

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Investing In Your Spiritual Life

by Dan Trygg

“And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.”

Mark 1:35

“But He Himself was habitually slipping away to deserted places and praying.”

Luke 5:16

“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God (lit., “God-breathed”) and profitable for teaching, for reproof (exposure of error), for correction (lit., “straightening-up-again”), for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the person of God may be adequate (fully prepared; proficient), equipped for every good work.”

II Timothy 3:14-17

“...the good hand of his God was upon him. ¹⁰ For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of Yahweh and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

Ezra 7:9,10

“For though by this time you ought to be (i.e., you are obligated to be; indebted to be) teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to (inexperienced in or unacquainted with) the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice (repeated activity: customary habit) have their senses (faculties of perception) trained (Gk. – *gymnazō*; “working out”) to discern good and evil.”

Hebrews 5:12-14

Someone asked me the other day, “What motivates you to get up early in the morning every day to spend time reading the Bible?” My immediate response was that **if Jesus found it necessary to get up early in the morning to seek His Father’s counsel and strength, how much more do we need to invest time in our walk with Him?** If the sinless Son of God found it needful to often get away to spend time in prayer, don’t you think we would benefit from doing the same? **Furthermore, if you pay attention to what Jesus taught, it is quite obvious that He had diligently studied and learned the Scriptures.** His mind and teachings were *steeped* in them. When He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He was able to quote passages from Deuteronomy to shut down each suggestion with finality. In order to do this, He must have spent much time studying and meditating on the written word of God. Jesus was made fully human, like us (Heb. 2:17). He did not have a photographic memory, nor was He born with a fully-developed mind. The scriptures specifically tell us that, as a child, He “was increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk. 2:52). In other words, **Jesus had to develop and learn the same way we all do, ...by gaining information through curiosity, experience, the teaching and counsel of others, and by applying Himself to read, study, memorize and meditate on the Scriptures.** Of course, in the Jewish culture of His day, studying the Scriptures was considered a valuable thing, so He would have been encouraged by the adults in His life to invest time in that pursuit. The point is that **Jesus’ understanding of the Scriptures did not just come to Him. He had to invest regular, consistent time in study, meditation and prayer.**

We see the same level of pursuit and discipline in His prayer life. Jesus was not a “born pray-er”, any more than the rest of us. **He developed His prayer life and His intimacy with God by investing time and effort in that area of His life. How do I know?** First of all, as noted above, **we see His customary discipline of rising early to invest time alone with His Father.** *This was a pronounced pattern in His life.* Even when life was busy, Jesus would withdraw from the activity and people to invest time in prayer and solitude. We see Him doing this *repeatedly*. **Secondly, we see Him taking time to seek God at critical junctures in life.** He did this *after* major events, such as times where God’s power had worked through Him in a powerful way (Matt. 14:23), *before* major decisions (Lk. 6:12,13) and to discern God’s strategic counsel *in the midst of* busy activity (Mk. 1:32-39). **Thirdly, Jesus learned to pray with intensity and perseverance.** Don’t think for a moment that intimacy with God and spiritual insight came *easily* to Him. We have a little glimpse into the development of His prayer life in Hebrews 5, “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications *with loud crying and tears* to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although being a son, He learned-by-practice-and-use the hearing-under-obedience from the things which He suffered, and being-fully-developed, He became to all the ones obeying Him the source of eternal salvation.” Although most people think this passage refers to the Garden of Gethsemane, the language clearly indicates a larger, long-term process of development. **Jesus learned to hear and respond to His Father through an intense, disciplined, experiential pursuit. He invested time and energy. He sacrificed sleep and comfort in order to invest in His relationship with God.** While others were still at home in bed, He was up and out of the house to get some time with His Father. Why was it necessary to get out of the house? First of all, there were distractions and temptations there. It would be easy to crawl back into bed. Again, remember this was before the time of electric lights. If you got up before the sun, you generally were sitting in the dark. What happens if you are physically tired and sit in

the dark? You tend to fall asleep! So, what did Jesus do? He *got up*, got dressed and left the house! Walking around outside helped Him to wake up, but also served to cement His resolve, ...to seek His Father's face. The passage gives us another reason Jesus left the house. As He walked, or kneeled to pray, He cried out to God with *loud* crying and even with *tears*! **There was an intensity in Jesus' pursuit that most of us never develop or experience. When was the last time you got up out of bed to seek God? When was the last time you called out to Him with loud crying and tears, because you wanted Him, and Him alone?** ...A time when you weren't desperate for some solution to a problem in your life, but you were desperate for hearing from God, so you could do His will? **How long did you keep this up?**

