

The Hidden Life of Prayer

By David McIntyre

CLASSICS
Time-tested Truths



But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray" (Matt. 6:6, asv). 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.

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. Many may not always be able to command quiet and solitude. But, "your Father knoweth."

In the carpenter's cottage in Nazareth there were, it appears, no fewer than nine persons who lived under one roof. When our Lord had entered on his public ministry, there were occasions when he found it difficult to secure the privilege of solitude. When his spirit hungered for communion with his Father, he was fain to bend his steps toward the rough uplands.

Any place may become an oratory, provided that one is able to

find in it seclusion. Isaiah went into the fields to meditate. Elijah withdrew to the lonely crest of Carmel. Daniel spent three weeks in an ecstasy of intercession on the banks of Hiddekel.

And if not a 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 clamour 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."

Quiet Hour

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 I do not mean an "hour" of exactly 60 minutes, but a portion of time withdrawn from the engagement of the day, fenced round from the encroachment of business or pleasure, and dedicated to God.

Certainly, if we are to have a quiet hour set down in the middle of a hurry of duties, and kept inviolate, we must exercise both forethought and self-denial. We must be prepared to forego many things that are pleasant, and some things that are profitable. We shall have to redeem time, it may be from recreation, or from study, or from works of beneficence, 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.

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 our Lord. He was always enfolded in divine love, his communion

with the Father was unbroken. But St. Luke tells us it was his habit to withdraw himself into the wilderness and pray (Luke 5:16).

And this one who sought retirement with so much solicitude was the Son of God, having no sin to confess, no shortcomings 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, that awful agony in which his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood. His prayers were sacrifices, offered up with strong crying and tears.

We know, of course, that prayer cannot be measured by divisions of time. But the advantages 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.

Quiet Heart

For most of us, it is still harder to secure the quiet heart. When we enter the inner chamber we should present ourselves before God in meekness and affiance, and open our hearts to the incoming and infilling of the Holy Spirit.

So shall we 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 and sin-stained lips, in "groanings which cannot be uttered." Without the support of the Holy Spirit, prayer becomes a matter of incredible difficulty. 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.

It will greatly help to calm the mind if we open the sacred volume and read it as in the presence of God, until there it shall come to us out from the printed page a word from the eternal. Let us be silent to God that he may fashion us.

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From Prayer Connect magazine