

## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The book you now hold in your hands will perhaps prove to be one of the most helpful devotional classics ever put together on the subject of prayer. David M. McIntyre has given us two book-length treatments on the topic. The first, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, is already widely considered one of the greatest and most helpful books on the subject ever written. It should be read thoughtfully and carefully. Christians from all over the world have reaped great benefits from its contents.

The second, *The Prayer-Life of Our Lord*, is not as well-known, but it is no less helpful to the Christian yearning to grow strong in the privilege and discipline of prayer. Upon seeing the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer, the disciples earnestly requested he teach them to pray as he did, such was the kind of freedom, reverence and fellowship he had with the Father. It was McIntyre's belief that Christians can still benefit from meditating on those marvelous and awesome meetings between the heavenly Father and incarnate Son. We should be simultaneously *led to worship* and *challenged to follow* our great Savior. Taken together, the present volume should provide such stimulus to the soul as to warrant repeated readings over the length of one's Christian pilgrimage. We are deeply indebted to our brother for these books.

As a publisher we have changed precious little, fixing a few typos and altering punctuation where necessary to make the reading a little easier for the average reader. We trust the contents of the material will be of tremendous blessing to the body of Christ.

May the Lord help us to "pray always and not lose heart."

– C.T. December, 2011



*the* **HIDDEN LIFE** *of* **PRAYER**

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber,  
and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret,  
and thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee.

—Matt. 6:6



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

The occasion<sup>\*</sup> which has prompted the dedication of this book permits me to inscribe upon it the honoured name of Dr. Andrew A. Bonar, and to recall the fervent devotion which characterised those who were most intimately associated with him in the service of Christ.

*The Diary of Dr. Bonar*, already a Christian classic, is probably the best treatise on private prayer which we possess. Originally meant to mark the memorabilia of his life, it became, almost exclusively, an instrument for recording and testing his prayers.

On Thursday, 4th December, 1856, Mr. Bonar was inducted into the pastoral charge of Finnieston Church, Glasgow. On the evening of that day he signified anew his sense of the value of prayer: "The Lord filled me with desire, and made me feel that I must be as much with him alone as with souls in public."

A few months later he wrote: "For nearly ten days past have been much hindered in prayer, and feel my strength weakened thereby. I must at once return, through the Lord's strength, to not less than three hours a day spent in prayer and meditation upon the Word."

On the first anniversary this entry occurs: "Tomorrow I propose to spend the most of the day in prayer in the Church. Lord, help me." Later, we find him setting apart one whole day in each month for prayer and fasting. But his devotion overflowed all prepared channels. Sentences such as these carry with them their own instruction: "Felt in the evening most bitter grief over the apathy of the district. They are perishing! They are perishing! And yet they will not consider. I lay awake thinking over it, and crying to the Lord in broken groans."

Again, he observes, "I should count the days, not by what I have of new

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\* The Jubilee of the Finnieston Church, Glasgow, of which Dr. Andrew Bonar was Minister. Dr. M'Intyre was colleague and successor to Dr. Bonar and also son-in-law.

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instances of usefulness, but by the times I have been enabled to pray in faith, and to take hold upon God." At another time he remarks that "Prayer should make room for itself"; again, that it should "interweave" itself into all work for Christ; again, that in "the incessant occupations, the bustle of even right things, Satan may find his opportunity to hinder prayer." He quotes Flavel: "The devil is aware that one hour of close fellowship, of hearty converse with God in prayer, is able to pull down what he hath been contriving and building many a year"; and he adds from his own experience, "Satan, like the lapwing, drew me away from the real object (prayer and fellowship with God) by suggesting every now and then something about some other part of my work...and so the best hours of yesterday were in great measure lost, so far as 'prayer and transfiguration' might have been."

His holidays were especially opportunities of "trading with the talent of prayer." "I see," he writes, "that the Master teaches the necessity of such times of continued waiting on God as a stay in the country presents." In sailing to America to attend the Northfield Conference, and in returning, he was "enabled to pray some hours every day in the ship." Of his frequent visits to Mull, he writes, "The best thing I have found in this quiet island has been seasons of prayer."

And as he reviewed his ministry from time to time, amid many regrets his deepest sorrow was on account of the unexhausted possibilities of prayer: "My heart smites me still for being unlike Epaphras, who 'laboured fervently in prayers.'" "One terrible failure confronted me everywhere, viz.: 'Ye have asked nothing in my name.'" "Want of prayer in the right measure and manner." "Had some almost overwhelming sense of sins of omission in the days past. If I had only prayed more." "Oh, that I had prayed a hundred-fold more."

Perhaps the most intimate of Dr. Bonar's ministerial associates was Robert Murray McCheyne. His prayerfulness has almost become a proverb. Dr. James Hamilton writes of him:

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He gave himself to prayer. Like his blessed Master he often rose up a great while before it was day, and spend the time in singing psalms and hymns and the devotional reading of that Word which dwelt so richly in him. His walks and rides and journeys were sanctified by prayer.... There was nothing which he liked so much as to go out into a solitary place, and pray; and the ruined chapel of Invergowrie, and many other sequestered spots around Dundee, were the much-loved resorts where he had often enjoyed sweet communion with God. Seldom have we known one so specific and yet reverential in his prayers, nor one whose confessions of sin united such self-loathing with such filial love. And now that "Moses my servant is dead," perhaps the heaviest loss to his brethren, his people, and the land, is the loss of his intercessions.

