

even conclude that it is of the flesh and needs to be forsaken as though it were an anxious care. However, this active seeking and longing after the Lord may be the open door to resting in Him when all else fails. So let your heart be Spirit-led to long for the Lord as He wills.

You may also find yourself reluctant to tell the Lord how much you love Him when you see how shallow and selfish your love really is, how little gratitude and self-sacrifice there is in it. Don't pretend it is any more than it is. Just be grateful that in His love He has given self-centered, self-serving you any selfless love at all. Thank Him that Christ in you loves fully and freely where the old you cannot. Thank Him that He in you meets His Father's desires where you can't. Praise and give Him glory that you are complete in Him in all respects, including these where you feel so unworthy.

A Gentled Spirit

One who learned to commune and walk with God many years ago said the first thing he noticed as a response to God's working was a gentling of his spirit. While I have a very long way yet to go in this regard, I can add my testimony to his. We need to see gentleness as the Spirit-induced virtue it is.

In the life in the Spirit there's no room for harshness and unkindness. Of course, there may be those who inappropriately apply these labels to unbending firmness on behalf of righteousness, but we must make no excuse for any hardness of heart or harshness of manner. Remember that others may most readily see the Lord in us in our meek and gentle spirit.

Praise and Thanksgiving

"Rejoice in the LORD always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The LORD is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy meditate on these things." Philippians 4:4-8

Have you ever noticed how Paul, in urging God's people to pray, repeatedly asked them to pray without anxiety but with rejoicing, praise, and thanksgiving; and how he repeatedly cited peace as the result of thanksgiving? You may be surprised to learn that heartfelt thanksgiving may be the most important aspect of the Christian life. To a large extent, whether you live in thanksgiving or not determines what happens to your spiritual life and your relationship with the Lord.

A thankful spirit is the peak of positive response to the realization that God is working all things together for our good. Complaining, bitterness, anger, anxiety, frustration, hatred, strife, push, shove, hurry, and worry are all the opposite of thankful-

ness. They show that we really don't believe God is always working everything together for our good.

Never Defend Negative Responses

Positive, thankful, trusting, non-resistant, unperturbed responses to our circumstances must replace the old negative ones if we're going to respond positively and lovingly to God and His work in our lives. Seek never to let yourself cover up the defiling character of complaining, grumbling, thanklessness, discontent, and resentment. When you do, let Him teach you to be quick to acknowledge and turn from it. In all likelihood, you can't yet praise your wonderful Lord and give Him thanks for allowing the difficulties in your life to be the means of bringing you blessing and benefit, but you will as He enables.

Continual Communion

"Pray without ceasing."
1 Thessalonians 5:17

Devotion and communion aren't just for prayer time. We should seek to be in constant quiet communion and communication with the Lord. Seek to fellowship with the Lord out of love, free from pressure. Let Him teach you to discuss everything with Him as with a best friend. Talk to Him rather than yourself.

It won't do that we stop worshiping when we leave the quiet place! Always an act of worship for us is simply to rest in the reality that Christ in us is all-sufficient for our needs all the day and every moment. So it is that we rest, content in Him and His working on our behalf.

If we long for God to reveal Himself to us, it must be in order that He may reveal Himself in us. So may He be attractive in us to others in whom He may reveal Himself, and in them to still others, and so on. Anything less is selfishness, and has no place in our worship.

As we continue to look to Him, human self-interest will be swallowed up in His interests. Self-pleasing gives way little by little to our longing to please Him and to give Him pleasure. We long to see His majestic perfection be made known and His name be praised.

May the Lord become our center. Let Him be precious. Stand in awe of Him, yet accept His Father love. Prayer must not be what we want, but what He wants; not what or who we are, but what and who He is; not our love, but His; not our importance, but His.

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"True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24

"Seek first the kingdom [realm] of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Matthew 6:33

"In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:18

What is the purpose of devotional prayer? Surely one of God's purposes in prayer is to bring us to a place of closer harmony with Him and of growing dependence on Him. As we let God be God and learn to respond to Him as such, our differences dissolve and our independence subsides.

