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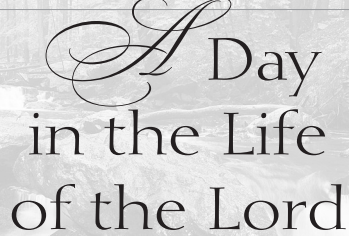
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CHAPTER I



A Day in the Life of the Lord

Some time ago, I asked the women who were attending a weekend conference where I was speaking to write on a three-by-five-inch card why they had come and what it was they were hoping God would do in their lives through the weekend. "Where does God find you as we start this weekend?" I asked.

Later, as I read the responses to my question, I was amazed at how many of them sounded alike. Here is a sampling of what those women expressed:

"I feel I'm out of control sometimes with so many pressures."

"I face too much stress and responsibility."

"I need God to show me how to cope with the stresses at this moment."

"I feel like I'm torn in all directions. I want God to show me how to manage my different 'hats' of teacher, mother, wife, and daughter successfully, and still have time for church work and 'me.'"

"I need to stop worrying about everything. I try not to and I know I shouldn't, but my worries that I conjure up even disturb my sleep and dreams."

"I've given myself up to service for about twenty-four months, and I feel a need to slow myself down and renew myself, but life gets real hectic."

"With a new baby, I need to find the Lord's peace and rest—physically and emotionally."

"I often get overly busy and find my day gone without having done the things I most wanted to do."

"I am a single person by divorce, and I really am tired."

"I've left a whirlwind at home, and need a renewed spirit to face all that these coming weeks will hold."

"I want to slow down. I feel as if I'm on a speeding treadmill, and if I try to jump off I will stumble and fall."

"I need help with my frazzled, frenzied state."

"My busyness has robbed me of my joy."

Do you find yourself relating to any of these feelings? I find these kinds of responses are increasingly common among the women I meet. Why do we live such hectic, harried lives? Is this what God intended for us? And can we actually get off that speeding treadmill without hurting ourselves (and others) in the process?

Busy Days

The first chapter of the gospel of Mark gives us a glimpse into a day in the life of the Lord Jesus. In some respects, this particular day was not unlike many of the days that you and I experience.

We pick up the account in verse 21:

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. (MARK 1:21–22)

If you've ever taught a Sunday school class, led a small group, or taught a Bible study, you know there's a lot more behind these words than what appears on the surface.

You know that you don't just get up before a group and teach the Word of God with power and effectiveness apart from a lot of time spent in preparation—not just preparation of the notes and the material, but preparation of your heart and life.

I love teaching the Scripture; to me there is nothing quite like seeing the Word of God penetrate and transform lives. But the process of preparing to speak is an intense one for me.

I agonize to determine what it is that the Lord wants me to teach; I wrestle with the passages involved, seeking to understand what the Scripture really means; I labor to put the material together in a form that is understandable and meaningful to the listener.

Throughout the process, I ask the Holy Spirit to search my own heart, to shine the light of His Word into every nook and cranny of my life, and to show me where I don't measure up to the truth I am about to proclaim. Before opening my mouth to speak, I spend time in prayer, pleading with God for a fresh anointing of His Spirit on my life and my lips, and interceding for those who will hear the message. I feel like a runner about to run an important race—every muscle taut, totally concentrated on the race ahead.

Then, while I'm actually teaching, there is more energy expended—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I am intensely focused, never letting up from my goal—I want the truth to penetrate every heart; I want every individual to say yes to God about any issue He is addressing in her life.

When I have finished speaking, the battle is still not over—that is when the Enemy often seeks to discourage me with feelings of inadequacy or to tempt me with seeking the praise of men for my ministry. By the time it's all over, I am generally depleted and in need of restoration.

So when I read that Jesus began this particular day by

teaching in the synagogue, I know this was not just a casual effort on His part. The people listened attentively to Him because they could tell this was not your normal, run-of-the-mill Sabbath message. Unlike the preachers they were accustomed to hearing, Jesus spoke with authority and power. We know that in order for this to be possible, He had spent concentrated time with His heavenly Father in preparation. As He ministered, He was being expended on behalf of others.

The apostle Paul said, “I will very gladly spend and be spent for you” (2 Corinthians 12:15 KJV). That’s part of what is involved in ministering to others, whether in a synagogue, a Sunday school class, or a house full of little ones.

Confronting Evil

This was just the beginning of Jesus’ day—His work was not nearly over. Before He even had a chance to finish His message, there was an interruption in the service. Let’s continue reading in Mark 1:

Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.” (MARK 1:23–27)

Here we see Jesus engaged in a battle between heaven and hell. Everywhere Jesus went during His years of earthly ministry, the demons of hell were stirred up because He lived and spoke and ministered in the power and the authority of God.

Obviously, this was not some casual, relaxed encounter with the Enemy. This was all-out warfare.

Now, I have never exorcised a demon. And in the course of

an average day, you and I are not likely to have audible or visible encounters with demons. But God's Word teaches that we are in the midst of a battle against "principalities and powers"—that at this very moment there is a cosmic warfare being waged between heaven and hell. And sometimes, God sends us right into the front lines of that battle. Many of the people we encounter and deal with on a daily basis are in the midst of an intense spiritual battle for their souls, and sometimes we get caught in the cross fire.

In the course of being a wife, a mother, a daughter, a friend, an employee, you will find yourself in the midst of difficult, strenuous, demanding situations where you have to be alert to the schemes of Satan and skilled in using the sword of the Spirit to fight off his attacks. There is a natural drain that is a part of being God's servant in these situations. Jesus experienced those moments of intense confrontation with the powers of darkness.

As a result of this encounter with the demonized man, the Scripture tells us that "news about [Jesus] spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee" (v. 28). Try to imagine how that must have complicated Jesus' life. All of a sudden, people all over the area wanted Him to come speak at their synagogues and banquets, wanted to interview Him for their publications, wanted Him to heal their sick and cast out their demons. They all wanted a piece of Him. Later in this passage we learn that the time finally came when Jesus couldn't even stay in the cities, but had to find quiet, remote places where the crowds couldn't find Him, in order to get time alone with His Father.

Perhaps you have had the experience of ministering to someone in need—lending a listening ear to a discouraged young mother, helping out in your child's classroom, preparing a meal for a family in a crisis, being a youth sponsor on a mission trip, ministering to a friend's troubled teenager, or offering biblical counsel to a woman in a shaky marriage. Then the word spreads that you are available to help people in need—and all of a sudden, your phone is ringing off the hook

with people wanting your time and help.

Everybody Needs Me!

Well, the service at the synagogue is finally over and we feel a sense of relief when we read the next verse: “As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew” (v. 29).

Whew! Jesus has spent hours giving out and expending Himself for others. Finally He has a chance to get away with His friends, away from all the needy people. He gets to go home, kick up His feet, open up a good book, and relax—maybe even take a nap. Right? Wrong!

Read on: “Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her” (v. 30). Jesus is finally out of the public eye, back in the safe haven of a friend’s home, and even there, someone needs Him.

Do you relate to any of this as a woman? Do you ever feel that there is no time, no place where you can totally escape the demands of other people? If it’s not the people at work, it’s your husband; if it’s not your husband, it’s your children; if it’s not your children, it’s the neighbor’s children; if it’s not someone else’s children, it’s your mother-in-law; if it’s not your mother-in-law, it’s . . .

But as we would expect, the serving heart of Jesus comes out and He makes Himself available to meet the need: “So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them” (v. 31).

Finally, Jesus can close the door and settle in for a nice quiet evening alone with his friends . . . “Martha, go see who’s knocking at the door!”

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door. (MARK 1:32–33)

I don’t know how many people came to see Jesus that

evening, but it sounds like a lot to me! Remember, this is still the same day—He started early that morning, teaching, casting out demons, and healing the sick, and now the whole city is lined up at His door wanting help.

Do you ever feel like the whole town is gathered at your door? Maybe it's your bathroom door, and you're just trying to get three minutes alone without having to answer any questions—but somebody's knocking on the door, the doorbell is ringing, the phone is ringing, the oven timer is buzzing, your three children seem like thirty-three, you feel like half the world is sick, and everybody needs you—all at the same time. You panic: "There's just not enough of me to go around!"

And Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons. (MARK 1:34)

How Did He Do It?

You wonder, How did He do it? How did He stay sane? How did He keep His sense of equilibrium? How did He keep meeting the needs of so many people without falling apart Himself?

We know Jesus was God. But He was also a man—He got tired; He got hungry; He knew what it was to have crowds pressing around Him all the time; He knew what it was to have His privacy invaded. But He kept right on letting the crowds into His life. He kept on teaching, healing, confronting the powers of hell—and never a cross or impatient word. How did He do it?

Besides, He was only given three years on this earth to accomplish the whole eternal plan of redemption. Talk about a long "to do" list! Yet He never seemed hurried, harried, or overwhelmed with all there was to do in a day. Why not? How did He handle all the stress, strain, and responsibility without "losing it"?

I believe verse 35 gives us the key—not only to Jesus' life,

but also to your life and mine, whatever our specific responsibilities and circumstances may be. That verse begins, “*Very early in the morning . . .*”

I don’t know about you—but when I’ve had a long, draining day like the one we just read about, I know exactly what I want to do very early the next morning. *Nothing—except sleep!*

Now, there’s nothing wrong with sleeping when our bodies need it. But Jesus knew there was something He needed that next morning even more desperately than His body needed sleep. He had poured Himself out for countless needy individuals, and His spirit needed to be replenished. He knew it would never happen once the crowd woke up, so what did He do?

“*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up . . .*” He got up! The Scripture says that Jesus was tempted in every point as we are; so I have no doubt that Jesus was tempted to sleep in. But He made a choice to say no to His body and yes to His Father. He got up. Then He “left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (v. 35).

And He did so none too soon. For it wasn’t long before “Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’” (vv. 36–37).

However, having just been in touch with His heavenly Father, Jesus knew exactly how He was to respond to the demands of the new day: “Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come’” (v. 38).

