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THE WHOLE LIFE MUST PRAY

Prayer at its best is the expression of the total life. Certainly there have been and will continue to be instances when an isolated prayer may be answered even when the one uttering it may not have been living an exemplary Christian life. But we assume that most of those who read this page are not satisfied to get a prayer through occasionally; they want to know a more satisfying prayer life, one that elevates and purifies every act of body and mind and integrates the entire personality into a single spiritual unit. Such prayer can only be the result of a life lived in the Spirit.

All things else being equal, our prayers are only as powerful as our lives. In the long pull we pray only as well as we live. Some prayers are like a fire escape, used only in times of critical emergency—never very enjoyable, but used as a way of terrified escape from disaster. They do not represent the regular life of the

one who offers them; rather they are the unusual and uncommon acts of the spiritual amateur.

William Law somewhere pleads for Christians to live lives that accord with their prayers, and one of our well-known hymns asks that God help us “to live more nearly as we pray.” Most of us in moments of stress have wished that we had lived so that prayer would not be so unnatural to us and have regretted that we had not cultivated prayer to the point where it would be as easy and as natural as breathing.

We do not want to leave the impression that prayer in times of sudden crisis is not a good and right thing. It most certainly is, and God is said to be a “very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1); but no instructed Christian wants to live his whole life on an emergency level. As we go on into God we shall see the excellency of the life of constant communion where all thoughts and acts are prayers, and the entire life becomes one holy sacrifice of praise and worship.

To pray effectively it is required of us that there be no un-blessed areas in our lives, nor parts of the mind or soul that are not inhabited by the Spirit, no impure desires allowed to live within us, no disparity between our prayers and our conduct.

All this may appear to be placing the standard too high to be reached by men and women under the sun. But it is not so. If Christ is the kind of Savior He claims to be, He should be able to save His people from the bondage of sin. This is not to support the man-made doctrine of “sinless perfection”; it is rather to declare the God-inspired doctrine that it is possible to “walk in the Spirit” and so “not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” It is to say that God has made provision in the cross of Christ for His children

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to be delivered from the galling yoke of sin: “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11).

Undoubtedly the redemption in Christ Jesus has sufficient moral power to enable us to live in a state of purity and love where our whole life will be a prayer. Individual acts of prayer that spring out of that kind of total living will have about them a wondrous power not known to the careless or the worldly Christian.

From *The Root of the Righteous*
(1955; repr., Chicago: Moody, 2015)

EXPLORING WITH TOZER

Tozer’s opening comment that “prayer at its best is the expression of the total life” is both a simple and complex truth. It is simple to the believer who is in constant communion with the Father where all his thoughts and acts are prayers. His entire life is one holy sacrifice of praise and worship. This individual is not necessarily a prayer warrior as others would classify him; but a saint desirous of moment by moment fellowship with the Lord, of impacting his world for Christ not only by his righteous actions but also his prayers, and of leaving the fragrance of Christ among believers and nonbelievers. This believer understands that God “always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14–15).

The truth that “prayer at its best is the total expression of the total life” is complex to the believer who is not in constant communion with the Father, who has conformed much to the world, and who sees prayer only as a fire escape in difficult times or in critical emergencies. This believer tends to call on God only when he cannot work out a solution to a difficult situation, that is, he has no other option. To this believer, prayer is a duty and burdensome. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). When the whole life prays, there is no burden or legalistic bondage with prayer. The other issue that adds to the complexity of this truth on the total life is the inability of this believer to discern or connect the dots on unanswered prayer, sin, and their walk in Christ. Prayer seems to be a mystery to this believer, a random process that doesn’t make sense. However, in actuality, God is trying to grasp the attention of this believer by unanswered prayers or few prayers being answered to make him realize that God desires his submission to Him in all things under the power of the Holy Spirit, his resistance to the devil, and his drawing near to God (and God will draw near to him) (James 4:7–8). If this believer responds to God’s wooing, he will begin to realize that a holy life is the fertile soil for prayer that changes the world around them. To not respond to God’s gentle and loving promptings forces God the Father to discipline us in many ways inclusive of our prayers that we might share His holiness (Heb. 12:10). Thus, the journey is more painful and complex!

THE WHOLE LIFE MUST PRAY

REFLECT AND APPLY

1. “All things being equal, our prayers are only as powerful as our lives.” How does one assess our life in Christ? Do we start with prayer? Put another way, are my prayers filled with emergency prayers or much prayer throughout my day? Do we examine our priorities of seeking first the kingdom of God? This honest assessment will take some time alone and may require some input from a spiritual mentor or two.
2. How does one cultivate a prayer life so that prayer becomes as natural as breathing? Should we read more books on prayer? Talk about prayer more? Pray more? Study James 4:7-8; 1 Peter 5:6-10; and 2 Kings 22:18-20.
3. What were the circumstances of your last emergency prayer? What was the answer? How was your prayer life affected after that—did it become a digression, a return to the status quo, or serve as a progression? Write down your impressions of the aftereffects from your last answered emergency prayer.
4. Was there a time in your life where you prayed more or saw more answered prayer? Reflect on what your walk in Christ was like at that time. On the other hand, can you identify some times in your life where your walk in Christ was more holy but answered prayer was less? What is the possible reason for this?

