if you oversleep, at least do this much: from a "Promise Box" or other collection of cards with verses printed on them, select a verse, put it in the mirror frame, and glance at it many times as you

dress. It will turn your thoughts heavenward.

The most important thing is that you stick to whatever time you decide upon as best for you. **"It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful"** (I Corinthians 4:2).

Devotions may take a long time or a short time. Five minutes, a half hour, two hours. As a spark of life may be sustained upon a meager diet, so many a dwarfed spiritual life be sustained upon skimpy spiritual food. As more food gives one greater energy, so more time spent with the Lord gives one greater spiritual energy. Try taking a mental snapshot of yourself to decide how much strength your body would have if you ate only as often as you read GOD's Word.

All too often when we go into our prayer closets, our subconscious attitude is, "Lord, I have five minutes to spare. If Thou hast anything to say to me, say it quickly." We think we have so much to do!

GOD knows the value of your time. He knows what else you should or might be doing and exactly how important that thing is. The busier we are and the more valuable our time is the more choice it is to give Him.

"A calm hour with GOD is worth a whole lifetime with man," wrote Robert Murray McCheyne, a young Scottish preacher who was greatly used of GOD. Although he died in his twenty-ninth year, he was recognized as one of the great spiritual leaders of his day. His sermons and notes are still read by Christians to inspire them to a closer walk with GOD.

If you really want to know the Lord, you will have to spend time with Him; that is the key to the quiet time. You have to want to keep it.

The Cry of the Heart

JESUS, we kneel at Thy dear feet,
Because Thou bidst us come;
'Tis there we find a safe retreat,
Thy words will guide us home.

Thy pardoning grace is full and free,
And free Thy boundless love;
There is no other help but Thee,
Our Father, GOD, above!

Remove the pain and guilty fear
From our poor sinful hearts!
O, wipe away each bitter tear,
Thy healing grace impart!

Make us obedient to Thy will,
To shun the world and sin,
Lord, with Thy HOLY SPIRIT fill

Our longing souls within!

When we the cross no longer bear;
When pilgrim life is o'er,
Set free from earthly sin and care,
We'll praise Thee evermore!

- Charlotte Mary She

~ end of chapter 2 ~
