

The following chapter on prayer was taken from PRAYER AND THE LIVING

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Title: Grace and Method

Text: Revelation 3:20

The worst thing to say to a child is: "If you do that, Daddy won't love you any more." A child should never be made to feel he is earning his parents' love or that there is anything he could do which might kill that love. Now, I know a few people who have been made to feel this way by their parents, and all their lives they feel like they are walking on quicksand. What can they count on to be strong and secure if their parents' love, the first love they have known, has failed them.

And the same thing is true about God. The worst thing that can be taught ~~xx~~ about christianity is a conditional love of God. It really amazes me when people think that God will love them according to their deserts. The central meaning of Christianity is that God meets us, loves us, and helps us as we are. We don't have to earn that Love. It is already given to us. <sup>John 3:16</sup> Not only is this love shown in the life of Christ but our ability to receive and radiate this love is made possible to us by His continuing presence and power.

Why, then, is there any need of method or discipline in prayer? If God, is personal and understands and loves us as persons, why must there be special times and preparations for this deep relationship of prayer?

The fact is that most of the time we do not feel God's closeness. We have evidences of his closeness through growth of courage, understanding healing of body, or relationships. Sometimes we find that the sign and assurance of his presence is simply our doing what we ought to do. Occasionally God leads us to the banquet hall and we are given the gift of joy and delight in the conscious awareness of God. But this is seldom.

And I believe this is the central reason for discipline and method in prayer. It teaches us how to surrender - how to let go. It teaches us how to relax the body, the will, the intellect, and the emotions, and to turn these relaxed faculties over to a Power which is not ours. God can only work through us in a very limited way if he just work through our unrelaxed, unsurrendered, tightened-up selves.

~~It/doesn't~~ Danny once got a bad splinter in his finger. I wanted to help him and take the splinter out. But when I got the needle and sat down beside him and tried to take his hand, he clenched his hand into a tight fist and began to cry. ~~He~~ was making so much noise that he couldn't even hear ~~my~~ voice trying to comfort him and explain the procedure to him. His fingers were squeezed so tightly and the ~~Muscles~~ so tense that I could not take away the very thing that was hurting him.

This is exactly what happens when we pray to God. We call for help but are so tense and distrustful that God can't get through to us and help us. The discipline of prayer teaches us how to let God do the thing we are asking of him. It teaches us how to say "yes" to God as he takes us into his hands to heal us and remake us.

~~Now, I don't want to become to involve and spend a great deal of time discussing methods.~~

To say "yes" to God is the only thing we can do for him. All else he does for us. He gives us the health, the love, the strength and wisdom. We stand utterly in his life and power. But the choice whether or not to say "yes" arises from the choice of our own free will, and no one else in all creation can say it for us. Nor can any power in all creation stop us from saying "no" if we choose, and from going off into the bewildering darkness of our own fragmented will and being.

Some people can know without trying how to say "yes" to God's power, but most of us do not. We have to learn how, and the learning is helped and guided by God's presence. Every "Yes" we say to God when meeting the challenge of each new day, each new person, when facing joy or pain or uncertainty, enables us to enter more deeply into the grace which helps make the next "yes" easier. *as that is the method of God learning how to say yes*

*Technique*  
Now, it is not my purpose tonight to enter into a discussion on methods of prayer. I can recommend many excellent books on the subject. But, whatever method of prayer you use, remember that a life of prayer is based on the living Christ. It is not an anxious striving. We need not feel guilty if we lapse - as we will - sometimes for weeks at a time. We are not trying to prove anything, least of all our own worthiness. Christ himself is our goal, and if we surrender to him and keep on surrendering, we have already reached our goal. We are already planted in him, and our prayer life in him is part of a slow maturing process which will take this lifetime and the lifetime beyond to come to the fullness of perfection and fruition. We can relax and rejoice in this. If we have forgotten to pray, we can commend ourselves to Christ and begin again. It is being in him that matters, not how many times you fall down and rise again.

The life of prayer outside the strength of Christ is often a solemn, anxious, heavy striving, where a person feels it is all up to him whether or not he reaches the ineffable light, and if he fails, he fails. But this is ridiculous for the Christian. The Christian has learned that he will fail if he stands by himself. That is why he is standing in Christ. That is why Christ came into the world. The Christian has no need to defend himself to his conscience. He can laugh while he grows in the grace and method of Jesus Christ.