

Busyness and Spiritual Discipline

by Paul Washer

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being alone with God, seeking His presence, and growing in godliness and character. It highlights the need for constant prayer, studying the Word, and disciplining oneself for piety. Additionally, it stresses the necessity of crying out for the outpouring and power of the Holy Spirit in ministry and personal life.

Scripture: Luke 11:9, 1 Timothy 4:1, Luke 11:13, Matthew 5:13

Topics: "Solitude with God", "Empowerment by the Holy Spirit"

Description

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Transcript

Again, it's a great privilege for me to be here with you, a great privilege. When we think of all that must be done in the church, we think of all the great need that there is in the world. We look at ourselves in the mirror.

We seem powerless to affect any change. And in fact, we are. All our intelligence, all our academics, all our eloquence matters nothing.

There is a mountain that stands before us that cannot be moved by the arm of the flesh. I wish in my own life, and I wish in yours, that for once and for all, we could put away all confidence in the flesh. I do not wish that we would be strong.

I wish that we would be weak. That we would all come to a point in our lives when we realize that we can't breathe apart from the power of God. I would pray even that in God's providence, he would work weakness into our lives, no matter the cost.

Whether it be trial, whether it be pain, whether it be affliction or persecution, it doesn't matter, whatever it takes to work weakness into our lives so that we would seek him and be filled with him. There's so much that I would like to say today, so much. And I'm going to try to touch on several things that must be a part of the life of the man of God, of the woman of God.

Now, what I say is what I miss so much about preaching in the jungle. You don't have to worry about any of this stuff. Mark chapter 1, before we read our text, the famed psychologist once said this, busyness and hurry are not of the devil.

They are the devil. I don't agree with secular psychologists, and even this statement has its error in it, but there is a great point to be taken. One of the greatest attacks of the enemy is to make you busy, to make you hurried, to make you noisy, to make you distracted, to fill the people of God and the church of God with so much noise and activity that there's no room for prayer.

There's no room for being alone with God. There's no room for silence. There's no room for meditation.

I remember a poem years ago that was written, and I'll try to quote it here, talking about Jesus coming in from the wilderness, and it says, weak from the journey, the long passing days, hungry to worship and join in the praise, but shock met with anger that burned on His face when He entered the wasteland of that barren place. Talking about Christ coming in from the wilderness, and then going into the temple in hopes to find praise and prayer, but only He finds noise and barrenness. Shock met with anger that burned on His face as He entered the wasteland of that barren place.

And then it talks in the poem about Him making a whip and driving out all the noise, all the clatter, all the activity. It says then, the noise and confusion gave way to His Word. At last, sacred silence so God could be heard.

Conferences like this are wonderful. Meeting together and challenging and encouraging one another, it's wonderful. It is a part of the will of God and the work of God.

But all of it comes to nothing unless you go home and you spend more time with your God. You spend more time with Him. Now look in verse 29 of Mark 1. And immediately they came out of the synagogue and came into the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever, and immediately they spoke to Jesus about her. And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand. And the fever left her, and she waited on them.

When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city had gathered at the door. And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and He cast out many demons.

And He was not permitting the demons to speak because they knew who He was. In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place and was praying there. Simon and his companions searched for Him.

They found Him and said to Him, Everyone is looking for You. Everyone is looking for You. Now let's look back in verse 29.

The word immediately. And immediately after they came out of the synagogue. One of the things you'll notice about the book of Mark is that if you read through it in one setting, you will be breathing hard at the end.

Literally, Mark has set up this book in a way that it's almost like several snapshots of Jesus Christ. It is so busy, so much activity, so much ministry, that as you're reading it, you constantly hear, after He finishes one task, immediately He goes to another. And then immediately He goes to another.

And He is describing these three years of Christ ministering on earth and how it took its toll even upon the Messiah. Well, He had come out of the synagogue where He was teaching, where He was ministering. He comes into a house to get a little bit of rest.

But even there in that house, there is a need. And they call upon Him and He goes and ministers to this woman and she is healed. Then it says here in verse 32, when evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed and the whole city had gathered at the door.

Films about the life of Jesus Christ can sometimes be very, very deceiving. I can only imagine how this would be portrayed by Hollywood. Jesus is calmly sitting in the house and all of a sudden there's a gentle knock at the door.

He opens up the door and there are many, many people waiting in line very quietly, very politely. And He goes out and He walks by them one by one and touches them and they're healed. I want you to know that is absolutely wrong.

This was a multitude of needy people. This was a multitude of desperate people. Hundreds, maybe thousands of people gathered at this door ready to knock the door down because of their need, because of their desperation, because there is only one cure for them and it is found in that house and they're willing to do absolutely anything to get to Him.

I saw this several years ago when I was a minister in the country of Peru. We were working up in the mountains, in the Andes Mountains in the northern regions of Peru in a province called Pura. And for some reason on that journey I took a friend of mine with me who was a doctor.

