

TAKING STEPS FORWARD  
*in the struggle to pray*

*Pathway to*  
prayer

Compiled & Edited by  
M. J. HANCOCK

# *Pathway to Prayer*

*To Paul & Carole Schmidt,*

*who like Epaphras  
have struggled on our behalf  
in their prayers*

Pathway to Prayer

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Scriptures within quotations are from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible. Stand-alone Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. O Father, sanctify us in the truth; your word is truth (Jn. 17:17).

The Holy Scriptures have been sprinkled throughout this text without typographical emphasis. My intention is in no way to minimize the glory and weight of God's words, but to encourage the reader to engage with the Scriptures rather than skimming over them.

## PREFACE

. . . they ought always to pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1)

Father, you have told me to keep on praying and never give up, yet consistent prayer remains such a struggle. You know all the hardships I've faced in prayer and all the times I've walked away from you into seasons of prayerlessness. But you are merciful and gracious, so you brought me back to the path of prayer and made the way clear through the teaching and encouragement of my brothers and sisters. Thank you for their biblical instruction and practical advice, their honesty in sharing their struggles and their testimonies of your faithfulness in helping them overcome. And now I ask you Lord, continue to use these writings to lead others down the path of prayer. By your Spirit, enable us all to pray consistently and not lose heart. Answer me for the spiritual renewal of your people and for the advance of Christ's Kingdom among all the peoples of the earth. I ask through the name your beloved Son and my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. —*M.J. Hancock*

Come, and stir us up to pray;  
Wake us from our slumber.  
Fill us with love and zeal that cries;  
Then send down your answer.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Steps *Toward* Praying

### 1. Recommit to Following Christ's Example

If anyone serves me, he must follow me. (John 12:26)

The man who is not leading a life of prayer, no matter how many excellent things he may be doing, is not walking as Jesus walked.<sup>1</sup>

The highest way of honoring Christ is to be like to Christ; he who says he abides in Him, ought himself also to walk even as He walked (1 Jn. 2:6).<sup>2</sup>

Let our Lord's conduct in this respect be our example. We cannot work miracles as He did; in this He stands alone. But we can walk in His steps, in the matter of private devotion. If we have the Spirit of adoption, we can pray. Let us resolve to pray more than we have done hitherto. Let us strive to make time, and place, and opportunity for being alone with God.<sup>3</sup>

Wise will it be for us to consider Jesus. . . . If He, the sinless One, He the mighty One, He the divine One, felt deeply and momentarily . . . the need of drawing from above by the breath of prayer those supplies needful for the accomplishment of His work and for the glorifying of His Father. Oh, how much more have we need that prayer should precede, accompany, and follow every step we take; that communion with God should prompt, aid, and sanctify every act of our lives; that, in a word, in imitation of our blessed Lord, we should often rise up a great while before day, and depart into a solitary place, and before secular and worldly things took possession of our minds, give ourselves to prayer.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R.A. Torrey <sup>2</sup>Thomas Brooks <sup>3</sup>J.C. Ryle <sup>4</sup>Octavius Winslow

We may say his whole life was a kind of prayer, a constant course of communion with God. If the sacrifice was not always offering, yet was the fire still kept alive.<sup>5</sup>

Our Lord's life was exceptionally busy. He worked under constant pressure. At times He had no leisure even for meals, but the pressure of the multitudes was never permitted to crowd out prayer. We are apt to advance pressure of business as a reason for not praying. With Jesus, it was a reason for giving extra time to prayer (see Lk. 5:15–16; Mk. 1:35; Lk. 4:42; Jn. 6:15).<sup>6</sup>

Oh that we would daily propound to ourselves this noble pattern for our imitation, and make it our business, our work, our heaven, to write after this blessed copy that Christ has set us, namely, to be much with God alone.<sup>7</sup>

“He departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.” “My soul! enter into your closet, and shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in secret. You have secret declensions to confess, secret sorrows to unveil, secret wants to present, secret blessings to crave.” Away then, to your chamber. Take with you the blood of Jesus, and with your hand of faith upon His Word, open all your heart in filial, loving confidence to God, and in paternal love, He will open all the treasures of His heart to you. Let nothing keep you from secret communion with God. Business, family, friends must all give place to this, if you want soul prosperity. Five minutes alone with Jesus will carry you through five hours of toil and trial. Come, my people, enter into your chamber.<sup>8</sup>

## **2. Acknowledge the Difficulty with Hope**

[Here] is something we all have learned from experience: there is nothing in a sense which is so difficult as just to pray. There are many difficulties [in it]. . . . These things tend to happen because prayer is the supreme activity of the human soul. It is the highest point we ever reach

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Scougal <sup>6</sup>J. Oswald Sanders <sup>7</sup>Thomas Brooks <sup>8</sup> Octavius Winslow

in this life, communion with God. As we engage in prayer, all the forces of hell are playing upon us, and they are doing their utmost to spoil our efforts. . . . Don't be discouraged by the fact that you have found prayer difficult.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes it may seem to us that our prayer life would develop more easily under easier conditions, [but] the open field with no obstacle . . . carries no exhilaration.<sup>10</sup>

[Prayer] is a travail and not a pastime. If it were easy it might scarcely be worth counselling: it is tremendously difficult, but its rewards are infinite.<sup>11</sup>

Though in its beginnings prayer is so simple that the feeblest child can pray, yet it is at the same time highest and holiest work to which man can rise. It is fellowship with the unseen and most Holy One.<sup>12</sup>

Nothing would be better for most of us than a great revival in our habits of private prayer. Perhaps we cannot do as Luther, who was accustomed to say, "I have so much work to do today that I cannot get through it with less than three hours of prayer." . . . But that we should pray more, that we should labor in prayer as Epaphras did, that we should cultivate the art of prayer, is clear. Habits of prayer need careful cultivation. The instinct and impulse are with us by the grace of the Holy Spirit, but we need to cultivate the gracious inward movements until they become solidified into an unbending practice.<sup>13</sup>

Prayer comes by training, and there is no discipline so exacting. . . . It is the very highest energy of which the human heart is capable, and it calls for the total concentration of all the faculties.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Martyn Lloyd Jones<sup>10</sup> Amy Carmichael<sup>11</sup> J.H. Jowett<sup>12</sup> Andrew Murray<sup>13</sup> F.B. Meyer

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Chadwick

We often come before God in prayer unfit to pray, and spoil the action in the very outset by having an unprepared heart. At other times, when we are in the midst of devotion, when we are being borne up upon the wings of zeal, pride will intrude, and we congratulate ourselves upon the excellence of our worship. . . . Alas, how hard it is to begin, continue, and end a prayer in the Spirit!<sup>15</sup>

To speak specially of the lack of prayer, and the desire of living a fuller prayer-life, how many are the difficulties to be met! We have so often resolved to pray more and better, and have failed. We have not the strength of will some have, with one resolve to turn round and change our habits. The press of duty is as great as ever it was; it is so difficult to find time for more prayer . . . [and] our prayers, instead of being a joy and a strength, are a source of continual self-condemnation and doubt. We have at times mourned and confessed and resolved; but, to tell the honest truth, we do not expect, for we do not see the way to any great change.<sup>16</sup>

As long as we measure our power, for praying aright and perseveringly, by what we feel, or think we can accomplish, we shall be discouraged when we hear of how much we ought to pray. But when we quietly believe that, in the midst of all our conscious weakness, the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of supplication is dwelling within us, for the very purpose of enabling us to pray in such manner and measure as God would have us, our hearts will be filled with hope.<sup>17</sup>

God is ready and willing to help us, and we should come to him in that confidence (Matt. 7:11). . . . We should pour out our hearts into his bosom, in full confidence of his pity. Whom can a child expect help of, if not of a father? But no father has the bowels of compassion that God has toward his own.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> C. H. Spurgeon <sup>16</sup> Andrew Murray <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>18</sup> Thomas Boston



As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. (Ps. 103:13-14)

### 3. Examine Your Prayer Life

Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!

Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven. (Lam. 3:40-41)

I wish you would each keep a diary of how you pray next week, and see how much, or rather how little time you spend with God out of the twenty-four hours!<sup>19</sup>

It would be well for us all, if we examined ourselves more frequently as to our habits about private prayer. What time do we give to it in the twenty-four hours of the day? What progress can we mark, one year with another, in the fervency, fullness, and earnestness of our prayers? What do we know by experience of, "laboring fervently in prayer?" (Col. 4:12). These are humbling inquiries, but they are useful for our souls.<sup>20</sup>

O reader, reflect upon your duties [of prayer], consider what spirituality, sincerity, humility, broken-heartedness, and melting affections after God, are to be found in your duties: Is it so with you? Or do you hurry over your duties as all interruption to your business and pleasures? Are they an ungrateful task, imposed upon you by God, and your own conscience? Are there no hungerings and thirstings after God in your soul?<sup>21</sup>

Backsliding generally first begins with *neglect of private prayer*. . . . The daily act of prayer itself is hurried over, or gone through without the heart: these are the kind of downward steps which many a Christian descends to a condition of spiritual palsy, or reaches the point where God allows him to have a tremendous fall. This is the process which

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<sup>19</sup> C.H. Spurgeon <sup>20</sup> J.C. Ryle <sup>21</sup> John Flavel <sup>22</sup> J.C. Ryle

forms the lingering Lots, the unstable Samsons, the wife-idolizing Solomons.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.  
(1 Cor. 10:12)

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matt. 26:41)

O guard against it, reader; look well to the state of your soul; examine your prayers; see that you have not substituted the cold *form* for the glowing *spirit*, the mere body for the soul. Real prayer is the breathing of God's own Spirit in the heart; have you *this*? It is *communion* and *fellowship* with God; know you what *this* is? It is brokenness, contrition, confession, and that often springing from an overwhelming sense of his goodness and his love shed abroad in the heart; is *this* your experience? Again we repeat it, look well to your prayers.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. Acknowledge Your Helplessness

But I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. . . . I am helpless. (Ps. 88:13-15)

If man is man and God is God, to live without prayer is not merely an awful thing: it is an infinitely foolish thing.<sup>24</sup>

People sit down groaning under their discouragements because they do not look further than themselves. God humbles us with great weakness, that he may turn us to prayer. That is as easy for the Spirit as it is hard for nature. If God commands anything beyond our nature, it is to bring you to your knees for grace.<sup>25</sup>

To pray is nothing more involved than to let Jesus into our needs, and permitting Him to exercise His own power in dealing with them. And

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<sup>23</sup> Octavius Winslow <sup>24</sup> Phillips Brooks <sup>25</sup> Thomas Manton <sup>26</sup> O. Hallesby

that requires no strength. It is only a question of our *wills*. Will we give Jesus access to our needs?<sup>26</sup>

The Christian often tries to forget his weakness; God wants us to remember it, to feel it deeply. . . . The Christian thinks his weaknesses are his greatest hindrance in the life and service of God; God tells us that it is the secret of strength and success. It is our weakness, heartily accepted and continually realized, that gives our claim and access to the strength of Him who has said, “My strength is made perfect in weakness.”<sup>27</sup>

Christ does not teach you to pray, “Lord, give me enough to serve me for two or three years” but, “this day our daily bread.” This is to teach us that we must live upon God in a dependent condition every day.<sup>28</sup>

We are always needing; and therefore we had need be praying always. The world is always alluring; and therefore we had need be always a-praying. Satan is always a-tempting; and therefore we had need be always a-praying. We are always a-sinners; and therefore we had need be always a-praying. We are in dangers always; and therefore we had need be praying always.<sup>29</sup>

## **5. Confess & Forsake Sin & Worldliness**

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened. (Ps. 66:18-19)

If prayer does not constantly endeavor the ruin of sin, sin will ruin prayer, and utterly alienate the soul from it.<sup>30</sup>

When a sick man is in a decline, his lungs suffer, and his voice, and so when a Christian is in a spiritual decline, the breath of prayer is affected, and the cry of supplication becomes weak. . . . [If] your prayers

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew Murray <sup>28</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs <sup>29</sup> Thomas Brooks <sup>30</sup> John Owen

are hindered, there is something in your spiritual system which needs to be ejected or something lacking which ought to be taken care of at once!

<sup>31</sup>

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? . . .  
A little leaven leavens the whole lump. (Gal. 5:7-9)

Guard vigilantly and strive prayerfully against that which creates a conscious distance between God and your soul. Is it the *world*?—come out of it. Is it the *creature*?—relinquish it. Is it the *flesh*?—mortify it. Is it *sin*?—forsake it. Is it *unbelief*?—nail it to the cross. Oh, let nothing separate you from Christ—no earthly good or carnal delight cause a distance, or coldness, or shyness between God and your soul. Give Jesus your undivided heart, and let God be your all in all.<sup>32</sup>

Hours for the world! Moments for Christ! The world has our best and our prayer closet the remnants of our time. We give our strength and freshness to the ways of [wealth] and our fatigue to the ways of God. Therefore . . . we need to be commanded to attend to that very act which it ought to be our greatest happiness, as it is our highest privilege to perform—to meet with our God!<sup>33</sup>

[One] time-wasting thief is excess of worldly cares and business. . . . The world is first in the morning in their thoughts, and last at night, and almost all the day. . . . The world devours all the time almost that God and their souls should have: it will not give them leave to pray, or read, or meditate, or discourse of holy things: even when they seem to be praying, or hearing the word of God, the world is in their thoughts.<sup>34</sup>

If you will be hotter in duty you must be colder towards the world. . . . Wood that has the sap in it will not burn easily; neither will your heart readily take fire in holy duties [if you] come so sopped in the world to them. Drain, therefore, your heart of these eager affections. . . . Now,

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<sup>31</sup> C.H. Spurgeon <sup>32</sup> Octavius Winslow <sup>33</sup> C.H. Spurgeon <sup>34</sup> Richard Baxter

no better way for this than to set your soul under the frequent meditation of Christ's love to you, your relation to him, with the great and glorious things you expect from him in another world. This, or nothing, will dry up your love to this world, as your wood which is laid a sunning is made fit for the fire.<sup>35</sup>

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:2-3)

The spirit of the world is the great hindrance to the spirit of prayer. All our most earnest calls to men to pray more will be vain except this evil be acknowledged and combated and overcome. . . . And how is this to be done? There is but one way—the Cross of Christ, “by which,” as Paul says, “the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”<sup>36</sup>

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you. (Col. 3:5)

Would you . . . have much faculty for prayer, and be frequent in it, and experience much of the pure sweetness of it? Then deny yourselves more the muddy pleasures and sweetness of the world. If you would pray much, and with much advantage, then be sober, and watch unto prayer. Suffer not your hearts to long so after ease, and wealth, and esteem in the world.<sup>37</sup>

. . . lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely. (Heb. 12:1-2)

[O Lord], deliver me from those excessive cares of this world, which would so engross my time and my thoughts, that the one thing needful should be forgotten. May my desires after worldly possessions be moderated, by considering their uncertain and unsatisfying nature. . . . May I never be too busy to attend to those great affairs which lie

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<sup>35</sup> William Gurnall <sup>36</sup> Andrew Murray <sup>37</sup> Robert Leighton <sup>38</sup> Phillip Doddridge

between you and my soul; never be so engrossed with the concerns of time, as to neglect the interests of eternity.<sup>38</sup>

## 6. Consider Prayer a High Priority

Now set your mind and heart to seek the LORD your God. (1 Chron. 22:19)

And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things. . . . Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. . . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Lk. 12:29-34)

