The Place of Private Prayer in Ministry

There is probably not much need to commend to you the importance of private prayer in your life and in your ministry. As ambassadors of God, our prayer has a power beyond anything we can estimate. The more familiar we are with "the courts of heaven", the better we will be able to fulfil our heavenly calling wherever we are.

Among all the formative influences that go to make a person effective in God-given ministry, there is none more effective than his or her familiarity with our Father God in prayer. When we consider all the training programmes, orientation, language study etc. that we try to provide, I know of nothing more vital or more effective than our own relationship with God in prayer.

So often we focus on preparation for effective ministry and this has some value, but prayer is the tool that the Great Potter uses to mould us into effective ministers. It is by prevailing prayer in private that we grow into effective ministry in public.

As we share with Muslims what will help us most will be time spent in prayer beforehand. Perhaps while others are out hunting like Esau, you, like Jacob, will find "savoury meat" near at hand as you spend time in prayer. (Gen. 27:1-16) Remember that there is always a temptation to take credit falsely rather than attributing everything that happens in our friends lives to the power of God alone. Jacob lied and falsely said, "The Lord brought it to me".

As you prepare to go out as God's ambassador, pray earnestly to the Lord that you will be effective and accomplish all He wants you to accomplish. Then you won't fail. So often we are blinded by the spiritual powers of darkness, but persevering prayer lifts the veil and allows us to see the issues – the blockages in people's hearts – and to deal with them.

About 300 years ago, a great puritan preacher, Richard Baxter, was often in debates with others who didn't believe in evangelical truth. While others were presenting their views, Baxter used to jot down notes on paper. Some people were curious to know what he wrote. They got some of his notes and there was nothing on the page except, "Please Lord give me more light". How we need to echo that prayer when sharing with our local friends.

Prayer will help you in preparation for evangelism, for discipling people, for encouraging fellow workers as well as in resolving disputes. Nothing can so gloriously equip you to be effective in the calling the Lord has given to you.

When you emerge fresh from communion with God, you will be much more effective in pleading with men to accept the great gift of God because you have been wrestling with God on their behalf. As you pour out your heart in prayer, your time spent with people will be filled with God's love for them, full of wisdom and full of life. It will have great power to thaw cold hearts. We've all been surprised by hearing a worker new to outreach speak through translation with great power and effect. We sense right away that this is just the fruit of prayer in their lives. There is no "school" for this other than much time spent at the foot of the Cross in prayer.

One of our great dangers comes <u>after</u> effective ministry. We get to a high pitch of excitement after a breakthrough in the life of someone we have been sharing with. Do we then reflect on the breakthrough? Was it me/us? No, it was God's mighty work! Conversely, how often we are depressed by impotency in witness and our fear of failure! We are conscious of our shortcomings. We discover there is no rest in our spirits. All we can do is to confess our sin and plead with God that our stupidity might in no way hinder the work of His Spirit.

Like Joseph in Genesis 43, we need to weep in God's presence where we can freely express ourselves. We need to plead with Him to lift the sluice gates and allow the effectiveness of His Holy Spirit to pour revelation and blessings into the hearts of those with whom we share. We don't

become effective with people on God's behalf, but we can endeavour with both our hearts and our minds to prevail in prayer with God. We can save no one nor can we persuade them to be saved, but the least we can do is to be deeply grieved by the madness of their unbelief and cry out for the 'interference' of our mighty Lord Jesus in their lives.

To do otherwise than pray earnestly for God's work is surely to be conceited – to act as if we think that we are sufficient in ourselves and there is no need to appeal to God. But this is baseless pride. We have no power at all to change men and women.

If we are truly humble-minded, we will never venture into the battle until the Lord of Hosts has clothed us with all power and said to us, ***"Go in this might of yours and save … Do not I send you?"*** (said about Gideon in Judges 6:16)

To neglect prayer in ministry implies that we don't really understand the value of a soul and we have not even begun to understand the meaning of eternity. At best, such a worker has become a merely superficial talker. He will never be one who ploughs deep and reaps abundant harvests. It is easy to become a loiterer rather than a labourer. Proverbs 26:7 is an interesting verse. Here are several translations:

- ***"Like a lame man's legs that hang limp, is a proverb in the mouth of a fool."*** (New International Version)
- ***"The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of fools."*** (21st Century King James)
- ***"A wise saying spoken by a fool is as useless as the legs of a crippled person."*** (New Century Version)

We can apply this to ourselves when we are so foolish that we spend less time in prayer than we do in 'ministry'.

We will never know how much blessing we may have missed through our failure to spend time in earnest prayer. We will never know how different our 'ministry' might have been if we had lived habitually nearer to God in prayer. Regrets are useless, but earnest determination to change in this area will be far more useful. It is not simply that we **ought to** pray more. We **must** pray more! The secret of all success in the work God has called us to depend on our passion in prayer and our commitment to spend time at the "Mercy Seat" of God.

Let us pray for one another that God would burden us deeply to give ourselves to prayer and intercession.