And so we go up there and we're preaching. There were about 1,000 to 1,500 mountain men and women who had gathered there to hear the Word of God preached. And I happened to say in one of my sermons the first day that I had brought a doctor with me.

If you could have seen what happened to that crowd. This is a group of people, they have nothing. Many of them have never seen a doctor.

Many of them have never had any medicine. They've never had anything and yet their lives are filled with illnesses and sicknesses and decay. And so when they heard the news that there was a doctor with me, they almost stormed the house.

Literally almost stormed the house. And that doctor began waiting on people and he waited on them from the wee hours of the morning until late at night. And then when he would try to go to bed, they would still be knocking on the door.

Some of them would be very, very angry because they had a need or their child had a need and the doctor was in there sleeping and they didn't even think about his welfare at all. All they could think about was their desperate need. That's what's going on here.

Jesus is literally engulfed in a mass of people that are on the verge of hysteria because of their need. Needless to say, at the end of it, he was quite wore out. Look at the text.

It says, And when evening came, verse 32, after the sun had set. So the sun had already set. It was already nighttime and at night, after a full day of ministry, they began bringing to him all who were ill and those who were demon possessed and the whole city had gathered at the door.

And it goes on in verse 34, And he healed many who were ill with various diseases and cast out many demons. And he was not permitting the demons to speak because they knew who he was. In the New Testament, in the Gospels, we understand that Jesus Christ was God.

But he was also man. And he walked among us as a man in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the Scriptures tell us that when he ministered, when he healed, that virtue went out from him.

When the woman touched the hem of his garment, virtue, power went out from him. Those of us who minister to many needy people understand that text. That when we minister, when we preach, and then afterwards, when we counsel until the morning hours, we're literally almost paralyzed, numb.

We can't even begin to think about raising our head from a pillow. Because virtue has gone out of us. Any Christian filled with the Holy Spirit, ministering according to the will of God, ministering according to their gifts as they minister, virtue, power will go out from them.

I notice this many times, that you can preach and preach and preach for hours and hours every day, but when the work is done, it leaves your body with nothing. You are totally, completely undone, wore out. That is what we see here with the Christ.

But now look, it says in verse 35, in the early morning, while it was still dark, we're looking at possibly 4 o'clock in the morning, 5 o'clock in the morning, it is still dark. Now realize this, the people did not even begin to bring their sick ones to Him until it was evening. So how much did He sleep? How much time did He have to rest? It appears that He had almost no time at all.

Now, most of us in this situation would simply say, I'm wore out. I'm tired. I can't go on.

The wisest thing I can do is sleep. And that might be true in some instances. But I want you to look at the life of Jesus Christ.

Although He was God in the flesh, although He was a perfect man, filled with the Holy Spirit without measure, look at what He deems important. He saw it as absolutely necessary to meet with God. Now I want you to look at something else.

When Jesus walked out that door, there were probably hundreds of people, maybe even thousands of people asleep on the ground. I've seen it myself in Peru. Asleep on the ground.

I think it had to be supernatural that He could even get out of the door and get away from these people. But they're sleeping. And they are needy.

Not everyone had been healed. Not everyone had been dealt with. There were still people left behind with great problems.

He could have stayed there and done something for them, but look at what He deems important. He knew that He had to meet with His Father. He could not live His life pragmatically.

He could not live His life simply reacting to the needs of others. He knew that He needed to be with His Father. He knew He needed to be in communion with Him.

He had to pass time there, to be renewed there, to be strengthened there. Now look how different we are. Now let's just stop for a moment.

This is not some great theological problem that I'm going to put before you. Just look at your life. Look at your life.

Those of you who are ministers, laypersons, businessmen, housewives, look at your life. Is it not true that oftentimes we live our lives reacting to what is going on around us and to the needs of others? Many of you housewives, you jump out of bed and immediately, it's time to take care of the children. It's time to do this.

Many of you young people, you jump up. It's time to go to school. Time to go to work.

Many of you men, you jump up out of bed, frantically taking off, running in every direction. And guess what? The ministers are the worst of the lot. Driven by the needs of others and a genuine compassion, they just take off.

So much to do today, but so unlike Jesus Christ. And even so unlike our dear Martin Luther. It is said that he said this, I have so much to do today, I will never accomplish it unless I pray at least three hours.

Now think about that. He met with God. Alone with God before the day began.

When you look at men and women who have been used of God down through the centuries, when I was a younger man, I tried to find something in common between them. I noticed that theologically, oftentimes they could have differences. Their lifestyles were oftentimes different.

Their way of looking at different things was oftentimes very different. And as I studied the lives of men and women down through the ages that have been mightily used of God, I tried to find what did they have in common. I found one thing.

They met with God. They met with God. I know that doesn't sound like some great truth.

I know it's not something you've never heard before. I know you may have been expecting something far greater this afternoon to come out of this pulpit. But are you obeying this one simple truth? Does this one simple truth control your life? You see, every one of us, if I were to talk to you personally, every one of us in here would admit that we're weak.

