

Be Sure You Have a Solid Foundation

Christ is in you; you are in Him. When these become more than mere words to your spirit, this wonderful reality can lay a foundation for everything else you learn about your relationship with the Lord. Christ is in you, your hope of glory, as stated in Colossians 1:27.

“And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” Colossians 2:10

Christ is your life (see Colossians 3:4), your all-sufficiency. You are at home in Him where you may rest quietly in the glad assurance that He will supply all you need. For your prayer time this means that, whatever happens in it, you can be at home in Him. You can be content that He is doing and being everything you need then and there whether you feel like it or not.

To begin with then, as you look for a cure for the frustration you feel at having those difficult prayer periods, you must depend on the reliability of the written Word, not on feelings of any sort. He is in you; you are in Him. That is the sure fact of the Word of God.

When you're more conscious of your failure than you are of His sufficiency, everything grinds to a halt, even if you're more conscious of your failure to reach God. Worship, love, dependency, supply, all get backed up as in a clogged drain. You must become more conscious of His sufficiency than of your failure for the spiritual process to restart.

Make no mistake about it, humility does not cause you to be more conscious of your failure than of His sufficiency, pride does! Pride says it shouldn't be so. Humility says it will always be so but for the grace of God. Humility says your failure and need, not your deserts, qualify you for the grace of God now as any other time. What you need is His mercy!

About Those Feelings

Sometimes our biggest hindrance in prayer may be our feelings. On occasion these may be a result of the condition, not of our spirits, but of our bodies. For example, one of my most difficult, disappointing periods of prayer occurred recently. The only time I felt anything good happened was when I was largely asleep while seeking the Lord! But even after this, I felt terrible. No wonder! Within an hour, my dear wife was shocked to find me as white as a sheet. I'd just come within a hair's breadth of passing out in the bathroom! I might be at peace, but she feared for my physical heart.

Feelings are certainly not to be depended on. In this sure knowledge is hope for those who suffer from mental illness, especially from nerve disorders that may be caused by a chemical imbalance in the physical system.

We need to beware of depending at all on feelings, so readily can they be the enemy of faith. We're so easily snared by bad feelings, and almost equally by good feelings, the good feelings we too often covet instead of Him.

Regardless of feelings, He is in you, and you are in Him! You have a right to trust Him and rest in Him. He's the all-sufficient supply of all you need. None of these truths are dependent on the presence of feelings. Why should we live by changing feelings when we can live by the changeless reality?

What More Can You Do?

Seek to worship Him, not with mere words, nor just abstractly, but as what and who you need right now. To do otherwise is sometimes to play word games of pretense, which could be part of the reason for your failure to communicate with the God of truth and reality.

Let the Lord show you where you're not pleasing Him. Let Him deal with whatever it is He reveals as displeasing until it's happily settled between you. Let Him reveal your worries and fears, your mistrust of Him. Agree with Him about them. Allow Him to change them. Admit your wandering, loveless heart. Sincerely mourn over it if God enables you to.

Thank and praise Him for who He is and what He does, even when you don't feel at all like doing it.

Read the Word. Let it search and instruct you. Soak up Philippians 4:4-13. Let the Lord use it to make prayer in all its aspects and genuine heart submission real to you.

Write whatever comes to your mind that reflects where you're really at in your responses to the Lord right at that moment. The sense of failure may disappear as you see in black and white before you the evidence of your seeking heart.

Lay down in His arms. If you go to sleep there, be less concerned than if you continue to strive too long in agitated prayer.

At any point, under the Lord's direction, be prepared to turn your attention from your relationship with the Lord to genuine, heart-intercession for others. When Job did this, He found Himself freed. So may you. Sometimes, while I think it should be the opposite, I find my heart becoming sensitive to the Lord after times of loving intercession for others. God uses it to free me from my self-centeredness.

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By: Pastor Ron Marr

“Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him.” Job 23:3, 8

Sometimes even the most sincere seekers feel as if their prayers aren't reaching beyond the ceiling. Sometimes in spite of your best attempts to practice what you've learned, all seems to end in frustration. Sometimes you can't worship God, seek Him, love Him, praise Him, thank Him, or wait on Him in rest and peace. The ability to relinquish everything to Him in loving surrender has just disappeared!

Accepting these dry times as from the Lord without anger or resentment is to trust Him to bring good from all He allows in the prayer time as elsewhere. Still, the fact is that this is a frustrating experience. If long continued and not responded to wisely, this may become spiritually debilitating, even leading to some abandoning the quest for more of God. To those discouraged seekers, I offer some practical suggestions and guidelines for dealing with times when you seem to have hit a brick wall.

Removing the Blockages

Unaware of our neediness and sin, we may have been living in practical independence from the Lord. So when we come to Him in prayer, He is not in all our thoughts. Some sin or disobedience may be unconfessed and unforsaken. This will not do. Agree with God immediately. Confess and forsake it gladly for His sake. Let nothing deter you!

We may be distracted from the Lord by the things of this life. Paul desired "that you may serve the LORD without distraction" (1 Corinthians 7:35). We may have replaced our attention to Him with attention to TV, radio, or idle talk. We may not have taken time and opportunity to turn our attention and affection back to Him often throughout the day. As a result, we may find our attention firmly fixed on things rather than on the Lord.

Just being in a hurry can get us so wound up that we have little time, or thought, or room for God, or even for others.

We may secretly resent some circumstance God permits in our life or some demand we fear He may be making of us. We may be resenting Him for not giving us what we seek in prayer.

OVERCOMING HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

Our negative reactions of resentment, anger, bitterness, fear, anxiety, and a harsh, unkind spirit may have replaced our trust and rest in the Lord and the gentle tenderness of spirit He brings. It really isn't hard to see why a gulf separates us and the Lord. That chasm is bridged by releasing to Him and His mastery all that separates or offends, and then returning to Him to rest contentedly.