Time is a commodity of which there seems to be a universal and chronic shortage. Lack of time is a much overworked excuse for neglect of duty. And yet, strangely enough, even in the midst of exacting routine we always manage to find time for all we urgently want to do. In reality, the fundamental problem lies not in the *time factor*, but in the realm of *will* and *desire*. We each have all the time there is, and we each choose our own priorities. We automatically place first that which we consider most important. If prayer is meager it is because we consider it supplemental, not fundamental. To our Lord it was not a reluctant addendum, but a fundamental necessity. The time we spend in prayer will depend on the way we allocate our priorities. If we share Christ's view of the indispensability of prayer, we will somehow make time for it.<sup>39</sup>

What men set their hearts upon, they will find time and place to effect it, whether it be good or whether it be evil. . . . He who has an inflamed love to God will certainly find out a corner to enjoy secret communion with God. True lovers will find out corners to enjoy one another in.<sup>40</sup>

Anything which hinders prayer must be wrong; if any management of the family, or lack of management, is injuring our power in prayer, there is an urgent demand for an alteration.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> J. Oswald Sanders <sup>40</sup> Thomas Brooks <sup>41</sup> C.H. Spurgeon

Prayers may be hindered . . . by having too much to do. . . . The rich man in the parable had no time for prayer, for he was busy in planning new barns in which to bestow his goods—but he had to find time for dying when the Lord said, “This night shall your soul be required of you” (Lk. 12:20)<sup>42</sup>

Ah! how well might it have been with many a man, had he but spent one quarter of that time in closet prayer, that he has spent in curious inquiries after things that have not been fundamental to his happiness.<sup>43</sup>

Most men lose their fervency and strength of their desires by misplacing them; they are zealous for such things as cannot . . . pay them for their pains.<sup>44</sup>

Consider your ways. . . . You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. (Hag. 1:7-9)

You allow yourself space for recreation; what do you set apart for those exercises which in very truth re-create the soul?<sup>45</sup>

Some professors indulge in amusements which I am sure are not consistent with prayer. . . . How can you come home from frivolity and sin, and then look into the face of Jesus? . . . You cannot roll in the mire, and then approach with clean garments to the mercy seat!<sup>46</sup>

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (Jam. 4:3-4)

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<sup>42</sup> C.H. Spurgeon <sup>43</sup> Thomas Brooks <sup>44</sup> William Gurnall <sup>45</sup> C.H. Spurgeon <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

Mark well the places and society and companions that unHINGE your hearts for communion with God and make your prayers drive heavily. There be on your guard.<sup>47</sup>

Oh, let us keep an eye continually upon our private devotions! Here is the pith, and marrow, and backbone of our practical Christianity.<sup>48</sup>

Let your first care be to keep the fountain of your heart clear all the day long, remembering that from it those holy affections (which in prayer you are to pour forth to God) must be drawn.<sup>49</sup>

The mind that is turned loose to wander after vanity the rest of the day is unfit in an hour of prayer or meditation, to be taken up with the love of God. It must be the work of the day, and of our lives, to walk in a fitness for [prayer], though we are not always in the immediate, lively exercise of it.<sup>50</sup>

We prove the value we attach to things by the time we devote to them. The Kingdom should be first every day, and all the day. Let the Kingdom be first every morning. Begin the day with God, and God Himself will maintain His Kingdom in your heart.<sup>51</sup>

Ah! friends, did you but love the Lord Jesus with a more strong, with a more raised love, you would never faint in closet-duties, nor you would never grow weary of closet-duties. . . . Divine love will make all closet-duties more easy to the soul, and more pleasant and delightful to the soul; and therefore do all you can to strengthen your love to Christ, and your love to closet-work.<sup>52</sup>

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart, wean it from earth, through all its pulses move; stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art, and make me love thee as I ought to love.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> J.C. Ryle <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>49</sup> William Gurnall <sup>50</sup> Richard Baxter <sup>51</sup> Andrew Murray

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Brooks <sup>53</sup> George Croly



## 7. Prepare What to Pray For

Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field,  
and after that build your house. (Prov. 24:27)

It is well to approach the seat of the King of kings as much as possible with premeditation and preparation, knowing what we are about, where we are standing, and what it is which we desire to obtain. . . . God forbid that our prayer should be a mere leaping out of one's bed and kneeling down, and saying anything that comes to hand; on the contrary, may we wait upon the Lord with holy fear and sacred awe.<sup>54</sup>

A most beneficial exercise in secret prayer before the Father is to write things down exactly, so I see exactly what I think and want to say. Only those who have tried these ways know the ineffable benefit of such strenuous times in secret.<sup>55</sup>

I find it well to preface prayer not only by meditation but by the definite request that may be directed into the channels of prayer to which the Holy Spirit is beckoning me. I also find it helpful to make a short list, like notes prepared for a sermon, before every season of prayer. The mind needs to be guided as well as the spirit attuned. I can thus get my thoughts in order, and having prepared my prayer can put the notes on the table or chair before me, kneel down and get to business.<sup>56</sup>

Do you not sometimes fall on your knees without thinking beforehand what you mean to ask God for? . . . You will find it more helpful to your prayers, if you have some objectives at which you aim and I think, also, if you have some persons whom you will mention. Do not merely plead with God for sinners in general, but always mention some in particular.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> C.H. Spurgeon <sup>55</sup> Oswald Chambers <sup>56</sup> J.O. Fraser <sup>57</sup> C.H. Spurgeon

Keep a prayer list of subjects for intercession, and always have a list of people for whom you pray.<sup>58</sup>

Intercession should be definite and detailed. Vagueness is lifelessness. St. Paul besought the Romans to pray for him, and then told them exactly what he wanted, four definite petitions to be presented for him (Rom. 15:30-32). . . . It is considerable practical help if we make our intercession systematic, especially if the Lord gives us many to pray for. If every day has its written list of special names to be remembered, we shall be less likely to forget or drop them. Each several name was engraved on the breastplate of the high priest that it might be borne upon his heart continually (Ex. 28:21, 29).<sup>59</sup>

A great reason why we reap so little benefit by prayer is because we rest too much in generals. . . . Besides, to be particular in our petitions would keep the spirit from wandering much when we are intent upon a weighty [request].<sup>60</sup>

[It is essential in prayer] that some proper method be observed, not only that what is said be good, but that it be said in its proper place and time; and that we offer not anything to the glorious Majesty of heaven and earth which is confused, impertinent, and indigested.<sup>61</sup>

## **8. Plan a Time & Place for Prayer**

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Eph. 5:15-17)

After all the difficulties [of prayer] have been duly recognized and all the dangers of legalism properly acknowledged, the fact remains that unless we *plan to pray* we will not pray. The reason we pray so little is that we do not plan to pray.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Samuel Chadwick <sup>59</sup> Francis Havergal <sup>60</sup> Samuel Lee <sup>61</sup> Matthew Henry

<sup>62</sup> Oswald Chambers

Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it.<sup>63</sup>

Lack of proper planning will be enough to make the prayer life of many unproductive and ineffective. . . . The labor of prayer requires a definite plan and purpose. I must know what work I have to do in my secret chamber before I enter into it.<sup>64</sup>

Some people hinder their prayers . . . by a lack of order. They get up a little too late, and they have to chase their work all the day, and never overtake it. They are always in a flurry, one duty tripping up the heels of another. They have no appointed time for retirement, to little space hedged about for communion with God, and consequently, something or other happens, and prayer is forgotten.<sup>65</sup>

[Others], give such undue attention to petty details that matters of major importance are squeezed out. This is especially the case where prayer is concerned.<sup>66</sup>

How many periods of five, ten, or fifteen minutes that could be devoted to prayer do we waste or leave unemployed in the course of a day?<sup>67</sup>

We [all] have been entrusted with the same amount of time, but not all use it in such a way that we produce a tenfold return. . . . We are not responsible for our capacity. We are responsible for the strategic investment of our time. If we consider prayer as a high priority, we will so arrange our day to make time for it.<sup>68</sup>