None of you would boast of your power, your strength, that you could walk independently of God. None of you would say such things. But look at your life in reality.

In reality, your life reflects an independence from God. If someone were to study your life, they might say that person believes that they can live and do well and even prosper in the Christian life without drawing strength from God in prayer, without learning wisdom from God. Isn't that true? It is true.

Repent. Repent. Stop it.

I know that doesn't sound too eloquent, but that's what you need to hear. Stop it. Stop running around.

Stop scheduling time for absolutely everything other than God. You can be of no use to Him unless you are a person who walks with Him. And you can't learn to walk with Him unless you spend time with Him.

I often hear people say this. Well, you know, brother Paul, especially young men, I hear them say, well, you know, brother Paul, I don't pray that much in a specific place or anything. I just pray as I go and I practice the presence of the Lord as I'm going through my daily activities.

I don't believe that. I don't believe that at all. Because it's the wisdom of men down through the ages that the only way that you can truly learn to practice the presence of God throughout your entire life and throughout your day is by spending great portions of time with God isolated and alone, separated from the noise.

You see, it's in your prayer closet that you learn to walk with God. It's in your prayer closet that you come to understand and know and sense His presence. It's in your prayer closet that you'll learn to practice the presence of God so that no matter where you are throughout the day, He is the greatest reality.

I should not think this. You should not think this to be boasting, but I can tell you this. The presence of God is a greater reality to me in this pulpit right now than the presence of any one of you.

And that's the way it should be in the life of a man of God, in the life of a woman of God, in the life of a youth of God. When I was first called into the ministry, I went to my dear pastor. I was telling him that God had called me into the ministry.

And he turned around and he looked at me. He was a bold man. He was filled with the Holy Spirit.

He looked at me and he said, Boy, can you be alone? I didn't understand him at that time. I thought he was saying that if I accepted the call into the ministry and I preached the truth, that I would be alone, that people would hate me, that they would separate themselves from me. But that's not what he meant.

What he meant was this. And young men who aspire for the ministry, you listen to me, please. This is what he meant.

Paul, when all the other boys are running around in bachelor groups and having Bible studies together, when all the other little boys are going on retreats and running around doing all sorts of things in the name of Jesus, can you separate from them all and be alone with your God? You want to do evangelism and preach on the streets, praise God, do it. But unless you've got time in the closet, don't go out there. You must know your God.

You want to do mighty things? Well, you can go to seminary and still not do mighty things. You can memorize all the Scriptures and still not do mighty things. You can be bold as a lion and still not do mighty things.

The one who does mighty things is the one who knows his God. He doesn't just know facts about his God. He knows his God.

He has an intimate relationship with his God. I have a dear friend, Dr. Berry. He is a medical doctor.

He knows much more facts about my wife than I do. He can tell you everything about my wife. He can tell you how she breathes, how she walks, how she maintains her balance.

He can discuss everything about her inner ear. He knows all about her guts. He knows everything.

But I know my wife better than he does. I know her intimately. The relationship of husband and wife.

He's got the facts, but I know her. Now, you need both. In theology, you should strive to have correct doctrine.

You should strive to know the great truths of Christian history. You should strive to be biblical and doctrinally sound. But knowing facts about God is not the same thing as knowing God.

Being with Him. Dwelling with Him. Passing time with Him.

The night watches. You know them? And everyone else is asleep. And the world is finally quiet.

And He awakens you from your sleep and bids you to come. The morning watch. When the sun has still not raised its head.

Do you know what it's like? Is that a reality in your life? That's what you need. That's what you need. All this activity, all this noise, all this shouting.

But He's saying, come away with me, my love. Come away. Let's just go.

I haven't planned this. I don't plan most of the stuff I do. But let's go to the Song of Solomon for a moment.

Look at chapter 5. Verse 2. Verse 2. This little bride of Israel is sleeping. I was asleep, but my heart was awake. A voice.

My beloved was knocking. Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is drenched with dew. My locks with the damp of the night.

Here she is asleep. And her lover appears. Now, let's set the stage for this for a moment.

Do you remember when you first laid eyes on your wife? Do you remember that? And you got all, you felt all funny inside. Maybe you saw stars. Your heart started beating just with a glance of her eyes.

You'd do anything to see her. You'd make up reasons to go over there and visit her. I mean, you'd mow her dad's yard.

You'd do anything just to get... If the phone rang, your heart jumped. Then you married her. And she comes to you in the night and says, Darling.

And you go, What? Something changed, didn't it? If it did, you're in sin. Didn't see that one coming, did you? Isn't that sad when love becomes common? I hate that. I hate that.

Just as a side note, you know, everybody wants to be this great man of God. I just want to end my life loving my wife like I'm supposed to. I figure if I can do that, I can do anything else.

But love, when it becomes common, is so wrong. So wrong. Do you remember when you were first a believer? Let's go on.

It says, I was awake. I was asleep, but my heart was awake. A voice, my beloved, was knocking open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of the night.

Now look at her response. When she first met this man, she would have done anything to be with him. She'd put a basket on her head and walk around the market all day just hoping to bump into him.

But now that she knows him, now that love has grown common, look what she says. I've taken off my dress. How can I put it on again? And I've washed my feet.

How can I dirty them again? I'm tired. I've already taken my clothes off and I've taken my shoes off. I'm in bed.

Do you really expect me now to just go through all this trouble of just opening the door to you? Do you remember when you were a brand new Christian? Do you remember? You'd study your Bible just hoping to hear something from God. You'd pray and I mean just hoping that something, that He would share something with you. And if He didn't, you made something up just to feel good about yourself.

You just wanted to be with Him. You wanted to know Him. Everywhere you went, all you could think about was Him.

But now, you're mature. Now you're a strong Christian. Now, He comes to you at night and He says, spend time with me.

Lord, I'm tired. I've been ministering. Lord, I've been working all day.

There's stuff to do. Do you remember when you used to just strain your ear hoping to hear a word from Him? Now, He speaks loudly. Come away with me and you pretend that He's not talking.

The Christian life is not about ministry. The Christian life is not just about keeping rules. The Christian life is not even just about revival.

The Christian life is communion with Him. And that's what you need more than anything. That's what I need more than anything.

It's communion with Christ. To sit still. To be there at His feet.

To study His word. To pray. To seek His face.

You know, one of the ways in which I knew that I really needed to marry the woman I married was I could just sit beside her and do absolutely nothing. And that was better than doing something without her. When was the last time you just sat in silence before God? Thinking great thoughts about God.

Saying tender things to God. Listening. Delighting.

Reveling. You know, most people say, Brother Paul, I just can't pray that much. And I go, after talking to them about their prayer life, I understand why they can't.

They have reduced prayer down to only intercession. And that's why they can't pray. My dear friend, let me tell you something.

You think prayer is hard work? Intercession is hard work. It is a task that we do with our boots on. And if your prayer life is only intercession, you are not going to pray much.

Because it's ministry. It's hard work to intercede for people. Intercede for nations.

Intercede for the kingdom. Stand in the gap. It's hard work.

But that's not the whole of a prayer life. Prayer life is thanksgiving. It is searching.

Remembering. Thinking back on the day. Trying to make sure that nothing has escaped you.

But giving thanks to God for all things. It is confession. Confession is wonderful.

It is wonderful. You know, Robert Murray McShane said this. He said when we go into the bathtub to wash ourselves, we don't wash ourselves in part.

We wash ourselves in whole. In the same way with confession. Some of you right now, your conscience is bothered.

You don't really feel clean. You don't feel free. You feel soiled.

You know, when you start feeling like that, you know what the problem is? You need to sit down. Listen. Read the Word.

Cry out to God to examine your heart and everything He brings to mind that is sin. You need to confess it. Confess it.

Confess it. And stay there until you are clean. It's confession.

But more than anything, it's communion. Communion. To sit in the dark.

To meditate upon a text. And to think great thoughts about God. That is your delight.

That is your inheritance. That is your birthright. That you might know Him and Jesus Christ.

He has sinned. So the first thing that I just wanted to share with you is that one of your great needs in mind is to constantly be delighting in the Lord. Constantly being away with Him.

Shut up to God. Will you do that? Will you obey? Have you repented? Will you repent? Will you obey and begin to seek your God? Another thing that I want us to look at is found in 1 Timothy. Chapter 4. While you're turning there, let me say this.

In Luke 11, the disciples came to Jesus. And this is what they asked Him. Teach us to pray.

Teach us to pray. Now I want you to think about something for a moment. Just think about this.

The disciples of Jesus Christ had seen Him do all sorts of things. They had seen Him walk on water. They had seen Him raise the dead.

They had seen Him cast out demons. They had seen Him refute the Pharisees. They had seen Him do every manner of miracle.

Is that not true? Great and marvelous things they had seen from Jesus. But now I want you to think about something. Nowhere in Scripture do we hear the disciples say this.

Lord, teach me to walk on water. Lord, teach me to cast out demons. Lord, teach me to preach.

But they said this. Lord, teach us to pray. You know what that tells me? That the most astounding aspect of the life of Jesus Christ was His praying.

It was more powerful than casting out demons. It was more miraculous than raising the dead. It was more majestic than healing the sick.

I mean, if you come to me Well, let's say that I'm standing here and who's the famous football player? Beckham? That's him? That's right, right? I'm an American. I don't know anything about these things. Well, if he was standing here and I was standing here and you wanted to know something about football, who would you ask? You'd probably ask him because that is his expertise.

In the same way, they looked at Jesus. Teach us to pray. They knew it was His expertise.

They knew it was the magnificent thing that He did unlike anyone else. Now, pastor, preacher, has anyone ever come up to you and said, teach me to pray. Is your prayer life and your prayers so astounding that men, young men, come up to you and say, teach me to pray like you pray.