To come to Him, yielding Him our loving, responsive attention is to allow Him to transform us little by little into more of His likeness. Partly a purging process, this relieves us of our burden of sin, pride, rebellion, resistance, and resentment. Given the awesome reality of our awful depravity (Jeremiah 17:9), it is hard to imagine any Christian belittling the necessity of this spiritual exercise.

Worshipful Prayer

Come to Him worshipfully then, seeking only Him. Be relieved of your concern for things of time and space to commune lovingly with Him in the dimension of the Spirit.

To keep our attention on things temporal and physical rather than on God and things eternal and spiritual is to incapacitate our spirits from worshiping Him in the realm of the Spirit. So the elemental aim of private communion with God is freedom from earthly entanglements to worship Him in love.

Our calling is to love and worship God, now and through all eternity. But worship is far more, and perhaps other, than we have thought. We may worship Him with words, thoughts, or hymns, but our hearts may worship the Lord without words. We may worship Him with the loving attention of a quiet, waiting spirit. Words may lie, but not the tender and meek spirit. So may we worship Him by simply enjoying gratefully who He is. We may just soak up His love, or even Himself, and that may be worship. We may let go of all that has displaced Him in our thoughts or affections, and that, too, may be a genuine act of worship. But there are more even than these.

Sacrifice of Self

THE PRAYER OF LOVE

At the end of the eleventh chapter of Romans, Paul sings a doxology of praise to God as the transition from the doctrinal discussion to the practical application section which begins in chapter twelve. There he calls on us to perform a sensible service: offering ourselves once-for-all as a perpetual sacrifice on the altar of love to God. That is worship!

To be reconfirming this in continual self-sacrifice would surely be worship delighting His Father heart even more. Are you prepared, on leaving your quiet time, to be a living sacrifice? Are you willing to die daily to your desires that He may accomplish His pleasure in you? No less an objective should be ours.

We can start toward this goal by coming to God in devotional prayer, with a meek and quiet spirit, needing Him, being still before Him. Yield your concerns for earthly things to Him. Give Him your attention as fully as possible. As He enables, all the ungodly selves of self-reliance, self-dependence, self-pride, self-will, self-effort, and self-love along with rebellion, resistance, and resentment will dissolve to be replaced by the all-encompassing God.

As He becomes the focus of your loving, worshipful attention, let Him relieve you increasingly of your fear, anxiety, worry, and tension. Release them to Him in quiet trust, confidence, and love. Let go of everything into His control. Refuse to hold onto anything, to seek to control anything, or to be controlled by anything but God Himself.

Sometimes, you will release them one by one as each raises its ugly head. More often, you may simply rest content in Him, letting go of everything in general to Him, to find your temporal interests, fears, and concerns dissolving in His loving presence. Nothing needs to be of undue concern to you because all is of such intimate concern to the Almighty. Be assured He is in the business of perfectly taking care of all your cares.

In devotional prayer, be willing to let go of all that is on your heart and mind that preempts His position there. Give it all to Him. If you don't, there will be no room for Him, and you will come into your prayer closet and leave again in frustration.

Let God Guide

Beware of focusing on anything other than the Lord Himself, the one reality to which we need to gravitate in utter dependency. Let it be in rest and peace rather than in our independent self-efforts. He works as we wait in quiet confidence, not as we struggle and strive; even to give Him our loving attention.

Beware of seeking to know Him with your intellect. Only your spirit is really equipped to know Him. So come to Him with as sensitive a spirit as He'll enable, even more than with a willing mind.

Our Experiences Will Differ

You may be disappointed that sometimes you can't find the same sweet communion with Him that you do at other times. Don't be unduly concerned when nothing seems to happen in your time with Him. You may feel barren, dull, empty, and hopeless.

The real danger is that you may turn from seeking the Lord to self-pity. You may even accuse God of not rewarding you for your faithfulness. If you do, may God enable you to recognize with horror the rebellion such responses reveal and run again into His arms of love. Realize that He is graciously teaching you to walk by faith and not by sight.