God, who is the Lord of time, has reserved some part of our time to himself every day.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Corrie ten Boom* <sup>64</sup> *O. Hallesby* <sup>65</sup> *C.H. Spurgeon* <sup>66</sup> *J. Oswald Sanders* <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Thomas Brooks*

It would revolutionize the lives of most men if they were shut in with God in some secret place for half an hour a day.<sup>70</sup>

Martin Luther . . . said to his friend, “I have a very busy day, today. I have so much work to do that I am afraid I shall not get through it all. I must have at least three hours of prayer, or else I shall not have time to get through all my toil.” The more work he had to do, the more prayer he felt that he needed! Is not that right? The more loads you have to drag, the more horses you need—and the more work there is to be done, the more reason is there for crying to God to help you to do it! That is not a waste of time. On the contrary, it is the best employment of time that anyone can have!<sup>71</sup>

You can work without praying, but it is a bad plan; but you cannot pray in earnest without working. Do not be so busy . . . that you have no strength left for praying. True prayer requires strength.<sup>72</sup>

Closet communion needs time for the revelation of God’s presence. It is vain to say, ‘I have too much work to do to find time.’ You must find time or forfeit blessing. God knows how to save for you the time you sacredly keep for communion with Him.<sup>73</sup>

We should redeem time for private prayer out of our eating time, our drinking time, our sleeping time, our buying time, our selling time, our sinning time, our sporting time, rather than neglect our closet communion with God.<sup>74</sup>

[Brothers and sisters], pray; in spite of Satan, pray; spend hours in prayer; rather neglect friends than not pray; rather fast and lose breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper—and sleep too—than not pray. And we must not talk about prayer, we must pray in right earnest. The Lord is near. He comes softly while the virgins slumber.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Samuel Chadwick <sup>71</sup>C.H. Spurgeon <sup>72</sup>J. Hudson Taylor <sup>73</sup>A.T. Pierson

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Brooks <sup>75</sup> Andrew Bonar

To effect a radical change in our use of time so as to make more time for prayer will require strength of purpose and a deep dependence on the Lord's enabling.<sup>76</sup>

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matt. 6:6)

In praying, the principal object to be sought, is to be alone with God. We should endeavor to find some place where no mortal eye sees us, and where we can pour out our hearts with the feeling that no one is looking at us but God. . . . When a person has a real desire to find some place where he can be in secret with his God, he will generally find a way.<sup>77</sup>

The greater measure any man has of the Spirit of God, the more that man will delight to be with God in secret. . . . The more any man has of the Spirit of Christ, the more he loves Christ, and the more any man loves Christ, the more he delights to be with Christ alone. Lovers love to be alone.<sup>78</sup>

God wills that men should pray everywhere, but the place of His glory is in the solitudes, where He hides us in the cleft of the rock, and talks with man face to face as a man talks with his friend.<sup>79</sup>

I must secure more time for private devotions. I have been living far too public for me. The shortening of devotions starves the soul, it grows lean and faint. I have been keeping too late hours.<sup>80</sup>

## **9. Stick to the Appointed Time**

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. (1 Pet. 4:7)

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<sup>76</sup> J. Oswald Sanders <sup>77</sup> J.C. Ryle <sup>78</sup> Thomas Brooks <sup>79</sup> Samuel Chadwick

<sup>80</sup> William Wilberforce

[Do you] hear Satan and your flesh whispering in your ear. . . . “This is not a fit time for praying. Stay for a more convenient season.” . . . Now beware, Christian, your foot is near a snare. . . . When the flesh or Satan beg time of you, it is to steal time from you. They [delay you] at one time, on a design to shut you out at last from this duty at any time.<sup>81</sup>

Certainly if we are to have a quiet hour set down in the midst of a hurry of duties, and kept [invariably], we must exercise both forethought and self-denial. We must be prepared to forgo many things that are pleasant, and some things that are profitable. We shall have to redeem the time.<sup>82</sup>

What are your amusements but an attempt to kill the time that hangs laboriously on your hands? . . . Oh, if you did but know what you are made for and your high destiny, you would not waste your time in the [trivial] things that occupy your hands and your souls! . . . God forgive those moments of frivolity which ought to have been occupied in prayer!<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, whether the desire for prayer is on you or not, get to your closet at the set time; shut yourself in with God; wait upon Him; seek His face; realize Him; pray.<sup>84</sup>

[You may say], “I can’t pray when I don’t feel like it.” Yes you can. You can say to your Lord, “Lord Jesus, I don’t feel like speaking to You. I’m sorry about that. Why is it so?” . . . Never mind your feelings. The one thing that matters is not to stay away from your Lord because of them. Tell Him that your feelings are all wrong and ask Him to put you right.<sup>85</sup>

Whatever your position, if you cannot speak, cry; if you cannot cry, groan. If you cannot groan, let there be “groans which cannot be uttered.” And if you cannot even rise to that point, let your prayer be at

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<sup>81</sup> William Gurnall <sup>82</sup> David McIntyre <sup>83</sup> C.H. Spurgeon <sup>84</sup> R.F. Horton

<sup>85</sup> Amy Carmichael

least a breathing—a vital, sincere desire—the outpouring of your inner life in the simplest and weakest form, and God will accept it.<sup>86</sup>

Not to pray because you do not feel fit to pray is like saying, “I will not take medicine because I am too ill.” Pray for prayer! Pray yourself, by the Spirit’s assistance, into a praying frame! . . . So, under a sense of prayerlessness, be more intent on prayer. Repent that you cannot repent, groan that you cannot groan and pray until you do pray—in so doing *God will help you*.<sup>87</sup>

When you can pray and long to pray—why, then, you *will* pray! But when you cannot pray and do not wish to pray—why, then, you *must* pray, or evil will come of it! He is on the brink of ruin who forgets the Mercy Seat!<sup>88</sup>

Beware of the first beginnings of a neglect [of secret prayer]: Watch against temptations to it: Take heed how you begin to allow of excuses. Be watchful to keep up the duty in the height of it; let it not so much as begin to sink. For when you give way, though it be but little, it is like giving way to an enemy in the field of battle; the first beginning of a retreat greatly encourages the enemy, and weakens the retreating soldiers.<sup>89</sup>

## 10. Confront Laziness

Do not be slothful in zeal . . . be constant in prayer. (Rom. 12:11-12)

Let us ever be on our guard against the slothful, indolent, lazy spirit in religion, which is natural to us all, and especially in the matter of our private prayers. When we feel that spirit creeping over us, let us remember Peter, James, and John in the garden, and take care.<sup>90</sup>

Awake! Awake! Put on strength! Wake up you sleepy Christians! Awake thou that sleepest! Arise from the dead! Christ will give you life!<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>C.H. Spurgeon <sup>87</sup>Ibid. <sup>88</sup>Ibid. <sup>89</sup>Jonathan Edwards <sup>90</sup>J.C.Ryle <sup>91</sup>Ian Paisley

Lying too long in bed not merely keeps us from giving the most precious part of the day to prayer and meditation, but this sloth leads also to many other evils.<sup>92</sup>

Sleep not away your time for prayer in the morning, and then think you are sufficiently excused for omitting it because your worldly business calls you another way. Jade not your body with over-laboring, nor overcharge your mind with too heavy a load of worldly cares in the day, and then think that the weariness of the one, and discomposure of the other, will discharge you from praying again at night.<sup>93</sup>

Zeal and diligence take the opportunity, which sloth and negligence let slip. They are up with the sun, and “work while it is day;” they “seek the LORD while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.”<sup>94</sup>

O Christian! should it not make you blush much more to see the whole town up and as busy as bees about a garden, one flying this way, another that way . . . while you, Christian, sleep away your precious time.<sup>95</sup>

[Is not the reality that] the devil is at your door, enough to keep you out of your bed of sloth and negligence?<sup>96</sup>

God deserves [that] the prime and strength of thy soul should be bestowed on him in thy prayers. He gave thee the powers of thy soul and all thy affections. When thou art therefore going to pray, call up thy affections, which haply are asleep ... ‘What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God.’<sup>97</sup>

We should stir up ourselves to lay hold on him; we should rouse mind and heart, graces and affections, that all may be stirring and active, and

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<sup>92</sup> *George Muller* <sup>93</sup> *William Gurnall* <sup>94</sup> *Richard Baxter* <sup>95</sup> *William Gurnall* <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*



not shut up in a careless, drowsy listlessness. This is to watch unto prayer, this is to be vigilant and careful about it.<sup>98</sup>

It is no easy thing to pray and to work a lazy, dead heart into a necessary height of affection. The weights in a clock always run downward, but they are wound up by force; “to you, O LORD, I lift up my soul” (Psalm 25:1).<sup>99</sup>

Some may be ready to say they can’t be earnest. They often times find themselves dull and spiritless, that they have not their hearts in it. But when it is so . . . you should be earnest in wrestling with a dull and hard heart.<sup>100</sup>

Awake, cold lips, and sing! Arise, dull knees, and pray; Lift up, O man, your heart and eyes; Brush slothfulness away. . . . Cast every weight aside! Do battle with each sin; fight with the faithless world without, the faithless heart within.<sup>101</sup>

### **11. Do It! Do it! Do it!**

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. . . .  
[Not a] hearer who forgets but a doer who acts,  
he will be blessed in his doing. (Jam. 1:22-25)

The main lesson about prayer is just this: Do it! Do it! Do it! You want to be taught to pray. My answer is: pray and never faint, and then you shall never fail. . . . A sense of real want is the very root of prayer.<sup>102</sup>

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:17)

We do not know much about prayer, but surely this need not prevent us from praying!<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> David Clarkson <sup>99</sup> Thomas Manton <sup>100</sup> Jonathan Edwards <sup>101</sup> Horatius Bonar

<sup>102</sup> John Laidlow <sup>103</sup> Albert Richardson

There is no way to learn to pray but by praying. No reasoned philosophy of prayer ever taught a soul to pray.<sup>104</sup>

It is useless to say you know not how to pray. . . . It is simple speaking to God. It needs neither learning nor wisdom nor book-knowledge to begin it. It needs nothing but the heart and the will. The weakest infant can cry when he is hungry.<sup>105</sup>

Begin by giving at least ten minutes a day definitely to this work. It is in *doing* that we learn to *do*; it is as we take hold and begin that the help of God's Spirit will come. It is as we daily hear God's call, and at once put it into practice, that the consciousness will begin to live in us.<sup>106</sup>

Prayer is a fine delicate instrument. . . . However, certain requirements must also be met if the art of prayer is to be acquired . . . *practice* and *perseverance*. Without practice no Christian will become a real man or woman of prayer. And practice cannot be attained without perseverance.<sup>107</sup>

O friends! take heed of dallying, delaying, trifling, and going about the bush, when you should be a-falling upon the work of prayer. . . . Do as well as you can, and you shall find acceptance with God: "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he has not" (2 Cor. 8:12).<sup>108</sup>

Come now . . . turn aside for a while from your daily employment; escape for a moment from the tumult of your thoughts. Put aside your weighty cares; let your burdensome distractions wait. Free yourself awhile for God and rest awhile in him. Enter the inner chamber of your soul; shut out everything except God and that which can help you in seeking him, and when you have shut the door, seek him. Now, my whole heart, say to God, "I seek your face, LORD, it is your face I seek."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Oswald Chambers <sup>105</sup> J.C. Ryle <sup>106</sup> Andrew Murray <sup>107</sup> O. Hallesby <sup>108</sup> Thomas Brooks

<sup>109</sup> Anselm of Canterbury

## CHAPTER TWO

### Steps *While* Praying

#### 1. Ask for Help

Apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

We cannot, without the Spirit's assistance, bring our hearts into a right frame for prayer. Our inability to do so is the reason why [prayer seems so awkward].<sup>110</sup>

Pray by the Spirit's assistance; seek it, wait for it; do nothing that may check or restrain it, and give any impediment to it. Rely not upon inward abilities, or outward helps, real or pretended, so as to disengage that blessed Spirit. . . . Depend upon him alone who can help you to make requests in everything.<sup>111</sup>

When you are seeking to excite or exercise any grace, send up a fervent request to God to show his love and power upon your dead and sluggish heart.<sup>112</sup>

Be earnest with God in prayer to move and order your heart in its thoughts and desires. . . . It is not in man, not in the holiest on earth, to do this without Divine assistance. Therefore we find David so often crying out in this respect to order his steps in his word, to unite his heart to his fear, to incline his heart to his testimonies.<sup>113</sup>

[When] looking upon the multitude of temptations without, and of corruptions within himself, and the weakness of the grace he has, [a Christian might say], "Alas! How can this be? Shall I ever attain my journey's end?" But again, when he looks upward and lifts his eyes above

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<sup>110</sup> Thomas Ridgley <sup>111</sup> David Clarkson <sup>112</sup> Richard Baxter <sup>113</sup> William Gurnall

his difficulties, behold, the strength of God [is] engaged for him [and] directs his prayers.<sup>114</sup>

God is always ready to give us his grace; all he requires is that we should ask for it. Let us pray then, and form habits of prayer, and God will give us grace abundantly.<sup>115</sup>

## **2. Meditate on Truth**

As I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue. (Ps. 39:3)

The Christian is like some heavy birds, as the bustard and others, that cannot get upon the wing without a run. . . . Now, meditation is the great instrument you are to use in this preparatory work.<sup>116</sup>

When your minds are empty, and you cannot pump up plentiful matter for holy thoughts, the reading of a seasonable book, or [conversation] with a full experienced Christian, will furnish you with matter.<sup>117</sup>

I believe it is the experience of many who love secret devotion that at times they cannot pray, for their heart seems hard, cold, dumb, and almost dead. Do not pump up unwilling and formal prayer, my brethren; but take down the hymn-book and sing. While you praise the Lord for what you have, you will find your rocky heart begin to dissolve and flow in rivers.<sup>118</sup>

Do you ever find prayer difficult because of tiredness or dryness? When that is so, it is an immense help to let the psalms and hymns we know by heart say themselves or sing themselves inside of us. . . . Hymns, little prayer-songs of our own, even the simplest of them, can sing us into . . . the consciousness of His love, for we are never for one moment out of it.<sup>119</sup>

Have you ever felt discouraged in prayer because words would not come? Often our Lord Jesus turned Bible words into prayer. The Psalm

book was the prayer book of the early Church. It is ours still. We cannot ever fathom the depths of this book. . . . Is there a need it cannot meet? Is there a dryness it cannot refresh?<sup>120</sup>

The first thing the child of God has to do morning-by-morning is to obtain food for his inner man. . . . Now what is the food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.<sup>121</sup>

The reading of the Scriptures . . . is a part of our daily work, and should ordinarily accompany our prayers and praises. When we speak to God we must hear what God says to us, and thus the communion is complete.<sup>122</sup>

To keep up a good fire of zeal, we must have much fuel. . . . If I understand aright, zeal is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and genuine zeal draws its life and vital force from the continued operations of the Holy Spirit in the soul. Next to this, zeal feeds upon truths.<sup>123</sup>

Desires blown by meditation are the sparks that set prayer alight in flame.<sup>124</sup>

I find it helpful to begin . . . in adoring love and wonder of His character and attributes, of His majesty and might, of His grace and glory. Musing kindles the fire, and the flame becomes “a wall of fire round about,” which keeps beasts and intruders at a safe distance.<sup>125</sup>

Let us take a few moments before we enter upon such solemnities, to pause and reflect on the perfections of the God we are addressing [and] on the importance of the business we are about to engage in. . . . When

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<sup>120</sup> *Amy Carmichael* <sup>121</sup> *George Muller* <sup>122</sup> *Matthew Henry* <sup>123</sup> *C.H. Spurgeon*

<sup>124</sup> *Samuel Annesley* <sup>125</sup> *Samuel Chadwick*

engaged, let us maintain a strict watchfulness over our own spirits, and check the first wanderings of thought.<sup>126</sup>

Don't rush into God's presence as though it were a common thing. We have a God who notices the preparation of the heart.<sup>127</sup>

A great part of my time is spent in getting my heart in tune for prayer.<sup>128</sup>

Rush not suddenly into the awful presence of God. Sanctuary preparation is necessary to sanctuary communion. Such suitable preparatory frames of mind come down from God.<sup>129</sup>

Be still, and know that I am God. (Ps. 46:10)

### **3. Acknowledge God's Presence**

Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!

(1 Chron. 16:11)

The first rule of right prayer is to have our heart and mind framed as becomes those who are entering into conversation with God.<sup>130</sup>

[When we pray], it is most fitting for us first to feel that we are doing something that is real; that we are about to address ourselves to God, whom we cannot see, but who is really present.<sup>131</sup>

It is the realization of that second Person as really present, the consciousness of the divine presence, which makes prayer real.<sup>132</sup>

When you go to private prayer your first thought must be: The Father is in secret; the Father waits me there.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Amy Carmichael <sup>127</sup> Phillip Doddridge <sup>128</sup> Robert Murray McCheyne

<sup>129</sup> Samuel Annesley <sup>130</sup> John Calvin <sup>131</sup> C.H. Spurgeon <sup>132</sup> Ibid.

[The tempter] would keep you in a lazy, sluggish coldness, to read, and hear, and pray as asleep, as if you did it not. Awake yourselves with the presence of God, and the great concernment of what you are about, and yield not to your sloth.<sup>134</sup>

Shut the world out, withdraw from all worldly thoughts and occupations, and shut yourself in alone with God, to pray to Him in secret. Let this be your chief object in prayer, to realize the presence of your heavenly Father.<sup>135</sup>

[Get away] to your closet, and in the first place call your thoughts off the world, and as much as is possible clear your soul of all that is foreign to the work [of prayer]. . . . You are going to stand before the great God!<sup>136</sup>

If the Majesty of an earthly king strikes such terror, then what ought not the presence of so great a God? . . . How can distraction, and divisions enter into your heart when it's applying itself to such infinite greatness?<sup>137</sup>

O the vainness of our hearts! And how hard is it to establish them on him who dwells on high! Even while we are speaking to him, we suffer them to break loose and rove, and to entertain foolish thoughts. We would not use a king or great person so, nor any man whom we respect, when we are speaking to him seriously.<sup>138</sup>

How is it possible to keep the world from coming in and the mind from straying out? . . . God is in secret. Let the first act be to affirm the fact of the Holy presence. Call every faculty of mind and body to remembrance, recognition, and realization of the God that is in secret and seeth in secret. Hold the mind to this fact. Tolerate no distraction, allow no diversion, indulge no dissipation.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Andrew Murray <sup>134</sup> Richard Baxter <sup>135</sup> Andrew Murray <sup>136</sup> William Gurnall <sup>137</sup> Anthony Burgess <sup>138</sup> Robert Leighton

Rest not content with the form of prayer, the duty of prayer, the act of prayer. Be not satisfied unless [you are] conscious of the listening ear of God, the responding heart of Jesus, the vital breathing of the Spirit. Oh, let your communion with heaven be a blessed reality. Do not leave the Mercy-Seat without some evidence that you have been in solemn, holy, precious audience with the Invisible One. . . . Leave it not until God in Christ has spoken to you face to face.<sup>140</sup>

We should never leave our prayer-closets in the morning, without having concentrated our thoughts deeply and intensely on the fact of the actual presence of God: there with us, encompassing us, and filling the room as literally as it fills heaven itself.<sup>141</sup>

Be not satisfied to think slightly and superficially of God. Take time to consider him, and know who he is; and then you will reverence him in your thoughts. . . . Shall we shut out God, or think any sudden passing look enough for him?<sup>142</sup>

But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him. (Hab. 2:20)

Enable me, O God, to collect and compose my thoughts before an immediate approach to you in prayer. May I be careful to have my mind in order when I take upon myself the honor to speak to the sovereign Lord of the universe. . . . You are infinitely too great to be trifled with, too wise to be imposed on by a mock devotion, and abhor a sacrifice without a heart. Help me to entertain a habitual sense of your perfections as an admirable help against cold and formal performances. Save me from engaging in rash and precipitate prayers, and from abrupt breaking away to follow business or pleasure as though I had never prayed.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Samuel Chadwick <sup>140</sup> Octavius Winslow <sup>141</sup> F. B. Meyer <sup>142</sup> Robert Leighton



#### 4. Pray Until You Pray

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isa. 40:30-31)

Look well to it that you really pray—do not learn the language of prayer—seek the spirit of prayer, and God Almighty will bless you and make you mightier in your supplications.<sup>144</sup>

[The Holy Spirit] is the giver of all prayer. Pray for prayer—pray till you can pray; pray to be helped to pray, and give not up praying because you cannot pray, for it is when you think you cannot pray that you are most praying; and sometimes when you have no sort of comfort in your supplications, it is then that your heart, all broken and cast down, is really wrestling and truly prevailing with the Most High.<sup>145</sup>

Many of the most blessed seasons of prayer I have ever known have begun with the feeling of utter deadness and prayerlessness; but in my helplessness and coldness I have cast myself upon God, and looked to Him to send His Holy Spirit to teach me to pray, and He has done it.<sup>146</sup>

God may, and does sometimes conceal his enlivening presence, till the soul be engaged in the work. . . . Have you never launched out to [prayer] as the apostles to sea, with the wind on your teeth, as if the Spirit of God, instead of helping you on, meant to drive you back, and yet found Christ walking to you before the [prayer] was done?<sup>147</sup>

Our realization of the presence of God may, however, be accompanied with little or no emotion. Our spirits may lie as if dead under the hand of God. Vision and rapture may alike be withdrawn. But we ought not therefore to grow languid in prayer. . . . It may be that the prayer which

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<sup>143</sup> *Susanna Wesley*<sup>144</sup> *C.H. Spurgeon* <sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>146</sup> *R.A. Torrey* <sup>147</sup> *William Gurnall*

goes up through darkness to God will bring to us a blessing such as we have not received in our most favored hours.<sup>148</sup>

Do you not sometimes rise from your knees in your little room and say, “I do not think I have prayed. I could not feel at home in prayer”? Nine times out of every ten, those prayers are most prevalent with God which we think are the least acceptable.<sup>149</sup>

You may mistake, and think your prayers weak, when they are strong. The strength of prayer consists not in anything outward, not in expressions either by word or tears, not in outward gestures or enlargements. It is a hidden, an inward strength.<sup>150</sup>

The greater deadness and barrenness your heart . . . and the less hope you have to get out of the indisposition, the more joyful will the quickening presence of God be to you. The assistance that thus surprises you beyond your expectation will be a true Isaac—a child of joy and laughter.<sup>151</sup>

It is a common temptation of Satan to make us give up the reading of the Word and prayer when our enjoyment is gone; as if it were of no use. . . . The truth is, in order to enjoy the Word, we ought to continue to read it, and the way to obtain a spirit of prayer is to continue praying.<sup>152</sup>

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet. (Heb. 12:12-13)

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<sup>148</sup> *David McIntyre* <sup>149</sup> *C.H. Spurgeon* <sup>150</sup> *David Clarkson* <sup>151</sup> *William Gurnall*