I've never heard anybody pray like you pray. Now, that's a legacy. That's a legacy.

That's a legacy. Looking at my children, I homeschool them, I teach them the Word, but I have to say right now that the thing that I have seen most impact them is prayer time. Prayer time.

Because they begin to see in prayer. Yes, we study the 1689 Confession of Faith. We go through the Catechism.

They're studying different books of the Bible. They're memorizing Scripture, but it's when we get down and pray together that I can see them get a picture of reality. There's power in prayer.

More than anyone has ever mapped out, there is no man on this earth that has ever exhausted the power of prayer. Now, I want us to go on. 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 1. But the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.

Men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. What is he telling Timothy? He's telling Timothy this. Listen, Timothy.

In latter times the very foundations of the world are going to be shaken. Immorality and godlessness, they are going to run wild. Society is going to collapse upon itself.

Evil is going to be prevailing. Even among those who profess faith in Christ, there is going to be a turning away, an apostasy, a falling from the truth. Liars and deceivers are going to enter into the church and create all sorts of chaos and carry men away.

Timothy, this is going to happen in your time. So what should Timothy do? Does he tell Timothy because of all of this you need to start some sort of evangelistic ministry? Timothy, to take care of this you need to create an organization, a global ministry and change the world? No. What does he tell Timothy to do? We're going to see.

I want you to look at verse 6. In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly fully nourished on the words of faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. He said, Timothy, this world is going to collapse upon itself morally, ethically, doctrinally. The evil is going to be rampant now.

In order for you to be salt and light, in order for you to have an impact, in order for you to be an instrument in advancing the kingdom, here's what you must do in the first place. Number one, you must be nourished constantly on the words of faith. Let me ask you, are you doing that? Are you doing that? If someone were to visit you and spend several days at your home, would they see that your strength comes from the nourishment of the Word of God, which is a daily part of your life? You know, some of you, to attend this conference and to get up early enough, you didn't do any of this this morning.

You ran to the conference. Or maybe you have to preach today, so you didn't spend much time in the Word. Or in prayer.

There's other things to be done. No! If you want to truly be used of God, if you could be an instrument that God could use to bring revival, you must be a man, a woman, convinced that every day you must be nourished in the Word of God. Even if you have no time to prepare sermons, even if you have no time to do anything else, first of all, the most important thing is not what you can do, but who you are.

Your character, your person, and it's all depending upon being nourished, a lifestyle of gaining nourishment from the Word of God. To you young men, what I would recommend is this. Robert Murray McShane's reading list.

In which you read through the entire Bible, the Old Testament once a year, and the New Testament twice, Psalms and Proverbs, or at least do this. Begin to study the Scriptures systematically. Some of you jump around Romans, Ephesians, Malachi, back and forth, but you have no sense of the full body of the Word of God.

There's a real sense in which computers and concordances have done us great damage. We can find all sorts of verses without ever reading the Bible. I beg you to read the Bible systematically every day of your life.

Make it a daily practice, a life principle. Right now, I'm in Isaiah chapter 52. You've got to have this foundation of being just nourished and fed with the Word of God.

But not only the Word of God, he says, nourished on the words of faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. Listen to me. I sometimes wonder, will God grant revival? Because can He trust us with revival? Revival.

Do we have enough of the Word of God in us to instruct the people that would be swept into the kingdom? You see, usually you find all these people that are all about prayer, or you find these people that are all about the Word. What we need are men and women of God who live in both. A systematic reading of the Word, a memorizing of the Word, but also taking the Word, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and

creating and forming a system of doctrine that is historically balanced, that is true Christianity.

You must be a theologian. The street preacher who runs out there wild saying all sorts of things, it doesn't matter how bold he is, he's of no use to God. When he gets out there and preaches, truth must come out of his mouth.

Doctrine. Doctrine. We should be marked by prayer.

We should be marked by a nourishment in the Word, and we should be marked by sound doctrine. It is absolutely essential. Essential.

Essential. And then he goes on, verse 7, but have nothing to do with worldly fables. Fit only for old women.

On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. Now that's a command. Let me ask you a question.

You want to be godly, don't you? That's why you came here. But, but do you think godliness is just going to jump on you? It's going to crawl on your back and grow all over your body? I do believe that when we seek God in prayer, we cry out for him. Through the Spirit of God, he can do unusual works in our life.

He can advance us quickly. Filling us with the Holy Spirit. Especially outpouring his Spirit upon us.

Causing us to advance in the things of the kingdom very quickly. But those are unusual works of God. Parallel to those works, we must be a people who disciplines itself to be godly.

Holiness, godliness, Christ-likeness is not just going to jump on you. It's not just going to come on you at a meeting about revival. You are called to plan your day, to plan your life so that you might grow in godliness.

How many of you have a plan? How many of you are training yourself in piety? Think about this. I'm not here to hurt you. I'm here to help you think.

Imagine the Olympic athlete for a moment. Just imagine. Especially the 100 meter sprinter.