Jesus taught about importunity in prayer (Lk. 11:1-13; 18:1-8). What is importunity? It means "shameless persistence". It means pursuing a matter with God to the point of near-embarrassment. It means persisting when "normal people" would give up. Luke tells us that Jesus was teaching them "to show that they ought to pray at all times and not to lose heart" (18:1). Later on in this passage, Jesus gives us an idea what He meant by this. He says, "...will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry out to Him day and night...?" *Day and night!* Jesus is not just talking about shooting an occasional "arrow prayer" into heaven. **He is talking about battering down the doors of heaven with shameless persistence! Day and night! When was the last time you sought God day and night about anything?**

What are we to be seeking God relentlessly for? In chapter 11, the conclusion Jesus directs their thoughts to is the Holy Spirit (vs.13). **We ought to be seeking God diligently, relentlessly, almost to point of embarrassment in order to receive the power and counsel of the Holy Spirit!**

The Scriptures seem to link Jesus' habitual prayer life with the presence and powerful activity of the Holy Spirit in His ministry (Lk. 5:16,17). This does not come out so clearly in our English translations, but it is quite clear in the Greek. "But He Himself was habitually slipping away to deserted places and praying. *And it happened on one of the days* also He was teaching, ...and power of the Lord was being there for Him to heal." The original language seems to draw the reader to make a correlation between the regular prayer investment of Jesus and the activities of effective teaching and the presence of God's Spirit to heal that followed. **Throughout history, men and women of faith who were powerfully used by God have said that there is a price to be paid for securing intimacy with God and the power of His Spirit. The price is the investment of time and dedicated effort to seek God in study and prayer. Jesus Himself paid this price!** Again, if He found it necessary to get up early to invest in His spiritual life, *how much more* should we be carving out time to study the Scriptures and pray?

We see this kind of focus, determination and passion in the lives of Ezra, Timothy and the apostle Paul. Each one chose to make a clear choice to depart from the cultural norm to pursue God. Ezra the scribe set his heart to study the word of God and to practice it, so that he could teach it with integrity to others. Paul, too, radically committed his life to pursuing Christ. He gave up everything he had obtained in life, and devoted himself to coming to know Christ, personally and intimately (Phil. 3:3-17). He endured terrible hardships and sacrifices to fulfill God's calling on his life (II Cor. 11:22-28). He, in turn, directed Timothy to the Scriptures as the solid, stable ground in which to establish his spiritual roots. **The written word of God is an incredible resource which the Lord has given to us to nurture, guide and equip us, yet most of us will hardly crack open the cover of our Bibles.** Timothy grew up with the Scriptures, but Paul admonished him to *continue to study them*, and see that they are read aloud at church gatherings (I Tim. 4:13). Jesus said that those who continue in, or abide in, His word are truly His followers. These people will come to know the truth, and the truth will set them free. He also said that if we would abide in, or live in, His word, and His word is living in us, then we can ask whatever we desire, and God will answer us (Jn. 15:7). In other words, the key to a powerful and effective prayer life is to live in the teachings of Christ, and being led by them. This is so obtainable, so reachable, yet we will not choose to even read it? What does that say about our level of interest or commitment to Him and His Lordship in our lives? The writer to the Hebrews indicates that **our willingness to study and implement the word of God is a key ingredient in our spiritual development.** Those who regularly study and utilize it will develop their spiritual insight and discernment, and will progress on toward maturity. Those who disregard the word will remain spiritually dull and immature, and will be easy prey for the enemy of our souls. Those who do not know or understand the truth are more susceptible to being duped by the deceiver. After all, he has been practicing on people for generations. Unless we are equipping ourselves to know God's plan and expectations, we can easily be led astray by smooth words and attractive speech.

There are other disciplines for pursuing a deeper relationship with God, but these two seem foundational. Somehow getting the word of God into our lives in a regular, consistent manner is crucial to a stable growing walk with Christ. And securing regular quiet time with God, to pray and hear from Him, is what relationship is all about. **So, what are you going to do to incorporate these two most basic disciplines into your daily life?**