

Calling on God!

The Equipment for Prayer



Huge amounts of money are spent each year to recruit young people to show up at the flagpole of their local schools for prayer. The rage some years ago was to get Christians to pray on the steps of their State Capitol buildings. I recall the lament of one who had been involved in the national prayer movement because the major media gave no coverage to their event. Now the battle cry is being sounded again to preserve the right to quote the Lord's Prayer following the National Anthem at football games.

Allow me to be candid. The purpose of prayer is not to get the attention of men - the purpose of prayer is to get the attention of God! Jesus condemned the Pharisees who loved to pray on the street corners "to be seen of men." Prayer is not a media event or campaign to draw attention to ourselves by displaying our piety.

Yes, we should be profoundly thankful for our heritage of religious freedom and do all in our power to preserve it. But no Godly person in the Bible ever used prayer to acquire a place in the public limelight. If you want to be seen by men, head for the stage. If you want to be seen and heard by God, head for the closet. Biblical praying is never designed for the ears or eyes of men - it is for God.

In Genesis 4:26 we read, "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD." Apparently there was a period of time after the Fall when men did not "call upon the name of the Lord." I think it is fair to assume that many of Adam's descendants had gone the way of Cain who "went out from the presence of the Lord." Cain was out of touch with God, and no doubt many others had wandered away from the presence of God along with him.

However, when Enos was born, "then men began to call upon the name of the Lord." "Enos" means "frail, weak, faint." His name denotes mortality and weakness. By the time Enos was born people had begun to experience the ramifications of Adam's sin. Sickness, sorrow, death, and grief caused men to look for a source of strength and power outside of themselves. Here we find men calling on God, and perhaps calling themselves by the name of the Lord. It has been suggested that this was the beginning of organized public worship. Whether that is true or not, I don't know. But one thing is certain, this is the first reference to prayer after the Fall - "*then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.*"

There are only two classes of men: those who call on the Lord, and those who profane the name of the Lord. Abram pitched his tent and built his altar, and there called upon the name of the LORD. The temptation for us is that we merely pitch our altars and spend our whole lives building our tents! I ask you, do you call upon the name of the Lord?

Throughout the Bible we find righteous people calling on God. Jacob called on God for a blessing. Hannah called on God for a child. Moses called on God to spare Israel. Jabez called on God for an enlarged coast (expanded influence). David called on God for forgiveness. Elijah called on God to send fire. Solomon called on God for wisdom. Job called on God in his distress. Daniel called on God when it was against the law. Stephen called on God to forgive his executioners. Saul of Tarsus called on God after his conversion. All God's people are praying people.

The internal change, which the new birth brings, affects an outward change in a person's life. The Spirit of adoption causes saved people to cry "Abba Father." Like the homing instinct of the pacific salmon, which returns to the place of its birth, the child of God is instinctively inclined to call on the Lord in prayer. Matthew Henry wrote, "It is taken for granted that all who are disciples of Christ pray. You may as soon find a living man that does not breathe, as a living Christian that does not pray. If prayerless, then graceless."

D. M. McIntyre said, "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." Here we find three essentials for calling on God.

A Quiet Place

Later in life the Lord Jesus often retired to the garden, the desert, the wilderness, or the mountains to commune with His Father. Sometimes He prayed the night through and at other times He was up long before daybreak to pray. As the multitudes thronged Him He would often withdraw Himself into the wilderness to pray. Yet in His upbringing, He faced the same challenges that we face. He grew up in a carpenter's cottage with Joseph and Mary as well as brothers and sisters. With limited personal space in His living quarters, He managed to find a private place to pray. It may have been the storage closet in the carpenter's shop or out in a field, but we know He prayed because He always did those things that pleased His Father.

Issac went out into a field to meditate. Joseph worshipped leaning upon his staff. On his deathbed, Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed for an extended life. Moses was alone in the cleft of the rock when God's glory passed by. Ahab went down to eat and drink while Elijah withdrew to the lonely crest of Mount Carmel. Daniel sought the face of God in his chamber. Paul sang praises to God from his prison cell. Alone in Gethsemanee, Jesus yielded His will to God.

Even in cases where no better place presents itself, you can withdraw from the surrounding busyness and focus your attention on the Lord. Many who are constantly exposed to the roar of jet engines, the sound of passing traffic, and clanging machinery have learned to shut out these distractions. A mother in an apartment complex, a soldier in the barracks, or a student in a crowded dorm may not be able to find the desired seclusion and solitude. But it is possible to be in a crowd and not be in company. Millions of people live in crowded cities where they are practically alone. The park, the sidewalk, a parking lot, or the backyard can all be quiet places when the focus is narrowed and the attention is concentrated upon God. There was a poor

woman (Suzannah Wesley) who was never able to free herself from the insistent clamor of her little ones. She made herself a sanctuary by pulling her apron over her head to shut out household distractions so she could commune with God. Returning home on board a crowded ship one man said, "I can just cover my face with my hat, and I am as much alone with God as in a closet."

Confined in Worcester jail for the testimony of Christ, John Spilsbury said, "I shall not henceforward fear a prison as formerly, because I had so much of my Heavenly Father's company as made it a palace to me." Another in similar circumstance said, "I thought of Jesus until every stone in my cell shone like a ruby." Kings may imprison God's preachers in order to silence their voices, but no government on earth can enforce a law that prohibits the people of God from crying out to the Lord.

