

A Stop by Quiet Waters

By

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Don't be too Busy to Pray!

As a young pastor I once heard a very successful pastor, whom I admired greatly, make the following statement to a group of his people: "*An important part of your work in the church is to pray for me, your pastor. I cannot spend the time in prayer I would like to because of all the demands on me, so it is your responsibility to be prayer warriors on my behalf.*" That statement deeply bothered me because I felt he did not understand the importance of prayer in the life of every believer, including busy pastors. I also felt that he was making an unrealistic assumption, his life was busier than the lives of his people, so it was easier for them to pray than it was for him.

I would like to share with you one or two things I have learned about prayer, and some prayer habits I have developed over the years. First, praying is one of the two most important practices there is for me as a Christian, reading the Bible for the nourishment of my soul being the other. If I am too busy to pray, I am too busy.

Second, I have been convinced for a long time that God never gives me more to do in any given day than I am able to handle. So, if I am repeatedly going to bed not having done everything I set out to do that day it can only be because I have put things into my schedule which were not God's plan for me. If this is the case, then how do I know what God wants me to do in a given day?

I found the answer to this question a long time ago in Mark 1. Here Mark describes a very long, busy, and successful day of ministry for the Lord Jesus, at the end of which he was exhausted. But Mark went on to write the following: "*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!' Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else-to the nearby villages-so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.'*" Mark 1:35-38 NIV

Why did Jesus go off so early in the morning to pray? Because He needed to know whether the Father wanted Him to stay there, having had such a successful beginning, or move on. This was not a decision Jesus wanted to make on His own because, as He said in John's Gospel, He only did what the Father told him to do. The question was, what did the Father want Him to do?

The disciples, who thought like we do, could not understand why Jesus was out there praying when everyone back in town was looking for him. To them it was obvious that Jesus should be back in the town ministering because He had everything going for Him there. This was not the time to be praying. But wanting to be led by his Father, not His own desires or those of the people around Him, the decision was not that obvious to Jesus. Because he took the time to seek the will of God, His Father in heaven showed Him what to do next.

God will give you the same clear leading if you will take the time to ask Him and then listen closely for God's response to you. I have learned to approach almost every day in my life this way -- I say "almost every day" because I still have those days when I plunge into all that is before me without taking the time to find out what God wants me to do and what he wants me to leave alone.

I have also learned that if I make the choices about what to do and not do on my own I will inevitably choose that which is of most interest to me, not necessarily that which is of greatest importance to the kingdom of God. It is so easy to deceive oneself, and there are few things in this life worse than being self-deceived. I think it was Thomas Merton who said, "*Because I think I am doing the will of God does not mean I am doing the will of God.*" The only way to avoid this is to listen closely to God in his word and in prayer.

Wouldn't it be great to go through each day knowing you were doing the will of God for that day? And, wouldn't it be great to come to the end of each day knowing you had done that day what God asked you to do even though there were many other things left undone? This will become more and more your experience as you take the time to seek the will of God for each day.

There is so much more I could say about this, but I trust this is of help to you as you seek to serve God as His choice and chosen servant-leader. Believe that God desires to lead you and that He wants to deliver you from the experience of being overwhelmed by more than you can handle, then go to Him in prayer day-by-day as Jesus did and He will respond to you as he did to his Son.

I want to keep these inspirational messages short so you will read them. Therefore, the next time I write you I will share with you some of the things I have learned about how to recognize the voice of God in answer to your prayers.

Scripture Resources

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!' Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else-to the nearby villages-so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' " Mark 1:35-38 NIV

“Be joyful always; pray continually;” 1 Thessalonians 5:16,17 NIV

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5 NIV

“Watch and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” Matthew 26:41 NIV

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 NIV

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