THE SACRAMENT OF LIVING: PART 1

One of the greatest hindrances to internal peace the Christian encounters is the common habit of dividing our lives into two areas—the sacred and the secular. As these areas are conceived to exist apart from each other and to be morally and spiritually incompatible, and as we are compelled by the necessities of living to be always crossing back and forth from the one to the other, our inner lives tend to break up so that we live a divided instead of a unified life.

Our trouble springs from the fact that we who follow Christ inhabit at once two worlds—the spiritual and the natural. As children of Adam we live our lives on earth subject to the limitations of the flesh and the weaknesses and ills to which human nature is heir. Merely to live among men requires of us years of hard toil and much care and attention to the things of this

world. In sharp contrast to this is our life in the Spirit. There we enjoy another and a higher kind of life—we are children of God; we possess heavenly status and enjoy intimate fellowship with Christ.

This tends to divide our total life into two departments. We come unconsciously to recognize two sets of actions. The first are performed with a feeling of satisfaction and a firm assurance that [these actions] are pleasing to God. These are the sacred acts and they are usually thought to be prayer, Bible reading, hymn singing, church attendance, and such other acts as spring directly from faith. They may be known by the fact that they have no direct relation to this world, and would have no meaning whatever except as faith shows us another world, “an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1).

Over against these sacred acts are the secular ones. They include all of the ordinary activities of life we share with the sons and daughters of Adam: eating, sleeping, working, looking after the needs of the body, and performing our dull and prosaic duties here on earth. These we often do reluctantly and with many misgivings, often apologizing to God for what we consider a waste of time and strength. The upshot of this is that we are uneasy most of the time. We go about our common tasks with a feeling of deep frustration, telling ourselves pensively that there’s a better day coming when we shall slough off this earthly shell and be bothered no more with the affairs of this world.

This is the old sacred-secular antithesis. Most Christians are caught in its trap. They cannot get a satisfactory adjustment between the claims of the two worlds. They try to walk the tight-rope between two kingdoms and they find no peace in either.

THE SACRAMENT OF LIVING: PART 1

Their strength is reduced, their outlook confused and their joy taken from them.

I believe this state of affairs to be wholly unnecessary. We have gotten ourselves on the horns of a dilemma, true enough, but the dilemma is not real. It is a creature of misunderstanding. The sacred-secular antithesis has no foundation in the New Testament. Without doubt, a more perfect understanding of Christian truth will deliver us from it.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is our perfect example, and He knew no divided life. In the presence of His Father He lived on earth without strain from babyhood to His death on the cross. God accepted the offering of His total life, and made no distinction between act and act. "I do always those things that please him" was His brief summary of His own life as it related to the Father (John 8:29). As He moved among men He was poised and restful. What pressure and suffering He endured grew out of His position as the world's sin bearer; they were never the result of moral uncertainty or spiritual maladjustment.

The apostle Paul's exhortation to "do all to the glory of God" is more than pious idealism. It is an integral part of the sacred revelation and is to be accepted as the very Word of Truth. It opens before us the possibility of making every act of our lives contribute to the glory of God. Lest we should be too timid to include everything, Paul mentions specifically eating and drinking. This humble privilege we share with the beasts that perish. If these lowly animal acts can be so performed as to honor God, then it becomes difficult to conceive of one that cannot.

That monkish hatred of the body, which figures so prominently in the works of certain early devotional writers, is wholly

without support in the Word of God. Common modesty is found in the sacred Scriptures, it is true, but never prudery or a false sense of shame. The New Testament accepts as a matter of course that in His incarnation our Lord took upon Him a real human body, and no effort is made to steer around the downright implications of such a fact. He lived in that body here among men and never once performed a non-sacred act. His presence in human flesh sweeps away forever the evil notion that there is about the human body something innately offensive to the Deity. God created our bodies, and we do not offend Him by placing the responsibility where it belongs. He is not ashamed of the work of His own hands.

Perversion, misuse, and abuse of our human powers should give us cause enough to be ashamed. Bodily acts done in sin and contrary to nature can never honor God. Wherever the human will introduces moral evil we have no longer our innocent and harmless powers as God made them; we have instead an abused and twisted thing which can never bring glory to its Creator.

Let us, however, assume that perversion and abuse are not present. Let us think of a Christian believer in whose life the twin wonders of repentance and the new birth have been wrought. He is now living according to the will of God as he understands it from the written Word. Of such a one it may be said that every act of his life is or can be as truly sacred as prayer or baptism or the Lord's Supper. To say this is not to bring all acts down to one dead level; it is rather to lift every act up into a living kingdom and turn the whole life into a sacrament.

