

man in our image, after our likeness. . . . And God created man in his own image” (Gen. 1:26-27). Also in Exodus 26, God ordered the people of Israel to “make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen: with cherubim the work of the skilful workman shall it be made” (v.31). The cherubim have the likeness of a man; and every one has four faces—that of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle (Ez. 1:5,10). This veil is to separate the Holiest from the Holy Place.

After gathering together these passages, the question will naturally be asked: did God contradict Himself? On the one hand He commanded not to make any image and He judged Israel because they made the image of the golden calf; on the other hand He Himself ordered them to make the image of the cherubim. Why does the Bible both permit and forbid the making of images? Why is no image permitted except that of cherubim? To what does the image of the cherubim point? This will lead us to Hebrews. Hebrews 10:20 indicates that the veil typifies the flesh of Christ, meaning the Lord Jesus Himself. In other words, all images are idols except the One who is the image of God. Notice what Genesis 1:26-27 said. When the Godhead was in council, it was decided to make “a man in our image.” But when it came to actual creative work, “God created man in his own image.” In verse 26 it is the plural “our,” while in verse 27 it becomes the singular “his.” Such transfer from the plural pronoun to the singular is a fact to be reckoned with. It reveals that in the Godhead only one Person has an image, and that Person is Christ. By combining all these passages, we conclude that God rejects all images except the one image—His own Son.

Some Notable Students of the Bible*

* Editor's Note: In reading this section, it must be kept in mind that these messages were given in 1948. However, the principles still retain their value and thus the message has been left in its original form. [71 72 A Living Sacrifice](#)

Through the centuries many children of God have spent time on the Word of God. Some of the best brains of these two thousand years have been engaged in God's Word. Indeed, God has chosen first rank minds from this world for His Word. This is part of the heritage of the Church.

First, let us mention the lower critics, those who scrutinize the letter of the Bible. People such as Tregelles, Dean Alford, Wordsworth and Westcott are giants among thousands of such critics. Why was such a task necessary? Because there was no printing press when the Bible was first written, and it was a forbidden book too. If anyone was found with a Bible, he could be thrown to the wild beasts. In order to read the Bible, he had to copy it himself. He could only copy a little at a time and he had to copy in a great hurry lest he be found by the police. Under such circumstances, error in copying was inevitable. Even with today's typesetting, mistakes are unavoidable; how much more was the possibility of making mistakes when every word had to be copied by hand? It would be extremely easy to miss a stroke or add a dot. People in the first century copied in a hurry, and people in the later centuries copied from hand to hand. Today we have a great number of hand-copied manuscripts with some variations in letters.

Hence, God has raised up many who specialize in criticizing the letters of the Bible. They gather many manuscripts and compare them word by word, stroke by stroke. It is a time consuming job, for every letter in the Old and New Testaments has to be verified. Some experts have traveled to several countries, visiting many museums for the sake of verifying just one letter. Their devotion ought to move us to tears. They are the great scholars of Hebrew and Greek. They spend all their life on such research. How we thank God for raising them up for this difficult task.

Then we have the translators of the Bible. Many people all over the world have spent a great deal of time in carefully translating the

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Learning to pray follows studying the Bible. Prayer is both the most profound and the simplest of all Christian exercises. A person newly saved can pray. Yet, many of God's children even on their deathbeds confess that they have not yet mastered the art of prayer.

Answered prayer is one of the basic privileges or rights of a Christian. A Christian is given by God the right of having his prayers heard. If one has been a Christian for three to five years and has not had one prayer answered, his Christian life must be quite questionable. For a child of God not to have his prayers answered is wrong. A Christian's prayers ought to be answered.

"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be made full" (John 16:24). He who prays often and has his prayers answered often will be a happy Christian. This is a fundamental experience that every believer must have. One may be careless in other spiritual matters, but in this matter of answered prayer a Christian cannot afford to deceive himself. It is either yes or no. He must seek to have prayers answered.

Ask a new believer if he has prayed today. Ask him if God has heard his prayer, for prayer is not beating the air, nor something done casually. The aim of prayer is its answer. If no answer to the prayer is forthcoming, the prayer is in vain. One must learn to have his prayers answered. Prayer is not just for spiritual devotion; it is also for being heard. If it is solely for devotion, one may pray for hours without expecting any answer. But if prayer is for an answer, then one must pray until the answer comes.

It is therefore imperative for beginners to learn this lesson well so that they may have their prayers answered. It would be a difficult task to correct this foundational lack if one has perhaps been praying three to five years without receiving an answer.

The Conditions for Answered Prayer

A number of conditions for answered prayer may be found in the Bible, but we will pick out a few which we believe are quite sufficient for beginners. These few may well cover over half of the requirements learned by advanced Christians.

1. ASK

To pray one must really ask. “Ye have not, because ye ask not” (Jas. 4:2). “And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Lk. 11:9-10).

When I was newly saved, I professed that I prayed daily. One day a sister in the Lord asked me, “Have your prayers been answered by God?” I was surprised because to me prayer was simply praying and nothing more. I prayed but I never thought of whether or not I was heard. Since that time, however, I have prayed to be heard. After she asked me I first examined my prayers to see how many God had answered. I discovered that I had not prayed many prayers of the type that required answers. My prayers were mostly general, so the answers really did not matter too much. It was like asking God for the sun to rise tomorrow; it would rise whether one prayed or not! After having been a Christian for a whole year, I could not find a single instance of answered prayer. Yes, I had knelt before God and uttered many words, but I had not really asked for anything.

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“Knock, and it shall be opened unto you,” says the Lord. But I had been knocking on the wall! The Lord will not open the wall for you, for He does not know what you really want. If you are truly knocking on the door, He will surely open it for you. If you ask for one thing, the Lord will give that thing to you. Suppose there are several things here: a hymn book, a cup, a Bible, a table cloth and a fountain pen. What do you really want? “Seek,” says the Lord. You cannot ask God for a department store; you must ask for something definite.

“Ye have not, because ye ask not.” Asking needs to be specific. This is what both seeking and knocking signify. It is seeking for one particular object; it is knocking on the door, not on the wall. Many may pray for a whole week and yet not have asked for a single thing. They do not receive because they have not asked. They have the form of prayer, but they lack the object of asking.

Young Christians should learn how to pray specifically. Do not imitate some brothers who stand and pray in the church for twenty minutes or half an hour but, when asked later what have they prayed for, are at a loss to answer. Many learn to pray long prayers, but yet do not know how to pray for definite things.

Suppose you ask your father or husband or wife or child to get you something. You must tell him or her what it is that you want. Can a doctor go to a pharmacy to obtain a drug without saying what drug he wants? Can one go to the market and not know what to buy? How strange it is for men to come to God’s presence without anything definite in mind—just as if anything will do. The difficulty or hindrance to prayer lies in this particular respect. We must ask specifically, not just generally.

Beginners should be clear about this condition of prayer. Otherwise, in times of difficulty they will not be able to pray through. General prayer does not meet a specific need. It may do for ordinary days, but it will not be sufficient when need arises. If our

prayer is general in nature, we shall find no help in our hour of need, for then our problems and happenings are all very specific. Only by learning to pray specifically can we have specific experience to meet specific difficulty.

2. DO NOT ASK AMISS

Men ought to ask of God. Scripture, however, lays down a second condition: do not ask amiss. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss" (Jas. 4:3). Men may ask God for their needs, but they are not supposed to ask unreasonably or beyond their measure. It requires a few years of learning before anyone can pray so-called "big prayers" before God.

In the early days of our spiritual life, it is rather difficult for us to differentiate between big prayers and praying amiss. It is best for us at the beginning not to ask according to our lusts nor to ask wantonly for what we are not in need of. God will only supply our need and give us that which is necessary. Many times, though, God does grant us exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask. But if the young ask wrongly they will not be heard.

What is meant by asking amiss? It means asking beyond your measure, beyond your need, beyond your actual want. For instance, I have a certain need and I ask God to supply it. I ask according to the amount of my need. If I ask beyond my need, I will be asking amiss. If my need is great, I can ask God to supply that great need. But I should not ask for more, for God has no delight in hearing flippant prayer. Prayer ought to be measured by need; it should not be offered recklessly.

To ask amiss is like a four year old child asking for the moon in heaven. It is far beyond his need. Likewise, young believers should learn to keep their place in prayer. Only after they have more spiritual experience should they pray big prayers. But for now, let

them pray within measure. Let them not open their mouths too wide lest they exceed the limit of actual need.

3. SIN MUST BE DEALT WITH

It may be that men have asked and have not asked wrongly, yet still are not heard. Why? Perhaps it is because there is a basic hindrance—sin standing between God and man.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear” (Ps. 66:18). If anyone has a known sin in his heart and his heart clings to it, he shall not be heard. What is meant by regarding iniquity in the heart? It simply means there is a sin which one in his heart will not give up. Though a person may have great weaknesses, God will forgive them. But if one has a sin of which he is aware and yet still desires it in his heart, then it is more than a weakness in outward conduct; it is regarding iniquity in his heart.

The man in Romans 7 is quite different. He declares that what he does is something which he hates. He has failed, but he hates that failure. The man, however, who regards iniquity in his heart is one who will not give up his sin. He neither gives it up in his conduct nor in his heart. The Lord will not hear the prayer of such a person, for sin has hindered his prayer from being answered.

It is important that young believers drive away all iniquities from their heart. Every sin must be confessed and be put under the blood. Though it may not be easy to overcome all one's sins, yet one must not regard iniquity in his heart. God may forgive our weaknesses, but He will not permit us to regard iniquity in our heart. It is of no avail to be outwardly delivered from sin and still be inwardly attached to it. Therefore, young Christians should at the start of their Christian life ask God to be gracious to them that they may be holy in their heart as well as in their conduct. There must be a thorough dealing in the heart for the heart to hate each and every sin and not retain or

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love or regard one single iniquity. If there is sin in the heart, it is futile to pray because the Lord will not hear.

