

THE SOUL'S SINCERE DESIRE

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I do not know why God should have blessed me for the past two years with an almost continuous stream of answered prayer. Some of the answers were marvelous, many unexplainable, all of them joy-giving. But, greater than any particular blessing that came with any particular answer, greater than the combined blessings of all the combined answers, was a gift, a blessing, that was so much larger, so much more inclusive than all the other special gifts, that it encompassed all within itself. I refer to the peace and happiness and absolute liberation from the bondage of fear and anger and the life-destroying emotions that came to me and revealed to me the practicability of finding the Kingdom of Heaven in the practical world of men.

Concomitant with this great blessing came the impulse to share it with others—to pass it on that they too might have their burdens eased and their paths made smooth. But whenever I approached a friend to tell him how I prayed, my brain stumbled and words failed me. My method was so simple, so natural, it seemed to me, that its very simplicity defied analysis. Like the air I breathed it could not be captured and confined in any form.

So two years went by. Then one day while walking home from college a student said to me: "I wish very much that you would tell me how you pray. Won't you tell me sometime?" It suddenly occurred to me that this was the first time anyone had put that question to me. I do not know whether it is that every question has its own answer residing in it, just as every seed contains the entire life plan of the completed plant; or whether the commands of Jesus, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," were meant to be applied to questions we ask of each other as well as questions we ask of God when we do so in the spirit of Christian humility and love; but this I do know: late in the evening the answer to this question leaped full-fledged into my brain. For two years I had striven in vain to answer a question that no one had ever asked; and then in a twinkling, before a question asked in all sincerity and with honest purpose, the answer came.

The essay which follows contains the answer to that question. I wish to have it clearly understood, however, that I do not wish the method here described to become a

formula: I offer it rather as an opening of doors and windows through which man's soul may find liberation from the confinement of the things which bind, and expand a bit to meet the ever-expanding love of God.

I find the frame for my method in the Lord's Prayer and the Twenty-third Psalm. I say "frame" because either one of these can be recited in less than half a minute, and a prayer such as we materialistically minded moderns need is one which will demand at least fifteen minutes of our time.

In this day of the coliseum, the gymnasium, and the "daily dozen," I know it may sound impractical and visionary to suggest that the spirit deserves as much care as the body. But is not our spiritual health as important to our well-being as our physical health? Is not the life more than the food, and the body more than the raiment? Is not the kernel within the seed and the sap within the oak—in other words, that which is within, vitalizing, propelling the life processes—more important than that which is without and can be seen and touched?

Let me stand in the marketplace with the physical culturists and demand, as they demand, fifteen minutes of your time every day for two months. And while I hesitate to promise, as they promise, that at the end of that time you will find yourself a new man, this I can say: at the end of that time you will find yourself in a new world. You will find yourself in a friendly universe, where religion will no longer be a thing to be believed or disbelieved, a thing to be worn or cast off, but where religion will be a part of life as blood is a part of the body. You will find yourself in a new world where your God no longer dwells in churches and meeting places and forms and days, but where He governs every minute of every day of every year. You will find yourself in a new world where immortality will no longer be sought as something far away, to be found at some far distant time, for you will know that you are immortal now and that the entire universe with all its good and with all its beauty belongs to you now and forever.

Let us take then as our model the zeal and steadfastness of the physical culturist and utilize it in the field of the spirit. To associate these two fields in our mind will prove very helpful for our present purpose, for a prayer should be for the spirit exactly what calisthenics should be for the body—something to keep one in tune, fit, vital, efficient and constantly ready for the next problem of life.

Now, what are *the underlying principles in Walter Camp's "daily dozen"*?

1. The first principle is that the man shall stretch his muscles, as the caged lion stretches, whenever he can. And, mark you, the muscles that are seen are not so important as the muscles that are unseen—in the language of Walter Camp, "the muscles under the ribs". This should be the first principle of prayer also. One should first of all stretch the mind to take in God, not a one-sided, two-sided, or a three-sided view of God, but *all*. Moreover, this stretching should not be for the objective mind—which is out where we can see and control it—so much as for the subjective mind, the mind that is out of

- sight, the mind that is "under the ribs."
2. The next principle underlying the daily dozen, as well as all other good setting-up exercises, is to breathe deeply and freely. There is nothing that clears the brain and avenues of circulation like breathing with eleven-elevenths of the lungs and not with one-eleventh—breathing out the old waste poisons and breathing in the new clear life from the atmosphere which surrounds us. This should be the second step in our prayer. We should pray out the bad and pray in the good; dismiss from our mind the trouble which seems imminent and restate emphatically the great promises of God; forgive the sinner and accept forgiveness for the sin.
 3. The final phase of these exercises is that they should be kept up steadily, daily, until the habit of deep breathing has been transferred to the nervous system; in other words until it becomes an automatic habit, so that a man between jobs at his office unconsciously stretches his legs under the table and continues all day to breathe deeply and freely from the depth of his lungs. This is the goal of all true prayer—to make the "stretching" of the mind to see God a continuous habit all through the day, to make the deep breathing of the soul—which mentally denies entrance of the bad thought to the brain and expands the good thought—a steady automatic habit of the subconscious. This is in accord with St. Paul's admonition, "Pray without ceasing."