Only a few months before his death, Mr. McCheyne drew up some considerations touching *Reformation in Secret Prayer*. "I ought," he says, "to spend the best hours of the day in communion with God. It is my noblest and most fruitful employment, and is not to be thrust into any corner." This paper on personal reformation is evidently left unfinished. "And now," adds his biographer, "he knows even as he is known."

Dr. Moody Stuart was a friend greatly beloved. Of him his biographer writes: "Dr. Moody Stuart was preeminently a man of prayer.... He prayed without ceasing.... He prayed always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance. He felt that nothing was too small for him to bring to his God in prayer, and that nothing was too great for him to ask in Jesus' name.... Prayer was to him a second nature." His own testimony was, "I cannot say that a day passes without beholding the beauty of the Lord, and being revived by his grace. For the most part the Lord is with me the greater part of the day, and is daily giving me some new insight into the depth and freeness of his love, together with the conviction of sin and contrition of spirit, in which there is much peace and rest."

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The rules which he offered to others, and in accordance with which he guided his own prayer-life, were: (a) Pray till you pray; (b) Pray till you are conscious of being heard; (c) Pray till you receive an answer.

Dr. A. N. Somerville was another “true yoke-fellow.” In the work of his own congregation, it was his custom “to go into the church alone, and go over the pews, and, reading the names of the sitters in them commit them to God in prayer.” When the missionary hunger seized and held his heart, he used to spread open before him an atlas, and pray for men of every nation and kindred and people and tongue. And from the chair of the General Assembly of his Church he exhorted her members to address themselves to more fervent and believing intercession: “The greatest, the most successful servants that Christ ever had divided their functions into departments – ‘We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.’ What would be thought of dividing the twelve hours of our day by giving six hours to prayer for the Gospel and six to the ministry of the Word? Had all Christ’s servants acted thus, could anyone estimate how mighty the results on the world would be today?”

Of William C. Burns, another fellow-soldier, it is said, “His whole life was literally a life of prayer, and his whole ministry a series of battles fought at the mercy-seat.” Very early in his ministerial course he gave it as his judgment that “The great, fundamental error, as far as I can see, in the economy of the Christian life, which many, and alas! I for one commit, is that of having too *few* and too *short* periods of solemn retirement with our gracious Father and his adorable Son, Jesus Christ.” From this opinion he never swerved. He spent days and sometimes nights “before the Lord,” and sighed, “Oh, for a day every week to spend entirely in the secret of his presence.” For weeks before the Kilsyth awakening, as his brother informs us, “he was full of prayer; he seemed to care for nothing but to pray. In the daytime, alone, or with others, it was his chief delight, and in the night watches he might be heard praying aloud.” And the Lord whom he sought came to his temple *suddenly*.



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One might speak of John Milne of Perth, Patrick Miller of Dundee, Daniel Cormick of Kirriemuir, Dr. Bonar's brothers, Dr. James Hamilton of London, Joseph Wilson of Abernyte, and the rest, their "friends and companions." Let it suffice to mention only one other, William Hewitson of Dirleton. Dr. Andrew Bonar says of him, "One thing often struck me in Mr. Hewitson. He seemed to have no intervals in communion with God – no gaps. I used to feel, when with him, that it was being with one who was a vine *watered every moment*." And so it was that he was able to say in truth, "I am better acquainted with Jesus than with any friend I have on earth."

Books on secret prayer are without number; but it seems to me that there is still room for one in which an appeal may be taken, steadily, and from every point, to life – to the experience of God's saints. In these pages no attempt has been made to explain the mysteries of intercourse with God and commerce with heaven. What is here offered is a simple enumeration of some things which the Lord's remembrancers have found to be helpful in the practice of prayer. The great Bengel explained that if he desired the most perfect intimacy with real Christians on one account rather than another, it was "for the sake of learning how they manage in secret to keep up their communion with God."

Lord, teach us to pray.

My God, Thy creature answers Thee.  
–Alfred de Musset

The love of Christ is my prayer-book.  
–Gerhard Tersteegen

Prayer is the key of heaven;  
the Spirit helps faith to turn this key.  
–Thomas Watson

## CHAPTER 1

# *The Life of Prayer*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In one of the cathedrals of Northern Europe, an exquisite group in high relief represents the prayer life. It is disposed in three panels. The first of these reminds us of the apostolic precept, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). We see the front of a spacious temple which opens on the market-place. The great square is strewn with crowds of eager men, gesticulating, bargaining—all evidently intent on gain. But One, who wears a circlet of thorn, and is clothed in a garment woven without seam from the top throughout (John 19:23), moves silently through the clamorous crowds and subdues to holy fear the most covetous heart.

The second panel displays the precincts of the temple and serves to illustrate the common worship of the Church. White-robed ministers hasten here and there. They carry oil for the lamp, water for the laver, and blood from the altar; with pure intention, their eyes turned toward the unseen glory, they fulfill the duties of their sacred calling.

The third panel introduces us to the inner sanctuary. A solitary worshipper has entered within the veil and, hushed and lowly in the presence of God, bends before the glancing Shekinah. This represents the hidden life of prayer of which the Master spoke in the familiar

words, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee” (Matt. 6:6 RV).

Our Lord takes it for granted that His people will pray. And indeed in Scripture generally the outward obligation of prayer is implied rather than asserted. Moved by a divinely-implanted instinct, our natures cry out for God, for the living God. And however this instinct may be crushed by sin, it awakes to power in the consciousness of redemption.