To me, that's the... I mean, I really respect them, but in one way it's the saddest event I can think of. The Olympic 100 meter sprinter. When this young man is six years old, the coach sees that he is very unusual.

He can run like the wind. This young man is gifted. Starts training him.

It becomes more and more evident how gifted he is. By the time he's 11 or 12 years old, he's training in the morning before school. He's going to school.

After school, he's training more. And for the next several years, 15, 20 years of his life, all he does is train. He doesn't go out with friends.

He doesn't party. His meals are guided for him. They're set up in a specific manner in order to make him the best sprinter possibly.

He sleeps a certain number of hours. I mean, everything in his life is designed to make him fast. And he is running for a race that will last less than 10 seconds.

And when he wins the gold, he's got a gold medal that's not even gold. He trains and trains and trains to be fast, to win a medal that will rot and rust. Yet admire his dedication and then look back at yourself.

You've been called to run a race of eternal significance. Eternal significance. The prize to be one is eternal.

Are you training yourself to be a more pious man? Have you designed your life that you might be more godly? Are you disciplining yourself? You discipline yourself to work, to go to your job, and that's important. But Christ-likeness and godliness is far more important. As a pastor, you discipline yourself possibly to study Scripture, to preach, or to meet with people, and that's important.

But do you have a plan that I get up at a certain time in the morning, I study the Word, I pray, I memorize Scripture, I've carefully marked out my lifestyle, eliminating things that are going to cause me to deviate from being godly. And not only my own life, but gentlemen, our homes are specifically designed so that our children will grow up in this discipline of godliness. Are we doing that? Most of us are not living in rebellion in a sense of purposely living in rebellion, but most of us are so nonchalant about growing in the things of God that it's though it had no importance.

Let me share with you something. It's very important to understand. I don't think that the great litmus test on the day of judgment for the believer is going to be the size of his or her ministry.

In the West, we think a man is holy or a man is spiritual or a man is more noble than the rest because his ministry is larger. We do. Well, I've met a lot of men with a lot of large ministries and I can tell you that theory just doesn't work.

You know one of the most humbling things for me is I sometimes will preach to thousands of people and I'll look out in the audience and I see men sitting there that nobody knows who are far more noble, far more godly than I am and they have forgotten more about God than I've ever learned. I remember preaching one time and I decided that I would preach the entire time through the Old Testament that week. The different pictures of regeneration in the Old Testament.

And I looked out there on the first night and to my terror sat a man by the name of Dr. Mugliar. You don't know him, do you? Well, he's forgotten more about the Old Testament than I'll ever know. He's one of the godliest men I've ever had the opportunity to be around.

You don't know him. But you know me even though I'm less noble than him. The point I'm trying to make is activity, ministry, supposed success and all that means nothing.

The important thing is godliness. It's Christ likeness. It's our character.

Let me just give you an example. Hold your place in Timothy and go really quick to Matthew. Look at chapter 5, verse 13.

What does it mean? Jesus says, you are the salt of the earth. Alright? That's the text that we especially use in America, in the United States. We're the salt of the earth.

That means somebody buy a drum and let's go do a Jesus parade or something. Let's create a big ministry. Let's have some activity.

Let's go out there and be militant. What does it mean? Well, let's look. You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

What is he saying? I'll tell you what he's saying. Now listen to me. Salt has certain properties or characteristics.

You lose those properties, those characteristics, you no longer have salt. You take those characteristics away and even replace them with other characteristics that may be noble, you still don't have salt anymore. Salt has certain characteristics.

What is Jesus teaching us? True discipleship. A true disciple of Jesus that will have an impact on the world has certain characteristics. And it is by those characteristics that he will have an impact on the world.

Now, what are those characteristics that will make us impact our world? Look in the context. Chapter 5, verse 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the gentle. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

How do we have an impact on the world? Character. Christ-like character. I think it was Tozer who said, I see all these young men wanting to be used of God, lamenting that they're not used of God, but I have discovered if a man will make himself usable, God will wear him out.

Young men, listen to me. It's all about character. And why do I harp on this? Because that is not the news of the day.

It's not what's being preached from the pulpits. It's most certainly not being taught by all these flamboyant, traveling universal TV evangelists who have almost no character. You want to be used of God.

You want to be Christ-like. You want to train yourself in godliness. I remember several years ago, I was preaching in a church that didn't have a pastor, and I preached the first sermon, and I came down from the pulpit, and when I came down from the pulpit, a pulpit committee came up and said, would you consider being our pastor? And I looked at them and I said, are you crazy? What do you mean, are we crazy? I said, gentlemen, you just asked me to be your pastor.

You don't know if I love my wife. You heard me preach one sermon. You don't know if I'm a godly man.

You know nothing about my character. What this world needs. Young men, not just to rise up and make a bunch of noise, but young men with character, with integrity, with Christ's likeness, with some depth to them.

Now let's go back. He says, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. Now I just, because time is going, I just want to touch on a few things here that are very, very important.