As stated above, we find this "frame" suggested to us in the Lord's Prayer and the Twenty-third Psalm. The first phase—the expanding of the mind to take in all of God—is given very briefly in these short half-minute prayers; nevertheless, they were full of connotation to the ones to whom they were addressed. "The Lord is my Shepherd." "Our Father Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name." Think of what the words "Shepherd" and "Father" imply!

The second phase of prayer, the denial and affirmation, is suggested figuratively in the Psalm by "Thy rod and Thy staff," and the actual denials are given in very clear-cut form: "I shall not want," and "I shall fear no evil." Each of these is followed by a series of affirmations. In the Lord's Prayer, this rhythmic handling of our problems is suggested by 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. This suggests the in-breathing and out-breathing of that prayer which is real communion with God.

The third. phase—that is, keeping the prayer thought as a continuing force throughout the day—is suggested very beautifully in both the examples we are using: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever"; "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done; in earth as it is in Heaven." You can see in these statements a realization of the Kingdom *here and now*, about us, in whatever activity we may be engaged.

How then shall we apply these principles to our own prayers? Perhaps some examples may help here. The following may open your eyes a wee bit to the possibilities

you yourself might work out in prayer.

Stretching the Mind to Take in All of God

1. Our Heavenly Father, we know that Thy Love is as infinite as the sky is infinite, and Thy Ways of manifesting that Love are as uncountable as the stars of the heavens.
2. Thy Power is greater than man's horizon, and Thy Ways of manifesting that Power are more numerous than the sands of the sea.
3. Thy Wisdom is greater than all hidden treasures, and yet as instantly available for our needs as the very ground beneath our feet.
4. Thy Joy is brighter than the sun at noon day and Thy Ways of expressing that Joy as countless as the sunbeams that shine upon our path.
5. Thy Peace is closer than the atmosphere that wraps us around, and as inescapable as the very air we breathe.
6. Thy Spirit is as pure as the morning dew, and yet as impervious to all that is unlike itself as the diamond which the dew represents.
7. As Thou keepest the stars in their courses, so shalt Thou guide our steps in perfect harmony, without clash or discord of any kind, if we but keep our trust in Thee. For we know Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusts in Thee. We know that if we but acknowledge Thee in all our ways, that Thou shalt direct our paths. For Thou art the God of Love, Giver of every good and perfect gift, and there is none beside Thee. Thou art omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, in all, through all, and over all, the only God. And Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.

The Deep Breathing of the Soul

Before it is possible to breathe, one must be surrounded by atmosphere and atmosphere must be *in* one. Likewise, before it is possible to commune with God, which is a more conventional way of characterizing the deep breathing of the soul, one must know that God surrounds all and God is in all; that the Kingdom of Heaven is *here* and *now*.

As breathing is a mere rhythmic interchange of that which is within with that which is without, a casting-out of that which seems to be bad and a receiving, in its stead, of that which seems to be good, so the breathing of the soul is a casting out of all that would poison, cramp, or belittle life—in short all that is unlike God, and a taking in of all that is pure, perfect, and joyous, and which enriches life—in short, that which is *like* God.

Without question the very finest examples of this rhythmic communion with God are to be found in the Psalms of the Old Testament. And as our New England forefathers used to begin the day by offering a prayer and reading a Psalm, why can we not emulate their example and add to it perhaps just a touch of originality by offering a prayer and improvising a psalm? Indeed, is not the psalm as much a part of worship as a prayer, and is there any more reason why present-day worshipers should be limited to the collection of Psalms preserved for us in the Old Testament than that we should be limited in our prayers

to the petitions preserved for us in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the ancient Prophets?

The only new and revolutionizing idea that I am introducing into this discussion of prayer, in fact, is a plea for reinstating the psalm, the little brother of prayer, in our private and public worship. We find it now lost completely to our private worship and reduced to a mere form in our public worship. What I wish to see is the bringing of the psalm back in the form and manner that the old Psalmists themselves made use of as a frank and spontaneous improvisation in the presence of a real need, an imminent calamity, a present sorrow—an actual outpouring of that particular need, trouble, or sorrow upon the outstretched arms of God, and the breathing in of His healing peace, comfort, and love. Such spontaneous psalms were in themselves prayers—the finest and purest examples of prayer that the world has ever seen, of prayer which is dynamic and healing, of prayer which is a real communion with God.