“He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy” (Prov. 28: 13). Sin must be confessed. After it is confessed, the Lord will forgive and forget. One should go to the Lord saying: “Here is a sin which my heart does regard and finds hard to give up, but now I ask for your forgiveness. I am willing to forsake it; I ask you to deliver me from it that it may not remain with me. I do not want it and I resist it.” The Lord will pass over your sin if you so confess before Him. Then your prayer will be heard. This is a matter that should not be overlooked.

4. MUST BELIEVE

There is yet a positive condition that must be fulfilled, and that is, one must believe. Otherwise prayer will not be effectual. The incident in Mark 11:12-24 shows us clearly the necessity of faith in prayer. The Lord with His disciples came out from Bethany. He hungered on the way. Seeing a fig tree afar off, He approached that He might find some figs, but He found nothing except leaves. So He cursed the tree, saying, “No man eat fruit from thee henceforward for ever.” The next morning they passed by and saw the fig tree withered away from the roots. The disciples were astonished. And the Lord answered, “Have faith in God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”

One must believe when he is praying, because if he believes then he shall receive. What is faith? Faith is believing that he receives what he prays for.

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We Christians often have a wrong concept of faith. The Lord says, he who believes that he receives shall receive; but we Christians maintain, he who believes that he will receive shall have it. Thus we have here two different kinds of faith. The Lord uses the word “receive” twice (Chinese version): once “he receives,” then he “shall receive.” Many believers, however, fasten their faith to “shall receive.” We pray to the Lord, believing that we shall receive what we ask. We believe the mountain will be removed to the sea. Great seems to be our faith. But we have disassociated faith from “he receives” to he “shall receive.” This is not the kind of faith our Lord is talking about. The faith of which Scripture speaks is associated with “he receives.” It is far more exact than “shall receive.”

I was brought to the Lord through the instrumentality of Miss Dora Yu. Years later she got sick, having cancer of the breast. She heard that I had recently been healed of my tuberculosis. So she wrote and asked me to visit her in Kiang-wan, Shanghai. She thought she showed great faith by saying to me, “I believe God will heal me.” I told her that this could not be reckoned as faith, for the Lord Jesus never associates faith with “shall receive.” So we had a long conversation that day.

As you know, cancer is a disease which destroys many cells and eats away the flesh. It is most painful and gives off a bad odor. At first the doctor suggested an operation, but later on surgery was useless. Miss Yu, however, maintained that God would heal her. When I tried to show her that merely believing God would heal was not faith, the missionaries who were by her side remonstrated with me and reminded me of Miss Yu’s great faith. I answered: “She must believe that God has healed her. Only this is faith. It is not believing God will heal, rather it is believing God has healed. To believe that God will heal or even that God must heal is mere expectation, for faith deals with God’s past and present while hope deals with God’s future. If I believe God will heal me tomorrow, then I am only expecting God to heal me.” 83 84 A Living Sacrifice

Two months later, I received a letter from her. She wrote in her letter, "I have decided today to get out of bed within two or three days, for I believe that God will heal me." As I was rather busy that day and could not visit her at once, I wrote her saying, "First faith, then work. Such work is living. If work precedes faith, it is dead. This is a basic principle. If you believe that you are healed, then your getting out of bed is living; otherwise it is dead."

The next day I hurried to her place. I pleaded with her not to get up. I said to her again: "If you are healed, you can get up; but you cannot get up in order to be healed." She did not get up that day, and she passed away to be with the Lord later on.

So, what is faith? Faith is when you are brought to the place whereby you can claim God has already heard your prayer. It is not when you say God will hear you. You kneel down to pray, and somehow you are able to say: Thank God, He has heard my prayer. Thank God, this is done. Now, this is faith, for it adheres to "he receives." If you rise from your knees and proclaim that you believe God will hear you or God must hear you, however insistent you are, nothing will happen. Your decision does not produce any result.

The Lord says, "Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." He did not say: "Believe that ye will receive them, and ye shall have them." Brethren, do you get the key? True faith knows "it is done" already. Thank God, for He has heard my prayer.

To new believers, permit me to say something out of my experience. Prayer may be divided into two parts: the first part is praying without any promise until the promise is given, praying without God's word to having God's word. All prayers begin this way. Pray by asking God, and keep on asking. In George Muller's case, some prayers were answered in one minute while some were not yet heard even after seven years. This part is the praying part. The second part is praying from the point at which the promise is

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given to the realization of the promise, from having God's word to the fulfillment of His word. During this period, there should be praise, not prayer. So, the first part is prayer and the second part is praise. Pray in the first part from no word to God's word. Praise in the second part from having the promise till the promise is fulfilled. This is the secret of prayer.

To the people of this world, prayer has only two focal points: I have not, so I pray; after I pray, God gives to me. For example: I prayed yesterday for a watch. After several days, the Lord does give me a watch. This is from nothing to something. But to Christians, there is a third point, a point in between these two: faith. If I pray for a watch and one day am able to claim that God has heard my prayer, then I have reached the point of faith, I know inwardly that I have the watch though my two hands are still empty. A few days later, the watch arrives. Christians need to know how to receive in the spirit; otherwise they have neither faith nor spiritual insight.

Men ought to pray earnestly; they should pray till faith is given. We may say that the first part is praying from no faith to faith; the second part is praising from faith to actual possession. Why should we divide prayer into these two parts? Because once having faith, one can only praise, not pray. If he continues to pray, his faith will be lost. He should use praise to remind God, to speed up the fulfillment. God has already promised to give, what more can he ask? Brothers and sisters all over the world have had such experiences—after faith is given, further prayer is impossible. The one thing to do is to say, "I praise you, Lord." Alas, some brothers do not have this knowledge. God has already promised, yet they keep on praying; and so they pray till they lose everything. This, indeed, is a great loss.

How should one maintain one's faith? By praising the Lord: "O Lord, I praise You, for You have heard my prayer. You heard me a month ago." How precious are the words in Mark 11:24. Nowhere in the New Testament is faith more expressed than in that precious 85 86 A Living Sacrifice

verse. "All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." There are three main points here: (a) pray, with nothing in hand, (b) believe, still with nothing, and (c) believe, and the thing is in hand. May new believers really understand what prayer is and know how great a part prayer plays in their lives.

5. KEEP ON PRAYING

There is another side of prayer which may seem contradictory to what we have just said but which is equally real; it is, men "ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Lk. 18: 1). The Lord shows us that some prayers require persistency. We must keep on praying till the Lord is worn out, as it were, by our continual coming. This is not a sign of unbelief, rather it is just another kind of faith, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" says the Lord. This is the kind of faith which believes that by praying persistently God will eventually answer, with or without a previous promise.

Oftentimes we neither do nor can pray the second time for we have not actually asked for anything. How many of our prayers have we prayed two, three, five or ten times? Many prayers once we offer them are forgotten. Need we wonder that God also forgets them? We can pray and keep on praying only when there is a real need. Then we are under a sort of environment which presses us and moves us to pray. After fifty years have gone by, we may still remember that prayer. O Lord, if you do not act, I will keep on praying.

Such prayer does not conflict with that in Mark 11. Mark tells us that we ought to pray till we are given faith; here it tells us that we ought to pray always and not to faint. Many of our prayers are so without heart that they are soon forgotten by the offerers. How can we expect God to hear such heartless prayers? We ourselves have forgotten and yet we wish God would remember. There is no such a

thing. Therefore, young brothers and sisters should learn how to pray and how to pray till they have received what they have asked for.

A certain sister prayed many years for her brother. God did not seem to hear and the situation grew worse. However, one day she declared that she knew her brother would be saved. She looked as if she had great assurance. From where did she get this assurance? It was because she had read the story of the widow pleading with an unjust judge to avenge her of her adversary. She said, "God has shown me that I have never troubled Him enough. Early in the morning I will ask God to save my brother, at noon I will ask again for the salvation of my brother, and in the evening I will remind Him again of the same. If I pray day and night, from dawn to dusk, then one day God will be so worn out by me that He will say, 'All right, I will grant salvation to your brother!' I have determined to pray in this way. Therefore I know my brother will be saved." This sister had really mastered Luke 18:5.

Naturally speaking this sister was a timid person, but now she became exceedingly bold. She troubled God to the extent that God could do nothing but save her brother. After a week her brother was saved! The light she received from the Bible was terrific. What nature could not make of her, light from heaven did; she was transformed into a "violent" person.

Therefore, if you are asking for something, you must learn to trouble God. How can you expect Him to hear you if you yourself have forgotten what you have asked for? If your need is real, you will pray always and faint not. Pray till God has to hear you.

Prayer as a Work to Be Done

New believers should take prayer seriously as a job to be done. 87 88 A Living Sacrifice

First, each one should prepare a prayer-book, a book of prayer accounts. All prayers are to be recorded in this book. Each page should be divided into four items: for example, in my prayer-book of 1948, the first item is the date; the second the subject matter, that which one prays for on a certain date; the third the date of the answer; and the fourth how God answered the prayer. Thus, one is able to know how many things he has asked of God, how many times God has answered his prayers, and how many prayers are still waiting to be heard. In this way one's prayers can be accounted for.

During one year, God answered George Muller's prayers three thousand times. How would he know that figure if he had not recorded them? It is a pity that I threw away my old prayer-books. To look over those old books would be most interesting. Once I was rather ambitious; I wrote down one hundred and forty names in my prayer-book. Eighteen months later, all except two were saved. Some names were entered in the morning and the people saved that very afternoon; others were saved after seven or eight months. Once the things are recorded in the book, they become business items to be seriously transacted before God. There can be no let-up. They must be prayed for over and over again, day by day till the transactions are completed.

The chief advantage of a prayer-book is that it enables one to know how many prayers are answered and how many are not. If our prayers are not heard, not answered, something must be drastically wrong. The old as well as the young should keep a prayer-book. Zealousness alone is futile if prayers are not heard. Unless the way to God is clear, the way to men is blocked. He who is powerless before God is powerless before men. Men ought to seek to have power in prayer before God; otherwise they will be useless persons.

Several matters should be recorded in the book and prayed over daily: (a) All children of God should pray daily for the people of the world that they may be saved. (b) God's children should pray for the

full restoration of Israel for they are God's chosen people. Whoever blesses them shall be blessed. (c) Believers should ask the Head of the church to give light, grace, gifts and life to the church. How the church today needs these things. And (d) Christians ought to pray for their countries, that they may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and purity. These are four big items for which we must pray as well as for other things recorded in our prayer-book.

