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A Praying Ministry Successful

The principal cause of my leanness and unfruitfulness is owing to an unaccountable backwardness to pray. I can write o r read or converse or hear with a ready heart; but prayer is more spiritual and inward than any of these, and the more spi ritual any duty is the more my carnal heart is apt to start from it. Prayer and patience and faith are never disappointed. I have long since learned that if ever I was to be a minister faith and prayer must make me one. When I can find my heart in frame and liberty for prayer, everything else is comparatively easy. -- Richard Newton

It may be put down as a spiritual axiom that in every truly successful ministry prayer is an evident and controlling force -- evident and controlling in the life of the preacher, evident and controlling in the deep spirituality of his work. A ministry m ay be a very thoughtful ministry without prayer; the preacher may secure fame and popularity without prayer; the whole machinery of the preacher's life and work may be run without the oil of prayer or with scarcely enough to grease one cog ; but no ministry can be a spiritual one, securing holiness in the preacher and in his people, without prayer being made a n evident and controlling force.

The preacher that prays indeed puts God into the work. God does not come into the preacher's work as a matter of cour se or on general principles, but he comes by prayer and special urgency. That God will be found of us in the day that we seek him with the whole heart is as true of the preacher as of the penitent. A prayerful ministry is the only ministry that br ings the preacher into sympathy with the people. Prayer as essentially unites to the human as it does to the divine. A pra yerful ministry is the only ministry qualified for the high offices and responsibilities of the preacher. Colleges, learning, bo oks, theology, preaching cannot make a preacher, but praying does. The apostles' commission to preach was a blank till filled up by the Pentecost which praying brought. A prayerful minister has passed beyond the regions of the popular, bey ond the man of mere affairs, of secularities, of pulpit attractiveness; passed beyond the ecclesiastical organizer or gener al into a sublimer and mightier region, the region of the spiritual. Holiness is the product of his work; transfigured hearts and lives emblazon the reality of his work, its trueness and substantial nature. God is with him. His ministry is not project ed on worldly or surface principles. He is deeply stored with and deeply schooled in the things of God. His long, deep co mmunings with God about his people and the agony of his wrestling spirit have crowned him as a prince in the things of God. The iciness of the mere professional has long since melted under the intensity of his praying.

The superficial results of many a ministry, the deadness of others, are to be found in the lack of praying. No ministry can succeed without much praying, and this praying must be fundamental, ever-abiding, ever-increasing. The text, the serm on, should be the result of prayer. The study should be bathed in prayer, all its duties so impregnated with prayer, its wh ole spirit the spirit of prayer. "I am sorry that I have prayed so little," was the deathbed regret of one of God's chosen one s, a sad and remorseful regret for a preacher. "I want a life of greater, deeper, truer prayer," said the late Archbishop Tait . So may we all say, and this may we all secure.

God's true preachers have been distinguished by one great feature: they were men of prayer. Differing often in many thi ngs, they have always had a common center. They may have started from different points, and traveled by different road s, but they converged to one point: they were one in prayer. God to there was the center of attraction, and prayer was th e path that led to God. These men prayed not occasionally, not a little at regular or at odd times; but they so prayed that their prayers entered into and shaped their characters; they so prayed as to affect their own lives and the lives of others; they so prayed as to make the history of the Church and influence the current of the times. They spent much time in pra yer, not because they marked the shadow on the dial or the hands on the clock, but because it was to them so momento us and engaging a business that they could scarcely give over.

Prayer was to them what it was to Paul, a striving with earnest effort of soul; what it was to Jacob, a wrestling and prevai ling; what it was to Christ, "strong crying and tears." They "prayed always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, an d watching thereunto with all perseverance." "The effectual, fervent prayer" has been the mightiest weapon of God's mig htiest soldiers. The statement in regard to Elijah -- that he "was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" -- comprehends all prophets and preachers who h ave moved their generation for God, and shows the instrument by which they worked their wonders.

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