Theologians of all schools, and Christians of every type, agree in their recognition of this principle of the new life. Chrysostom has said, “The just man does not desist from praying until he ceases to be just”; and Augustine, “He that loveth little prayeth little, and he that loveth much prayeth much”; and Richard Hooker, “Prayer is the first thing wherewith a righteous life beginneth, and the last wherewith it doth end”; and Père la Combe, “He who has a pure heart will never cease to pray, and he who will be constant in prayer shall know what it is to have a pure heart”; and Bunyan, “If thou art not a praying person, thou art not a Christian”; and Richard Baxter, “Prayer is the breath of the new creature”; and George Herbert, “Prayer ... the soul’s blood.”

## 2. PRAYER IS HARD WORK

And yet, instinctive as is our dependence upon God, no duty is more earnestly impressed upon us in Scripture than the duty of continual communion with Him. The main reason for this unceasing insistence is the arduousness of prayer. In its nature, it is a laborious undertaking, and in our endeavor to maintain the spirit of prayer we are called to wrestle against principalities and powers of darkness (Eph. 6:12).

“Dear Christian reader,” says Jacob Boehme, “to pray aright is right earnest work.” Prayer is the most sublime energy of which the spirit of man is

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capable.<sup>1</sup> It is in one aspect glory and blessedness; in another, it is toil and travail, battle and agony. Uplifted hands grow tremulous long before the field is won; straining sinews and panting breath proclaim the exhaustion of the “heavenly footman.” The weight that falls upon an aching heart fills the brow with anguish, even when the midnight air is chill. Prayer is the uplift of the earth-bound soul into the heaven, the entrance of the purified spirit into the holiest, the rending of the luminous veil that shuts in, as behind curtains, the glory of God. It is the vision of things unseen, the recognition of the mind of the Spirit, the effort to frame words which man may not utter. “A man that truly prays one prayer,” says Bunyan, “shall after that never be able to express with his mouth or pen the unutterable desires, sense, affection, and longing that went to God in that prayer.” The saints of the Jewish Church had a princely energy in intercession: “Battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer,” they took the kingdom of heaven by violence (Matt. 11:12). The first Christians proved in the wilderness, in the dungeon, in the arena, and at the stake the truth of their Master’s words, “He shall have whatsoever he saith” (Mark 11:23). Their souls ascended to God in supplication as the flame of the altar mounts heavenward. The Talmudists affirm that in the divine life four things call for fortitude; of these, prayer is one. One who met Tersteegen at Kronenberg remarked, “It seemed to me as if he had gone straight into heaven, and had lost himself in God; but often when he had done praying he was as white as the wall.” David Brainerd notes that on one occasion, when he found his soul “exceedingly enlarged” in supplication, he was “in such anguish, and pleaded with so much earnestness and importunity,” that when he rose from his knees he felt “extremely weak and overcome.” “I could scarcely walk straight,” he goes on to say, and “my joints were loosed, the sweat ran down my face and body, and nature seemed as if it would dissolve.” A living writer has reminded us of John Foster, who used to spend long nights in

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1. “Believe me, to pray with all your heart and strength, with the reason and the will, to believe vividly that God will listen to your voice through Christ, and verily do the thing He pleaseth thereupon—this is the last, the greatest achievement of the Christian’s warfare upon earth. *Teach* us to pray, O Lord.” —Samuel Taylor Coleridge

his chapel, absorbed in spiritual exercises, pacing to and fro in the disquietude of his spirit, until his restless feet had worn a little track in the aisle.<sup>2</sup>

One might easily multiply examples, but there is no need to go beyond Scripture to find either precept or example to impress us with the arduousness of that prayer which prevails. Should not the supplication of the Psalmist, “Quicken Thou me, according to Thy word . . . quicken me in Thy righteousness . . . quicken me after Thy loving-kindness . . . quicken me according to Thy judgments . . . quicken me, O Lord, for Thy name’s sake” (Ps. 119), and the complaint of the Evangelical Prophet, “There is none that calleth upon Thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee” (Isa. 64:7), find an echo in our experience? Do we know what it is to “labour,” to “wrestle,” to “agonize” in prayer?<sup>3</sup>

Another explanation of the arduousness of prayer lies in the fact that we are spiritually hindered: there is “the noise of archers in the places of drawing water” (Judg. 5:11). St. Paul assures us that we shall have to maintain our prayer energy “against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). Dr. Andrew Bonar used to say that, as the King of Syria commanded his captains to fight neither with small nor great, but only with the King of Israel (1 Kings 22:31), so the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2) seems to bend all the force of his attack against the spirit of prayer. If he should prove victorious there, he has won the day. Sometimes we are conscious of a satanic impulse directed immediately against the life of prayer in our souls; sometimes we are led into “dry” and wilderness experiences, and the face of God grows dark above us; sometimes, when we strive most earnestly to bring every thought and imagination under obedience to Christ, we seem to be given over

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2. Dr. Horton, *Verbum Dei*, 214.

3. “It is a tremendously hard thing to pray aright. Yea, it is verily the science of all sciences even to pray so that the heart may approach unto God with all gracious confidence, and say, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven.’ For he who can take to himself such confidence of grace is already over the hill of difficulty, and has laid the foundation-stone of the temple of prayer.” –Martin Luther, *Parting Words* (Edin., 1903), 73. “Perfect prayer is not attained by the use of many words, but through deep desire.” –Catherine of Sienna

to disorder and unrest; sometimes the inbred slothfulness of our nature lends itself to the evil one as an instrument by which he may turn our minds back from the exercise of prayer. Because of all these things, therefore, we must be diligent and resolved, watching as a sentry who remembers that the lives of men are lying at the hazard of his wakefulness, resourcefulness, and courage.<sup>4</sup> “And what I say unto you,” said the Lord to His disciples, “I say unto all, Watch!” (Mark 13:37).

### 3. WE MUST BE ON GUARD

There are times when even the soldiers of Christ become heedless of their trust, and no longer guard with vigilance the gift of prayer. Should any one who reads these pages be conscious of loss of power in intercession, lack of joy in communion, hardness and impenitence in confession, “Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Rev. 2:5).<sup>5</sup>

O stars of heaven that fade and flame,  
O whispering waves below!  
Was earth, or heaven, or I the same,  
A year, a year ago!  
The stars have kept their home on high,  
the waves their wonted flow;  
The love is lost that once was I,  
A year, a year ago.<sup>6</sup>

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4. “We know the utility of prayer from the efforts of the wicked spirits to distract us during the Divine office; and we experience the fruit of prayer in the defeat of our enemies.” – John Climacus, *The Holy Ladder of Perfection*, 28.64. “When we go to God by prayer, the devil knows we go to fetch strength against him, and therefore he opposeth us all he can.” –Richard Sibbes, *Divine Meditations*, 164.

5. “If thou find a weariness in this duty, suspect thyself, purge and refine thy heart from the love of all sin, and endeavor to put it into a heavenly and spiritual frame; and then thou wilt find this no unpleasant exercise, but full of delight and satisfaction. In the meantime, complain not of the hardness of the duty, but of the untowardness of thy own heart.” *The Whole Duty of Man* (Lond., 1741), 122.

6. F. W. H. Myers, *Poems*.

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The only remedy for this sluggish mood is that we should “rekindle our love,” as Polycarp wrote to the Church in Ephesus, “in the blood of God.” Let us ask for a fresh gift of the Holy Spirit to quicken our sluggish hearts, a new disclosure of the charity of God. The Spirit will help our infirmities, and the very compassion of the Son of God will fall upon us, clothing us with zeal as with a garment, stirring our affections into a most vehement flame, and filling our souls with heaven.

### 4. PRAYER IS CONTINUOUS

“Men ought always to pray, and”—although faintness of spirit attends on prayer like a shadow—“not faint” (Luke 18:1). The soil in which the prayer of faith takes root is a life of unbroken communion with God, a life in which the windows of the soul are always open toward the City of Rest. We do not know the true potency of prayer until our hearts are so steadfastly inclined to God that our thoughts turn to Him, as by a Divine instinct, whenever they are set free from the consideration of earthly things. It has been said of Origen (in his own words) that his life was “one unceasing supplication.” By this means above all others the perfect idea of the Christian life is realized. Intercourse between the believer and his Lord ought never to be interrupted.<sup>7</sup>

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7. “In our mutual intercourse and conversation—amidst all the busiest scenes of our pilgrimage—we may be moving to and fro on the rapid wing of prayer, of mental prayer—that prayer that lays the whole burden of the heart on a single sigh. A sigh breathed in the Spirit, though inaudible to all around us but God, may sanctify every conversation, every event in the history of the day. We must have fellowship at all times either with the spirit of the world or with the Spirit of God. . . . Prayer will be fatiguing to flesh and blood if uttered aloud and sustained long. Oral prayer, and prayer mentally ordered in words though not uttered aloud, no believer can engage in without ceasing; but there is an undercurrent of prayer that may run continually under the stream of our thoughts, and never weary us. Such prayer is the silent breathing of the Spirit of God, who dwells in our hearts (*vide* Rom. 8:9 and 1 Cor. 3:16); it is the *temper* and *habit* of the spiritual mind; it is *the pulse of our life which is hid with Christ in God.*” —Hewitson’s *Life*, 100-101. “My mind was greatly fixed on Divine things: almost perpetually in the contemplation of them. I spent most of my time in thinking of Divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and it was



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“The vision of God,” says Bishop Westcott, “makes life a continuous prayer.” And in that vision, all fleeting things resolve themselves and appear in relation to things unseen. In a broad use of the term, prayer is the sum of all the service that we render to God,<sup>8</sup> so that all fulfillment of duty is, in one sense, the performance of Divine service, and the familiar saying, “Work is worship,” is justified. “I am prayer,” said a Psalmist (Ps. 109:4). “In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving. . .” said an Apostle (Phil. 4:6).

In the Old Testament, that life which is steeped in prayer is often described as a walk with God. Enoch walked in assurance, Abraham in perfectness, Elijah in fidelity, the sons of Levi in peace and equity. Or it is spoken of as a dwelling with God, even as Joshua departed not from the Tabernacle (Exod. 33:11); or as certain craftsmen of the olden time abode with a king for his work (1 Kings 7:13-14). Again, it is defined as the ascent of the soul into the Sacred Presence, as the planets, “with open face beholding,” climb into the light of the sun’s countenance, or as a flower, lit with beauty and dipped in fragrance, reaches upward toward the light. At other times, prayer is said to be the gathering up of all the faculties in an ardor of reverence, and love, and praise. As one clear strain may succeed in reducing to harmony a number of mutually discordant voices, so the reigning impulses of the spiritual nature unite the heart to fear the name of the Lord.

