

The Life of Prayer for the Life of Service

By Dave Butts

Burnout...wear-out...stress...all too often these can characterize the effective Christian servant. Even a famous Bible character like Elijah faced the issue of dropping out of serving God. He was so depressed over his perceived inadequacies that he wanted to die.

If you choose to serve God, you will most likely face this emotion at some point. It's a danger that goes with the job. Wherever you are serving, there will come the risk of discouragement and wearing out in the service of God. It's a part of the warfare that pervades our world. When you choose to serve God, Satan basically says... "Oh yeah? We'll see about that." And the battle begins with the enemy's intent being to put you on the sidelines.

When we understand the spiritual warfare aspect to this, it helps bring clarity. You begin to understand why Paul set the whole aspect of spiritual warfare into the context of prayer. *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of*

righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints” (Eph. 6:10-18).

I believe there are two foundations for lifelong service. The first is our desire for God Himself. This desire must be cultivated. It is not automatic. Without this desire, everything else becomes mechanics...merely “how-to” courses in the spiritual life.

Psalm 63 is a great example of a leader (David) who had cultivated this desire in his life. One of the most helpful things we can do is to pray Psalm 63 as a way of developing this desire for God: *“O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen You in the sanctuary and beheld Your power and Your glory. Because Your love is better than life, my lips will glorify You. I will praise You as long as I live, and in Your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise You. On my bed I remember You; I think of You through the watches of the night. Because You are my help, I sing in the shadow of Your wings. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me” (Psa. 63:1-8).*

The second foundation to a consistent life of service is an awareness of Christ living in you. Colossians 1:27 has become my life verse: *“Christ in us, the hope of glory.”* As we go through the day, whatever the tasks ahead of us, we must always keep before us this amazing truth: The Lord of the universe has come to take up residence within us. We are not on our own. Jesus lives within.

Such truth keeps us from compartmentalizing our lives into sacred and secular. We don't have times of devotion, but lives of devotion. Years ago I heard Argentine evangelist Juan Carlos Ortiz say, "To walk in the Spirit is to be continually aware of Christ in you." This awareness makes life become a grand adventure of walking with Jesus, continually conscious of His presence. Unfortunately, like many, I sometimes forget this awesome fact. So, my goal has been to narrow the gaps between times of awareness.

I have listed below some of the tools that have been helpful to me in learning to draw near to Jesus and to experience His presence daily:

Useful Tools

1. Develop a consistent prayer life. Journal on a regular basis. Pray Scriptural prayers. Have some extended times of prayer and fasting. Find opportunities to pray corporately with others.

2. The Word in your devotional life. Don't look at the Bible just for lessons or sermons. There's a difference between studying Scripture and coming to the Bible to meet God in the pages of His Word!

3. Make praise a priority. Pray the Psalms. Use praise tapes to help you worship throughout the week!

4. Develop a prayer shield. You are a target of the enemy, so you need protection. Get others praying for you and your family. Put on your armor daily.

5. Regular retreats. Jesus modeled this, not only for Himself, but also for the disciples. Mark 6:31 says, "*Come away with Me by yourselves to a quiet place, and get some rest.*" Retreats must be scheduled, or they will only happen in times of emergency. Some churches are now requiring a day of prayer each month for their staff as a part of their work

responsibilities.

6. Conventions/seminars. Do you only go to “how-to” seminars or do you also find time to attend gatherings that help your spiritual development?

Who we are is more important than what we do or what we know. God calls us to become His children, not His students. Paul wrote to Timothy, encouraging him to watch his doctrine...but even more, his lifestyle:

1 Timothy 4:7 – *“...train yourself to be godly.”*

1 Timothy 4:12 – *“...set an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity.”*

1 Timothy 5:22 – *“...keep yourself pure.”*

1 Timothy 6:11 – *“...pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.”*

Ultimately, the priority Jesus gives us for life is simply to sit at His feet. The wonderful story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 helps us understand this. As Martha complained about Mary’s lack of help in preparing a meal, Jesus’ response to her was that Mary had chosen the one thing that was needed...sitting at His feet...enjoying His presence. This becomes Jesus’ priority for us all – only one thing is needed...and *He* is that one thing.

Are we not to serve then? Of course! And we will serve with greater power and consistency than ever before, because we have learned to minister at the feet of Jesus.

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