We may not be spending enough time with the Lord to allow the Holy Spirit to break down all our resistances and remove our attention from earthly things to Himself. The whole of devotional prayer is to be centered on God.

We may be guilty of wanting more from this time than Him alone. If we don't let the Lord bring us to the place of being content with Him alone, what else can we be but discontent?

We may not have become willing to relinquish everything to Him, let go of our desire to control things, and be restfully assured He's safely in charge of everything.

We may be trying rather than trusting. The longer we remain with our attention as much as possible quietly directed toward Him in whatever way He makes possible, the freer we may be to receive from Him whatever He wishes to communicate to us. We can't prescribe to Him the nature of our relationship.

Dealing with Drowsiness

As you're alone with the Lord, occasionally you may fall into a sleep in which God is still your center and focus. This you need not resist, provided you benefit spiritually, not merely physically from it. Sometimes it has seemed to help my struggling heart come to a place of rest in Him.

However, if there is no spiritual benefit from it, you may need to move around, walk, or speak aloud in order to stay awake. Take a break for strenuous physical exercise. Deep breathing might work, as well as opening a window for some fresh air. I've occasionally given myself a good hard slap on the face. Sometimes I've thanked the Lord for the interruption of my wife, daughter, grand-daughter, or the phone to waken me or keep me awake.

Try writing down your thoughts. Be careful that you aim at simplicity, candor, and honesty rather than a pretty spiritual diary. God may use it for much more than keeping you awake.

Use your Bible and devotional aids, but you may find more help in interrupting your devotional prayers to intercede for others.

If falling asleep becomes a perpetual problem, go to bed ear-

lier, much earlier if necessary. Usually it is the evening hours that we waste anyway.

A Wandering Mind

Most of us will experience difficulties with a short attention span or lack of concentration during prayer times on occasion. First of all, do not fret or stew about it. To worry is to mistrust God. To mistrust Him is one of the most abominable of sins.

If you focus on the wandering, you're certainly not focusing on the Lord. Just be quietly at home in Him. Trust Him. Allow Him to draw your affections back to Him as He will.

You may find keeping your Bible or a devotional book open in front of you and referring to it often helps with this problem, too. Special passages that revere the Lord, for instance, in the Psalms, can easily turn your focus back to Him.

You may also find help from meditating on the characteristics of God. Find Him worthy of all honor, worship, praise, and adoration.

Writing down your prayer thoughts may help limit the wandering mind problem. So may periods of loving intercession for others.

Enemies of Rest

Some enemies of rest in the Lord are: lack of trust in Him, fear, uncertainty, impatience, worry, anxiety, contentiousness, excessive concern for opinions of others, self-imposed or self-met deadlines, resentment, bitterness, anger, envy, jealousy, lust, possessiveness, pretense, fantasy, unreality, selfishness, covetousness, self-righteousness, pride, independence from God, rebellion, willful disobedience. In other words, sins that separate from God prevent resting in Him.

The presence of any of these, when recognized, should set off warning bells that ring, "Give it to Jesus. Give it to Jesus." To walk without harboring or defending them, releasing them to Jesus as they're recognized, is to walk in the light, relaxing in the joy of the Lord.

We have no reason for tension to rule our lives. If we are weak enough, meek enough, willing enough to be needy, we can always, upon recognizing the cause, relinquish it to Him. The tranquility of resting content in Him can replace the tensions. Waves of rest will return after each resurgence of tension as we live in continuing preference for God and His order of peace rather than for ourselves and our order of constant restlessness. This relinquishing and relaxing can lead to the beautiful release of rest, peace, joy, and liberty in the Lord that we may have only dreamed about.

Stuck on a Treadmill

Why do we make so little progress in prayer and our relationships with the Lord? We simply must die to having any hope in ourselves so it may all be in Him alone.

"We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead." 2 Corinthians 1:9

"Always carrying about in the body the dying of the LORD Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

2 Corinthians 4:10-11

This is why the life that is in Christ is repugnant to many Christians and neglected by many teachers. Die they will not. While initially attractive because of all the promise it holds, when the Christ-life demands our death, all that is of the old man rises up in rebellion.

God offers us Himself and every good thing. But the best, kindest, loveliest, most wonderful gift He offers is our death stroke. To this we say no, and ultimately to all He offers. He can live fully and freely only in those who have willingly accepted the slaying of their independent selves.

We may not be willing to come to Him to be emptied of ourselves, to die to our independent selves. Trying to worship Him, love Him, thank Him, give Him our attention and affection is useless apart from recognizing our sin and neediness, and repudiating ourselves for Him. But we need to be sure we look only long enough at ourselves to see our ugly sin and failure, and then to run back quickly to Father.

We have nothing to give God, not even loving attention. Our focus is naturally consumed on ourselves. We're not natively loving. In fact, our attempt to give Him our attention to love Him, worship Him, or give Him pleasure, may benefit us most by showing us we cannot do anything that is good. If it is good, He alone is its author and empowerer.

So, give up on yourself. Release everything into His tender care. If you can do nothing more, you can seek to rest content in Him.

God sometimes seems to withdraw Himself for His own good purposes. We must accept this also as a gift of His love and remain as faithful in our times with Him as though it weren't so. Often when we feel nothing is transpiring between us and the Lord, a great deal is really happening. In our blindness and ignorance, we simply are not able to see it.

Whatever the Lord sends you in your time with Him, submit yourself to Him and to it. Let Him be Lord of the quiet time, too. Especially be sure it isn't just feelings you are missing. God hasn't promised you feelings, but Himself. Trust Him to keep His word. Be satisfied that He is there with you, that you are in Him and He in you. Rest and be content.