But the most familiar, and perhaps the most impressive, description of prayer in the Old Testament is found in those numerous passages where the life of communion with God is spoken of as a waiting upon Him. A great scholar has given a beautiful definition of waiting upon God: “To wait is

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always my manner to sing forth my contemplations. I was almost constantly in ejaculatory prayer, wherever I was. Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent.” –Jonathan Edwards, *Memoirs*, ch. 1. “I see that unless I keep up short prayer every day throughout the whole day, at intervals, I lose the spirit of prayer. I would never lose sight any hour of the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and if I have this sight I shall be able to pray. –Andrew A. Bonar, *Diary*, Oct. 7, 1860.

8. Is not the name of Prayer usual to signify even all the service that ever we do God?” –Hooker, *Eccles. Polity*, v. 23.

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not merely to remain impassive. It is to expect—to look for with patience, and also with submission. It is to long for, but not impatiently; to look for, but not to fret at the delay; to watch for, but not restlessly; to feel that if He does not come we will acquiesce, and yet to refuse to let the mind acquiesce in the feeling that He will not come.”<sup>9</sup>

Now, do not let any one say that such a life is visionary and unprofitable. The real world is not this covering veil of sense; reality belongs to those heavenly things of which the earthly are mere “patterns” and correspondences. Who is so practical as God? Who among men so wisely directed His efforts to the circumstances and the occasions which He was called to face, as “the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13)? Those who pray well, work well. Those who pray most, achieve the grandest results.<sup>10</sup> To use the striking phrase of Tauler, “In God nothing is hindered.”

### 5. PRAY ON ALL OCCASIONS

The cultivation of the habit of prayer will secure its expression on all suitable occasions.

In times of need, in the first instance—almost everyone will pray then. Moses stood on the shores of the Red Sea, surveying the panic into which the children of Israel were cast when they realized that the chariots of Pharaoh were thundering down upon them. “Wherefore criest thou unto Me?” said the Lord (Exod. 14:15). Nehemiah stood before King Artaxerxes. The monarch noted his inward grief, and said, “Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart.” That question opened the door to admit the answer to three months’ praying; and the hot desire that had risen to God in those slow months gathered itself into one fervent ejaculation: “So I prayed to the God of heaven” (Neh. 1:1-2:4).

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9. Dr. A. B. Davidson, *Waiting upon God*, 14.

10. Compare the sentence of Thomas Hooker, of Hartford: “Prayer is the principle work of a minister, and it is by this that he must carry on the rest.”

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Again, one whose life is spent in fellowship with God will constantly seek and find opportunities for swift and frequently recurring approaches to the throne of grace. The apostles bring every duty under the cross; at the name of Jesus their loyal souls soar heavenward in adoration and in praise. The early Christians never met without invoking a benediction; they never parted without prayer. The saints of the Middle Ages allowed each passing incident to summon them to intercession: the shadow on the dial, the church-bell, the flight of the swallow, the rising of the sun, the falling of a leaf.

The covenant which Sir Thomas Browne made with himself is well-known, but one may venture to refer to it once more: "To pray in all places where quietness inviteth; in any house, highway, or street; and to know no street in this city that may not witness that I have not forgotten God and my Saviour in it; and that no parish or town where I have been may not say the like. To take occasion of praying upon the sight of any church which I see, or pass by, as I ride about. To pray daily, and particularly for my sick patients, and for all sick people under whose care soever. And at the entrance into the house of the sick to say, 'The peace and the mercy of God be upon this house.' After a sermon to make a prayer and desire a blessing, and to pray for the minister." And much more of a like nature.

Once more, one who lives in the spirit of prayer will spend much time in retired and intimate communion with God. It is by such a deliberate engagement of prayer that the fresh springs of devotion which flow through the day are fed. For, although communion with God is the life-energy of the renewed nature, our souls "cleave to the dust," and devotion tends to grow formal—it becomes emptied of its spiritual content and exhausts itself in outward acts. The Master reminds us of this grave peril and informs us that the true defense against insincerity in our approach to God lies in the diligent exercise of private prayer (Matt. 6:6).<sup>11</sup>

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11. "Whoever is diligent in public prayers, and yet negligent in private, it is much to be feared he rather seeks to approve himself to men than to God." —*The Whole Duty of Man* (Lond., 1741), 119.

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In the days of the Commonwealth, one of the early Friends, “a servant of the Lord, but a stranger outwardly,” came into an assembly of serious people, who had met for worship:

And after some time he had waited on the Lord in spirit he had an opportunity to speak, all being silent; he said by way of exhortation, “Keep to the Lord’s watch.” These words, being spake in the power of God, had its operation upon all or most of the meeting, so that they felt some great dread and fear upon their spirits. After a little time he spake again, saying, “What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:37). Then he was silent again a little time, but the whole meeting, being sensible that this man was in some extraordinary spirit and power, were all musing what manner of teaching this should be, being such a voice that most of the hearers never heard before, that carried such great authority with it that they were all necessitated to be subject to the power.<sup>12</sup>

Soldier of Christ, you are in an enemy’s country; “Keep to the Lord’s watch.”

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12. Harvey’s *The Rise of the Quakers*, 73-74.



Remember that in the Levitical Law there is a frequent commemoration and charge given of the two daily sacrifices, the one to be offered up in the morning and the other in the evening. These offerings by incense our holy, harmless, and undefiled High Priest hath taken away, and instead of them every devout Christian is at the appointed times to offer up a spiritual sacrifice, namely, that of prayer: for “God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” At these prescribed times, if thou wilt have thy prayers to ascend up before God, thou must withdraw from all outward occupations, to prepare for the inward and divine.

