

“Renewing Prayer”

Isaiah 40:21-31, Mark 1:29-39, Psalm 63:1

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August 27, 2017

One hot July week, I was backpacking on the Appalachian trail. The summer had been rainy, so the trail was surrounded by lush vegetation. I enjoyed the shady, vibrant green hike. I stopped at a spring to fill my water bottles and read the sign, “Warning last water for 22 miles.” That seemed odd to me, so I got out my trail guide and learned that I would soon be entering an old zinc mining area where all the water and dirt was contaminated from the mine. I checked the elevations and estimated my water needs. Ideally, I would take 9 pounds of water, but I only had water bottle capacity for 6 pounds. Besides every ounce makes a big difference in backpacking. I decided I would ration the 6 pounds of water.

One thing that I had not factored into my water needs was the effect of the zinc mine on the vegetation. For twenty miles almost everything was dead, only a few anemic plants survived and no trees, so the hot sun ruthlessly beat down upon me significantly increasing my water needs. Mentally, things were made even worse by a large blue meandering river that paralleled the mountain in the valley below. Occasionally, I would see boats and dream of swimming in the cool refreshing water as I walked on the hot, dusty dark rocky trail that reflected the heat back at me like a blast furnace. Late that evening, my water was gone I was parched. I tried not to think of a cool refreshing drink of water or splashing the cool liquid on my face. Finally, I made it to a tiny spring where the water was safe. I was excuratingly tempted to dip my bottle in the water and take a drink immediately, but I knew I needed to filter the water which takes a few minutes. I threw my pack down, ripped out the filter, assembled it, and began pumping. All the while longing for a drink. I never realized before how many pumps it takes to get a few drops of water. It seemed like an eternity before I was able to have my refreshing drink.

The psalmist declares **Psalm 63:1** “**O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.**” Physically, nothing renews a hot, dehydrated body more than a drink of water. Spiritually, we need to be renewed by prayer. Isaiah knew it and he was shocked that some of the Israelites forgot. Isaiah lectured them, **Isaiah 40:28 NLT** “**Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth.**” Isaiah echoes the frustrations of Moses. These stiffed neck, stubborn people think they can do everything themselves. Isaiah implores them, “Remember God’s power to create and God’s presence to help.” God is almighty and all-powerful and yet still cares for each of us personally. Even the strongest, fittest athletes get tired at times, but God’s power and strength never diminish. God is never too tired or too busy to listen and help. God’s strength is the source of our strength. God’s love is the source of our love. God’s joy is the source of our joy. When you feel all of life crushing you and you cannot go another step, remember that you can call upon God to renew your strength. Isaiah put it this way, **Isaiah 40:28-31** “**God does not faint or grow weary; God’s understanding is unsearchable. God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.**”

Have you noticed the rhythm in all of life? The seasons? Day and night? Sleep and awake? Work and rest? The gospel of Mark explains the flurry of activity around Jesus. Jesus the teacher, healer, comforter, and friend. Jesus is working, giving, and loving. Jesus rests. Jesus keeps alone time. Jesus prays. **Mark 1:29-39** “**After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and**

Andrew's home. Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. So Jesus went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them. That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. The whole town gathered at the door to watch. So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak. Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. Later Simon and the others went out to find him. When they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." But Jesus replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came." So Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons."

Crowds were clamoring for Jesus. He has far more work to do than can be done. Jesus has the longest, most urgent "to do" list ever. So does Jesus get right to work. No! Jesus begins with prayer. Work is more productive with prayer. Life is more abundant with prayer. **"Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray."** There are numerous other accounts of Jesus making prayer a priority. Jesus physically rested and sought spiritual refreshment. Jesus prayed, letting God nourish his soul, soaking in God's love. There is a rhythm between the can-do Jesus, the resting Jesus, and the praying Jesus. We have the same access to God's world altering power and personal rejuvenation as Jesus did. The power of prayer.

Jesus became exhausted, spiritually drained and needed to be renewed by prayer. When we are the busiest, under the greatest amount of stress, when time seems so scarce, that is when we are the most in need of a moment of prayer. Martin Luther declared, "I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours per day in prayer." John Wesley believed that we can do nothing apart from the transformational power of prayer and spent three hours per day in prayer. John Hyde made prayer such a dominant part of his life that he compared prayer to oxygen, to breathe was to pray. Missionary Hudson Taylor began everyday with prayer and said, "Do not have your concert first and tune your instruments afterward. Begin the day with God."

When praying don't confuse quality with quantity. Think about your deepest, most significant relationship. I suspect only a few words, vocal inflections, looks or hug from that person can communicate volumes of information and feelings in seconds. If we are daily cultivating a deep relationship with God, then even on our busiest day just seconds in prayer can give us volumes of spiritual nourishment.

A couple of times a day I pray by visualizing I am with Jesus at the most beautiful, awe inspiring campsite. Jesus takes the burden of my backpack. We enjoy the majestic mountains and pristine lake by a warm fire. Jesus fills me with joyful love. We laugh together. When I am drained, or a crisis arises, I visualize that scene with Jesus. It only takes a few seconds for peace and energy to flow from God into me.

I have worked prayer into my routine. My first thought when I awake, in the shower in the morning, traveling to church, waiting in line, riding my bike, walking the labyrinth, breathing. When can you work renewing prayer into your life? On the way to school or work, in a meeting, cooking supper, exercising or any routine task. Prayer is unique for each person.

Over the years I have prayed in numerous ways. Every so often one of my ways of praying dries up for me. After a little searching, reading, spiritual direction, seeking advice from others, I find a different form of prayer. The internet and bookstores have an abundance of devotions and different forms of prayer. Talk to your family and friends about their forms of prayer. