

“SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR DAILY QUIET TIME”

“Reading Prayer”

When you read the subtitle at the top of the page, your tendency will be to *misread* it. I am not talking about the practice of reading prayers that have been written out prior to the time of prayer. I often journal (write out) my prayers in my early morning Quiet Time, and I have often been greatly blessed as I have gone back much later and read the written prayers (this is the subject of another vignette), but that is not the meaning of the title. This brief observation has to do with *turning your reading into prayer*.

Every Christian should have spiritual reading habits that penetrate every day, if possible. Years ago, I heard a saintly old Christian say, “The best way to pray is to read the Word, let God speak to you from it, and repeat or paraphrase back to Him what He is saying—with surrender to Him and the truth He has given to us and with thanksgiving for Him/it.” I was instructed (and intimidated) years ago by reading the biography of George Mueller of Bristol, England, the great “man of faith” who sponsored several large orphanages for years merely by depending on God for their support. The remarkable story included this line: “He read the Bible completely through over seventy-five times on his knees.” I am not the person to question that, challenge that, or seek to imitate that, but I do want to learn and be inspired from it. Personally, I cannot read the Bible and be warmed by its fire without reciprocally communicating with its Author on the basis of the Truth just received. I’m sure Mr. Mueller would have abandoned the habit of daily-Bible-reading-on-his-knees if it had not stimulated personal exchange with God.

My mother used to say to me, “When someone speaks to you, it is impolite to change the subject, and the more important the speaker is, the more important the rule is—don’t change the subject.” This is simply great sense; I would say “*common* sense,” but it just happens that common sense has become about the most *uncommon* thing there is! Dear Christian, ask this question and apply this test: How many times have powerfully anointed church services ended with prayers that are more *rote* than *relationship*, more *regular* than a reflection of Divine-human *romance*? As a pastor for many years, I made the mistake of entrusting the closing prayer to many a “Hallelujah” service over to a “humdrum” pray-er. “Reading prayer” means that you cultivate the habit of “talking back” to God on the basis of the live words He has just spoken to you, and talking back with the same passion with which He addressed you.

Of course, this habit should begin with your reading and study of the Bible. During these immediate days, I am reading/studying the twenty-fourth of Luke, the great story of the Emmaus Walk Jesus took with two common disciples. *What a story!!!* At every dramatic twist and turn, I have looked up from the page and let my thoughts be drowned in praise and worship. I have thanked God with every sentence that I am privileged to know this story and use it as a model for my own walk with Him. I have recited the principles, the patterns, etc., of the passage and asked God to powerfully ‘in-flesh’ them *in me*. How many times have I thought (and said), “Wow, this is mine!

Jesus, this is You and me! This is the model for every Christian. My feet touch the Emmaus Road with every step I take. Please, do not let my eyes be ‘holden’ as theirs were; instead, let them be ‘opened’ by the Miracle of the Spirit’s Grace, as theirs were.” This is “reading prayer,” that is, prayer that is formed (and forced) and fired and fueled by the reading of that moment.

I want to be very cautious as I proceed “the rest of the way” in this vignette. Reading prayer should not only characterize your reading of the Bible. It should also be used in/during *everything you read*. Certainly, it should apply to all the devotional books you use to fuel your Quiet Time and your relationship with God. How many times have I recited, repeated, paraphrased, and rewritten in other words (the margins of all of my books look like the “scribble terrain” of a writer who is a hundred miles from notebook paper), the content of a daily devotional from Oswald Sanders’ *My Utmost For His Highest*. I have often prayed, “Lord, you have given ‘Your Utmost for my highest,’ now, please transform me so I can give ‘my utmost for Your highest!’” I have heard from God out of those pages again and again, and again and again I have transposed the words of the text into the words of my lips/heart as I repeat them back to God in awe, wonder, brokenness, praise and worship. I have had at least an equal experience in the use of Glyn Evans’ *Daily With the King*. I have been absolutely stupefied at the consistent Divine speech that has resonated in my heart from the daily use of these two books. “When an Important Person speaks to you, don’t change the subject!” Never has my mother’s dictum meant more to me than today. “*Child of God, don’t change the subject when God speaks!*” Exhaust all possibilities inwardly and in exchange with Him to maximize what He is saying. When you get to the vignette based on “Buy the truth and sell it not,” remember this vignette. Treat the immediate truth God speaks to you like a woman-with-a-new-diamond treats that diamond, turning it over in the sunlight to examine every facet of it, then re-turning it as if she has missed one or as if she would invent one that isn’t even there! “Search the (reading) daily,” and repeat the surface truths, the subtleties, the innuendos, back to God with a heart-shout of praise.

Now, here’s the rub of this brief meditation. I personally believe this can/should be done by a Christian *with all reading*, not merely his “devotional” or “spiritual” reading. Reading prayer can be triggered by the newspaper. How many times have I heard my wife respond with prayer to a *happy* or a *horrible* news report while holding the daily newspaper spread open in her hands! “Lord, bless that,” “Lord, thank you for,” “Lord, please help those people” How many times have we stopped our reading, recited the content to the other, then laid the newspaper down momentarily to pray for the people involved in some story. When we saw/read the first reports of the earthquake/tsunami in the area of the Indian Ocean, both of us wept and prayed as we tried to identify with the trauma-emotions and the devastation of the people of the area. Every newscast should be a stimulant to prayer every day, every *National Geographic Special* or the specials on *The History Channel* should be used to intercede for the ethnic groups, cultures and nations featured, and every page read (of *anything*) should be a loud bell within a Christian ringing out “the call to prayer.”

Another rub. I have found that literature-at-large is a great foundation for reading prayer. In another vignette, I have listed an entire category of short stories from great “classic authors” that have smashed my heart with great lessons of spiritual truth and strategy. I have read and re-read some of them many, many times, and have recited them again and again with one person, in small groups, in teaching settings, etc., etc. I have used their content as illustrations of the great truths of the Gospel over and over. But their appropriation, appreciation and application began with me, not just as a reading, but as reading *prayer*. Why should I “waste” such great truths as God has stimulated through the minds and pens of great writers just by an inward “thinking with the author” as I read? Why should I not also exchange with The Great Author of all truth as I read? And sometimes, I have prayed *negatively* over the reading, protesting the Spirit’s disagreement with an untruth, a verbal or lingual abuse, etc. That is, *everything read causes a spiritual revolution within me*. I just want to be so insulated in Christ that anything disagreeable to His Presence will spread instantly throughout my character, and anything He approves can permeate me through and through. However, I do not want that insulation to become isolation. I want to be “in the world, but not of it,” as Jesus said. I want to be *in* the world as a catalyst for His Cause, as a representative of His revelation, as a stimulus for spiritual life. All of this can be initiated by *reading prayer*; that is, by reading that is instantly turned into prayer.