–Henry Vaughan, *Silurist*

God comes to me in silent hours,  
As morning dew to summer flowers.

–Mechthild von Magdeburg

It will never be altogether well with us till we convert the universe into a prayer room, and continue in the Spirit as we go from place to place. . . . The prayer-hour is left standing before God till the other hours come and stand beside it; then, if they are found to be a harmonious sisterhood, the prayer is granted.

–George Bowen

## CHAPTER 2

### *The Equipment*

“**B**ut thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray” (Matt. 6:6 RV).

“Of this manner of prayer,” says Walter Hilton of Thurgarton, “speaketh our Lord in a figure, thus: ‘Fire shall always burn upon the altar, which the priest shall nourish, putting wood underneath in the morning every day, that so the fire may not go out.’ That is, the fire of love shall ever be lighted in the soul of a devout and clean man or woman, the which is God’s altar. And the priest shall every morning lay to it sticks, and nourish the fire; that is, this man shall by holy psalms, clean thoughts, and fervent desire, nourish the fire of love in his heart, that it may not go out at any time.”<sup>1</sup>

The equipment for the inner life of prayer is simple, if not always easily secured. It consists particularly of a quiet place, a quiet hour, and a quiet heart.

#### 1. A QUIET PLACE

With regard to many of us, the first of these, a quiet place, is well within our reach. But there are tens of thousands of our fellow-believers who find it generally impossible to withdraw into the desired seclusion of the secret place. A house-mother in a crowded tenement, an apprentice in city lodgings, a ploughman in his living quarters, a soldier in barracks, a boy

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1. *The Scale of Perfection*, I. i. 1.

living at school, these and many more may not be able always to command quiet and solitude. But, “your Father knoweth.” And it is comforting to reflect that the very Prince of the pilgrims shared the experience of such as these. In the carpenter’s cottage in Nazareth there were, it appears, no fewer than nine persons who lived under the one roof. There were the Holy Child, Mary His mother, and Joseph. There were also the Lord’s “brothers”—four of them—and at least two “sisters” (Matt. 13:55-56). The cottage consisted, let us suppose, principally of a living room, the workshop, and an inner chamber—a store-closet in which the provision for the day, the kitchen utensils, the firewood, etc., were laid. That gloomy recess had a latch on the inner side, placed there, it may be, by the carpenter’s Son, for that dark chamber was His oratory, not less sacred than the cloud-wrapt shrine of the Presence in the Temple.<sup>2</sup>

Afterward, when our Lord had entered on His public ministry, there were occasions when He found it difficult to secure the privilege of solitude. He frequently received entertainment from those who showed Him the scantiest courtesies and afforded Him no facility for retirement. When His spirit hungered for communion with His Father, He was to bend His steps toward the rough uplands (Luke 6:12, et al):

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2. The late Dr. John Paton, of the New Hebrides, tells of such a prayer-chamber in his father’s modest dwelling: “Our home consisted of a ‘but’ and a ‘ben,’ and a mid-room, or chamber, called the ‘closet’.... The ‘closet’ was a very small apartment betwixt the other two, having room only for a bed, a little table, and a chair, and a diminutive window shedding a diminutive light on the scene. This was the sanctuary of that cottage home. There daily, and many times a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and ‘shut the door’; and we children got to understand, by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about), that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil of the Most Holy Place. We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice, pleading as for life, and we learned to slip out and in past that door on tip-toe, not to disturb the holy colloquy. The outside world might not know, but we knew, whence came that happy light, as of a new-born smile, that always was dawning on my father’s face: it was a reflection from the Divine Presence, in the consciousness of which he lived. Never, in temple or cathedral, in mountain or in glen, can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, more visibly walking and talking with men, than under that humble cottage roof of thatch and oaken wattles.” —Dr. John G. Paton, *Autobiography*, 10-11.



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Cold mountains and the midnight air  
Witnessed the fervor of His prayer.

And when, a homeless man, He came up to Jerusalem to the Feasts, it was His custom to “resort” to the olive-garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39). Under the laden branches of some gnarled tree, which was old when Isaiah was young, our Lord must often through the soft summer night have out-watched the stars.

Any place may become an oratory, provided that one is able to find in it seclusion. Isaac went into the fields to meditate (Gen. 25:63). Jacob lingered on the eastern bank of the Brook Jabbok, after all his company had passed over; there he wrestled with the Angel, and prevailed (Gen. 32:22-32). Moses, hidden in the clefts of Horeb, beheld the vanishing glory which marked the way by which Jehovah had gone (Exod. 33:18-23). Elijah sent Ahab down to eat and drink, while he himself withdrew to the lonely crest of Carmel (1 Kings 18:41-42). Daniel spent weeks in an ecstasy of intercession on the banks of Hiddekel (Dan. 10:1-5), which once had watered Paradise (Gen. 2:10-14). And Paul, no doubt in order that he might have an opportunity for undisturbed meditation and prayer, “was minded to go afoot” from Troas to Assos (Acts 20:13).

And if no better place presents itself, the soul which turns to God may clothe itself in quietness even in the crowded concourse or in the hurrying streets. A poor woman in a great city, never able to free herself from the insistent clamor of her little ones, made for herself a sanctuary in the simplest way. “I threw my apron over my head,” she said, “and there is my closet.”<sup>3</sup>

## **2. A QUIET HOUR**

For most of us it may be harder to find a quiet hour. I do not mean an

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3. “On his return from West Indies to the Clyde, Hewitson was privileged to lead to Christ one of the sailors. ‘I am not in want of a closet to pray in,’ said he one day, as the voyage drew near its termination; ‘I can just cover my face with my hat, and I am as much alone with God as in a closet.’ The man had sailed from Antigua as a careless sinner.” —Hewitson’s *Life*, 283.