<sup>152</sup> *George Muller*

## 5. Persist Through Every Distraction

I discipline my body and keep it under control. (1 Cor. 9:26-27)

What various hindrances we meet in coming to the mercy seat! Yet [whoever] knows the worth of prayer but wishes to be often there!<sup>153</sup>

When I would speak and pray to God by myself, a hundred thousand hindrances at once intervene before I get at it. Then the devil can throw all sorts of reasons for delay into my path; he can block and hinder me on all sides; as a result, I go my way and never think of [prayer] again . . . . Try it. Resolve to pray earnestly, and no doubt you will see how large an assortment of your own thoughts will rush in on you and distract you, so that you cannot begin aright.<sup>154</sup>

How oft, alas! do our souls begin to speak with God in prayer, and on a sudden [whim], fall a-chatting with the world! . . . [One moment] we pursue hard after God with full cry of our affections, but instantly we are at a loss and hunt cold again.<sup>155</sup>

None knows how many bye-ways the heart hath and back-lanes, to slip away from the presence of God.<sup>156</sup>

The tempter hinders holy duty much, by wandering thoughts, and [depressing] perplexities, and a hurry of temptations, which torment and distract some Christians, so that they cry out, "I cannot pray, I cannot meditate;" and are weary of duty, and even of their lives. This shows the malice of the tempter and your weakness; but if you [want to be] delivered from it, it hinders not your acceptance with God.<sup>157</sup>

With me every time of prayer, or almost every time, begins with a conflict.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> William Cowper <sup>154</sup> Martin Luther <sup>155</sup> William Gurnall <sup>156</sup> John Bunyan

<sup>157</sup> Richard Baxter <sup>158</sup> Andrew Bonar

Prayer meets with obstacles, which must be prayed away. That is what men mean when they talk about *praying through*.<sup>159</sup>

The battle of prayer is against two things in the earthlies: wandering thoughts, and lack of intimacy with God's character as revealed in His word. Neither can be cured at once, but they can be cured by discipline.<sup>160</sup>

To strive in prayer means in the final analysis to take up the battle against all the inner and outward hindrances which would dissociate us from the Spirit of prayer.<sup>161</sup>

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. (2 Tim. 2:3-4)

Some find that vocal prayer does more excite them, and keep the mind from wandering, than mere mental prayer does; so free discourse is but a vocal meditation.<sup>162</sup>

[Do] not suffer diversions, but answer all foreign thoughts, as Nehemiah . . . [to] them that would have called him off from building.<sup>163</sup>

I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you? (Neh. 6:3)

When blasphemous or disturbing thoughts look in, or fruitless musings, presently meet them, and use that authority of reason which is left you, to cast them and command them out.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Albert Richardson <sup>160</sup> Oswald Chambers <sup>161</sup> O. Hallesby <sup>162</sup> Richard Baxter <sup>163</sup> William Gurnall <sup>164</sup> Richard Baxter

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” . . . There is danger lest our minds and hearts should wander from God, when they should be fixed on him. . . . [Be] vigilant to prevent wanderings and distractions, those loose [impulses] of our vain minds and hearts into which they are apt to run when they should be most fixed.<sup>165</sup>

Ah dearest Lord, I cannot pray, my fancy is not free; unmannerly distractions come, and force my thoughts from Thee. The world that looks so dull all day glows bright on me at prayer, and plans that ask no thought but then wake up and meet me there. . . . I cannot pray; yet, Lord, Thou knowest the pain it is to me to have my vainly struggling thoughts thus torn away from Thee. . . . Yet Thou art oft most present, Lord, in weak distracted prayer: A sinner out of heart with self, most often finds Thee there. For prayer that humbles sets the soul from all illusions free, and teaches it how utterly, dear Lord, it hangs on Thee.<sup>166</sup>

Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. (Ps. 86:11)

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<sup>165</sup> *David Clarkson* <sup>166</sup> *Frederick W. Faber*

## CHAPTER THREE

### Steps *After* Praying

#### 1. Believe God Accepts Your Prayer

The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer. (Ps. 6:9)

Perhaps prayer often needs to be followed by a little pause, that we may have time to open our hearts to that for which we have prayed. We often rush from prayer to prayer without waiting for the word within, which says, “I have heard you, My child.”<sup>167</sup>

To pray and not to *act faith*, is to shoot and not look where the arrow lights. . . . You have in prayer labored to [prevail with] God to hear and help you; now take as much pains to overcome your heart into a quiet waiting on God and entire confidence in him.<sup>168</sup>

The fact is that sincere prayer may often be very feeble to us, but it is always acceptable to God. . . . [Our prayers] are foul with unbelief, decayed with [foolishness], and worm-eaten with wandering thoughts; but nevertheless, God accepts them at heaven’s own bank, and gives us rich and ready blessings, in return for our supplications.<sup>169</sup>

In the best prayer that was ever offered by the holiest man that ever lived, there was enough sin in it to render it a polluted thing if the Lord had looked upon it by itself. . . . Our consolation lies in this—that our beloved intercessor who stands before God for us, even Christ Jesus—possesses such an abundance of precious merit, that He puts fragrance into our supplications, and imparts a delicious aroma to our prayers!<sup>170</sup>

We are sometimes tempted to think that we get no good by our prayers, and that we may as well give them up altogether. Let us resist the

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<sup>167</sup> *Amy Carmichael* <sup>168</sup> *William Gurnall* <sup>169</sup> *C.H. Spurgeon* <sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

temptation. It comes from the devil. Let us believe, and pray on. Against our besetting sins, against the spirit of the world, against the wiles of the devil, let us pray on, and not faint. For strength to do duty, for grace to bear our trials, for comfort in every trouble, let us continue in prayer. Let us be sure that no time is so well-spent in every day, as that which we spend upon our knees. Jesus hears us, and in his own good time will give an answer.<sup>171</sup>

## 2. Keep Walking in the Attitude of Prayer

. . . praying at all times in the Spirit. (Eph. 6:18)

To pray is to let God into our lives. He knocks and seeks admittance, not only in the solemn hours of secret prayer. He knocks in the midst of your daily work, your daily struggles, your daily grind.<sup>172</sup>

Supplement those times [of private prayer] by a thousand thought-prayers as we go about the job of living. Let us practice the fine art of making every work a priestly ministrations. Let us believe that God is in all our simple deeds and learn to find Him there.<sup>173</sup>

Into all our daily duties, dear friends, however absorbing, however secular, however small, however irritating they may be, however monotonous, into all our daily duties it is possible to bring Him.<sup>174</sup>

If the Apostle wills “that men pray always,” (1 Tim. 2:8) it must be possible while going about business, study, daily work, work at home amongst the children . . . not only to pray while we are working, but to *make work prayer*, which is even better. . . . If, in all that I do, I try to realize my dependence on God for power; to look to Him for direction, and to trust Him . . . then whether I eat, or drink, or pray, or study, or buy and sell, or marry or am given in marriage, all will be worship of God.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> J.C. Ryle <sup>172</sup> O. Hallesby <sup>173</sup> A.W. Tozer <sup>174</sup> A. Maclaren <sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

By practice, remembering God as much as we can, and asking Him to forgive us when we had passed long hours in forgetfulness of Him, this habit would become easy and natural to us—a kind of second nature.