Why was this morning appointment with His Father so crucial to Jesus’ earthly ministry among us?

Jesus knew that any power or ability He had to minister to others was due to the fact that He was “one with the Father.” He knew it was essential for Him to stay connected to His Father, for that was His Source of life, joy, power, peace, and fruitfulness. He knew He had to walk in union and communion with His Father if He was to know and do His Father’s will. He had

no other purpose for being on this earth than to do the will of His Father. So He had no higher priority than to abide in intimate, unbroken fellowship with His Father, so that He might fulfill His Father's will.

For Jesus, time alone with God was not an option. It was not something He tacked on to an overcrowded schedule. It was His lifeline to the Father. It was not something He could do without. It was the highest priority of His life—more important than being with His disciples, more important than preaching the gospel, more important than time with His mother and brothers, more important than responding to the demands and needs of the crowds, more important than anything else.

The gospel of Luke tells us that “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16). This was the pattern of His life. This is where He got His “marching orders” for the day. This is where He discovered the will of God for His life. This is where He got renewed and restored when virtue had gone out of Him as He ministered to the crowds. This is where He gained the resources to do battle against Satan—and win! This is where He stepped back from the corruption, clutter, and clamor of life on this earth and was given the ability to see the world from God's point of view. This is where He received grace to love the unlovable and power to do the impossible.

And this is precisely where you and I so often miss out on all that God has for us. Unlike Jesus, we attempt to live life in our own energy. We think we can keep giving out without getting replenished. Then, wearied and weakened by the demands of life and ministry, we become impatient and annoyed with the very ones God has sent us to serve. Rather than exhibiting a gracious, calm, joyous spirit, we become uptight, frazzled, and frenzied women, resenting, rather than welcoming, the people and opportunities God brings into our lives.

Is it really possible for us to manifest the same spirit Jesus did when facing pressure? That all depends on whether we are

willing to make the same choice He made, to adopt His number one priority as the number one priority of our lives:

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. (MARK 1:35)

MAKING IT PERSONAL

1. Take stock of the usual quantity and quality of time you spend alone with God in the Word, praise, and prayer. Which of the following best describes the current condition of your personal devotional life?

_____ *For all practical purposes, I have no devotional life.*

_____ *My devotional life is inconsistent and sporadic.*

_____ *I am spending time in the Word and prayer on a consistent basis, but I often feel that I am just going through the motions. My devotions are more a matter of duty than delight.*

_____ *I am meeting alone with the Lord on a daily basis and am cultivating a meaningful, intimate relationship with Him through His Word, prayer, and praise.*

2. Write three or four words that would typically describe your spirit when your schedule is full or you are in the midst of pressured circumstances (for example: calm, prayerful, frenzied, demanding).

3. Based on the account we have just considered in Mark 1, write a brief paragraph describing the way Jesus responded to pressure.

What do you think accounted for His ability to respond to interruptions, demands, and the incessant needs of those around Him?

4. Take a few moments to pray and ask God to speak to you through this study. Ask Him to make you like Jesus in your response to the circumstances of life. Ask Him to give you a deeper desire to make your relationship with Him the most important priority of your life.

□ □ □ FROM THE HEART OF □ □ □

Elisabeth Elliot

We “need Him every hour.” If we aim to be consistent in the way we live and walk, we cannot settle for a hit-or-miss nod in God’s direction. There is no way to live the Christian life without strong effort, faithful commitment, and spiritual disciplines.

The primary obstacle I face is myself—my laziness, preoccupations, worries, lack of concentration. I must deal with these in the strength of the Lord. But I am responsible to do what I am meant to do. He will help me, but He will not physically move me to the quiet place or to my knees.

Married or single, mothers or not, we must arrange to be quiet, alone, consistently, before God. We must arrange this. We can. “The Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed” (Isaiah 50:7 KJV).

The daily quiet time is an offering up to God of one’s praise and all that the day may hold. To start my quiet time, I use an ancient hymn, the *Te Deum*. This begins the day with praise, not with my own petty little lists of what I want.

Then I read the Word, asking the Holy Spirit to apply it to my heart and life.

I sing and memorize psalms and hymns. I seek to make myself, my hopes and fears, the whole of my life (circumstances, duties, work, sorrows and joys, my body) a daily offering and sacrifice, full of thanksgiving.

Throughout the day, I offer up prayer, keeping lists of people and things to pray for. I pray that God will teach me to pray. I use the Lord’s Prayer and the prayers of the Epistles to help me pray. There are no legitimate excuses for skipping prayer—prayer can be made, as Brother Lawrence learned, even while scrubbing pots in a kitchen in the monastery.

The older I get, the more I am aware of my desperate need of Christ Himself. I want to listen and learn and glorify Him.

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Elisabeth Elliot is a much-loved speaker and author. While she and her first husband, Jim, were young missionaries in Ecuador, her husband was martyred by the Auca Indians. Elisabeth has one daughter, eight grandchildren, and four step-grandchildren, and is married to Lars Gren.

NOTE

PART PAGE: Andrew Murray, *The Secret of Fellowship* (Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1981), Introduction.