

Historical Reflection

Earnestness: Its Marring And Maintenance



by Charles Haddon Spurgeon

If I were asked -- What in a Christian minister is the most essential quality for securing success in winning souls for Christ? I should reply, "earnestness": and if I were asked a second or a third time, I should not vary the answer, for personal observation drives me to the conclusion that, as a rule, real success is proportionate to the preacher's earnestness. Both great men and little men succeed if they are thoroughly alive unto God, and fail if they are not so. We know men of eminence who have gained a high reputation, who attract large audiences, and obtain much admiration, who nevertheless are very low in the scale as soul-winners: for all they do in that direction they might as well have been lecturers on anatomy, or political orators. At the same time we have seen their compeers in ability so useful in the business of conversion that evidently their acquirements and gifts have been no hindrance to them, but the reverse; for by the intense and devout use of their powers, and by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, they have turned many to righteousness. We have seen brethren of very scanty abilities who have been terrible drags upon a church, and have proved as inefficient in their spheres as blind men in an observatory; but, on the other hand, men of equally small attainments are well known to us as mighty hunters before the Lord, by whose holy energy many hearts have been captured for the Saviour. I delight in M'Cheyne's remark, "It is not so much great talents that God blesses, as great likeness to Christ." In many instances ministerial success is traceable almost entirely to an intense zeal, a consuming passion for souls, and an eager enthusiasm in the cause of God, and we believe that in every case, other things being equal, men prosper in the divine service in proportion as their hearts are blazing with holy love. "The God that answereth by fire, let him be God;" and the man who has the tongue of fire, let him be God's minister.

Brethren, you and I must, as preachers, be always earnest in reference to our pulpit work. Here we must labour to attain the very highest degree of excellence. Often have I said to my brethren that the pulpit is the Thermopylae of Christendom: there the fight will be lost or won. To us ministers the maintenance of our power in the pulpit should be our great concern, we must occupy that spiritual watch-tower with our hearts and minds awake and in full rigour. It will not avail us to be laborious pastors if we are not earnest preachers. We shall be forgiven a great many sins in the matter of pastoral visitation if the people's souls are really fed on the Sabbath-day; but fed they must be, and nothing else will make up for it. The failures of most ministers who drift down the stream may be traced to inefficiency in the pulpit. The chief business of a captain is to know how to handle his vessel; nothing can compensate for deficiency there, and so our pulpits must be our main care, or all will go awry. Dogs often fight because the supply of bones is scanty, and congregations frequently quarrel because they do not get sufficient spiritual meat to keep them happy and peaceful. The ostensible ground of dissatisfaction may be something else, but nine times out of ten deficiency in their rations is at the bottom of the mutinies which occur in our churches. Men, like all other animals, know when they are fed, and they usually feel good tempered after a meal; and so when our hearers come to the house of God, and obtain "food convenient for them," they forget a great many grievances in the joy of the festival, but if we send them away hungry they will be in as irritable a mood as a bear robbed of her whelps.

Now, in order that we may be acceptable, *we must be earnest when actually engaged in preaching*. Cecil has well said that the spirit and manner of a preacher often effect more than his matter. To go into the pulpit with the listless air of those gentlemen who loll about, and lean upon the cushion as if they had at last reached a quiet resting place, is, I think, most censurable. To rise before the people to deal out commonplaces which have cost you nothing, as if anything would do for a sermon, is not merely derogatory to the dignity of our office, but is offensive in the sight of God. We must be earnest in the pulpit for our own sakes, for we shall not long be able to maintain our position as leaders in the church of God if we are dull. Moreover, for the sake of our church members, and converted people, we must be energetic, for if we are not zealous, neither will they be. It is not in the order of nature that rivers should run uphill, and it does not often happen that zeal rises from the pew to the pulpit. It is natural that it should flow down from us to our hearers; the pulpit must therefore stand at a high level of ardor, if we are, under God, to make and to keep our people fervent. Those who attend our ministry have a great deal to do during the week. Many of them have family trials, and heavy personal burdens to carry, and they frequently come into the assembly cold and listless, with thoughts wandering hither and thither; it is ours to take those thoughts and thrust them into the furnace of our own earnestness, melt them by holy contemplation and by intense appeal, and pour them out into the mould of the truth. A blacksmith can do nothing when his fire is out, and in this respect he is the type of a minister. If all the lights in the outside world are quenched, the lamp which burns in the sanctuary ought still to remain undimmed; for that fire no curfew must ever be rung. We must regard the people as the wood and the sacrifice, well wetted a second and a third time by the cares of the week, upon which, like the prophet, we must pray down the fire from heaven. A dull minister creates a dull audience. You cannot expect the office-bearers and the members of the church to travel by steam if their own chosen pastor still drives the old broadwheeled waggon. We ought each one to be like that reformer who is described as "*Vividus vultus, vividi oculi, vividce manus, denique omniu virida,*" which I would rather freely render – "a countenance beaming with life, eyes and hands full of life, in fine, a vivid preacher, altogether alive."