Jesus instructed His followers to enter into their closets and pray to their Father in secret. Any place can become a place of prayer. The early church called on God from the rooftop, the riverbank, the seashore, the jail, the prison, and their homes. The closet, wherever or whatever it may be, is accessible to all who would pray to their Father in secret.

A Quiet Time

For most, a quiet time is more difficult to find than a quiet place. It was the practice of a group of Christian men in South Africa to periodically join together for a night of prayer on a certain mountain. One night they had invited a brother, who happened to be of Dutch descent, to come with them for the night of prayer. As they walked toward the mountain the Dutchman asked one of the black Africans, "How are we going to spend the night in prayer?" In other words, "What are we going to say to God all night long?" The African replied, "Brother, your problem is you are in a hurry and God is not!" Andrew Murray stated, "Hurry is the death of prayer." Whenever the temporal consistently eclipses the eternal, our priorities are out of order. If we are too busy for God, we are too busy.

God's Word admonishes us, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds." We are warned to avoid being pressured into the pattern of the world system. "Don't allow the world to force you into its mold." Is not the pattern of the world that of constant motion, loud volume, and a dearth of meditative and contemplative time? Running from one activity to another does not lend itself to quietness of heart. If the mind is to be renewed, and the life transformed, the heart must be still in the quiet presence of God. Martin Luther said, "If I should neglect prayer but a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith."

There is no doubt that God has a place of usefulness and service for us in the world, but how can we discern the will of God apart from regular daily prayer? Time invested in heart-felt communion with God is never wasted. Daniel prayed three times a day. The Psalmist praised God seven times a day because of His righteous judgments. Peter and John went up to the temple at the "hour of prayer." Psalm 5:3 states, "O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer

unto thee." It is imperative to meet God in the morning in order to secure the presence of Christ for the rest of the day. He that runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him later.

It is the blood of Jesus, the newly slain way, which grants us access into the "holiest." I believe it was A.T. Pierson who said we must linger inside the veil long enough to lose the impression of what lies without before we can gain the impression of what lies within. Proper perspective, direction, empowerment, and vitality can only be found "inside the veil."

Jesus had no sins to confess, no unbelief to subdue, and no lack of love to overcome. If He continually resorted to prayer, how much more do we need repeated quiet seasons with God! No man is any greater than his prayer life. No woman will ever be greater than her prayer life. No church can rise above its level of corporate prayer. Jonathan Edwards said, "There is no way that Christians in their private capacity can do so much to promote the work of God and advance the kingdom of Christ as by prayer."

A Quiet Heart

An African missionary, who was late for an engagement, had hired a troop of African men to help him transport his supplies via backpack to a remote location. For several days the missionary had driven the men to the point of near exhaustion. The missionary was up early the next morning and sought to rouse his helpers to begin the day's journey. That morning no one except the missionary stood up and strapped on his backpack. After repeated attempts to rally the men to follow, he asked why no one would obey his orders. One of the men said, "We're waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies." These Africans recognized the need for soul restoration and nothing except a period of waiting on God would suffice.

A quiet heart is not a luxury; it is a necessity. God's Word says, "Be still and know that I am God." We humans also need to "get quiet and hear the still small voice of God." A quiet heart may be even harder to come by than a quiet time and a quiet place. "How rare to find a soul quiet enough to hear God speak!" said Fenelon. The "better part" of sitting at Jesus' feet will never be obtained unless we, like Mary, consciously choose to release ourselves from being "cumbered about by much doing."

Prayer is the uplift of the earth-bound soul into heaven. It is the entrance of the purified spirit into the holiest of all. The pure in heart are the ones who will see God. This art of cultivating a quiet spirit can be, and must be, developed.

We read in Genesis that after Enos was born, "Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord." Calling on God is both a privilege and solemn obligation. There have been tragic periods in human history when the purposes and plan of God have been far from the minds of men. In the Old Testament we find these words, "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee." When looking for a man to stand in the gap as an intercessor in those days, the Lord found none.

What about us today who live in a pressure-packed and hurried world? Have we become disoriented and sidetracked? Of course we are in the world, but we are not to be of it. Have we allowed ourselves to become forced into the mold and pattern of the world? How many of us are in desperate need of a renewed mind and revived heart?

How does all this relate to program-packed churches whose members are constantly running from one activity to another? Is the Father's house still a house of prayer? Are we more in touch with our generation than we are in touch with God? Will we continue to substitute activity, entertainment, psychology, and methodology in place of the power of God?

There have always been tares among the wheat, but the problem now is trying to find any wheat among the tares. In America church membership has become virtually meaningless and many that attend services show no scriptural evidences of regeneration. The biblical doctrine of conversion is so rarely discussed that few church people even know what it means to be saved. Isn't it time for God's people to once again seriously call upon the Lord?

Revival has never come to those who sat idly by surveying the spiritual horizon looking for signs of a stirring. D. L. Moody said, "Every revival can be traced to a kneeling figure." Militant intercession is our only hope for a better day. The equipment of a quiet place, a quiet time, and a quiet heart are ours, but these resources must be employed. May God be able to find us among the faithful who down through the ages have called upon and cried unto God. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

—Harold Vaughan