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I suspect I have been allotting habitually too little time to religious exercises as private devotion, religious meditation, Scripture reading, etc. Hence I am lean and cold and hard. God would perhaps prosper me more in spiritual things if I were to be more diligent in using the means of grace. I had better allot more time, say two hours or an hour and a half, to religious exercises daily, and try whether by so doing I cannot preserve a frame of spirit more habitually devotional, a more lively sense of unseen things, a warmer love to God, and a greater degree of hunger and thirst after righteousness, a heart less prone to be soiled with worldly cares, designs, passions, and apprehension and a real undissembled longing for heaven, its pleasures and its purity.--William Wilberforce

"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." The words are the words of our Lord, who not only ever sought to impress upon His followers the urgency and the importance of prayer, but set them an example which they alas have been far too slow to copy.

The always speaks for itself. Prayer is not a meaningless function or duty to be crowded into the busy or the weary ends of the day, and we are not obeying our Lord's command when we content ourselves with a few minutes upon our knees in the morning rush or late at night when the faculties, tired with the tasks of the day, call out for rest. God is always within call, it is true; His ear is ever attentive to the cry of His child, but we can never get to know Him if we use the vehicle of prayer as we use the telephone--for a few words of hurried conversation. Intimacy requires development. We can never know God as it is our privilege to know Him, by brief and fragmentary and unconsidered repetitions of intercessions that are requests for personal favours and nothing more. That is not the way in which we can come into communication with heaven's King. "The goal of prayer is the ear of God," a goal that can only be reached by patient and continued and continuous waiting upon Him, pouring out our heart to Him and permitting Him to speak to us. Only by so doing can we expect to know Him, and as we come to know Him better we shall spend more time in His presence and find that presence a constant and ever-increasing delight.

Always does not mean that we are to neglect the ordinary duties of life; what it means is that the soul which has come into intimate contact with God in the silence of the prayer-chamber is never out of conscious touch with the Father, that the heart is always going out to Him in loving communion, and that the moment the mind is released from the task upon which it is engaged it returns as naturally to God as the bird does to its nest. What a beautiful conception of prayer we get if we regard it in this light, if we view it as a constant fellowship, an unbroken audience with the King. Prayer then loses every vestige of dread which it may once have possessed; we regard it no longer as a duty which must be performed, but rather as a privilege which is to be enjoyed, a rare delight that is always revealing some new beauty.

Thus, when we open our eyes in the morning, our thought instantly mounts heavenward. To many Christians the morning hours are the most precious portion of the day, because they provide the opportunity for the hallowed fellowship that gives the keynote to the day's programme. And what better introduction can there be to the never-ceasing glory and wonder of a new day than to spend it alone with God? It is said that Mr. Moody, at a time when no other place was available, kept his

morning watch in the coal-shed, pouring out his heart to God, and finding in his precious Bible a true "feast of fat things."

George Muller also combined Bible study with prayer in the quiet morning hours. At one time his practice was to give himself to prayer, after having dressed, in the morning. Then his plan underwent a change. As he himself put it: "I saw the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began, therefore, to meditate on the New Testament early in the morning. The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words for the Lord's blessing upon his precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God, searching as it were, into every verse to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word, not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated on, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably thus, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that, though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer."

The study of the Word and prayer go together, and where we find the one truly practised, the other is sure to be seen in close alliance.

But we do not pray always. That is the trouble with so many of us. We need to pray much more than we do and much longer than we do.

Robert Murray McCheyne, gifted and saintly, of whom it was said, that "Whether viewed as a son, a brother, a friend, or a pastor, he was the most faultless and attractive exhibition of the true Christian they had ever seen embodied in a living form," knew what it was to spend much time upon his knees, and he never wearied in urging upon others the joy and the value of holy intercession. "God's children should pray," he said. "They should cry day and night to Him, God hears every one of your cries in the busy hour of the daytime and in the lonely watches of the night." In every way, by preaching, by exhortation when present and by letters when absent, McCheyne emphasised the vital duty of prayer, importunate and unceasing prayer.

In his diary we find this: "In the morning was engaged in preparing the head, then the heart. This has been frequently my error, and I have always felt the evil of it, especially in prayer. Reform it then, O Lord." While on his trip to the Holy Land he wrote: "For much of our safety I feel indebted to the prayers of my people. If the veil of the world's machinery were lifted off how much we would find done in answer to the prayers of God's children." In an ordination sermon he said to the preacher: "Give yourself to prayers and the ministry of the Word. If you do not pray, God will probably lay you aside from your ministry, as He did me, to teach you to pray. Remember Luther's maxim, "To have prayed well is to have studied well." Get your texts from God, your thoughts, your words. Carry the names of the little flock upon your breast like the High Priest. Wrestle for the unconverted. Luther spent his last three hours in prayer; John Welch prayed seven or eight hours a day. He used to keep a plaid on his bed that he might wrap himself in when he rose during the night. Sometimes his wife found him on the ground lying weeping. When she complained, he would say, "O, woman, I

have the souls of three thousand to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them." The people he exhorted and charged: "Pray for your pastor. Pray for his body, that he may be kept strong and spared many years. Pray for his soul, that he may be kept humble and holy, a burning and shining light. Pray for his ministry, that it may be abundantly blessed, that he may be anointed to preach good tidings. Let there be no secret prayer without naming him before your God, no family prayer without carrying your pastor in your hearts to God."

"Two things," says his biographer, "he seems never to have ceased from--the cultivation of personal holiness and the most anxious efforts to win souls." The two are the inseparable attendants on the ministry of prayer. Prayer fails when the desire and effort for personal holiness fail. No person is a soul-winner who is not an adept in the ministry of prayer. "It is the duty of ministers," says this holy man, "to begin the reformation of religion and manner with themselves, families, etc., with confession of past sin, earnest prayer for direction, grace and full purpose of heart." He begins with himself under the head of "Reformation in Secret Prayer," and he resolves:

"I ought not to omit any of the parts of prayer--confession, adoration, thanksgiving, petition and intercession. There is a fearful tendency to omit confession proceeding from low views of God and His law, slight views of my heart, and the sin of my past life. This must be resisted. There is a constant tendency to omit adoration when I forget to Whom I am speaking, when I rush heedlessly into the presence of Jehovah without thought of His awful name and character. When I have little eyesight for his glory, and little admiration of His wonders, I have the native tendency of the heart to omit giving thanks, and yet it is specially commanded. Often when the heart is dead to the salvation of others I omit intercession, and yet it especially is the spirit of the great Advocate Who has the name of Israel on His heart. I ought to pray before seeing anyone. Often when I sleep long, or meet with others early, and then have family prayer and breakfast and forenoon callers, it is eleven or twelve o--clock before I begin secret prayer. This is a wretched system; it is unscriptural. Christ rose before day and went into a solitary place. David says, "Early will I seek Thee; Thou shalt early hear my voice." Mary Magdalene came to the sepulchre while it was yet dark. Family prayer loses much of its power and sweetness; and I can do no good to those who come to seek from me. The conscience feels guilty, the soul unfed, the lamp not trimmed. I feel it is far better to begin with God, to see His face first, to get my soul near Him before it is near another. "When I awake I am still with Thee." If I have slept too long, or I am going an early journey, or my time is in any way shortened, it is best to dress hurriedly and to have a few minutes alone with God than to give up all for lost. But in general it is best to have at least one hour alone with God before engaging in anything else. I ought to spend the best hours of the day in communion with God. When I awake in the night, I ought to rise and pray as David and John Welch."

McCheyne believed in being always in prayer, and his fruitful life, short though that life was, affords an illustration of the power that comes from long and frequent visits to the secret place where we keep trust with our Lord.

Men of McCheyne's stamp are needed today--praying men, who know how to give themselves to the greatest task demanding their time and their attention; men who can give their whole heart to the holy task of

intercession, men who can pray through. God's cause is committed to men; God commits Himself to men. Praying men are the vicegerents of God; they do His work and carry out His plans.

We are obliged to pray if we be citizens of God's Kingdom. Prayerlessness is expatriation, or worse, from God's Kingdom. It is outlawry, a high crime, a constitutional breach. The Christian who relegates prayer to a subordinate place in his life soon loses whatever spiritual zeal he may have once possessed, and the Church that makes little of prayer cannot maintain vital piety, and is powerless to advance the Gospel. The Gospel cannot live, fight, conquer without prayer--prayer unceasing, instant and ardent.

Little prayer is the characteristic of a backslidden age and of a backslidden Church. Whenever there is little praying in the pulpit or in the pew, spiritual bankruptcy is imminent and inevitable.

The cause of God has no commercial age, no cultured age, no age of education, no age of money. But it has one golden age, and that is the age of prayer. When its leaders are men of prayer, when prayer is the prevailing element of worship, like the incense giving continual fragrance to its service, then the cause of God will be triumphant.

Better praying and more of it, that is what we need. We need holier men, and more of them, holier women, and more of them to pray--women like Hannah, who, out of their greatest griefs and temptations brewed their greatest prayers. Through prayer Hannah found her relief. Everywhere the Church was backslidden and apostate, her foes were victorious. Hannah gave herself to prayer, and in sorrow she multiplied her praying. She saw a great revival born of her praying. When the whole nation was oppressed, prophet and priest, Samuel was born to establish a new line of priesthood, and her praying warmed into life a new life for God. Everywhere religion revived and flourished. God, true to His promise, "Ask of Me," though the praying came from a woman's broken heart, heard and answered, sending a new day of holy gladness to revive His people.

So once more, let us apply the emphasis and repeat that the great need of the Church in this and all ages is men of such commanding faith, of such unsullied holiness, of such marked spiritual vigour and consuming zeal, that they will work spiritual revolutions through their mighty praying. "Natural ability and educational advantages do not figure as factors in this matter; but a capacity for faith, the ability to pray, the power of a thorough consecration, the ability of self-littleness, an absolute losing of one's self in God's glory and an ever present and insatiable yearning and seeking after all the fulness of God. Men who can set the Church ablaze for God, not in a noisy, showy way, but with an intense and quiet heat that melts and moves every thing for God."

And, to return to the vital point, secret praying is the test, the gauge, the conservator of man's relation to God. The prayer-chamber, while it is the test of the sincerity of our devotion to God, becomes also the measure of the devotion. The self-denial, the sacrifices which we make for our prayer-chambers, the frequency of our visits to that hallowed place of meeting with the Lord, the lingering to stay, the loathness to leave, are values which we put on communion alone with God, the price we pay for the Spirit's trysting hours of heavenly love.

The prayer-chamber conserves our relation to God. It hems every raw

edge; it tucks up every flowing and entangling garment; girds up every fainting loin. The sheet-anchor holds not the ship more surely and safely than the prayer-chamber holds to God. Satan has to break our hold on, and close up our way to the prayer-chambers, ere he can break our hold on God or close up our way to heaven.

"Be not afraid to pray; to pray is right;
Pray if thou canst with hope, but ever pray,
Though hope be weak or sick with long delay;
Pray in the darkness if there be no light;
And if for any wish thou dare not pray
Then pray to God to cast that wish away."
