

## HABITS (3)

### Having God's Ear

#### A. Introduction

1. Two things we are called to do as followers of Jesus are to keep going and to keep growing.

To keep going means that we keep trusting in Jesus and don't give up.

To keep growing means that we become more and more like the Lord Jesus.

The way we keep going is as we keep growing.

"Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen." (2 Peter 3:17-18)

2. How do we keep going and growing?

Ultimately it is God who keeps His people going and growing.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

However, there are paths through which God works so that we survive, grow, and flourish and we are to walk these paths to keep going and growing.

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Philippians 2:12-13)

These paths are known as 'spiritual disciplines' or 'means of grace' or 'habits'.

*"A means of grace is a tool or instrument that God uses to strengthen and nurture us so that we grow in conformity to Christ."* (RC Sproul)

3. What are these habits that help us to keep going and keep growing?

*"Whilst there's no final and complete list of such practices, the long tally of helpful habits can be clustered underneath three main principles: hearing God's voice, having his ear, and belonging to his body. Or simply: word, prayer, and fellowship."* (David Mathis)

*"The 'means of grace' are such as Bible reading, private prayer, and regularly worshipping God in Church, wherein one hears the Word taught and participates in the Lord's Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact that no one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of an eminent saint who ever neglected them."* (JC Ryle)

4. After speaking and revealing His Son (His voice), God stops and stoops because He wants to listen to you.

We have God's ear. We call this prayer.

What is prayer?

"Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth." (Psalm 54:2)

Prayer is made up of three things: 1) Someone listening – God; 2) Someone speaking – Us; 3) The words that are spoken.

Prayer is speaking to the God who has spoken to us. It is coming humbly, expectantly, boldly into God's presence to talk with Him as His children.

This is only possible because of what Jesus has done (His death) and is now doing (His intercession), which is why we pray in Jesus' name.

"You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:14)

What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?

*"It is to pray as a believer in Christ's name, as someone who honours Christ's name, for what would increase Christ's fame, in communion with Christ, as if Christ was doing the asking, and with confidence in Christ's name."<sup>1</sup>*

Prayer is something God expects His children to do.

"And when you pray..." (Matthew 6:5)

"The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying." (Acts 9:11)

5. Having God's Ear helps us to keep going and keep growing.

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

No wonder the early church devoted themselves to "prayer".

## **B. How do we have God's ear?**

1. By praying in the closet.

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:5-6)

Set aside time each day to pray in secret, and enjoy the privilege of having God's ear.

What kinds of prayers will we pray? Praise. Thanks. Confess. Ask. Complain or Lament.

What are the 'same old things' we ask God about?

a) Family – married people for their spouses, singles might pray to be married, parents for their children.

b) Future – for direction about some decision, upcoming event, life change, hopes and dreams.

c) Finances – for God to provide for our needs.

d) Work or school work.

e) Christian concern – your church; church leaders; ministry you are involved in; brother or sister who is suffering; salvation of friends and family; persecuted church; missions and missionaries; spread of the gospel.

f) Current crisis.

g) Cultural or world affairs.

h) Protection – from the world, the flesh and the devil.

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<sup>1</sup> David Murray, The Most Used but Least Understood Phrase in the Church

### Practical Suggestions:

- i) Follow a structure – Martin Luther’s A Simple Way to Pray; Pray a Psalm (Rejoice, Repent, Request); ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication).
- ii) Have a time of free prayer – expressing your heart to your Father about what your burdens and anxieties are this day or this season of your life.
- iii) Write out daily prayers – see Peter Adam’s Daily Prayer.
- iv) Use written prayers – for example Valley of Vision or Prayers from 1542 Geneva Catechism.
- v) Use Prayer Lists or Prayer Cards or PrayerMate App.
- vi) Pray for the Flock.
- vii) Spend an hour in prayer – see Jon Tyson, How to Pray for an Hour.

### 2. By praying constantly.

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” (Luke 18:1)

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6:18)

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” (Colossians 4:2)

“Pray continually.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Prayer begins in the closet but doesn’t stay in the closet.

We are to take the posture of dependence expressed in the closet as we pray, when we go about our daily tasks and business.

### Practical Suggestions:

- i) When you are on your way to the next activity or appointment of the day – pray.
- ii) When you meet with friends and family or work colleagues and neighbours – pray.
- iii) When you read and watch the news – pray.
- iv) When you use social media – pray.

### 3. By praying with company.

“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” (Acts 1:14)

“They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.” (Acts 6:6)

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” (Acts 12:5)

“When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.” (Acts 12:12)

“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” (Acts 14:23)

“When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed.” (Acts 20:36)

We are not just to pray personally.

Praying with others brings us together and unites us as we join in praying for God's glory, the good of the church, and the conversion of lost sinners.

Practical Suggestions:

- i) Attend a church which prioritises public prayer.
- ii) Attend the midweek prayer meeting.
- iii) Pray with your family at home.
- iv) Form a prayer triplet.
- v) Set up "Prayer Societies".

