

## THE PASTOR IN THE SECRET PLACE\*

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The request from my brethren that I write this paper has caused much searching of my own soul.

It bore a reproof to my own heart for failure on the very point wherein I am asked to counsel others.

I discovered many years ago that I need to be reminded again and again lest I fail utterly in this most important duty. I would not have you to believe that mine is a prayerless life. I do enjoy blessed seasons of communion with God; there are times when heaven bends low and touches my waiting heart.

No, I am thinking now of that Holy exercise when as a Pastor I go to the secret place. Surely every God-called minister of the gospel has realized that he of all men must frequent the place of prayer.

Failure to do so is inexcusable.

There may be other weak points in our ministry which bring no sense of shame. There can be no excuse for neglect of this, the most important aspect of our sacred calling.

I am fully convinced that the secret of most of our failure in service to God and lost humanity can be traced to lack of prayer.

When I read books on prayer such as "Preacher and Prayer" by E. M. Bounds or "The Pathway to Prayer" by Samuel Chadwick, I am always convinced that here is the greatest single reason for our lack of conquest.

When I read of men such as John Knox or Robert Murray MacCheyne or any of the great spiritual giants who waxed mighty, because they were mighty in prayer, I see the great reason for my own puniness. How is it with you my brethren?

If it be true that every failure of my own life and ministry can be traced to this point of weakness, it is also true that every victory over sin and the devil, every triumph over the forces of evil, every soul won for Jesus, every message blessed of God to the edification of his people has been in answer to faithful believing prayer.

I am confessing to you my brethren that it is difficult work to pray.

It is easier for this man to do any of a number of things which may be and are highly important and yet relatively unimportant when compared with this all-important exercise of the soul.

Easier to study, easier to call, easier to do almost anything than it is to wrestle with God and prevail in prayer. There are three reasons it seems to me for the utter necessity of secret prayer in the life of every God called minister.

Certainly the first and most important reason is that His own soul may live and prosper. Surely if there is any man who is utterly dependent upon what God does for him in the secret place it is the pastor. Without continuous and copious showers of blessing falling upon his own soul, his heart will become as dry and as barren as the desert, His work will be as prefatory as that of any professional man, His many burdens will break him. His efforts will be but feeble, futile motions, He will mistake fretful anxiety for genuine soul burden, enthusiasm for genuine blessing, and while he still preaches to others he will lose his grip on God and sooner or later become a castaway.

He needs vital contact and Holy communion with God to protect him from the temptations peculiar to the servant of God.

The minister who neglects the secret place is apt to develop a head that is bigger than his heart. He is open to all the subtle attacks and sophistries of an unbelieving age. Unless his study is a place where his own spiritual strength is renewed it may well be the place where the seed of doubt is received and brings forth its awful fruitage. We need to be prayed up to meet the subtle approach of unbelief. The minister needs the strength which is found only in the secret place, if he is to withstand awful perils which beset him as he ministers to his people.

The preacher who is prayed up is not apt to fall into the gross sins which have ruined many a servant of God. The pastor must visit the secret place for the sake of his own soul.

In the second place the pastor should get his message in the secret place. We are all acquainted with various things which are helpful to us in our ministry of the word.

We read helpful books. We consult commentaries; we sit at the feet of great teachers; we study the needs of our people and our community.

All these are good, but all combined and even coupled with a thorough knowledge of God's word are not sufficient to prepare us to bring one single message from God to the heart of his waiting people or to the conscience of sinful men.

We need the holy anointing to enlighten our own hearts and minds. If we are to know the mind of Christ we must be in tune. If we bring a message it must be that we have heard from heaven. Who is there of us who at some time or other has not received in a flash the gist of a truth that far exceeded anything we could think through. It came while the soul was in communion with GOD. If we expect to preach with unction we must wait upon God in secret for the Holy anointing which alone can make it possible.

And finally the varied aspects of our work demand our attendance at the throne. The pastor is more than a preacher, more than a social worker, more than a moral reformer. He is a shepherd.

We are apt to think of a shepherd as one who seeks straying sheep. That is more heroic possibly than feeding lambs.

The heart of the true shepherd warms as he thinks of the Master with bleeding feet, finding his way over mountain crag, searching every crevice of the mountain side, seeking the lost.

Divine passion that drives us to such seeking is only experienced as we live close to the heart of the great shepherd.

Divine patience which leads us out in prayer for the weak and straying and sends us again and again sometimes for the same foolish, erring, wandering sheep, can only be developed as we learn to tarry in the secret place, nay dwell there.

Divine purpose which learns the plans of God and brings about their execution is born in the secret place before it lives and moves in channels of blessing and usefulness.

A prayerless preacher is like a builder without tools; like a physician with no remedies; like a soldier without weapons.

"Lord, teach us to pray."

\* Paper given at Ministers' Conference.

## HOW TO BE WRETCHED

Take offence easily.

Do not forgive readily.

Carry a chip on your shoulder.

Think and plan mostly for self.

Imagine that others intended to slight you.

Do not rejoice in the success of your rival.

Never apologize, but always insist that you are right.

Do not practice self-denial, but always yield to the flesh.

Give only enough to ease your conscience, but not your full share.

Take inward satisfaction in hearing of the misfortune of your opposer.

In glancing over a report, quickly notice if your name is mentioned or omitted.

Work like a slave if others will only revolve around you, like the planets around the sun. But if they do not, then sulk and come in late, so as to cripple the program.

Pull off in spirit from those who have the courage to tell you of your faults, but shout when you are commended or praised.

Do not give much credit to others for the success of the meeting, but rather infer that it was because "big I" was prominent.

Make believe that what you said or wrote was wholly original, when it was what you stole from another, but you were too dishonest to give proper credit.

Swell out when invited to sit on the platform, and do not offer to step down and give your place to another who is living cleaner and closer to God than yourself.

Be a fine politician; look ahead and boost another for a small office, if he is likely later on to obstruct your unsanctified ambition for a larger place.

Yes, my friend, these things, when entertained, will help make you perfectly miserable. But, thank God, if you will truly cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" then you will be able to say, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."  
—E. E. Shelhamer.

## "BY MY SPIRIT"

My brethren, if we had the Holy Spirit upon our ministry, it would signify very little about our talent. Men might be poor and uneducated; their words might be broken and ungrammatical; there might be no polished periods of Hall, or glorious thunders of Chalmers; but if there were the might of the Spirit attending them, the humblest evangelists would be more successful than the most pompous of diviners or the most eloquent of preachers.

It is extraordinary grace, not talent, that wins the day; extraordinary spiritual power, not extraordinary mental power. Mental power may gather a congregation; spiritual power will save souls. We want spiritual power.

Oh, we have some before whom we shrink nothing as to talent, but who have no spiritual power, and when they speak they have not the Holy Spirit with them. But we know others, simple-hearted, worthy men, who speak their country dialect, and who stand up to preach in their country place, and the Spirit of God clothes every word with power; hearts are broken, souls are saved, and sinners are born again.

Spirit of the living God! We want Thee. Thou art the life, the soul; Thou art the source of Thy people's success. Without Thee they can do nothing; with Thee they can do everything.—Charles H. Spurgeon.