. . . How much they miss, who only speak to God from their knees, or on set occasions! There must be such times for us all; but we may link them together by a perpetual ripple of holy and loving converse with Him who counts the hairs of our heads in His minute microscopic interest in our concerns.<sup>176</sup>

O blessed person! I hope there are many such persons among you, whose life is a perpetual prayer, as David gave himself to prayer, “but I give myself unto prayer” (Ps. 109:4). . . . He is prayer all over: he prays at rising and prays at lying down; he prays as he walks; and he is always ready for prayer.<sup>177</sup>

It pleases God thus to keep intercourse with those souls that love him, and for the ejaculations of their desires to him, looks back on them, and so they interchange as it were sudden glances of love that answer one another.<sup>178</sup>

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God.<sup>179</sup>

Oh, the sweet delights of constancy in prayer! The habit of prayer is charming, but the spirit of prayer is heavenly. Be always praying. Is that possible? Some have realized it, till the whole of the engagements of the day have been ablaze with prayer. . . . Blessed are we when prayer surrounds us like an atmosphere.<sup>180</sup>

O God, I thank You because, when I have been for some time interrupted in my work and my thoughts of You have been diverted, I

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<sup>176</sup> F.B. Meyer <sup>177</sup> Samuel Lee <sup>178</sup> Robert Leighton <sup>179</sup> Brother Lawrence <sup>180</sup> C.H. Spurgeon



have found how pleasing it is to my mind to feel the motions of Your Spirit quickening me and exciting me to return.<sup>181</sup>

I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. (Ps. 16:8)

### **3. Persevere in the Habit of Prayer**

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. (Rom. 12:11-12)

Do not expect, when you trust Christ to bring you into a new, healthy prayer-life, that you will be able all at once to pray as easily and powerfully and joyfully as you fain would. No, it may not come at once. But just bow quietly before God in your ignorance and weakness. . . . In due season you will learn to pray.<sup>182</sup>

It is far more easy to begin a habit of prayer than to keep it up. . . . Thousands take up a habit of praying for a little season, after some special mercy or special affliction, and then little by little become cold about it, and at last lay it aside. The secret thought comes stealing over men's minds that it is no use to pray. They see no visible benefit from it. They persuade themselves that they get on just as well without prayer. Laziness and unbelief prevail over their hearts, and at last they altogether "restrain prayer before God" (Job 15:4). Let us resist this feeling, whenever we feel it rising within us. Let us resolve by God's grace, that however poor and feeble our prayers may seem to be, we will pray on. It is not for nothing that the Bible tells us so frequently, to "watch unto prayer," to "pray without ceasing," to "continue in prayer," to "pray always and not to faint," to be "instant in prayer."<sup>183</sup>

Once having begun the habit [of prayer] never give it up. . . . Your body will sometimes say, "You are unwell, or sleepy, or weary; you need not pray." Your mind will sometimes say, "You have important business to

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<sup>181</sup> *Susanna Wesley* <sup>182</sup> *Andrew Murray* <sup>183</sup> *J.C. Ryle*

attend to today; cut short your prayers.” Look on all such suggestions as coming direct from the devil. There are all as good as saying, “Neglect your soul.” . . . It is not for nothing that Paul said, “Continue in prayer,” and “Pray without ceasing.”<sup>184</sup>

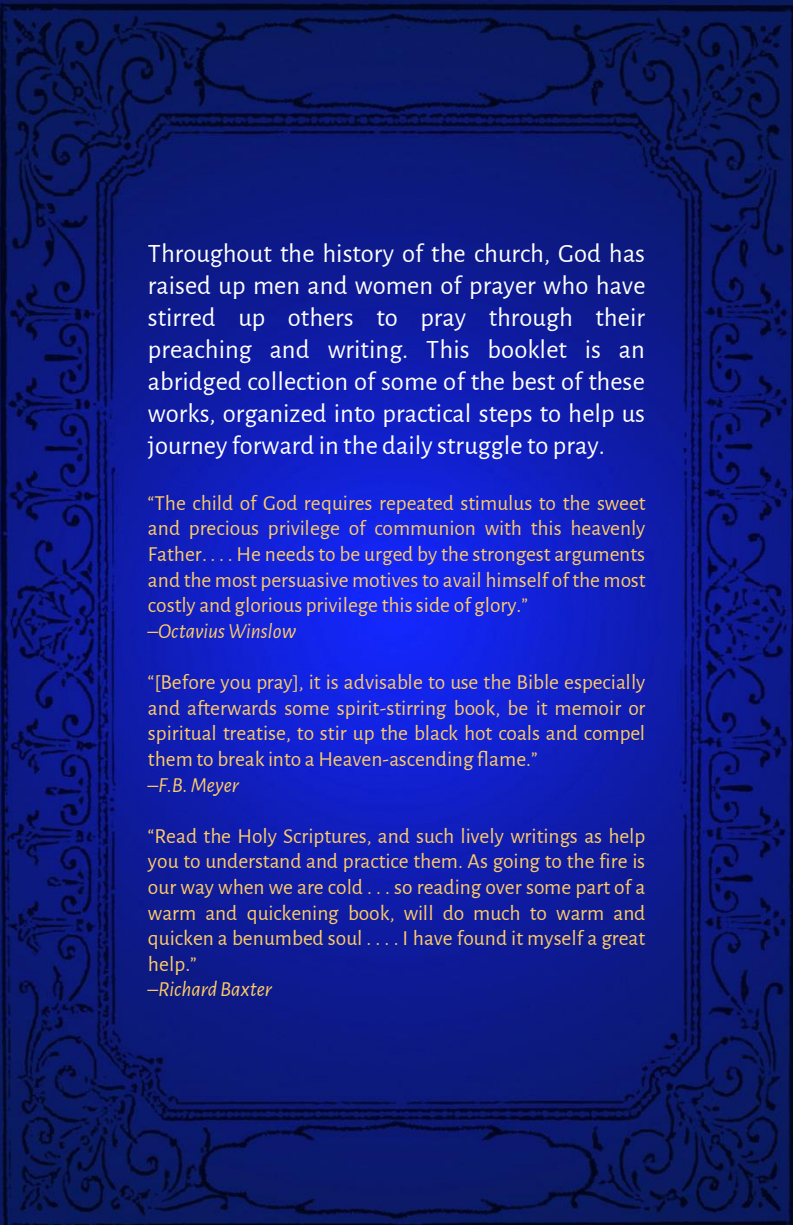
The command to continue in prayer is not an easy thing. It can mean conflict, [wrestling], agony. Forces are moving in the unseen about us, and prayer influences those movements. . . . “Lord, help us to continue, to persevere in prayer. Hold our hands steady until the going down of the sun” (Exod. 17:12).<sup>185</sup>

Pray on, pray on, believing ones, God’s promised word is sure, that they shall overcome by faith who to the end endure; Pray on, pray on, O weary not; the cross with patience bear, and though its burden weigh us down, the Lord will answer prayer. His eye foresees our greatest good, while we at best are weak, and thus in wisdom He withholds the boon that oft we seek; and yet His all-sufficient grace he bids us freely share, and in a way we little know the Lord will answer prayer.<sup>186</sup>

I shall, by assisting grace, follow this poor piece with my prayers, that it may be so blessed from on high, as that it may work mightily to the internal and eternal welfare—both of reader, hearer, and writer.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> J.C. Ryle <sup>185</sup> Amy Carmichael <sup>186</sup> Fanny Crosby <sup>187</sup> Thomas Brooks



Throughout the history of the church, God has raised up men and women of prayer who have stirred up others to pray through their preaching and writing. This booklet is an abridged collection of some of the best of these works, organized into practical steps to help us journey forward in the daily struggle to pray.

"The child of God requires repeated stimulus to the sweet and precious privilege of communion with this heavenly Father. . . . He needs to be urged by the strongest arguments and the most persuasive motives to avail himself of the most costly and glorious privilege this side of glory."

—*Octavius Winslow*

"[Before you pray], it is advisable to use the Bible especially and afterwards some spirit-stirring book, be it memoir or spiritual treatise, to stir up the black hot coals and compel them to break into a Heaven-ascending flame."

—*F.B. Meyer*

"Read the Holy Scriptures, and such lively writings as help you to understand and practice them. As going to the fire is our way when we are cold . . . so reading over some part of a warm and quickening book, will do much to warm and quicken a benumbed soul . . . I have found it myself a great help."

—*Richard Baxter*