In using the prayer-book, let it be observed that some subjects in the book need to be prayed over daily, while others may be prayed for once a week. This depends largely on how many things are recorded. If there are not too many, all can be covered by prayer each day. If there are a large number, they can be so arranged that each day of the week certain ones will be covered. I myself for two years set apart each Saturday for a whole day of prayer.

Prayer Has Two Ends

Prayer has two ends: one end is in the person who prays and the other end is the thing or person prayed for. Oftentimes the first end needs to undergo transformation before the other end can be changed. It is futile just to hope for the other end to change. We must learn to pray: "O Lord, where do I need to be changed? Is there yet sin that has not been dealt with? Is there any selfish desire which needs to be purified? Is there any practical lesson of faith that I must learn? Or is there anything that I need to forsake?" If there is need on our side for change, then let it be changed first. Too many of God's children hope the prayed for end may be realized, while they themselves refuse to be changed.

If young brothers and sisters learn the lesson of prayer from the outset as well as learn the lesson of studying the Bible, the church will be greatly strengthened. God will grant a glorious future which will far surpass our past. 89

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Let us get up early to the vineyards; Let us see whether the vine hath budded, And its blossom is open, And the pomegranates are in flower: There will I give thee my love.

S.S. 7:12

Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake right early. I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the peoples: I will sing praises unto thee among the nations.

Ps. 57:8-9

Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake right early. I will give thanks unto thee, O Jehovah, among the peoples; And I will sing praises unto thee among the nations.

Ps. 108:2-3

And they gathered it morning by morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted.

Ex. 16:21

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee. My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh languisheth for thee, In a dry and weary land without water.

Ps. 63:1 (Darby)

When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and sought early after God.

Ps. 78:34 (Darby)

Oh satisfy us in the morning with thy loving-kindness, That we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Ps. 90:14

Why Must We Rise Early?

That which we wish to lay before new believers now is extremely simple: we must rise early from our bed each day.

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Let me quote the words of Miss Groves, a co-worker of Miss M. E. Barber, who has helped us greatly. She stated that the first choice giving evidence of one's love towards the Lord is the choice between one's bed and the Lord. If one chooses to love his bed more, he sleeps longer; but if he chooses to love his Lord more, he will rise up a little earlier. She spoke these words to me in 1921, but I still sense the freshness of them even today. Yes, a man has to choose between the bed and the Lord. If you love your bed more, sleep on longer; but if you love the Lord more, you must rise up earlier.

Why must we rise early? Because the early morning is the best time to meet the Lord. Other than those few who have organic diseases of the body, all brothers and sisters should be encouraged to rise early. Most of us do not have organic diseases, but are sick only from loving ourselves too much! If the doctors advise us that we have some organic disease such as tuberculosis or heart trouble, then we should not rise up early. We do not want to go to extremes. Those who are sick, we persuade to rest more. But for most, we wish them to rise as early as possible. Dawn is the best time to meet the Lord, the best opportunity to commune with Him.

Many of God's servants in the Bible had the habit of early rising. Manna has to be gathered before the sun rises. Anyone who wishes to eat the food God has promised for him must rise up early. As the sun gets hot the manna melts, and then there will be none. Every young believer needs to know that to receive spiritual nourishment before God, to obtain spiritual food, to be spiritually uplifted and to enjoy spiritual communion, he has to rise up a little earlier. If he rises too late, he will lose his food. The sickly Christian life which prevails among God's children today is less due to any serious spiritual problem than it is to rising up too late in the morning. Do not, therefore, count this a small matter. The spiritual problem of many actually lies in their failure to rise up early in the morning.

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It is as if in the early morning before or just as the day begins to dawn, God dispenses His provision of spiritual food and holy communion to His children. Whoever rises late will miss it. Many of God's children do not lack in consecration, zeal and love, and yet they fail to be good Christians because of getting up too late. Rising early has much to do with spiritual life. I have never met a prayer warrior who rises late, nor have I known anyone close to the Lord who gets up late. All who know God at the very least go to God early in the morning.

“As the door turneth upon its hinges, So doth the sluggard upon his bed” (Prov. 26:14). How does the sluggard act on his bed? He is like a door turning upon its hinges. The slothful person will turn in his bed, but will never leave it. He will turn this way and that way but yet remain in bed. Many people simply cling to their beds. Turning to one side, they find the bed lovely; turning to the other side, they find it still lovely! They love to sleep, to sleep a little longer, and to linger more in bed. Let brothers and sisters notice, however, that if they desire to serve God they must daily rise early.