On the other hand, some of our experiences may be surpassingly glorious. We may have the joy of coming to rest in silent awe, content to be lost in Him and His love, nobody apart from Him, the struggle gone, the fears subsided, the needs met in Him. Words may be inconsequential, thoughts inadequate. To those who, at such a time, feel themselves immersed in God, the experience is sacred and indescribable.

Lost in His Love

The nature, duration, and intensity of such experiences may vary greatly. But for that moment even more than other occasions, we may find: all our desire is for Him; we trust Him implicitly; He is our joy and rejoicing; He alone is our hope; our hearts are gentle, tender, and pliable to Him; we relinquish everything to Him, seeking to retain nothing for ourselves; nothing He could ask of us is too great; we are gladly weak that He in us might be strong; no earthly possession is, at that moment, worth seeking after or holding onto; we could not possibly wish to disobey our lovely Lord; the thought that we could displease Him is more than we can bear; our greatest pleasure is to please Him and give Him pleasure.

If we think of ourselves at all, we despise our sins, our sinfulness, and our selfishness. Our innate depravity is a horrid burden we would be rid of. We are pained by anything other than Him. We would gladly die for Him. Our dearest desire is to be swallowed up in His infinite love, lost in Him. We yearn to be with Him where He is; yet, we're quietly at rest before Him, content with whatever He allows. Our focus is removed from ourselves and our spiritual growth, to center on Him alone.

Not Experiences, But Our God

Any or all of these responses, and others, may be ours in more or less intensity. We may experience something whenever God gives us the meek and quiet spirit that waits restfully before Him. While we dare not seek the experience, we may seek to be at home in Him as often as we will. We'll always profit, if we don't come looking for some selfish benefit or feeling, and then accuse God of letting us down because we didn't get it.

Whatever experiences are ours, we must be sure to make little of them, much of Him. Don't, my dear one, let any experience replace our glorious Lord in your affections.

If He permits you to have special feelings or experiences, receive what He gives. If He refrains from giving them, be grateful that He knows best. If He deprives you of that which He once gave, turn to Him for

His enabling grace to trust His love expressed even in such a way. Continue unabatedly to seek Him only.

Quiet Time

In your quiet time, be as alone with God as you can possibly be. Seek to give Him pleasure. Rest in Him, His love, and His peace. Yield everything to Him so He can be God to you, communicating Himself and any of His gifts that He can safely give, taking away what separates and grieves.

When we come in devotional prayer to look to the Lord in worship, we must first have our hearts and minds relieved of the burden of self-centeredness. Consciously or unconsciously, this must take place before we can give Him our loving, worshipful attention. Our needs, problems, wants, hopes, and things, all need to be displaced and replaced by Him. Until we trust ourselves and all our interests to Him in implicit confidence, are we not in bondage to our independent selves that makes genuinely worshiping Him impossible?

In our devotional praying, even though we may be taken up with concern for the spiritual rather than the temporal, we may become consumed, not with God, but merely with our relationship with Him. This may degenerate into simply preoccupation with our feelings. As a result, we continue in our self-centeredness rather than being delivered from it into the God-centeredness we seek.

The Prayer of Silence

If you come across an expression such as this in your reading, I suggest you see it as a quietness of heart, mind, and spirit that reflects the peace of God, in contrast to the cerebral approach of thinking or reasoning, the emotional approach of anxious concern, or the supposedly spiritual approach of feelings of God's presence and work. The importance of words and concrete thoughts is subjected to that of a spirit quietly waiting on God.

However, I urge you not to be deluded into trying to sit by the hour before God trying to do and think nothing. All that my attempts have accomplished is to put me quickly to sleep.

Value that inward peace and silence that listens to God. Learn to recognize what blocks it, and seek to see them reduced: hurry, worry, flurry; negative responses finding anything in our circumstances unacceptable. God must change us on the inside so we can grow toward accepting everything as from Him.

A Deep Yearning

We may find ourselves longing whole-heartedly after the Lord. We may find ourselves crying out for Him, wanting Him to reveal Himself to us, needing Him, yearning for Him until our hearts are near breaking.

Then, as we learn the value of resting quietly at peace in Him, we may abandon this zealous seeking for the Lord. We may