

Articles and Sermons :: Will and Emotions -J. Sidlow Baxter

Will and Emotions -J. Sidlow Baxter - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2005/9/7 13:49

Will and Emotions

Most of us need to lift our prayer life from the tyranny of our moods.

Let me give one illustration, a leaf out of my own diary.

When I entered the ministry in 1928 I determined that I would be the most "Methodist" Baptist in the history of the world. Talk about perfectionism! Talk about making plans for the day! They must have been a marvel to both angels and demons.

But, just as the stars in their courses fought against Sisera long ago, so the stars in the courses seemed set on smashing my well-made plans to smithereens. Oh, I would start. You know, I'd rise at 5:30. Fifteen minutes to wash and dress. Then an hour and a half of prayer and Bible reading. Half an hour for breakfast. Thirty minutes for a constitutional-to walk up to the woods, breathe deep and, when nobody was looking, run now and again-that's a constitutional.

I had everything all planned out; it was wonderful

Now I won't take time telling you all the subtle subterfuges which Satan used to trip me up and trick me out of keeping my plans. But I found that with increasing administrative duties and responsibilities in the pastorate my plans were going haywire. My time for prayer was getting crowded out and my periods of study with the Bible were getting scarcer.

That was bad enough, but it was worse when I began to get used to it. And then I began excusing myself. My prayer life became a case of sinning and repenting. Every time I got down to pray I had to start weeping and asking the Lord's forgiveness. I had to repent that I hadn't prayed more and ask Him to help me to do better in the future. All such things really take the pleasure out of praying!

Then it all came to crisis. At a certain time one morning I looked at my watch. According to my plan, for I was still bravely persevering, I was to withdraw for an hour of prayer.

I looked at my watch and it said: "Time for prayer, Sid." But I looked at my desk and there was a miniature mountain of correspondence. And Conscience said, "You ought to answer those letters." So, as we say in Scotland, I swithered. I vacillated. Shall it be prayer? Shall it be letters? Yes, no. Yes, no. Yes, no. And while I was swithering a velvety little voice began to speak in my inner consciousness: "Look here, Sid, what's all this bother? You know very well what you should do. The practical thing is to get those letters answered. You can't afford the time for prayer this morning. Get those letters answered."

But I still swithered, and the voice began to reinforce what it had said. It said, "Look here, Sid, don't you think the Lord knows all the busy occupations which are taking your time? You're converted, you're born again, and you're in the ministry. People are crowding in; you're having conversions. Doesn't that show that God is pleased with you? And even if you can't pray, don't worry too much about it. Look, Sid, you'd better face up to it. You're not one of the spiritual ones!"

I don't want to use extravagant phrases, but if you had plunged a dagger into my bosom it couldn't have hurt me more. "Sid, you are not one of the spiritual ones."

I'm not the introspective type, but that morning I took a good look into Sidlow Baxter. And I found that there was an area of me that did not want to pray. I had to admit it. It didn't want to pray. But I looked more closely and I found that there was a part of me that did. The part that didn't was the emotions, and the part that did was the intellect and the will.

Suddenly I found myself asking Sidlow Baxter; "Are you going to let your will be dragged about by your changeful emotions?" And I said to my will: "Will, are you ready for prayer?" And Will said, "Here I am, I'm ready." So Will and I set off to pray. But the minute we turned our footsteps to go and pray all my emotions began to talk: "We're not comin

g, we're not coming." And I said to Will, "Will, can you stick it?" And Will said, "Yes, if you can." So Will and I, we dragged off those wretched emotions and we went to pray, and stayed an hour in prayer.

If you had asked me afterwards, "Did you have a good time?" do think I could have said yes? A good time? No, it was a fight all the way!

What I would have done without the companionship of Will, I don't know. In the middle of the most earnest intercessions I suddenly found one of the principal emotions way out on the golf course, playing golf. And I had to run to the golf course and say "Come back." And a few minutes later I found another of the emotions; it had traveled one and a half days in advance and it was in the pulpit preaching a sermon I had not even yet prepared. And I had to say, "Come back."

I certainly couldn't have said we had a good time. It was exhausting, but we did it.

The next morning came. I looked at my watch and it was time. I said to Will, "Come on, Will, it's time for prayer." And all the emotions began to pull the other way and I said, "Will, can you stick it?" And Will said, "Yes, in fact I think I'm stronger after the struggle yesterday morning." So Will and I went in again.

The same thing happened. Rebellious, tumultuous, uncooperative emotions. If you had asked me, "Have you had a good time?" I would have had to tell you with tears, "No, the heavens were like brass. It was a job to concentrate. I had an awful time with the emotions."

This went on for about two and a half weeks. But Will and I stuck it out. Then one morning during that third week I looked at my watch and I said, "Will it's time for prayer. Are you ready?" And Will said, "Yes, I'm ready."

And just as we were going in I heard one of my chief emotions say to the others, "Come on, fellows, there's no use wearing ourselves out: they'll go on whatever we do."

That morning we didn't have any hilarious experience of wonderful visions with heavenly voices and raptures. But Will and I were able with less distraction to get on with praying. And that went on for another two or three weeks. In fact, Will and I had begun to forget the emotions. I would say, "Will, are you ready for prayer?" And Will replied, "Yes, I'm all ways ready."