Whoever purposes before God to rise early will soon experience manifold spiritual profit. His prayer at other times of the day cannot be compared with his early morning prayer. His Bible study at other hours cannot equal that of the morning hour; and his communion with the Lord is never as sweet at other moments as at daybreak. Remember well that the early morning is the best time of the day. We ought to present our best time to God, not to men or to the affairs of the world. He is a fool who spends his whole day in the world and then in the evening, when he is dog-tired, kneels down to pray and read the Bible before retiring to bed. Who can wonder if his prayer, his Bible study and his communion with the Lord are defective? His problem is one of getting up too late in the morning. 93 94 A Living Sacrifice

Examples of Early Rising in the Bible

God's servants in the Bible were all early risers. Let us note some of them:

1. Abraham

And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Jehovah.
Gen. 19:27

And Abraham rose up early in the morning . . .
Gen. 21:14

And Abraham rose early in the morning . . .
Gen. 22:3

2. Jacob

And Jacob rose up early in the morning . . .
Gen. 28:18

3. Moses

And Jehovah said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh . . .
Ex. 8:20

And Jehovah said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning. . .
Ex. 9:13

And Moses wrote all the words of Jehovah, and rose up early in the morning . . .
Ex. 24:4

. . . and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto mount Sinai . . .
Ex. 34:4

4. Joshua

And Joshua rose up early in the morning . . .

Josh. 3:1

And Joshua rose early in the morning . . .

Josh. 6:12

So Joshua rose up early in the morning . . .

Josh. 7:16

And Joshua a rose up early in the morning . . .

Josh. 8:10

5. Gideon

And it was so; for he rose up early on the morrow . . .

Judg. 6:38

6. Hannah

And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before Jehovah . . .

I Sam. 1:19

7. Samuel

And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning . . .

I Sam. 15:12

8. David

And David rose up early in the morning . . .

I Sam. 17:20

9. Job

. . . Job sent and sanctified them and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings . . . 95 96 A Living Sacrifice

Job 1:5

10. The Apostles

. . . they entered into the temple about daybreak . . .

Acts 5:21

11. Mary

Moreover certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb . . .

Lk. 24:22

Now when he was risen early on the first day of the week,
he appeared first to Mary Magdalene . . .

Mk. 16:9

Now on the first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark,
unto the tomb .

John 20:1

12. The Lord Jesus

And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose up and went out, and departed
into a desert place, and there prayed.

Mk. 1:35

These scriptural verses all mention about early rising; it was during this time that many things in relation to God's work and consecration were transacted. God's best servants both in the Old and in the New Testaments were all early risers. They all had the habit of communing with God, dealing with God, and working for God in the early morning. Although we do not find in the Bible any direct command of God to bid us rise early, we nonetheless have sufficient examples of many faithful servants of God who were all early risers.

Therefore new brothers and sisters who wish to follow the Lord must not contemptuously ask, what is the difference between an

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earlier or a later hour? We have enough experience to convince us that rising an hour late will spoil our Bible study, and rising two hours late will finish our prayer. I personally can testify that though I spend as much time in reading the Bible, yet an hour earlier produces much more than an hour later. Those two hours are not the same. The results in our Bible study and in our prayer are different.

Early rising is a great blessing. It is our desire that as he begins his Christian life, not one would miss this blessing of early rising. During the first three years of my Christian life, at least fifty times people asked me how early did I rise. It is such a great blessing, they did not want me to miss it. The world may see no difference in rising two hours earlier or two hours later; such a thing might not make any difference in the things of the world. But let me tell you, in spiritual things, it actually makes a great difference.

Not only were so many of God's servants early risers, even the Lord Jesus Himself rose early. He got up before dawn to pray; He called the twelve disciples early in the day. If we do not rise early enough, we no doubt will become exceedingly poor spiritually.

Besides the twelve Biblical examples mentioned above, we could mention a great number of God's servants through the centuries who were also early risers.

All of whom I have known or read, who have been of some use in God's hand, pay attention to this matter of early rising. They call it morning watch. Have you ever heard of people keeping watch after the sun is up? No, they keep watch until the sun rises. So morning watch must be kept quite early, or otherwise it will not be reckoned as a watch.

Morning watch is truly our Christian heritage; God's children should not throw it away. Even as the church has practiced this morning watch for so many years, so should we maintain and pass it 97 98 A Living Sacrifice

on to the next generation. We will keep the name, calling it morning watch, and exhort the younger generation to rise early in the morning to meet God.

I have known some missionaries greatly used of the Lord, such as Miss M. E. Barber and Miss Groves. They were both early risers. For many decades, Miss Groves always got up before five in the morning and Miss Barber between four and five in the morning. They told me that they dared not sleep too warmly lest they could not get up in the early morn.

George Muller rose early; so did John Wesley. Many great servants of God got up early. And thus we also expect young brothers and sisters to get up early and not allow time to glide away in sleep.

What to Do After Rising Early

Our aim is not just to get people out of bed in the early morning. We are seeking for spiritual value and spiritual content. So here are a few things which people should do after rising:

1. COMMUNE WITH GOD.

Men rise early in the morning that they may commune with the Lord. "Let us get up early . . . There will I give thee my love" (S.S. 7: 12). Being the best time of the day, it should be spent in holding fellowship with God, in waiting quietly before God, in meditating in God's presence, in receiving guidance and impressions from God, and in allowing God to speak to us, our spirits being open to Him.