“hour” of exactly sixty minutes, but a portion of time withdrawn from the engagements of the day, fenced round from the encroachments of business or pleasure, and dedicated to God. The “world’s gray fathers” might linger in the fields in meditation on the covenant-name until darkness wrapt them round. But we who live with the clang of machinery and the roar of traffic always in our ears, whose crowding obligations jostle against each other as the hours fly on, are often tempted to withdraw to other uses those moments which we ought to hold sacred to communion with heaven. Dr. Dale says somewhere that if each day had forty-eight hours, and every week had fourteen days, we might conceivably get through our work, but that, as things are, it is impossible. There is at least an edge of truth in this whimsical utterance. Certainly, if we are to have a quiet hour set down in the midst of a hurry of duties, and kept sacred, 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.<sup>4</sup> We shall have to redeem time, it may be from recreation, or from social interaction, or from study, or from works of benevolence, if we are to find leisure daily to enter into our closet, and having shut the door, to pray to our Father who is in secret.<sup>5</sup>

One is tempted to linger here, and, with all humility and earnestness, to press the consideration of this point. One sometimes hears it said, “I confess that I do not spend much time in the secret chamber, but I try to cultivate the habit of continual prayer.” And it is implied that this is more and better than that. The two things ought not to be set in opposition. Each is necessary to a well-ordered Christian life; and each was perfectly maintained in the practice of the Lord Jesus. He was always enfolded in the

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4. “Let no man that can find time to bestow upon his vanities. . . say that he wants leisure for prayer.” – *The Whole Duty of Man* (Lond., 1741), 120.

5. In all his journeyings, John Wesley used to carry about with him a little note-book for jottings, the first crude draft of his *Journals*. On the front page of each successive copy of this memorandum book, he always recorded a resolution to spend two hours daily in private prayer, *no evasion or provisio being admitted*. Perhaps such a rule may seem to some to be rigid even to formality. Let no one be bound by another’s practice; but in every case let due provision be made for intercourse with God.

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Divine love; His communion with the Father was unbroken; He was the Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:13). But St. Luke tells us that it was His habit to withdraw Himself into the wilderness and pray (Luke 5:16). Our Authorized Version does not at all give us the force of the original in this verse. Dean Vaughan comments on it thus: "It was not one withdrawal, nor one wilderness, nor one prayer, all is plural in the original—the withdrawals were repeated, the wildernesses were more than one, the prayers were habitual." Crowds were thronging and pressing Him; great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed of their infirmities; and He had no leisure so much as to eat (Mark 3:20). But He found time to pray. And this one who sought retirement with so much solitude was the Son of God, having no sin to confess, no shortcoming to deplore, no unbelief to subdue, no languor of love to overcome. Nor are we to imagine that His prayers were merely peaceful meditations or rapturous acts of communion. They were strenuous and warlike, from that hour in the wilderness when angels came to minister to the prostrate Man of Sorrows (Matt. 4:11), on to that awful "agony" in which His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). His prayers were sacrifices, offered up with strong crying and tears (Heb. 5:7).

Now, if it was part of the sacred discipline of the Incarnate Son that He should observe frequent seasons of retirement, how much more is it incumbent on us, broken as we are and disabled by manifold sin, to be diligent in the exercise of private prayer!

To hurry over this duty would be to rob ourselves of the benefits which proceed from it. We know, of course, that prayer cannot be measured by divisions of time. But the advantages to be derived from secret prayer are not to be obtained unless we enter on it with deliberation. We must "shut the door," enclosing and securing a sufficient portion of time for the fitting discharge of the engagement before us.

In the morning we should look forward to the duties of the day, anticipating those situations in which temptation may lurk, and preparing

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ourselves to embrace such opportunities of usefulness as may be presented to us. In the evening we ought to remark upon the providences which have befallen us, consider our attainment in holiness, and endeavor to profit by the lessons which God would have us learn. And, always, we must acknowledge and forsake sin. Then there are the numberless themes of prayer which our desires for the good estate of the Church of God, for the conversion and sanctification of our friends and acquaintances, for the furtherance of missionary effort, and for the coming of the kingdom of Christ may suggest. All this cannot be pressed into a few crowded moments. We must be at leisure when we enter the secret place. At one time at least in his life, the late Mr. Hudson Taylor was so fully occupied during the hours of the day with the direction of the China Inland Mission that he found it difficult to gain the requisite freedom for private prayer. Accordingly, he made it his rule to rise each night at two o'clock, watch with God till four, then lie down to sleep until the morning.

In the Jewish Church it was customary to set apart a space of time for meditation and prayer three times daily—in the morning, at noon, and in the evening (Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10). But in Bible lands there is a natural pause at mid-day which we, in our cooler climate, do not generally observe. Where it is possible to hallow a few moments in the mid-stream of the day's duties, it ought surely to be done.<sup>6</sup> And nature itself teaches us that morning and evening are suitable occasions of approach to God. A question which has been frequently discussed, and is not without interest is: Whether we should employ the morning or the evening hour for our more deliberate and prolonged period of waiting upon God? It is probable that each person can answer this question most profitably for himself or herself. But it should always be understood that we give our best to God.