**C. How does having God's ear help us to keep going and keep growing?**

1. When we pray we are being like children.

Every time we have God's ear, whether it be in the closet, constantly, or with company we are expressing how needy we are and how dependent we are upon our Father to keep us going and growing, and we trust Him to provide what we need.

2. When we pray we are being like Christ.

Jesus prayed in the closet.

"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)

"After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray." (Mark 6:46)

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Luke 5:16)

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." (Luke 6:12)

Jesus prayed constantly.

"At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure." (Luke 10:21)

"So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." (John 10:41-42)

Jesus prayed with company.

"About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray." (Luke 9:28)

"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." (Luke 11:1)

Jesus prayed in the closet, constantly and with company, because He was dependent upon His Father and trusted him to provide what He needed.

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses... Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:15-16)

## **D. Prayer Resources**

### 1. Peter Adam, Daily Prayer

#### *Praise and worship*

Our Lord and God, you are worthy to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. Lord Jesus Christ, you are worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed for God those from every tribe and language and people and nation.

#### *Trust*

'Who am I?' - Whoever I am, Lord, you know me, and I am yours.'

Whoever I am:

You know and understand me, for you made me, love me, and care for me.

You own me, for you have chosen, redeemed, and adopted me in Christ.

You have dealt with the sins, regrets, mistakes and failures of my past life and ministry.

You forgive and accept me, as you make me clean by the blood of Christ.

You have made me a temple of your Holy Spirit, who dwells within me.

You work all things for good for those who love you and are called according to your purpose.

Whoever I am:

Through the Holy Spirit you are transforming me into the image of your Son.

Though my outer nature is wasting away, you are renewing my inner nature every day.

Through these slight momentary afflictions you are working an eternal weight of glory.

Through our trials you are proving the genuineness of our faith, for your glory and honour.

Whoever I am:

I wonder at your grace, compassion, kindness, faithfulness and love.

I repent of my sins and my sinfulness, and claim your forgiveness through Christ.

I ask you to help me put to death the works of the flesh, and bring forth in me the fruit of the Spirit.

I ask you to sanctify me and make me useful in your service.

I offer myself to you today as a living sacrifice, to live for your glory.

Whoever I am:

You receive me and my daily sacrifice of myself, in your mercy.

You use me and my ministry by your mercy for your gospel purposes and for your glory.

You are worthy of all glory, honour, praise, and worship.

#### *Thanksgiving*

I praise and thank you for all the people who have enriched my life: for your gifts of creation and common grace in them, and for your salvation and transforming grace in those who trusted in Christ; for teachers, composers, musicians, authors, artists, architects, builders, craftsmen, gardeners, doctors and nurses, farmers, scientists, chefs and cooks.

#### *Repentance*

Please forgive my personal sins and my sins of ministry in these areas: love, care, patience, self-discipline, effective work, wisdom, contentment, trust, thanksgiving, and living for your glory. I repent of these sins, and turn from them. Please forgive me, and make me clean by the blood of Jesus Christ.

#### *Living before you*

I pray that you would fill me with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that I may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as I bear fruit in every good work and as I grow in the knowledge of you. Please make me strong with all the strength that comes from your glorious power, that I may be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving you thanks Father, for you have enabled me to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. You rescued me from the power of darkness and transferred me into the kingdom of your beloved Son, in whom I have redemption, the forgiveness of my sins.

#### *Ministry*

Guard my tongue, and keep me from slander, lies, untruth, unbalanced or un-pastoral truth, and from causing unintentional hurt. Help me stop comparing myself with others, feeling either jealous or superior. Help me to honour and love others in ministry and not compete with them. Take from me the desire to be noticed and praised by others, take from me the desire for happiness, and help me instead to desire your love, affirmation, approval, and acceptance, and your glory and honour.

*Today*

Please make me the person you want me to be, prepare me to do the good works you want me to do, and help me to do them. May I live today by these words of Paul: 'For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain'.

Today I offer myself to you, to love, worship and serve you. Please help me serve you today in all that I plan to do, and in the unexpected opportunities that you send.

Please increase and multiply the effects of my ministry and prayers, as the people I teach, train, pray for and encourage, continue to teach, train, pray for and encourage others as well.

I trust you: that you will provide all the gifts, time, energy and health for me to live for you and do the good works you have prepared for me to do; that you place me where you want me to serve you and be a blessing to others; and that you will use my life and ministry, hear and answer my prayers.

