

Fasting and Prayer

The sixteenth day of March, in the year 1831, was observed, by the church, in which I was pastor, as a day of fasting and prayer. This appointment was made with special reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; to seek, by united prayer, the revival of God's work in the midst of the congregation. The meetings for prayer were held in the church building, and a large portion of the members were present.

The next week, as I was returning home from a religious meeting late in the evening, and had turned into an unfrequented crossroad, in order to shorten the distance I had to walk; I was startled at the sudden sound of footsteps behind me, which seemed to be those of a man rapidly approaching me in the dark. I did not know but some evil-minded person might intend to do me harm in that obscure place, and under cover of the impenetrable darkness of one of the darkest nights that I ever saw. I did not choose *to run*, for, in that case, I should never know why I was so hotly pursued. I felt glad, that I had some corporeal strength; and though I cannot say that my courage very specially forsook me, yet I had no particular liking for a hostile attack and a tussle in the dark. As the footsteps so rapidly approaching me appeared to be directly in my rear, like a lover of peace I crossed to the other side of the road; and not preferring an attack in the rear, I stopped and faced about. My pursuer espied me, and, without slackening his pace, ran directly towards me across the street, till, coming within ten feet of me, much out of breath, he called my name. "That is my name, sir," said I. He came close up to me, panting for breath, and stopped in silence. After a few heavy and rapid breathing, he spoke. He told me who he was, and why he had run after me. He was a young man of my congregation, to whom I had never before spoken. I did not know him personally. He had just come from the schoolhouse

where I had been preaching; and, not willing to be seen by his companions speaking to me, he had waited till they were out of the way, and then run after me, through the obscure street into which he had seen me turn. He wanted to see me, for he felt that he was “a sinner unreconciled to God, and in danger of hell.” “What shall I *do*?” said he; “I can’t live so another week. Is there any way that such a one as *I* am can be saved?”

I had a long conversation with him standing there in the dark, (for he did not choose to go home with me,) and I found, that his first impressions of any particular seriousness had commenced in the church, on the *Fast-day*, the week before. He was an apprentice in a mechanic’s shop, where there were more than a dozen other irreligious young men. The master of the shop (not a professor of religion), told the whole of them, that if they wished to attend church on the *Fast-day*, they need not work. They accepted his proposal. And as he himself afterwards told me, *that* was the reason why *he* went to church that day himself. He said, he “did not expect the boys would take his offer, but would prefer to stay at home and work;” and if they had done so, he would have done so too; “but when they were all going to church,” says he, “I was *ashamed* to stay at home.”

That young man, his employer, and almost the entire number of those young men in the shop, became communicants in the church before the close of that year. Thirteen persons were received into the church, whose seriousness commenced *that day, in the church*, while the *people of God were praying* for that *very thing*. ‘The Lord is with you while ye be with Him.’ ‘Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.’