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6. "And here I was counseled to set up one other sail, for before I prayed but twice a day. I here resolved to set some time apart at mid-day for this effort, and, obeying this, I found the effects to be wonderful." —*Memoirs of the Rev. James Fraser* (Wodrow), 208.

### 3. A QUIET HEART

For most of us, perhaps, it is still harder to secure the quiet heart. The contemplationists of the Middle Ages desired to present themselves before God in silence, that He might teach them what their lips should utter and their hearts expect. Stephen Gurnall acknowledges that it is far more difficult to hang up the big bell than it is to ring it when it has been hung. McCheyne used to say that very much of his prayer time was spent in preparing to pray.<sup>7</sup> A New England Puritan writes, “While I was at the Word, I saw I had a wild heart, which was as hard to stand and abide before the presence of God in an ordinance, as a bird before any man.” And Bunyan remarks from his own deep experience, “O! the starting-holes that the heart hath in the time of prayer; none knows how many bye-ways the heart hath and back-lanes, to slip away from the presence of God.”<sup>8</sup>

There are, in particular, three great but simple acts of faith, which will serve to stay the mind on God.

(a) Let us, in the first place, recognize our acceptance before God through the dying of the Lord Jesus. When a pilgrim, either of the Greek or of the Latin Church, arrives in Jerusalem, his first act, before ever he seeks refreshment or rest, is to visit the traditional scene of the Redeemer’s passion. Our first act in prayer ought to be the yielding of our souls to the power of the blood of Christ. It was in the power of the ritual sacrifice that the high priest in Israel passed through the veil on the Day of Atonement. It is in the power of the accepted offering of the Lamb of Divine Appointment that we are

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7. But Fraser of Brea gives a caution respecting this which is worth remembering: “Under the pretense of waiting for the Lord for strength, I have been driven to gaze, and neglect the duty itself, when there hath been an opportunity; so in preparing for prayer I have neglected prayer.” —*Memoirs*, 290.

8. “It was a saying of the martyr Bradford that he would never leave a duty till he had brought his heart into the frame of the duty; he would not leave confession of sin till his heart was broken for sin; he would not leave petitioning for grace till his heart was quickened and enlivened in a hopeful expectation of more grace; he would not leave the rendering of thanks till his heart was enlarged with the sense of the mercies which lied enjoyed and quickened in the return of praise.” —Bickersteth, *A Treatise on Prayer*, 93.

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privileged to come into the presence of God. “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which He dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having a Great High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water: let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for He is faithful that promised” (Heb. 10:19-23 RV).

Were I with the trespass laden  
Of a thousand worlds beside,  
Yet by that path I enter—  
The blood of the Lamb who died.

**(b)** It is important also that we confess and receive the enabling grace of the Divine Spirit, without whom nothing is holy, nothing good. For it is He who teaches us to cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), who searches for us the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10), who discloses to us the mind and will of Christ, who helps our infirmities and intercedes on our behalf “according to God” (Rom. 8:26).<sup>9</sup> And we all, “with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). When we enter the inner chamber, we should present ourselves before God in meekness and trust and open our hearts to the incoming and infilling of the Holy Ghost. So we shall receive from the praying Spirit, and commit to the praying Christ, those petitions which are of Divine birth and express themselves, through our finite hearts

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9. “This helping of the Spirit (Rom. 8:26) is very emphatic in the original; as a man taking up a heavy piece of timber by the one end cannot alone get it up till some other man takes it up at the other end, and so helps him; so the poor soul that is pulling and tugging with his own heart finds it heavy and dull, like a log in a ditch, and he can do no good with it, till at last the Spirit of God comes at the other end, and takes the heaviest end of the burden, and so helps the soul to lift it up.” —Isaac Ambrose, *Prima Media et Ultima*, 333. Père La Combe says, “I have never found anyone who prayed so well as those who had never been taught how. They who have no master in man have one in the Holy Spirit.” —*Spiritual Maxims*, 43.

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and sin-stained lips, in “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26). Without the support of the Holy Spirit, prayer becomes a matter of incredible difficulty. “As for my heart,” said one who was deeply exercised in this engagement, “when I go to pray, I find it so loath to go to God, and when it is with Him, so loath to stay with Him, that many times I am forced in my prayers, first to beg of God that He would take mine heart, and set it on Himself in Christ, and when it is there, that He would keep it there. Nay, many times I know not what to pray for, I am so blind, nor how to pray, I am so ignorant; only, blessed be grace, the Spirit helps our infirmities.”

(c) Once more, as “the Spirit rides most triumphantly in His own chariot,” His chosen means of enlightenment, comfort, quickening, and rebuke being the Word of God, it is well for us in the beginning of our supplications to direct our hearts toward the Holy Scriptures. It will greatly help to calm the “contrary” mind if we open the sacred volume and read it as in the presence of God, until there shall come to us out from the printed page a word from the Eternal. George Müller confessed that often he could not pray until he had steadied his mind upon a text.<sup>10</sup> Is it not the prerogative of God to break the silence? “When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek” (Ps. 27:8). Is it not fitting that His will should order all the acts of our prayer with Himself? Let us be silent to God, that He may fashion us.

So shall I keep  
For ever in my heart one silent space;  
A little sacred spot of loneliness,  
Where to set up the memory of Thy Cross,  
A little quiet garden, where no man  
May pass or rest for ever, sacred still  
To visions of Thy sorrow and Thy love.

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10. The reader will find a striking passage, hearing on this point, in the *Autobiography of George Müller* (Lond., 1905), 152-3.