If a sacrament is an external expression of an inward grace, then we need not hesitate to accept the above thesis. By one act

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of consecration of our total selves to God we can make every subsequent act express that consecration. We need no more be ashamed of our body—the fleshly servant that carries us through life—than Jesus was of the humble beast upon which He rode into Jerusalem. “The Lord hath need of [him]” (Matt. 21:3) may well apply to our mortal bodies. If Christ dwells in us, we may hear about the Lord of glory as the little beast did of old and give occasion to the multitudes to cry, “Hosanna in the highest.”

That we *see* this truth is not enough. If we would escape from the toils of the sacred-secular dilemma, the truth must “run in our blood” and condition the complex of our thoughts. We must practice living to the glory of God, actually and determinedly. By meditation upon this truth, by talking it over with God often in our prayers, by recalling it to our minds frequently as we move about among men, a sense of its wondrous meaning will take hold of us. The old painful duality will go down before a restful unity of life. The knowledge that we are all God’s, that He has received all and rejected nothing, will unify our inner lives and make everything sacred to us.

From *The Pursuit of God*
(1948; repr., Chicago: Moody, 2015)

EXPLORING WITH TOZER

This particular selection from Tozer’s works might seem a bit strange to be chosen for a book on prayer, especially

since references to prayer are slight. However, Tozer makes it clear from the outset, as do the Scriptures, that “the common habit of dividing our lives into two areas—the sacred and the secular” is one of the greatest hindrances to internal peace for the Christian, who inhabits two worlds, the spiritual and the natural. This compartmentalization of life leads a believer to identify sacred acts, such as prayer, Bible study, worship, and more, and then to categorize the secular acts of everyday life as mundane and non-spiritual. Tozer notes that most Christians today are caught in this trap between two worlds. As a result, “they try to walk the tightrope between two kingdoms and they find no peace in either. Their strength is reduced, their outlook confused, and their joy taken from them.”

This tension, this conflict, this uneasiness, or this dilemma can lead to a Christian life filled with powerlessness and prayerlessness. Every act of our lives should contribute to the glory of God, and Jesus Christ is our example in that He never once performed a non-sacred act. His life was filled with power and prayer! Hopefully, we desire the same, but to get there we need to realize and practice every day that there is no non-sacred act. For instance, mowing the yard, washing the dishes, cleaning a garage, getting some exercise, organizing a shelf, writing a report, and hundreds more such secular acts should not rob us of intimate fellowship and prayer with God but should enrich it. Of course, that might mean that we have to unplug ourselves partially from the technology that intrudes into our thoughts, that seemingly magnifies our importance, that fills our time with meaninglessness, that stifles us from hearing God’s voice, and that undermines the sweet fellowship with Him that He desires for all His children.

REFLECT AND APPLY

1. As Tozer writes in the final paragraph, we should meditate “upon this truth,” [i.e., “living to the glory of God, actually and determinedly” in all we do] by talking it over with God often in our prayers, by recalling it to our minds frequently.” Do this for a day, then a week, and finally a month. We need to replace this sacred-secular perspective with the divine perspective that our daily labors can be performed as acts of worship acceptable to God. It will take much “reverent prayer to escape completely from the sacred-secular psychology.” Second, as God effects the escape, note the changes in your prayer life and your awareness of things that happen around you that God brings to your attention to pray about as well.
2. “The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is our perfect example, and He knew no divided life.” Tozer notes that Jesus “lived in that body here among men and never once performed a non-sacred act.” As believers, we need to ask ourselves under the searching of the Holy Spirit, do we live divided lives? Is the sacred act of praying separate from the secular activities of life? If separated, we will not respond to situations of stress, pain, difficulty, and more with spontaneous prayer in our heart and mind. Reflect on your past forty-eight hours as to whether there was separation or not between sacred and secular. Be honest!
3. Self-deception can hinder us from truly seeing the separation between the sacred and secular that has slowly occurred in our life and its impact on

our prayer life. If struggling for insight in living to the glory of God, seek out a mature believer to encourage you in this journey.

4. If access to such a believer is not available, consider the following example and your response: You are walking through a parking lot and notice a piece of paper. Since it looks like one that you have been carrying in your pocket, you pick it up to be sure. It is a draft of a letter to someone's parole officer. The writer of the letter evidently had been arrested for drug possession and sent to the jail, but now, years later, his/her life has turned around. The individual, now married, is seeking an end to the parole.

Would you respond with indifference and throw the piece of paper down immediately? Would you respond with contempt for the person? Would you say, "Except for the grace of God, I would be there too"? Or would you respond with empathy as you pray for this individual's plight, salvation, and future? One might even write on the note "I'm praying for you" and place it by the truck it was near. This is a secular event that can and should become sacred. The two merge easily for the individual who does all to the glory of God. There are many such events in each of our days to bless and pray!