

A TIME WITH THE LORD

The most prevailing need among Christians today is to spend a certain amount of time every day reading and praying in the presence of the Lord.

In the physical realm we need to spend time daily to obtain physical nourishment by eating physical food. How much more time we need to spend to obtain spiritual nourishment by eating the spiritual food. According to the present situation nearly all Christians know how to study, memorize, meditate, and search the Scriptures for knowledge, but very few know how to come to the Word of God to enjoy the Lord and to receive spiritual nourishment.

As people who have God living within them, we need to set aside some time each day to come to the Word of God to enjoy Him, to feed upon Him, and to receive spiritual nourishment... The best time for this is in the morning... During this [time] we must forget about knowledge, a message, a movement, or a work, etc. All this must be forgotten and our whole attention given to spending proper and adequate time in the Lord's presence. As sons of God this is the first and primary daily experience into which all Christians must be brought.

If we will do this for a period of time, the Lord will work a great change in us. Our experience of Christ will be deepened, and eventually our influence toward others will be prevailing. The whole situation among us will be radically changed, not by teaching, studying, and exhorting, but by contacting the Lord.

We must pay the price to spend this time with the Lord for the sake of our spiritual growth. In the mornings we must not love to lie sleepily in our beds so long. Watchman Nee once told us that if we love our bed, we can never love the Lord. There is a real struggle with us all between choosing the Lord or choosing our bed.

If by the Lord's mercy and grace we desire and agree to spend more time daily in the presence of the Lord, what shall we do? By what means can we touch the Word of God for nourishment and enjoyment? We must learn to do only one thing—we must mingle our reading with our praying. We must contact the Lord by mingling our reading of the Bible with prayer, and by mingling our prayer with reading. This is why a new word, pray-read, has been used. We must pray-read the Word.

First, begin by spontaneously offering a short prayer to the Lord. Then open your Bible and start to read. While you are reading, spontaneously respond to the Lord with what you read. Do not read too many verses, such as a long paragraph or a long section, before praying. While you are reading, respond to the Lord by praying.

Do not try to pray long sentence prayers, and do not pray for many things, asking the Lord to do something for you. Simply learn to pray with the words you read. The valuable prayer, the prayer which contacts the Lord, is to utter or express what is responding within you as you read the Word.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus speaks of God's Word as spiritual food: "But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God is spiritual food to nourish us. The Scriptures reveal at least three cases of those who ate the Word of God. One is Jeremiah, who said, "Your words were found and I ate them..." (Jer. 15:16). This statement is not according to our human concept. If it were not written in the Bible, we would never have thought that we must eat the Word of God. We might say that we must learn about the Word and study the Word. The most we would say is that we must receive the Word of God. But we would never use the word "eat"! Jeremiah ate the word of God. This means he received the Word into him, assimilated it, and made it a part of himself.

In the same verse Jeremiah also said, "Your word became to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." This is a kind of enjoyment. The Word, after being eaten, became a joy and also a rejoicing. Joy is experienced within, and rejoicing is expressed without. God's Word is an enjoyment; after being taken into us and assimilated into our very being, it becomes joy within us and rejoicing without.

Then in 1 Peter 2:2-3 we see that to eat the Word is to taste the Lord. "As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is good." In verse 2 there is the eating of the Word, and in verse 3, the tasting of the Lord. When we eat the Word of God as our spiritual nourishment, we taste the Lord. Therefore, like Jeremiah, we must eat the Word; then we will enjoy the Lord and receive spiritual nourishment.

If we do not know how to pray-read, we will pray in the following way: first, we will rise early in the morning, feeling that we must pray. Then we will try to pray like this: "Lord, I thank You that You are so good...that You have given me peace...that You have protected me from all kinds of danger..." Then we suddenly remember that we are about to travel somewhere: "Oh, I am about to travel...Lord, grant me journeying mercies...the safety...from a car accident..." After further hesitation, we continue, "I have a friend in Vietnam...Lord, remember him...remember James in Vietnam...also Tom in West Germany...Lord, Tom is there...he needs Your protection..."

We must answer honestly. What does this kind of prayer do for us? This is the way most Christians pray. But do they receive any nourishment? Do they gain something which causes them to be full of joy within and rejoicing without? No!

The right way is this: first, come to the Bible to pray-read. There is no need to close your eyes. Keep your eyes on the Word as you pray. In all sixty-six books of the Bible we cannot find one verse which says that we should pray with our eyes closed. But there is a verse which says that Jesus looked up to the heavens, saying, "Father..." (John 17:1). He was looking at heaven while He was praying! We would not argue in a doctrinal way, but we must realize that there is no need for us to close our eyes to pray. Simply look at the printed page which says, "In the beginning..." Then with your eyes upon the Word and praying from deep within say, "O Lord, 'In the beginning!' Lord, I praise Thee 'in the beginning was the Word.' Although I do not know what the Word is, the Word was there. I praise Thee, Lord! 'In the beginning!' Hallelujah! 'In the beginning!' O Lord, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'" Simply try to pray in this way.

While we are pray-reading there is no need for us to compose any sentences or create a prayer. Just pray-read the Word. Pray the words of the Bible exactly as they read. Eventually, you will see that the whole Bible is a prayer book! Not only is the "Lord's Prayer" a prayer, but the whole Bible is a prayer. Open to any page, any line, any word of the Bible, and start to pray with that portion of the Word. If you will continue to pray-read in this way in the presence of the Lord for thirty minutes, you will see what kind of enlightenment, watering, nourishment, refreshing, strengthening, and satisfaction you will obtain. From these thirty minutes, you will have a spiritual breakfast which will last the entire day!

Although you may not understand a certain passage, you still are nourished, because there is really something of God in His Word. The Word of God is His very breath. (Second Timothy 3:16 in the Greek is, "All Scripture is God-breathed.")

Do not try only to learn the Bible. We must realize that this is a book of life, not a book of knowledge. This book is the divine embodiment of the living Spirit, and He is life. The right way is not just to study or learn, but to contact the Word by exercising our spirit to pray-read. Thousands have proven that this is the right way. This way of coming to the Bible has revolutionized their lives. If you would try it for five mornings, you also will be changed. Your whole concept about the Bible will be radically altered. It may not work so well at first, but with practice, you will touch the living Spirit.

What the church needs today is not more knowledge and teachings, but nourishment, and the way the Lord nourishes His Body is by His Word. The Lord is eagerly waiting for a way to nourish us and become our enjoyment. Pray-reading gives Him that way. By this kind of prayer all the riches of Christ will be brought into us and even wrought into us. No teaching, doctrine, or knowledge can work Christ into us to such an extent; it is only by this way of prayer. Therefore, we all must learn to pray in this way. Eventually, we will be brought out of ourselves, saturated with Christ, and permeated with the Spirit.