

[This week I prayed that God would use this sermon to motivate at least 10 of you who do not have daily devotions to enter into a one week experiment of daily prayer. I've prayed that a couple of those ten would be young people. Of course I don't want to limit it to ten people and I don't want you to stop after a week. But I believe if I can get some of you to make a small commitment this morning, you will make a greater one later. Once you have had success in that small commitment, then you will have more confidence to commit more of yourself to Christ in the future.]

➔ One of the most frequent excuses that people give for not praying every day is, "I don't seem to have time. I'm so busy. I have so many things to do." But the life of Jesus was every bit as busy as the most busy person of any of us. Here in the first chapter of Mark we see what, I believe, was a typical day in the life of Jesus.

He began the day preaching in a synagogue. He cast out a demon, in the midst of that worship service. Then he went to the home of Simon Peter where he healed Peter's mother-in-law. That evening everyone in town pressed upon him to heal and minister to them until late at night. It was a busy day for Jesus. He must have felt emotionally and physically drained that night when he went to bed. But we read, "Very early next morning he got up and went out. He went away to a lonely spot and remained there in prayer." He got up--no sleeping in after a busy day. "He went out"-- out of the small house where every step would be heard-- "to a lonely spot." He could not carry on a ministry of constant self-giving without renewal and energizing that comes from personal contact with God. He knew where to find this-- in the open country, alone with God. He knew when to find it-- in the early morning before the crowds were up. With the day begun in solitude, silence, and

prayer he could face anything. And that daily time in prayer will help us to face anything as well. Martin Luther used to say, "Today is going to be a busy day. I must spend more time than usual in prayer so that I will have the power to accomplish all I have to do."

But how do you begin? Many people want to have daily devotions but they just don't know where to begin. They have tried before and failed and so they become discouraged. Well, let me suggest that if you begin, you begin small. Don't decide today that you are going to spend an hour in prayer every day for the rest of your life. Instead, decide today that you will set aside at least 10 or 15 minutes every day to get to know God better. And, if you decide to do this, I believe it is very important that you also decide upon a particular place and a particular time to meet with Christ every day this week. When I was in high-school I would get up at 6:30 and go to an unused bed-room where my desk and books were. Now,

I get up at about 6:30 and sit in the living room or the kitchen at the manse, fortified with a cup of coffee, my Bible and a prayer book.

But what do you do in those 10 or 15 minutes? Keith Miller gives some wonderful suggestions in his book, *The Edge of Adventure*. First, take about a minute just to relax. Take a deep breath and realise that God who loves you deeply is there with you in the room. Ask him to calm your heart and make you receptive to his will.

Second, read-- the gospel according to St. John is a good place to begin. Read, not for factual information to store away, but with some questions in mind: "What does this passage tell me about the God I have entrusted my life to? What is God telling me in this passage?"

Third, after you have read, begin to pray. Sometimes I need the help of the Book of Common Prayer or a hymn to get me started. But nearlyt

always I pray in the following order.

I begin with adoration. I just tell God that I love him-- or that I want to love him. Sometimes the words of a Psalm come to mind, "Bless the Lord, O my soul". Sometimes I pray the ancient and beautiful prayer entitled the Te Deum that is in our Book of Common Worship.

After adoration comes confession. Over and over the Bible stresses that we cannot approach God unless we are willing to part with our sins. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" the Psalmist wrote. And the apostle John wrote, "If anyone says that he has no sin, he is lying and the truth is not in him. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us."

It's important to be specific about our sins. Don't simply pray, "Lord, forgive all my sins." Be specific. "I really blew my top today and said some really unkind and

brutal things to my wife this morning."

Or, "I saw that girl again in my chemistry class yesterday and I confess, Lord, that I really thought about sleeping with her. Forgive me for my lust." Be specific and search your heart for the things you have done or left undone. Sometimes I repeat the 10 Commandments and as I do so I remember when and where I have failed to love God and my neighbor.

This specific honesty with God is absolutely necessary if we are to grow spiritually. If I really believe that God loves and accepts me despite my sins I can be free and open with him and myself about my sins. I can accept myself, knowing my self as I do, because I know God accepts and is more ready to forgive than to punish. I don't have to pretend to be righteous because I know Christ died for sinners like myself.

After adoration, and confession comes thanksgiving. Again I am specific. I thank God for the fun I had wrestling with my ^{boys} ~~kids~~

on the living room floor. I also thank God

for the opportunity he gave me to get away from the kids for awhile with Kay and just enjoy ourselves in the company of friends. As I search for daily blessings in my life I become more aware of how good God has been to me.

Next I turn to supplication or petition. I pray for others. For many years I have kept a prayer list on a little piece of paper in my Bible. The list reminds me to pray for people and things that I might otherwise forget. And then, I pray for myself.

You might have noticed that the first letters of the four parts of prayer I have listed form the word ACTS. A is for adoration. C is for Confession. T is for thanksgiving. S is for supplication. This makes it easy for me to remember. I find it important to pray in that order. If I start praying for my needs I so often forget all about thanking God for all his goodness.

These guidelines are not infallible. But for someone who wants to know how to begin having a time of daily prayer I present them hoping that they will be helpful in getting you started.

God is looking for men and women with committed hearts; people who earnestly desire to know Christ intimately and who follow him day by day. The Lord of heaven and earth yearns to see our face and hear our voice. Our daily time of prayer is important to him.

In Dr. Robert Munger's booklet, *My Heart, Christ's Home*, a young Christian tells how he yielded the various rooms of his heart to Christ and learned that Christ desired his fellowship. After showing Christ around the various rooms in his heart he writes, we walked next into the drawing room. I liked this room. It was intimate and pleasant, with a fireplace, comfortable chairs, a bookcase and a quiet atmosphere. The Lord seemed pleased with it.

"This is indeed a delightful room," he said. "Let us come here often and we can have fellowship together." As a young Christian I could think of nothing I would rather do than have a few minutes apart with Christ in intimate comradeship. He promised, "I will be here every morning early. Meet me and we will start the day together."

So morning after morning, I came downstairs to the drawing room. We would take the Bible from the bookcase, open it, and we would read together. He warmed my heart as he unfolded to me its truths, and revealed his love and grace toward me. Those were wonderful hours together.

But little by little, under the pressure of many responsibilities, our quiet times together shortened. This was not at all intentional, I was just too busy. Finally I began now and then to miss a day, then several days.

One morning as I rushed down the steps eager to be on my way, I glanced into the drawing room and saw the Lord sitting there alone. I thought in dismay, "He is my guest. I invited him into my heart as Lord of my home. And yet here I am neglecting him." With downcast glance I went in and said, "Have you been here all these mornings?" "Yes," he said, "I told you I would be here every morning to meet with you." Even more ashamed, I asked his forgiveness which he readily granted. He said, "The trouble with you is this. You have been thinking of the quiet time as a factor in your own spiritual progress but have forgotten that this hour means something to me also. Remember, I love you. I have redeemed you at a great cost. I desire your fellowship. Do not neglect this time, if only for my sake. Whatever esse may be your desire, remember I want your fellowship."

The truth that Christ wants our fellowship, that he loves you and me and waits for us

can do more to transform our quiet time of prayer than any other single fact. Don't let Christ wait alone in the drawing room of your heart.

I have prayed that at least 10 of you who do not have daily prayer will begin today a one week trial experiment in daily prayer. I have prayed that some of you young people would respond to this challenge. If you decide to take this step, tell me about it as you leave this morning. If you have invited Christ into your heart as Lord and Savior, don't let him wait alone another day in the drawing room of your heart.

Let us pray: