

Prayer and Fasting

Taken from *Edges of His Ways* by Amy Carmichael

This note is to those to whom the idea of "prayer and fasting" is new, and who are rather puzzled about it. First, what does it mean? It means a determined effort to put first things first, even at the cost of some inconvenience to oneself. It means a setting of the will towards God. It means shutting out as much as possible all interrupting things. For the thing that matters is that one cares enough to have time with God, and to say no to that in oneself which clamors for a good meal and perhaps conversation. It is that which is of value to our Lord. Such a setting of the will Godward is never a vain thing. "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain." But we must be in earnest. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." (Isaiah 45:19; Psalm 27:8)

A few simple "don'ts"...

1. Don't get into bondage about place, or position of the body. Where did our Lord spend His hours of prayer? We know how crowded and stuffy Eastern houses are; we know that sometimes, at least, He went out into the open air to a hillside; to a garden. Where did Elijah spend the long time of waiting on his God? Again, out in the open air. I have known some who could kneel for hours by a chair. I have known others who could not. David "sat before the Lord." Some find help in going out of doors and walking up and down; this was Bishop Moule's way. Some go into their room and shut their door. Do not be in bondage. Let the leaning of your mind lead you; a God-directed mind leans to what helps the spirit most.

2. Don't be discouraged if at first you seem to get nowhere. I think there is no command in the whole Bible so difficult to obey and so penetrating in power as the command to be still—"Be still, and know that I am God." Many have found this so. This is true. Let the tender understanding of your God enfold you. He knows the desire of your heart. Sooner or later He will fulfill it. It is written, "He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him." "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain." Thank God, for using the poor name Jacob there. Do you not often feel very much like the seed of Jacob? I do. "Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." There is none of either in the seed of Jacob. (Psalm 46:10; 145:19; Isaiah 45:19; 45:24; I Kings 3:9)

3. Don't feel it necessary to pray all the time; listen. Solomon asked for a hearing heart. It may be that the Lord wants to search the ground of your heart, not the top layer, but the ground. Give Him time to do this. And read the Words of Life. Let them enter into you.

4. Don't forget there is one other person interested in you—extremely interested; he will talk, probably quite vehemently, for there is no truer word than the old couplet, Satan trembles when he sees The weakest saint upon his knees. As far as I know the only way to silence his talk is to read or say aloud (or recall to mind) counter-words, "It is written, . . . It is written, . . . It is written"; or to sing, for the devil detests song. "Singing . . . in your heart," "singing . . . to the Lord" either or both are too much for him. (Matthew 4:4,7,10; Ephesians 5:19) But let the Spirit lead as to what to read. "Let Thy loving Spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness."

5. Don't give up in despair if no thoughts and no words come, but only distractions and inward confusions. Often it helps to use the words of others, making them one's own. Psalm, hymn, song—use what helps most.

6. Don't worry if you fall asleep. "He giveth unto His beloved in sleep." (Psalm 127:2)

7. And if the day ends in what seems failure, don't fret. Tell Him about it. Tell Him you are sorry. Even so, don't be discouraged. All discouragement is of the devil. It is true as Faber says again:

*Had I, dear Lord, no pleasure found
But in the thought of Thee,
Prayer would have come unsought
And been A truer liberty.
Yet Thou art oft most present, Lord,
In weak distracted prayer;
A sinner out of heart with self
Most often finds Thee there.
For prayer that humbles sets the soul
From all illusions free,
And teaches it how utterly,
Dear Lord, it hangs on Thee.*

Then let your soul hang on Him. "My soul hangeth upon Thee" not upon my happiness in prayer, but just upon Thee. Tell Him you are sorry, and fall back on the old words: "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee "unworthy as I am. Let these words comfort your heart: "The Lord . . . lifteth up all those that are down." "Cast not away . . . your confidence," there is a "great recompense of reward" waiting for you a little later on.

But maybe it will be quite different. "Sometimes a light surprises the Christian when he sings," or waits with his heart set upon access to his God; and he is bathed in wonder that to such dust of the earth such revelations of love can be given. If so it be, to Him be the praise. It is all of Him.

*Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting
covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working
in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus
Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Hebrews 13:20-21