Verse 12, let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. Show yourself an example of those who believe. I want to address at this moment the older brethren here.

Do you think that you ought to be respected in the church and listened to in the church because you have many years? Many years do not grant you the right to be listened to in the church. This type of character. Are you an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity? Young person, you think you're the great prophet that has been raised up before the second coming of Jesus Christ.

You preach on the streets boldly, but do you preach the very things that you yourself do not live? Do you demand of others the very things you yourself cannot carry? Should I listen to you? Let me watch your life first to determine whether or not I should listen to you. Should I want what you have? Should I listen to your message if your message has done so little good for your own character? Oh, how we need to be alone with God. To be examined by Him.

To renew our mind in His Word. To be changed. Changed.

In part, I'm taking this from Dr. Piper in part. When I say, Christians, come on. Do you think the world is going to be attracted to Jesus because you drive a big car? Do you think the world is going to be attracted to Jesus because you have fine clothes on? Do you think the world is attracted to Jesus because you prosper economically? No, you need to listen to the world.

They doubt the sincerity of your confession of faith in Jesus Christ because they can see that even though you say no, those things are more important to you than Jesus. And more important to you than all the people who are starving to death. Without clothes.

Without parents. Without the gospel. You want to impress the world? Live like Jesus.

Live a sacrificial life like Jesus. Seek to grow in godliness and character and righteousness. Poverty of spirit.

Mourning over sin. Rejoicing in righteousness. A person who gives all things freely.

You want to impress the world? You want the world to see that Jesus is real? Then follow him. And the disciple is not above his master. Follow him.

Fathers and husbands, listen to me. It is so easy for me right now to wax eloquently from this pulpit. But you know the true test? You know the thing that humbles me? Is not can I live these things out in front of you, but can I live these things out in front of the people who are closest to me? My wife and my children.

Teach them all manner of doctrine and truth. Yes, you must, you must, you must, but all is destroyed with one poor example from their father. Character.

Christ likeness. Seeking to train ourselves in speech. Have you gone into the Scriptures to discover how you ought to talk? Have you studied the Scriptures with regard to speech? Conduct.

I told a group of young people last week, I said, you're so much more full of the world than you can see. I know you want to be radical for Jesus. You want to preach on the streets and you wear your Jesus t-shirts and all sorts of things.

But have you studied godly conduct in the Scriptures and then sought to conform your life to godly conduct even though it totally contradicts your culture? Love. You studied love in the Scriptures? Because in the New Testament and the New Covenant, love is not something. It's everything.

Faith? Are you growing in faith? You see, in the Christian life, it begins with repentance and faith. But repentance and faith are also subject to sanctification. We're not to just repent and our repentance stay there or believe and our faith stay there.

But we are to grow in repentance becoming more and more sensitive to sin. We are to grow in faith so that as the years pass us by, we become more solid, more unshakeable. Not because we ourselves have grown stronger, but because we have a greater confidence in our God.

I want to go on. Just really quick, let's jump down to verse 15. Speaking about all these things of disciplining oneself to godliness with regard to godliness and piety.

He says in verse 15, take pains with these things. Be absorbed in them so that your progress will be evident to all. Now, he's saying take pains with these things.

Put so much effort, great effort and great exertion into growing in Christ-likeness. In this work of disciplining yourself for godliness. Make it such a part of your life that at times it exhausts you.

And then he says this. I love this part. Take pains with these things.

Be absorbed in them. Now, let's say that I have a table and on that table someone spills some water and it's left up. Well, there's about this much water piled up on the table.

You go by there and you say, oh, there's water on the table. But then I go and I get a towel. And I put the towel over the water.

It sucks up all the water. I pull the towel away. You walk by again and you say, where's the water? I say, it's absorbed in the towel.

Young men, young women, listen to me. There is a time for going out. For preaching.

For fellowship. For running with your friends. Great times together in the Lord.

But there is a time when you must be invisible. You must be absorbed. You must be hidden.

You are away from everyone else. No one sees you. Why? You are alone with your God.

You are studying the Scriptures. You are praying. You are seeking to be more and more like Christ.

You are pressing in to the kingdom. You are advancing. You are taking hold of it violently.

And that should carry on throughout the full course of your life. Now, I want to say one last thing. I promise you.

I want to read some things to you. I said I wanted to speak about three things. So far, I've touched on two.

One is prayer. The other is being alone with God. Word, doctrine, training yourself in piety.

Last thing I want to talk about for a moment is just the Holy Spirit. I want us to go just quickly to Luke chapter 11. Verse 13.

Well, let's begin in verse 9. So I say to you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be open to you.

For everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds and him who knocks it will be open. Now, suppose that one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish. He will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? We have become almost terrified with regard to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Why? Because there is so much false teaching, heresy, abominable, blasphemous things done in the name of the Holy Spirit. We are right to be afraid of false teaching, but not of the person and doctrine of the Holy Spirit. We have to be very careful in our theology that we do not build our theology in a reactionary manner.

And what I mean by that, we look at heresy and we try to run so far away from it that we run past the true teaching of Scripture. And I'm afraid that's what we've done. Now, you cannot be a Christian unless the Holy Spirit dwells in you.

You cannot be a Christian unless your heart has been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit dwells in you. You understand that? And the Holy Spirit, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is intimately involved with conversion and the moment a man is converted, the Holy Spirit indwells him. He does not have to ask that God also give him the Holy Spirit.

He has the Holy Spirit. You understand me? He indwells us at conversion. But there is something else that we need to understand.

You and I always stand in great need of the power of the Holy Spirit in our life, the working of the Holy Spirit in our life, and we should constantly be crying out to God for greater and greater infusions of His power and greater and greater outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Constantly in our lives and in the church. Listen, what we have to do cannot be done by us.

Don't you understand that? It cannot be done. The great missionary endeavor, what still lacks in taking the gospel to the nations, it cannot be done by us. We cannot organize it into happening.

We cannot make it happen. All our gifts, all our power, all our eloquence, all our strategies cannot achieve anything in what has to be done in this world. But the Holy Spirit can.

The power of the Holy Spirit. And we should constantly, I believe this text is telling us, constantly be crying out to God for greater and greater manifestations of His power in our life. Know this.

Some of the greatest manifestations have to do with character and the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our life. And the power of the Holy Spirit in ministry. Not to create confusion in the church and turn the church of Jesus Christ into a lunatic circus, but empower the church to be a witness for Jesus Christ and take the gospel to the nations.

We must have that. Your greatest need, young man, as a preacher, is to be alone with God, to shut yourself up in His Word, to study His Word, to study men of the faith who have gone on before you and been mightily used of God. But your other great need is this, to cry out and cry out for the outpouring and the power of the Holy Spirit on your life so that you might minister.

You must have this. More and more and more. When I was a young man, I would cry out and cry out and cry out, Oh God, pour out Your Spirit on my life that I might be able to preach.

I can remember going out street preaching in Austin, Texas and have no power, no boldness, no strength. Coming home defeated and finally just putting my Bible on the bed and saying whatever's in that book's not in my life. And then, praise God, someone came to me one night with a bunch of books.

Actually, one day with a bunch of books. Things from George Mueller, from Leonard Ravenhill, so many others. And I begin to look and say, these men are talking about God's willingness to do great and mighty things through the weakest vessel.

But I can see clear as I look through all these men that it is done in the power of the Holy Spirit. And just to cry out for months and months and months, Oh God, Oh God, pour out Your Spirit, strengthen me, do a work so that when I stand up I preach. He'll do that for you.

He will do that for you. And it is not some special thing that might make your ministry a little better. It is absolutely essential.

Now, to close, I'm going to read some great and magnificent Puritans, preachers of old, men that are respected far and wide throughout the evangelical community. George Smeaton, listen to this. No more mischievous and misleading theory could be propounded, nor any more dishonoring to the Holy Spirit than the principle that because the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the church has no need and no warrant to pray for effusions of the Spirit of God.

On the contrary, the more the church asks for the Spirit and waits for His communications, the more she receives. Jonathan Edwards, the Scriptures do not only direct and encourage us in general to pray for the Holy Spirit above all things else, but it is the expressed will of God that His church should be very much in prayer for that glorious outpouring of the Spirit, which is to be in the latter days, and for what shall be accomplished by it. Thomas Boston, therefore, breathe, pant, and long for the Spirit of Christ.

Charles Spurgeon, didn't we not hear, didn't we not hear some time ago from certain wise brethren that we are never to pray for the Spirit? I think I heard it said often. We have the Holy Spirit, and therefore, we are not to pray for Him. Like that other declaration from certain men of the same brotherhood, that we have pardon of sin and are not to pray for it, just as if we were to never to pray for what we have.

If we have life, we are to pray that we have it more abundantly. If we have pardon, in one respect, we are to ask for a fuller sense of it. And if we have the Holy Spirit, so that we are quickened and saved, we do not ask for Him in that capacity, but we ask for His power in other directions, and for His grace in other forms.

I do not go before God now and say, Lord, I am a dead sinner, quicken me by Thy Spirit, for I trust I am quickened of His Spirit. But being quickened, I now cry, Lord, let not the life Thou hast given me ebb down till it becomes very feeble, but give me of Thy Spirit, that the life within me may become strong and mighty, and may subdue all the power of death within my members, that I may put forth the vigor and the energy

which comes from Thyself through the Spirit. O you that have the Spirit, you are the very men to pray that you may experience more of His matchless operations and gracious influences, and in all the benign sanctity of His indwelling may seek that yet more and more that you may know Him.

You have this as your encouragement that God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. O brothers, sisters, what we need cannot be taught. What we need cannot necessarily even be trained into you, but to be clothed with power from on high.

To be clothed with power from on high. That is what the church needs. And I pray that in my lifetime she will have and have in abundance.

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