"Thy soul must overflow, if thou
Another's soul would reach,
It needs the overflow of heart
To give the lips full speech."

The world also will suffer as well as the church if we are not fervent. We cannot expect a gospel devoid of earnestness to have any mighty effect upon the unconverted around us. One of the excuses most soporific to the conscience of an ungodly generation is that of half-heartedness in the preacher. If the sinner finds the preacher nodding while he talks of judgment to come, he concludes that the judgment is a thing which the preacher is dreaming about, and he resolves to regard it all as mere fiction. The whole outside world receives serious danger from the cold-hearted preacher, for it draws the same conclusion as the individual sinner: it perseveres in its own listlessness, it gives its strength to its own transient objects, and thinks itself wise for so doing. How can it be otherwise? If the prophet leaves his heart behind him when he professes to speak in the name of God, what can he expect but that the ungodly around him will persuade themselves that there is nothing in his message, and that his commission is a farce.

Hear how Whitefield preached, and never dare to be lethargic again. Winter says of him that "sometimes he exceedingly wept, and was frequently so overcome, that for a few seconds you would suspect he never would recover; and when he did, nature required some little time to compose herself. I hardly ever knew him go through a sermon without weeping more or less. His voice was often interrupted by his affections; and I have heard him say in the pulpit, 'You blame me for weeping; but how can I help it, when you will not weep for yourselves, although your own immortal souls are on the verge of destruction, and, for aught I know, you are hearing your last sermon, and may never more have an opportunity to have Christ offered to you?'"

Earnestness in the pulpit must be real. It is not to be mimicked. We have seen it counterfeited, but every person with a grain of sense could detect the imposition. To stamp the foot, to smite the desk, to perspire, to shout, to bawl, to quote the pathetic portions of other people's sermons, or to pour out voluntary tears from a watery eye will never make up for true agony of soul and real tenderness of spirit. The best piece

of acting is but acting; those who only look at appearances may be pleased by it, but lovers of reality will be disgusted. What presumption! -- what hypocrisy it is by skilful management of the voice to mimic the passion which is the genuine work of the Holy Ghost. Let mere actors beware, lest they be found sinning against the Holy Spirit by their theatrical performances. We must be earnest in the pulpit because we are earnest everywhere; we must blaze in our discourses because we are continually on fire. Zeal which is stored up to be let off only on grand occasions is a gas which will one day destroy its proprietor. Nothing but truth may appear in the house of the Lord; all affectation is strange fire, and excites the indignation of the God of truth. Be earnest, and you will *seem* to be earnest. A burning heart will soon find for itself a flaming tongue. To sham earnestness is one of the most contemptible of dodges for courting popularity; let us abhor the very thought. Go and be listless in the pulpit if you are so in your heart. Be slow in speech, drawling in tone, and monotonous in voice, if so you can best express your soul; even that would be infinitely better than to make your ministry a masquerade and yourself an actor.

But our zeal while in the act of preaching must be followed up by intense solicitude as to the after results; for if it be not so we shall have cause to question our sincerity. God will not send a harvest of souls to those who never watch or water the fields which they have sown. When the sermon is over we have only let down the net which afterwards we are to draw to shore by prayer and watchfulness. Here, I think, I cannot do better than allow a far abler advocate to plead with you, and quote the words of Dr. Watts: -- "Be very solicitous about the success of your labours in the pulpit. Water the seed sown, not only with public, but secret prayer. Plead with God importunately that he would not suffer you to labour in vain. Be not like that foolish bird the ostrich, which lays her eggs in the dust, and leaves them there regardless whether they come to life or not (Job 39:14-17). God hath not given her understanding, but let not this folly be your character or practice; labour, and watch, and pray, that your sermons and the fruit of your studies may become words of Divine life to souls.

It is an observation of pious Mr. Baxter (which I have read somewhere in his works), that he has never known any considerable success from the brightest and noblest talents, nor from the most excellent kind of preaching, nor even when the preachers themselves have been truly religious, if they have not had a solicitous concern for the success of their ministrations. Let the awful and important thought of souls being saved by our preaching, or left to perish and to be condemned to hell through our negligence, -- I say, let this awful and tremendous thought dwell ever upon our spirits. We are made watchmen to the house of Israel, as Ezekiel was; and, if we give no warning of approaching danger, the souls of multitudes may perish through our neglect; but the blood of souls will be terribly required at our bands (Ezekiel 3:17)."

Such considerations should make us instant in season and out of season, and cause us at all times to be clad with zeal as with a cloak. We ought to be all alive, and always alive. A pillar of light and fire should be the preacher's fit emblem. Our ministry must be emphatic, or it will never affect these thoughtless times; and to this end our hearts must be habitually fervent, and our whole nature must be fired with an all-consuming passion for the glory of God and the good of men.

Now, my brethren, it is sadly true that holy earnestness when we once obtain it may be easily damped; and as a matter of fact it is more frequently chilled in the loneliness of a village pastorate than amid the society of warm-hearted Christian brethren. Adam, the author of "Private Thoughts," once observed that "a poor country parson, fighting against the devil in his parish, has nobler ideas than Alexander the Great ever had; "and I will add, that he needs more than Alexander's ardour to enable him to continue victorious in his holy warfare. Sleepy Hollow and Dormer's Land will be too much for us unless we pray for daily quickening.

Yet town life has its dangers too, and zeal is apt to burn low through numerous engagements, like a fire which is scattered abroad instead of being raked together into a heap. Those incessant knocks at our door, and perpetual visits from idle persons, are so many buckets of cold water thrown upon our devout zeal. We must by some means secure uninterrupted meditation, or we shall lose power. London is a peculiarly trying sphere on this account.

Zeal also is more quickly checked after long years of continuance in the same service than when novelty gives a charm to our work. Mr. Wesley says, in his fifteenth volume of "Journals and Letters," "I know that, were I myself to preach one whole year in one place, I should preach both myself and most of my congregation asleep." What then must it be to abide in the same pulpit for many years! In such a case it is not the pace that kills, but the length of the race. Our God is evermore the same, enduring for ever, and he alone can enable us to endure even to the end. He, who at the end of twenty years' ministry among the same people is more alive than ever, is a great debtor to the quickening Spirit.

Earnestness may be, and too often is, diminished by neglect of study. If we have not exercised ourselves in the word of God, we shall not preach with the fervour and grace of the man who has fed upon the truth he delivers, and is therefore strong and ardent. An Englishman's earnestness in battle depends, according to some authorities, upon his being well fed: he has no stomach for the fight if he is starved. If we are well-nourished by sound gospel food we shall be vigorous and fervent. An old blunt commander at Cadiz is described by Selden as thus addressing his soldiers: -- "What a shame will it be, you Englishman, who feed upon good beef and beer, to let these rascally Spaniards beat you that eat nothing but oranges and lemons!" His philosophy and mine agree: he expected courage and valour from those who were well nourished. Brethren, never neglect your spiritual meals, or you will lack stamina and your spirits will sink. Live on the substantial doctrines of grace, and you will outlive and out-work those who delight in the pastry and syllabubs of "modern thought."

Zeal may, on the other hand, be damped by our studies. There is, no doubt, such a thing as feeding the brain at the expense of the heart, and many a man in his aspirations to be literary has rather qualified himself to write reviews than to preach sermons. A quaint evangelist was wont to say that Christ hung crucified beneath Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. It ought not to be so, but it has often happened that the student in college has gathered fuel, but lost the fire which is to kindle it. It will be to our everlasting disgrace if we bury our flame beneath the faggots which are intended to sustain it. If we degenerate into bookworms it will be to the old serpent's delight, and to our own misery.

True earnestness may be greatly lessened by levity in conversation, and especially by jesting with brother ministers, in whose company we often take greater liberties than we would like to do in the society of other Christians. There are excellent reasons for our feeling at home with our brethren, but if this freedom be carried too far we shall soon feel that we have suffered damage through vanity of speech. Cheerfulness is one thing, and frivolity is another; he is a wise man who by a serious happiness of conversation steers between the dark rocks of moroseness, and the quicksands of levity.

We shall often find ourselves in danger of being deteriorated in zeal by the cold Christian people with whom we come in contact. What terrible wet blankets some professors are! Their remarks after a sermon are enough to stagger you. You think that surely you have moved the very stones to feeling, but you painfully learn that these people are utterly unaffected. You have been burning and they are freezing; you have been pleading as for life or death and they have been calculating how many seconds the sermon occupied, and grudging you the odd five minutes beyond the usual hour, which your earnestness compelled you to occupy in pleading with men's souls. If these frost-bitten men should happen to be the officers of the church, from whom you naturally expect the warmest sympathy, the result is chilling to the last degree, and all the more so if you are young and inexperienced: it is as though an angel were confined in an iceberg. "Thou shalt not yoke the ox and the ass together" was a merciful precept: but when a laborious, ox-like minister comes to be yoked to a deacon who is not another ox, it becomes hard work to plough. Some crabbed professors have a great deal to answer for in this matter. One of them not so very long ago went up to an earnest young evangelist who had been doing his best, and said, "Young man, do you call that preaching?" He thought himself faithful, but he was cruel and uncourteous, and though the good brother survived the blow it was none the less brutal. Such offences against the Lord's little ones are, I hope, very rare, but they are very grievous, and tend to turn aside our hopeful youth.

Frequently the audience itself, as a whole, will damp your zeal. You can see by their very look and manner that the people are not appreciating your warm-hearted endeavours, and you feel discouraged. Those empty benches also are a serious trial, and if the place be large, and the congregation small, the influence is seriously depressing: it is not every man who can bear to be "a voice crying in the

wilderness." Disorder in the congregation also sadly afflicts sensitive speakers. The walking up the aisle of a woman with a pair of pattens, the squeak of a pair of new boots, the frequent fall of umbrellas and walking-sticks, the crying of infants, and especially the consistent lateness of half the assembly; -- all these tend to irritate the mind, take it off from its object, and diminish its ardour. We hardly like to confess that our hearts are so readily affected by such trifles, but it is so, and not at all to be wondered at. As pots of the most precious ointment are more often spoilt by dead flies than by dead camels, so insignificant matters will destroy earnestness more readily than greater annoyances. Under a great discouragement a man pulls himself together, and then throws himself upon his God, and receives divine strength: but under lesser depressions he may possibly worry, and the trifle will irritate and fester till serious consequences follow.

Pardon my saying that the condition of your body must be attended to, especially in the matter of eating, for any measure of excess may injure your digestion and make you stupid when you should be fervent. From the memoir of Duncan Matheson I cull an anecdote which is much to the point: "In a certain place where evangelistic meetings were being held, the lay preachers, among whom was Mr. Matheson, were sumptuously entertained at the house of a Christian gentleman. After dinner they went to the meeting, not without some difference of opinion as to the best method of conducting the services of the evening. 'The Spirit is grieved; he is not here at all, I feel it,' said one of the younger, with a whine which somewhat contrasted with his previous unbounded enjoyment of the luxuries of the table. 'Nonsense,' replied Matheson, who hated all whining and morbid spirituality; 'Nothing of the sort. You have just eaten too much dinner, and you feel heavy.'" Duncan Matheson was right, and a little more of his common sense would be a great gain to some who are ultra spiritual, and attribute all their moods of feeling to some supernatural cause when the real reason lies far nearer to hand. Has it not often happened that dyspepsia has been mistaken for backsliding, and a bad digestion has been set down as a hard heart? I say no more: a word to the wise is enough.

Many physical and mental causes may operate to create apparent lethargy where there is at heart intense earnestness. Upon some of us a disturbed night, a change in the weather, or an unkind remark, will produce the most lamentable effect. But those who complain of want of zeal are often the most zealous persons in the world, and a confession of want of life is itself an argument that life exists, and is not without vigour. Do not spare yourselves and become self-satisfied; but, on the other hand, do not slander yourselves and sink into despondency. Your own opinion of your state is not worth much: ask the Lord to search you.

Long continued labour without visible success is another frequent damp upon zeal, though if rightly viewed it ought to be an incentive to sevenfold diligence. Quaint Thomas Fuller observes that "herein God hath humbled many painstaking pastors, in making them to be clouds to rain, not over Arabia the happy, but over Arabia the desert and stony." If non-success humbles us it is well, but if it discourages us, and especially if it leads us to think bitterly of more prosperous brethren, we ought to look about us with grave concern. It is possible that we have been faithful and have adopted wise methods, and are in our right place, and yet we have not struck the mark; we shall probably be heavily bowed down and feel scarcely able to continue the work; but if we pluck up courage and increase our earnestness we shall one day reap a rich harvest, which will more than repay us for all our waiting. "The husbandman *waiteth* for the precious fruits of the earth;" and with a holy patience begotten of zeal we must wait on, and never doubt that the time to favour Zion will yet come.

Nor must it ever be forgotten that the flesh is weak and naturally inclined to slumber. We need a constant renewal of the divine impulse which first started us in the way of service. We are not as arrows, which find their way to the target by the sole agency of the force with which they started from the bow; nor as bird, which bear within themselves their own motive power: we must be borne onward, like ships at sea, by the constant power of the heavenly wind, or we shall make no headway. Preachers sent from God are not musical boxes which, being once wound up, will play through their set tunes, but they are trumpets which are utterly mute until the living breath causes them to give forth a certain sound. We read of some who are dumb dogs, given to slumber, and such would be the character of us all if the grace of God did not prevent. We have need to watch against a careless, indifferent spirit, and if we do not is we shall soon be as lukewarm as Laodicea itself.

Remembering then, dear brethren, that we must be in earnest, and that we cannot counterfeit earnestness, or find a substitute for it, and that it is very easy for us to lose it, let us consider for a while the ways and means for retaining all our fervour and gaining more. If it is to continue, *our earnestness must be kindled at an immortal flame*, and I know of but one -- the flame of the love of Christ, which many waters cannot quench. A spark from that celestial sun will be as undying as the source from whence it came. If we can get it, yea, if we have it, we shall still be full of enthusiasm, however long we may live, however greatly we may be tried, and however much for many reasons we may be discouraged. To continue fervent for life we must possess the fervour of heavenly life to begin with. Have we this fire? We must have the truth burnt into our souls, or it will not burn upon our lips. Do we understand this? The doctrines of grace must be part and parcel of ourselves, interwoven with the warp and woof of our being, and this can only be effected by the same had which originally made the fabric. We shall never lose our love to Christ and our love to souls if the Lord has given them to us. The Holy Spirit makes zeal for God to be a permanent principle of life rather than a passion, -- does the Holy Spirit rest upon us, or is our present fervour a mere human feeling? We ought upon this point to be seriously inquisitorial with our hearts, pressing home the question: have we the holy fire which springs from a true call to the ministry? If not, why are we here? If a man *can* live without preaching, let him live without preaching. If a man can be content without being a soul-winner -- I had almost said he had better not attempt the work, but I had rather say -- let him seek to have the stone taken out of his heart, that he may feel for perishing men. Till then, as a minister, he may do positive mischief by occupying the place of one who might have succeeded in the blessed work in which *he* must be a failure.

The fire of our earnestness must burn upon the hearth of faith in the truths which we preach, and faith in their power to bless mankind when the Spirit applies them to the heart. He who declares what may or what may not be true, and what he considers upon the whole to be as good as any other form of teaching, will of necessity make a very feeble preacher. How can he be zealous about that which he is not sure of? If he knows nothing of the inward power of the truth within his own heart, if he has never tasted and handled of the good word of life, how can he be enthusiastic? But if the Holy Ghost has taught us in secret places, and made our soul to understand within itself the doctrine which we are to proclaim, then shall we speak evermore with the tongue of fire. Brother, do not begin to teach others till the Lord has taught *you*. It must be dreary work to parrot forth dogmas which have no interest for your heart, and carry no conviction to your understanding. I would prefer to pick oakum or turn a crank for my breakfast, like the paupers in the casual ward, rather than be the slave of a congregation and bring them spiritual meat of which I never taste myself. And then how dreadful the end of such a course must be! How fearful the account to be rendered at the last by one who publicly taught what he did not heartily believe, and perpetrated this detestable hypocrisy in the name of God!

Brethren, if the fire is brought *from* the right place *to* the right place, we have a good beginning; and the main elements of a glorious ending. Kindled by a live coal, borne to our lips from off the altar by the winged cherub, the fire has begun to feed upon our inmost spirit, and there it will burn though Satan himself should labour to stamp it out.

Yet the best flame in the world needs renewing. I know not whether immortal spirits, like the angels, drink on the wing, and feed on some superior manna prepared in heaven for them; but the probability is that no created being, though immortal, is quite free from the necessity to receive from without sustenance for its strength. Certainly the flame of zeal in the renewed heart, however divine, must be continually fed with fresh fuel. Even the lamps of the sanctuary needed oil. *Feed the flame, my brother, feed it frequently*; feed it with holy thought and contemplation, especially with thought about your work, your motives in pursuing it, the design of it, the helps that are waiting for you, and the grand results of it if the Lord be with you. Dwell much upon the love of God to sinners, and the death of Christ on their behalf, and the work of the Spirit upon men's hearts. Think of what must be wrought in men's hearts ere they can be saved. Remember, you are not sent to whiten tombs, but to open them, and this is a work which no man can perform unless, like the Lord Jesus at the grave of Lazarus, he groans in spirit; and even then he is powerless apart from the Holy Ghost. Meditate with deep solemnity upon the fate of the lost sinner, and, like Abraham, when you get up early to go to the place where you commune with God, cast an eye towards Sodom and see the smoke thereof going up like the smoke of a furnace. Shun all views of future

punishment which would make it appear less terrible, and so take off the edge of your anxiety to save immortals from the quenchless flame. If men are indeed only a nobler kind of ape, and expire as the beasts, you may well enough let them die unpitied; but if their creation in the image of God involves immortality, and there is any fear that through their unbelief they will bring upon themselves endless woe, arouse yourselves to the agonies of the occasion, and be ashamed at the bare suspicion of unconcern. Think much also of the bliss of the sinner saved, and like holy Baxter derive rich arguments for earnestness from “the saints' everlasting rest.” Go to the heavenly hills and gather fuel there; pile on the glorious logs of the wood of Lebanon, and the fire will burn freely and yield a sweet perfume as each piece of choice cedar glows in the flame. There will be no fear of your being lethargic if you are continually familiar with eternal realities.

Above all, feed the flame with intimate fellowship with Christ. No man was ever cold in heart who lived with Jesus on such terms as John and Mary did of old, for *he* makes men's hearts burn within them. I never met with a half-hearted preacher who was much in communion with the Lord Jesus. The zeal of God's house ate up our Lord, and when we come into contact with him it begins to consume us also, and we feel that we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard in his company, nor can we help speaking of them with the fervour which comes out of actual acquaintance with them. Those of us who have been preaching for these five-and-twenty years sometimes feel that the same work, the same subject, the same people, and the same pulpit, are together apt to beget a feeling of monotony, and monotony may soon lead on to weariness. But then we call to mind another sameness, which becomes our complete deliverance; there is the same Saviour, and we may go to him in the same way as we did at the first, since he is “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever.” In his presence we drink in the new wine and renew our youth. He is the fountain, for ever flowing with the cool, refreshing water of life, and in fellowship with him we find our souls quickened into perpetual energy. Beneath his smile our long-accustomed work is always delightful, and wears a brighter charm than novelty could have conferred. We gather new manna for our people every morning, and as we go to distribute it we feel an anointing of fresh oil distilling upon us. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Newly come from the presence of him that walketh among the golden candlesticks we are ready to write or speak unto the churches in the power which he alone can give. Soldiers of Christ, you can only be worthy of your Captain by abiding in fellowship with him, and listening to his voice as Joshua did when he stood by Jordan, and enquired – “What saith my Lord unto his servant?”

Fan the flame as well as feed it. Fan it with much supplication. We cannot be too urgent with one another upon this point: no language can be too vehement with which to implore ministers to pray. There is for our brethren and ourselves an absolute necessity for prayer. Necessity! -- I hardly like to talk of that, let me rather speak of the deliciousness of prayer -- the wondrous sweetness and divine felicity which come to the soul that lives in the atmosphere of prayer, John Fox said, “The time we spend with God in secret is the sweetest time, and the best improved. Therefore, if thou lovest thy life, be in love with prayer.” The devout Mr. Hervey resolved on the bed of sickness – “If God shall spare my life, I will read less and pray more.” John Cooke, of Maidenhead, wrote – “The business, the pleasure, the honour and advantage of prayer press on my spirit with increasing force every day.” A deceased pastor when drawing near his end, exclaimed, “I wish I had prayed more;” that wish many of us might utter. There should be special seasons for devotion, and it is well to maintain them with regularity; but the spirit of prayer is even better than the habit of prayer: to pray without ceasing is better than praying at intervals. It will be a happy circumstance if we can frequently bow the knee with devout brethren, and I think it ought to be a rule with us ministers never to separate without a word of prayer. Much more intercession would rise to heaven if we made a point of this, especially those of us who have been fellow-students. If it be possible, let prayer and praise sanctify each meeting of friend with friend. It is a refreshing practice to have a minute or two of supplication in the vestry before preaching if you can call in three or four warmhearted deacons or other brethren. It always nerves me for the fight. But, for all that, to fan your earnestness to a vehement flame you should seek the spirit of continual prayer, so as to pray in the Holy Ghost, everywhere and always; in the study, in the vestry, and in the pulpit. It is well to be pleading evermore with God, when sitting down in the pulpit, when rising to give out the hymn, when reading the chapter, and while delivering the sermon; holding up one hand to God empty, in order to receive, and with the other hand dispensing to the people what the Lord bestows. Be in preaching like a conduit pipe between the everlasting and infinite supplies

of heaven and the all but boundless needs of men, and to do this you must reach heaven, and keep up the communication without a break. Pray *for* the people while you preach *to* them; speak with God for them while you are speaking with them for God. Only so can you expect to be continually in earnest. A man does not often rise from his knees unearnest; or, if he does, he had better return to prayer till the sacred flame descends upon his soul. Adam Clarke once said, "Study yourself to death, and then pray yourself alive again." it was a wise sentence. Do not attempt the first without the second; neither dream that the second can be honestly accomplished without the first. Work and pray, as well as watch and play; but pray always.

Stir the fire also by frequent attempts at fresh service. Shake yourself out of routine by breaking away from the familiar fields of service and reclaiming virgin soil. I suggest to you, as a subordinate but very useful means of keeping the heart fresh, the frequent addition of new work to your usual engagements. I would say to brethren who are soon going away from the College, to settle in spheres where they will come into contact with but few superior minds, and perhaps will be almost alone in the higher walks of spirituality, -- look well to yourselves that you do not become flat, stale, and unprofitable, and keep yourselves sweet by maintaining an enterprising spirit. You will have a good share of work to do, and few to help you in it, and the years will grind along heavily; watch against this, and use all means to prevent your becoming dull and sleepy, and among them use that which experience leads me to press upon you. I find it good for myself to have some new work always on hand. The old and usual enterprises must be kept up, but somewhat must be added to them. It should be with us as with the squatters upon our commons, the fence of our garden must roll outward a foot or two, and enclose a little more of the common every year. Never say "it is enough," nor accept the policy of "rest and be thankful." Do all you possibly can, and then do a little more. I do not know by what process the gentleman who advertises that he can make short people taller attempts the task, but I should imagine that if any result could be produced in the direction of adding a cubit to one's stature it would be by every morning reaching up as high as you possibly can on tiptoe, and, having done that, trying day by day to reach a little higher. This is certainly the way to grow mentally and spiritually, -- "reaching forth to that which is before." If the old should become just a little stale, add fresh endeavours to it, and the whole mass will be leavened anew. Try it and you will soon discover the virtue of breaking up fresh ground, invading new provinces of the enemy, and scaling fresh heights to set the banner of the Lord thereon. This is, of course, a secondary expedient to those of which we have already spoken, but still it is a very useful one, and may greatly benefit you. In a country town, say of two thousand inhabitants, you will, after a time, feel, "Well, now, I have done about all I can in this place." What then? There is a hamlet some four miles off, set about opening a room there. If one hamlet is occupied, make an excursion to another, and spy out the land, and set the relief of its spiritual destitution before you as an ambition. When the first place is supplied, think of a second. It is your duty, it will also be your safeguard. Everybody knows what interest there is in fresh work. A gardener will become weary of his toil unless he is allowed to introduce new flowers into the hothouse, or to cut the beds upon the lawn in a novel shape; all monotonous work is unnatural and wearying to the mind, therefore it is wisdom to give variety to your labour.

Far more weighty is the advice, *keep close to God, and keep close to your fellow men whom you are seeking to bless*. Abide under the shadow of the Almighty, dwell where Jesus manifests himself, and live in the power of the Holy Ghost. Your very life lies in this. Whitefield mentions a lad who was so vividly conscious of the presence of God that he would generally walk the roads with his hat off. How I wish we were always in such a mood. It would be no trouble to maintain earnestness then.

Take care, also, to be on most familiar terms with those whose souls are committed to your care. Stand in the stream and fish. Many preachers are utterly ignorant as to how the bulk of the people are living; they are at home among books, but quite at sea among men. What would you think of a botanist who seldom saw real flowers, or an astronomer who never spent a night with the stars? Would they be worthy of the name of men of science? Neither can a minister of the gospel be anything but a mere empiric unless he mingles with men, and studies character for himself. "Studies from the life," -- gentlemen, we must have plenty of these if we are to paint to the life in our sermons. Read men as well as books, and love *men* rather than opinions, or you will be inanimate preachers.

Get into close quarters with those who are in an anxious state. Watch their difficulties, their throes and pangs of conscience. It will help to make you earnest when you see their eagerness to find peace. On the other hand, when you see how little earnest the bulk of men remain, it may help to make you more zealous for their arousing. Rejoice with those who are finding the Saviour: this is a grand means of revival for your own soul. When you are enabled to bring a mourner to Jesus you will feel quite young again. It will be as oil to your bones to hear a weeping penitent exclaim, "I see it all now! I believe, and my burden is gone: I am saved." Sometimes the rapture of newborn souls will electrify you into apostolic intensity. Who could not preach after having seen souls converted? Be on the spot when grace at last captures the lost sheep, that by sharing in the Great Shepherd's rejoicings you may renew your youth. Be in at the death with sinners, and you will be repaid for the weary chase after them which it may be you have followed for months and years. Grasp them with firm hold of love, and say, "Yes, by the grace of God, I have really won these souls," and your enthusiasm will flame forth.

If you have to labour in a large town I should recommend you to familiarize yourself, wherever your place of worship may be, with the poverty, ignorance, and drunkenness of the place. Go if you can with a City missionary into the poorest quarter, and you will see that which will astonish you, and the actual sight of the disease will make you eager to reveal the remedy. There is enough of evil to be seen even in the best streets of our great cities, but there is an unutterable depth of horror in the condition of the slums. As a doctor walks the hospitals, so ought you to traverse the lanes and courts to behold the mischief which sin has wrought. It is enough to make a man weep tears of blood to gaze upon the desolation which sin has made in the earth. One day with a devoted missionary would be a fine termination to your College course, and a fit preparation for work in your own sphere. See the masses living in their sins, defiled with drinking and Sabbath-breaking, rioting and blaspheming; and see them dying sodden and hardened, or terrified and despairing: surely this will rekindle expiring zeal if anything can do it. The world is full of grinding poverty, and crushing sorrow; shame and death are the portion of thousands, and it needs a great gospel to meet the dire necessities of men's souls. Verily it is so. Do you doubt it? Go and see for yourselves. Thus will you learn to preach a great salvation, and magnify the great Saviour, not with your mouth only, but with your heart; and thus will you be married to your work beyond all possibility of deserting it.

Death-beds are grand schools for us. They are intended to act as tonics to brace us to our work. I have come down from the bed-chambers of the dying, and thought that everybody was mad, and myself most of all. I have grudged the earnestness which men devoted to earthly things, and half said to myself, -- Why was that man driving along so hastily? Why was that woman walking out in such finery? Since they were all to die so soon, I thought nothing worth their doing but preparing to meet their God. To be often where men die will help us to teach them both to die and to live. M'Cheyne was wont to visit his sick or dying hearers on the Saturday afternoon, for, as he told Dr. James Hamilton, "Before preaching he liked to look over the verge."

I pray you, moreover, measure your work in the light of God. Are you God's servant or not? If you are, how can your heart be cold? Are you sent by a dying Saviour to proclaim his love and win the reward of his wounds, or are you not? If you are, how can you flag? Is the Spirit of God upon you? Has the Lord anointed you to preach glad tidings to the poor? If he has not, do not pretend to it. If he has, go in this thy might, and the Lord shall be thy strength. Yours is not a trade, or a profession. Assuredly if you measure it by the tradesman's measure it is the poorest business on the face of the earth. Consider it as a profession: who would not prefer any other, so far as golden gains or worldly honours are concerned? But if it be a divine calling, and you a miracle-worker, dwelling in the supernatural, and working not for time but for eternity, then you belong to a nobler guild, and to a higher fraternity than any that spring of earth and deal with time. Look at it aright, and you will own that it is a grand thing to be as poor as your Lord, if, like him, you may make many rich; you will feel that it is a glorious thing to be as unknown and despised as were your Lord's first followers, because you are making him known, whom to know is life eternal. You will be satisfied to be anything or to be nothing, and the thought of self will not enter your mind, or only cross it to be Scouted as a meanness not to be tolerated by a consecrated man. There is the point. Measure your work as it should be measured, and I am not afraid that your earnestness will be diminished. Gaze upon it by the light of the judgment day, and in view of the eternal rewards of faithfulness. Oh, brethren, the present joy of having saved a soul is overwhelmingly delightful; you have felt it, I trust, and know it now. To save a soul from going down to perdition brings to us a little heaven

below, but what must it be at the day of judgment to meet spirits redeemed by Christ, who learned the news of their redemption from our lips! We look forward to a blissful heaven in communion with our Master, but we shall also know the added joy of meeting those loved ones whom we led to Jesus by our ministry. Let us endure every cross, and despise all shame, for the joy which Jesus sets before us of winning men for him.

One more thought may help to keep up our earnestness. Consider the great evil which will certainly come upon us and upon our hearers if we be negligent in our work. “*They shall perish*” -- is not that a dreadful sentence? It is to me quite as awful as that which follows it, -- “but their blood will I require at watchman's hand.” How shall we describe the doom of an unfaithful minister? And every unearnest minister is unfaithful. I would infinitely prefer to be known as a murderer of men's bodies than as a destroyer of men's souls; neither do I know of any condition in which a man can perish so fatally, so infinitely, as in that of the man who preaches a gospel which he does not believe, and assumes the office of pastor over a people whose good he does not intensely desire. Let us pray to be found faithful always, and ever. God grant that the Holy Spirit may make and keep us so.

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