Suddenly one day while Will and I were pressing our case at the throne of the heavenly glory one of the chief emotions shouted, "Hallelujah!" and all the other emotions suddenly shouted, "Amen!" For the first time the whole territory of James Sidlow Baxter was happily coordinated in the exercise of prayer, and God suddenly became real and heaven was wide open and Christ was there and the Holy Spirit was moving and I knew that all the time God had been listening.

The point is this: the validity and the effectuality of prayer are not determined or even affected by the subjective psychological condition of the one who prays. The thing that makes prayer valid and vital and moving and operative is "My faith takes hold of God's truth."

Brothers and sisters, soon now we shall be meeting Him. When you meet Him, and I speak reverently, when you feel His arms around you, and when you embrace as well as adore Him, don't you want to be able to look into that wonderful face and say, "Lord, at last I'm seeing face-to-face the One I have for years known heart to heart."

Why don't you resolve that from this time on you will be a praying Christian? You will never, never, never regret it! Never!

Re: Will and Emotions -J. Sidlow Baxter - posted by Kadmiel (), on: 2005/9/7 15:16

Greg,

Wow! Thank you ever so much for sharing that. I have to have it for my diary now (smiling). That was so awesome and it spoke volumes to me personally. Bless you.

Re: Will and Emotions -J. Sidlow Baxter - posted by Warrior4Jah (), on: 2005/9/7 16:09

I want to pray and find myself not praying..
I want to read His word but I feel myself not reading..
I want to be with God and find myself not near Him..

This 'war' with the flesh is so hard.
There is this voice.. I recently had it while I was spending time readin the Bible and pray..
Why don't you turn on our computer? After I did I found that I actually had nothing to do on it.. :-?

Actually this 'voice' wasn't there there in the past.. perhaps thats why I just can't seem to spend time with God. It certainly makes Bible reading, studying, praying a 'dull' or not 'fun?' experience. There are other things to do that are much nicer! (as I need to satisfy something)

Is it a matter of disciplin?

Re:, on: 2005/9/8 17:38

Warrior :-(?

Sup with all'a this ?

How about just slappin' yourself once ?

Of course I'm only kidding, but your "life" depends on all those things you claim you "want to do" at the top there.

If you allow yourself to get into this pattern and start waiting for someone or something or even God Himself to "push you along",,,, you'll get "voices" alrighty.

Shake yourself friend and realize, if you're not moving forward, your moving 'backward', because spiritualality is never 'stationary'. It's like a moving river. You either paddle up stream, or lay 'still' and let it take you 'back down river'.

YOU have to decide for yourself - and once and for all - to "choose ye this day whom you will serve".

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, etc. etc.

Get a notebook and start writing down the verses that mention 'our' responsibility in this walk.

It's Work ... but if you Love Him, well

Love you, you know.
Annie

Re: - posted by Warrior4Jah (), on: 2005/9/8 18:34

Well yes Annie,

Sometimes I just get plain confused..
Ofcourse I can't just stay stationary.. thats why warning bells go off when it does happen.

Perhaps its just new for me.. we are urged to run the race as if we where to win it. I do believe God will carry me over some spots.. but still I have to choose.. I have to run.. :-)

I have to say that the first period after I got 'back' to God was probably very much God helping me getting on my way.

Yes I've chosen 'once and for all' who I wanted to serve.. Still I tend to mess up at times.. Still Jesus wants to forgive me for that! Still I want to serve Him.

Now you start about responsibility.. quite funny you bring that up.. :-)

God bless,
Jonathan

Re: Warrior Jonathan ~, on: 2005/9/9 0:08

Once again my brother-friend, you make me :-D .

Lord God BLESS you powerfully. Amen !

Re: Will and Emotions -J. Sidlow Baxter, on: 2007/4/25 21:48

I decided to browse through some old threads and I came across this article by J. Sidlow Baxter. I first heard this story of Baxter, his will and emotions from Gerhard DuToit. It has stuck with me ever since. Those words, 'Come on, will, it's time for prayer' come back ever so often when my will wants to pray but the emotions are dragging their heels. :)

If you've never read this before, take the time to do so. It's very encouraging not to let our emotions rule us in this area of prayer.

As Gerhard DuToit says, "Forty percent of my praying is desire and sixty percent determination, if it were the other way around I would only pray when I feel like it."

Re: Will and Emotions -J. Sidlow Baxter - posted by Tears_of_joy, on: 2007/5/7 3:48

A very profitable reading, thank you.

Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/5/7 3:56

blessed reading! i have been struggling to get up early in the mornings to pray, before the rest of the house awakes, i find it most difficult, but i got some god help here in this article , and by Gods grace and some help from *will* ill have victory over emotions

thank you

Christian

Re: - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2007/5/7 9:34

Thank you for this. I think we all can identify with this struggle - the will versus the emotions. The spirit is always willing; the flesh is weak. What Baxter says here is but an echo of the praying saints of old: if you stick with prayer, and resolve to drive on despite the constant haranguings of your emotions, the screaming and hollering will become more and more mitigated. The emotions will soon begin to step in line with the spirit of prayer. Oh, but to get to that point!

It doesn't happen overnight! Can you think of *one* beneficial disciplinary habit that is won overnight? Mastering the ministry of prevailing prayer, I believe, is the most difficult of the many difficulties a Christian can face. I have sailed this sea and had seasons of great success in war and adventure, only to once again smash my hull on those jutting rocks of emotion.

May the Lord pour out on all of us a profound spirit of prayer...and may we all fight and deny-self to keep it fresh and pulsating and throbbing and burning like a flame of fire.