

The Equipment of Prayer

by D. M. McIntyre

The equipment for the inner life of prayer is a quiet place, a quiet hour, and a quiet heart, which can be secured through diligence and the help of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 55:17, Matthew 6:6, Luke 5:16, Romans 8:26, Hebrews 10:19

Topics: "Private Prayer", "Quiet Reflection"

Description

D. M. McIntyre preaches on the importance of finding a quiet place, hour, and heart for prayer, emphasizing that even in challenging circumstances, God understands and provides opportunities for solitude. He draws parallels to Jesus' own struggles to secure moments of prayer amidst a busy life, highlighting the necessity of consistent private prayer in a Christian's life. McIntyre stresses the significance of dedicating time to communicate with God, urging believers to prioritize prayer over other distractions and to seek quietness and seclusion for meaningful communion with the Father.

Transcript

"Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray . . ." (Matt. 6:6, KJV).

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

For many, a quiet place is easily obtained. However, there are tens of thousands of believers who find it generally impossible to withdraw into the desired seclusion of a secret place. A mother in a crowded apartment, a laborer in city lodgings, a soldier in barracks, a student living at school--these and many more may not always be able to command quiet and solitude.

Nevertheless, our Father in heaven knows about our difficult circumstances. It is comforting to remember how Jesus experienced the same challenges when He lived on earth. In the carpenter's cottage in Nazareth, it appears that no fewer than nine persons lived under the same roof. In addition to Jesus, there were Mary and Joseph, the Lord's four brothers, and at least two sisters.

According to architecture of the day, the cottage probably consisted of a living room, a workshop, and a closet used for storing provisions. It could be that the gloomy storeroom often became Jesus' private place of prayer, no less sacred than the Holy Place in the innermost sanctum of the temple.

Later, when our Lord entered upon His public ministry, there were many occasions when He found it difficult to secure the privilege of solitude. He frequently received entertainment from those who showed Him the scantiest courtesy and offered Him no place for retirement. When His spirit hungered for communion with His Father, He would often head for the mountains:

Cold mountains and the midnight air

Witnessed the fervor of His prayer.

And when a homeless man, it was His custom to resort to the olive garden of Gethsemane during the feast days in Jerusalem. Under the laden branches of some gnarled tree that was old when Isaiah was young, our Lord often watched the stars.

Any place may become a private place of prayer as long as it is in seclusion. Isaac went into the fields to meditate. 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. Moses, hidden in the clefts of Horeb, beheld the vanishing glory that marked the way by which Jehovah had gone. Elijah sent Ahab down to eat and drink while he himself withdrew to the lonely crest of Carmel. Daniel spent weeks in an ecstasy of intercession on the banks of Hiddekel in Babylon. Paul, in order to have an opportunity for undisturbed meditation and prayer, determined to walk from Troas to Assos.

Even in cases where no better place presents itself, the soul that 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 throw my apron over my head," she said, "and there is my closet."

For most of us, it may be harder to find a quiet hour. I do not mean an hour of exactly 60 minutes, but a portion of time that is dedicated to God, withdrawn from the engagements of the day, and protected from the encroachments of business or pleasure. The saints of old often lingered in the fields in meditation on Jehovah until darkness wrapped around them. However, 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 use the few moments that are quiet for other purposes than communicating with heaven.

Dr. Dale says that if each day had 48 hours, and every week had 14 days, we might conceivably get through our work. There is 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, 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 will have to redeem time from recreation or from social intercourse or from study or from good works if we are to find unhurried time to enter into our closet daily and, having "shut the door," to pray to our Father in secret.

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." From this, it is implied that continual prayer is somehow better than private prayer. However, 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. His communion with the Father was unbroken, yet Luke tells us that it was still His habit to withdraw Himself into the wilderness to pray (Luke 5:16).

The force of this text, according to Dean Vaughan, is as follows: "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 upon Him. Great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed of their infirmities. Usually He did not have time even to eat. But He found time to pray, and He was the Son of God, having no sin to confess, no shortcoming to deplore, no unbelief to subdue, no lack 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, to that awful agony in which His sweat turned to great drops of blood, His prayers were sacrifices, offered up with strong crying and tears.

Now, if it was part of the sacred discipline of the incarnate Son to observe frequent seasons of retirement, how much more is it necessary for 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 that proceed from it. Although prayer cannot be strictly measured by divisions of time, the advantages to be derived from secret prayer are not to be obtained without much deliberation. We must "shut the door," protecting 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 ourselves to embrace such opportunities of usefulness as may be presented to us. In the evening we ought to remark upon the providences that have befallen us, consider our attainment in holiness, and endeavor to profit by the lessons that God would have us learn. And always we must acknowledge and forsake sin.

Then there are the numberless themes of prayer that 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 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 enough free time for private prayer. Accordingly, he made it his rule to rise each night at two o'clock, watch with God until four, then lie down for sleep until the morning. In the Jewish church it was customary to set apart a space of time for meditation and prayer three times a day--in the morning, at noon, and in the evening (Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10).

Where it is possible to hallow a few moments in the midstream of the day's duties, it should surely be done. However, nature itself teaches us that morning and evening are suitable occasions of approach to God. A question that has been frequently discussed and is not without interest is whether the morning or the evening hour should be set aside 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.

For most people, securing a quiet heart for prayer is even more difficult than finding a suitable time and place. The mystics of the Middle Ages were in the practice of presenting themselves before God in silence so that He might teach them what to pray. McCheyne used to say that much of his prayer time was spent in preparing to pray, 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 byways the heart has, and back-lanes, to slip away from the presence of God."

Fixing Our Hearts on Him

There are three great but simple acts of faith that will serve to stay the mind on God. Let us, in the first place, recognize our acceptance before God through the dying of the Lord Jesus. Our first act in prayer should 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 of Israel passed through the veil on the Day of Atonement. It is in the power of the accepted offering of Jesus, the Lamb of God, that we are privileged to come into the presence of God:

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)" (Heb. 10:19-23).

Were I with the trespass laden

Of a thousand worlds beside,

Yet by that path I enter--

The blood of the Lamb who died.

In the second place, it is important that we receive the enabling grace of the divine Spirit, without whom nothing is holy, nothing good. The Spirit is the one who teaches us to cry, "Abba, Father," who searches the deep things of God, who discloses the mind and will of Christ, who helps our infirmities, and who intercedes on our behalf. When we enter the inner chamber, we should present ourselves before God in meekness and submission, opening our hearts to the filling of the Holy Ghost. In this way we shall pray those things that are of divine origin and express them through our finite hearts 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 unwilling to go to God, and to stay with Him, that many times I am forced to beg God to take my heart and set it on Himself in Christ. Many times, I am so blind that I do not know what to pray for; only, blessed be grace, the Spirit helps our infirmities."

Finally, it is good to begin our supplications by directing our hearts to the holy Scriptures. The Word is God's chosen means of enlightenment, comfort, quickening, and rebuke. The practice of beginning with the Scripture will be a great help in calming our unruly minds.

George Mueller confessed that often he could not pray until he had steadied his mind upon a text. Is it not the prerogative of God to break the silence when we come into His presence? Is it not fitting that His will should order all the acts of our intercourse with Him? Let us be silent before God in order 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.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/d-m-mcintyre/the-equipment-of-prayer/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net