Communion means having one's spirit opened to God. As the spirit is opened to God, so is one's mind opened. This gives God opportunity to confer light, to supply a word, to grant an impression, and to render a living touch; it also gives the soul the privilege of

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learning to touch God, to meditate and contemplate, and to draw nigh in heart to God. This, in short, is communion with God.

2. SING AND PRAISE.

The morning hour is the best hour to sing praises unto the Lord. We may send forth our highest praises at the morning hour.

3. SEEK BEFORE GOD FOR FOOD.

This is the time to gather our manna. What is our manna? (Of course, manna points to Christ, but this is not our emphasis here.) It is the Word of God which we daily enjoy and through which we receive strength to walk in the wilderness. Manna is food in the wilderness and has to be collected in the early morning. How can one be satisfied and nourished if he spends the early morning in attending to other affairs?

We have mentioned before that every person should have two Bibles: one to be read at leisure in the afternoon in which many things may be written, and one to be used in the morning in which nothing should be written for it is purely for the gathering of manna. For the morning, do not read long portions; rather open a short passage of the Bible before God and mix prayer with the Word, singing with reading, and communion with the Bible.

We assert that we rise up early for communion. This does not mean that communion is the first step, praise the second step, reading the Bible the third step and prayer the fourth step. Actually it is combining all these, having them mixed together before God. You may appear in God's presence with His Word open before you as suggested in Malachi ("Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, even statutes and ordinances" Mal. 4:4), or you may join your prayer with the reading of the Word; you may confess your sins after reading God's 99 100 A Living Sacrifice

Word, or you may thank God for specific grace you have received; you may make a special request according to the Word you have read, or you may simply tell the Lord that this particular thing mentioned in the Scripture is just what you lack. To many words, you can say "Lord, I believe"; to many promises you can respond with "Lord, I receive." Sometimes you feel you want to thank the Lord, for His promise is so great; sometimes you are constrained to pray for your brothers and sisters as well as for yourself because you find their condition and yours contrary to what the Bible affirms. No, you are not criticizing or accusing anyone before God; you are merely asking God to fulfill His word in your brethren as well as in you. You, therefore, are confessing both your own sins and the sins of the church. You pray for your own self and for others. You believe on your own behalf and on the behalf of others. You give thanks for both yourself and others.

For this purpose, Bible reading in the early morning should not cover too long a portion. Three to five verses ought to be sufficient for an hour's prayer and communion. Pray and commune with God over everything. There are good examples of this in Nehemiah and David, of how they knew God and knew how to commune with Him.

In the psalms of David, we find he often shifts in the persons he addresses from "you" to "He." At one moment he is talking with men, and at the next moment he has turned it into prayer to God. In the same psalm, he may speak a few words before men and then direct his next words to God. If we do not know how to read the psalms, we will be at a loss to know at what he is aiming. But these very psalms prove that David was one who had communion with God. For myself I cannot speak to the brethren and to God at the same time; yet David's psalms were written with these two mingled.

Such also was Nehemiah. He mixed the managing of earthly affairs with prayer. As he was engaged in his task, he would say a few words and offer a short prayer. Even when he answered the king,

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he was talking with the Lord as well as with the King. Blending is an important principle in a believer's life.

A similar feature is found in Paul's epistles. For instance, the Letter to the Romans is addressed to the believers in Rome, yet time and again we find Paul's words run to the Lord as if he had quite forgotten the Romans.

Many readers may have read the life of Madame Guyon. Her autobiography has one special feature: whereas most biographies are written for men to read, hers is both for God and for men. In one instant she speaks to LaCombe (for it was LaCombe who bid her write her autobiography); at the next she talks with the Lord. This is what we call communion. Where it begins and where it ends are indefinite. As soon as one's spirit rises up, he or she goes forth to meet the Lord. It is not necessary to lay down the affairs of the world in order to pray, nor to take them up only after prayer is finished.

Indeed, early in the morning is the best time to gather manna. Learn to blend prayer and praise and communion into the Word of God. For a while you are on the earth and in the next moment in heaven; you are in your own presence for a second and then move on to God's presence the next instant. In so spending your time each morning before God, you will be daily satisfied. You will have fed on the Word of Christ, for Christ is the Word of God. You will also have allowed the Word of Christ to dwell in you richly. This way of reading the Word of God, of feeding on the manna, is indispensable. To the many weak brothers and sisters staggering in the wilderness, we would like to ask whether they have eaten. They can not run because what they have eaten is not sufficient to nourish them. Manna must be gathered in the early morning; therefore get up a little earlier lest you miss your food.

Let there be communion, praise, manna and prayer in the early morning. "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee" (Ps. 63:1 101 102 A Living Sacrifice

Darby). “And returned and sought early after God” (Ps. 78:34 Darby). In both psalms we find the word “early” in the original. Early in the morning is the time for prayer. After having communed with God and fed on manna, one is strengthened to lay all things before God and to carefully pray over them. It takes strength to pray; the weak cannot pray. With the new strength gathered from communion and from feeding on the manna, one is able to pray—for himself, for the church and for the whole world.