As our first spiritual exercise of the morning was a stretching of the mind to take in God, so this is a breathing of the soul. And just as in physical breathing we give a quick expulsion of the poisons we wish to eliminate, and then drink in slowly of the new, fresh, life-giving, body-building ozone, holding it, first deep in the lungs, then high, turning it over, so to speak, till we have extracted the life-giving oxygen it contains, so we should give our denials with expulsive force, turning instantly to the constructive, soul-building affirmations. The trouble with most of our praying, as with our breathing, is that it is too negative. We shut ourselves up in a cramped little three-dimensional room with our negations, breathing in again and again the troubles that we should let vanish into thin air, instead of turning to new and fresh air — to God.

Marvelous results will come if one will turn in thought to God and Heaven, deny the existence in Heaven of the wrong thing felt or thought, and then realize that in God and Heaven the opposite condition prevails. One must dismiss from his mind completely the thought that the wrong thing felt or seen is permanent, and then follow instantly with the realization that the opposite condition exists here and now.

For money troubles, realize:

There is no want in Heaven, and turn in thought to 1, 2, and 7 in Exercise 1.

For poor health, realize:

There is no sickness in Heaven, and affirm 1, 7, 6, 2, and 5.

For aid in thinking or writing, realize:

There is no lack of ideas, and affirm 3 and 7.

For happiness:

There is no unhappiness in Heaven, and affirm 1, 4, and 5.

For criticism and misunderstanding:

There is no criticism in Heaven, and affirm 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

For friends:

There is no lack of friends in Heaven, and affirm 1, 4, and 7.

For worry:

There is no worry in Heaven, and affirm 4, 5, and 7.

This is the kind of prayer the Psalmists of old had recourse to in their hours of trouble—the most beautiful example of which is the Shepherd Psalm:

FIRST PHASE:

The Lord is my Shepherd.

SECOND PHASE:

I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
He leadeth me beside the still waters,
He restoreth my soul.
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
(Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death)

I will fear no evil.

For Thou art with me.
Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.
Thou anointest my head with oil.
My cup runneth over

THIRD PHASE

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.*

Practicing the Presence of God

And now, having finished the prayer which in form is something like a Psalm, and having finished the Psalm which is similar to a prayer, let us consider how we can turn the strength derived in the quiet hour into the daily routine of the world of action. For the test of every life is, after all, How do the hours of contemplation harmonize with the hours of action?

The value of Walter Camp's "daily dozen" is that, after the fifteen minutes' exercise in the morning, you find you are breathing a little deeper all day. We should expect the same results from our fifteen minutes of prayer every morning. We should be living in the Kingdom of God a little more vitally all day. How? Let me tell you.

Here is where we can learn a lesson from the movies. No longer does one have to depend upon newspapers for news; one can see the world's news thrown on the screen if

one desires. Then why does one have to depend entirely upon one's prayers for contact with God? Cannot one see, if one knows how, the spiritual ideas of God revealed in the cinema pictures that flash by in actual life? The moment one awakes to the fact that one lives in God's world here and now, one begins to see in every event that comes, a part of the beautiful symmetrical plan of God. Of course, as it flashes by in little separate pictures of a fraction of a second each, not every picture may seem the most perfect. Neither would every stitch of a famous mosaic tapestry appear perfect to an eye looking through a microscope.

Once reach this stage and you have found the secret of following Paul's seemingly impossible command, "Pray without ceasing." And now miracles will begin to happen around you.

When a visitor comes, accept him as a messenger from God, and before long a divine message actually will come to you. Accept every disappointment as a signpost to show you to another path which is better, and you will always find the other path is there. Gradually this practicing the presence of God, or living in the Kingdom of Heaven, will become a habit. Then you will wonder why for so many years you had not been living there before.

But remember that the best way to get there is to stretch the mind frequently to take in all of God that you can, and practice frequently the deep breathing of the soul. In other words, one can enter the Kingdom only by prayer and meditation. "Love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all other things shall be added unto thee."

Thoughts about Prayer

Think of God and Heaven, not of the bad thing you are tossing off into the air.
Pray if possible out of loyalty to God, for the joy of it, not for results.
Do not pray to bring things to pass; pray to see things that are already in the Kingdom.
Do not limit the avenues by which God will answer your prayers.
Remember that God's ways of manifesting His love are as uncountable as the stars of the firmament.
Do not feel responsible for your prayers, or the answer to them. God alone is the planner and knows best. Love, rejoice, and be thankful for the unfoldment of His plan as you see it.