May this day be my best day of knowing, loving and serving you, and living for your glory, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

## 2. Prayers from the 1542 Geneva Catechism.

*Prayer to be recited in the morning, when getting up*

My God, my Father, and my Saviour, since you have been pleased to give me the grace to bring me through the night to the present day, may you also now grant me the gift of spending this day entirely in your service, so that I may not think, or say, or do anything except to please you and obey your good will, so that in this way all my works be done to the glory of your name and to the edification of my neighbours. And just as you are pleased to make your sun shine on the earth to give up bodily light, so illuminate my understanding and my heart through the light of your Spirit, to guide me along the straight paths of your justice. Thus, whatever my undertaking; may my main goal and intention always be to walk in the fear of you, to serve and honour you, expecting that all good and prosperity comes to me from your blessing alone, so that I do not attempt anything that is not pleasing to you. Furthermore, while I work hard for the sake of my body and for the present life, may I always cast my gaze further, namely, toward the heavenly life that you have promised to your children. Yet may it please you to be the protector of both my body and my soul, strengthening me against all the devil's temptations, and delivering me from all the earthly dangers that may threaten me. And because a good beginning is worthless without perseverance, please guide me onto your holy paths, not only for today but for my whole life, daily continuing and increasing your grace in me, until you bring me to full unity with your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is the true Son of our souls, shining endlessly and perpetually day and night. And in order that I may obtain these graces from you, please forgive my previous faults, forgiving me from them according to your endless mercy, as you have promised to all those who wholeheartedly ask this of you, Amen.

*Prayer to be said before starting lessons at a school*

O Lord, fount of all wisdom and knowledge, since you have been pleased to provide the way for me to be taught in my youth, to know how to chart the course of my life in a holy and upright way, may you also shed light in my understanding, which on its own is blind, so that my mind may understand the doctrine I am taught. Strengthen my memory, so that I may retain this teaching, and prepare my heart to receive it willingly and with appropriate eagerness, so as to avoid ruining through my ingratitude this opportunity you have given me. To do so, please pour your Holy Spirit upon me, the Spirit of all intelligence, truth, judgment, prudence, and doctrine, that makes me able to benefit from what I learn, so that the pains taken to teach me will not be wasted. No matter what subject I study, make it so that I direct this learning to the true goal, namely, to know you in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, to have full confidence of salvation and life in your grace, and to serve you in a pure and upright way according to your will, such that everything that I learn may be as an instrument to help me towards this goal. And given that you promise to give wisdom to the lowly and the humble, and to bring down the proud in their vain confidence in their own understanding, and to show yourself to the upright of heart, and in contrast to shut the eyes of the wicked and perverse, may you teach us

true humility, through which I may grow biddable and obedient, first to you and second to my superiors, whom you have charged with overseeing and teaching me. Furthermore, may you shape my heart to seek you without guile, leaving aside any carnal or evil affection. And may I in this way prepare myself now to serve you in whatever condition and vocation you will choose for me when I am old enough, Amen.

*Prayer to be said before eating*

Lord, in whom is the fullness of all good things, please grant your blessing to us, your poor servants, and bless the gifts which we receive from your bounty, so that we may make use of them in a temperate and pure fashion, according to your good will, that we may hence acknowledge you as Father and author of all mercy and always seek first the spiritual bread of your Word, which feeds our souls eternally, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, Amen.

*Thanksgiving after the meal*

Lord God, we thank you for all the blessings we continuously receive at your hand, in that you are pleased to sustain us in our bodily life, providing for all our needs, and especially that you have been willing to regenerate us in the hope of a better life, which you revealed to us in your Holy Gospel. We pray that you may prevent our affection from being rooted in these corruptible things, but that we instead may always raise our gaze higher, awaiting our Lord Jesus Christ, until he returns for our redemption. Amen.

*Prayer to be recited before sleeping*

Lord God, since it has pleased you to create the night for man's rest, just as you ordained the day for work, grant me the grace to have my body rest this night so that my soul is always awake to you, and that my heart is raised up in your love. Given my weakness, may I find such relief in laying down my earthly concerns that I may always remember you. May the record of your goodness and your grace remain always imprinted on my memory, and in this way may my conscience take its spiritual rest, just as my body takes its physical rest. Furthermore, may I not overindulge in sleep to unduly satisfy the desire of my flesh, but only sleep enough to satisfy my fragile nature in order to be fit for your service. Please also preserve my purity of body and soul and keep me from all dangers, so that even my sleeping is done to the glory of your name. And because the day that is past has not gone by without me offending you in various ways, given that I am a poor sinner, just as everything is now concealed by the darkness you send over the earth, may you also bury all my faults by your mercy, so that I will not be cast away from your face because of these sins. Hear my prayer, my God, my Father, my Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### 3. Martin Luther, A Simple Way to Pray.

O Heavenly Father, dear God, I am a poor unworthy sinner. I do not deserve to raise my eyes or hands toward thee or to pray. But because thou hast commanded us all to pray and hast promised to hear us and through thy dear Son Jesus Christ hast taught us both how and what to pray, I come to thee in obedience to thy word, trusting in thy gracious promise. I pray in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ together with all thy saints and Christians on earth as he has taught us: Our Father who art, etc., through the whole prayer, word for word. Then repeat one part or as much as you wish...

If I have had time and opportunity to go through the Lord's Prayer, I do the same with the Ten Commandments. I take one part after another and free myself as much as possible from distractions in order to pray. I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly.

If you have more time, or the inclination, you may treat the Creed in the same manner and make it into a garland of four strands. The Creed, however, consists of three main parts or articles, corresponding to the three Persons of the Divine Majesty, as it has been so divided in the Catechism and elsewhere.

4. Jon Tyson, How to Pray for an Hour