So every new believer needs to know the four things he ought to attentively do before God each morning: communion, praise, Bible reading and prayer. If he neglects these four, the day will declare it. Even a person like George Muller confessed that whether or not he was fully fed before God in the morning determined his spiritual condition for the whole day. His early morning foretold the day. Many Christians find their days hard because their mornings are ill spent. (I acknowledge that a person would not be easily affected by outward circumstances if he knew the separation of spirit and soul and thus the consumption of the outward man. This, however, is a totally different aspect.) To new believers, the exhortation must be directed towards early rising, for once they become careless about this, they will be careless about almost everything. The difference it makes in the day is exceedingly great, whether one has had nourishment in the morning or has gone hungry.

I remember a well-known pianist once remarked: “If I do not practice for one day, I notice something wrong; if I do not practice for two days, my wife notices something wrong; and if I do not practice for three days, the whole world notices something wrong.” Let us not forget that if we fail to have a good morning with the Lord, not only ourselves and our wives but the whole world will surely know it. Why? Because we have failed to reach the source of our spiritual life. Young believers ought to discipline themselves very strictly and get up early in the morning to practice communion,

praise, Bible reading and prayer before God that thus they may be well nourished.

Things to Be Observed in Early Rising

Finally, we would like to mention a few things which are related to the practice of early rising:

a) To rise early, one needs to go to sleep early. All early risers have the habit of going to bed early. It is improper to expect to retire late and rise up early. That would be like burning the candle on both ends.

b) Do not set too high a standard for rising early. Some decide to rise up at three or four o'clock in the morning. They try it for a few days and quit. Trying to rise too early will end up in failure. Let us rather take a moderate course—say, around five and six o'clock, just before or at the dawning of the day. If the time is set too early, it will be difficult to sustain. To set too high a standard will produce a bad conscience and we need to maintain a conscience without offence. Thus we do not advocate extremes. Let us each consider the matter carefully before God, taking into consideration the physical and environmental conditions of our lives, and then set a standard for ourselves as to what is the appropriate time for us to rise.

c) Cultivate the habit of early rising. It is inevitable that one will meet some difficulty in the first few days of early rising. He will love his bed and find it hard to climb out. It takes some time to establish a habit. In the beginning one has to force oneself to rise, but after a while he can get up early without effort.

Human nerves are like the tree on the hilltop that bends in the direction of the wind. If it is blown always in one direction, it develops the habit of leaning in that direction. Suppose you have the habit of rising late. It is like having your nerve bent northward. But 103 104 A Living Sacrifice

after you try to rise up early many times, your nerve will begin to turn its direction southward. Then, instead of it being difficult to get up early, you will find it hard to get up late, for you cannot sleep any longer! Until that habit is formed, though, ask God to give you grace that this good habit of early rising may be developed. Try it many times; do it again and again. Daily learn to desert your bed and get up early until you have formed the habit of rising early to enjoy the grace of morning communion with God.

d) Our sleep should not exceed eight hours. Pardon me for by passing physicians in speaking directly to new believers. I think few people need more than eight hours of sleep. Do not make yourself an exception. Unless your doctor prescribes more rest because of some organic disease, eight hours is quite sufficient for the ordinary person. Do not worry about your health in rising early. Many love themselves too much and worry themselves to ill-health. The average need for an ordinary person is six to eight hours of sleep. So long as you keep to the average, you will have enough rest.

e) The sluggard needs a little push. We are now in the Church, being members of the Body of Christ. How, then, can we be careless? The sluggard among us needs a little pushing, a little pulling, a little shaking. Likewise, those who sleep only three or four hours need a little correction too, for the lack of rest may become the cause of sickness. The average is eight hours; too much is unnecessary, too little is insufficient.

Give Help to the Young Believers

I hope that those who are more advanced in the Lord and have some weight before God will take up the responsibility of maintaining the practice of morning watch in the church. They themselves should both rise early and should help the young into this blessed state. Whenever there is opportunity, they should ask the young: "Brother, at what time do you get up these days?" Many rise

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up at eight, eat breakfast in five minutes and then have five minutes to hurry through the Bible. They spend too much time in bed. So older ones in the Lord should inquire of the younger ones, perhaps continuing such inquiry for as long as a year.

Remember: early rising is the first habit a Christian ought to form. Gathering on the Lord's Day is also a habit. The young ought to form both these habits, but the responsibility for helping them is with the older believers. How very many have never enjoyed the blessing of early rising!

If the church makes progress in this exercise, if many brothers and sisters learn to rise early, if each one goes to God and receives a little more light each day, how rich the whole church will become and how full of light she will be. If the church is poor it is only because too few are receiving anything from the Head. Should we learn to receive from the Head, even though each one of us receives only a little, the result will be that the church will become exceedingly rich.

Our way lies not in having ten or a hundred special workers or ministers to labor among us. We expect all the members of the Body to rise up before God to receive riches and grace. If all the brothers and sisters go this way, the riches among us will be without measure. I often think what we are able to give to the brethren must be far inferior to what God could give. But what each member does receive from the Head is for the gain of the whole Body. May there be many, many such receptive vessels before God, each one gaining his little portion to share with the Body. Therefore, let us not despise early rising as a small thing. Let us all keep the morning watch, and then we shall all together advance one more step. 105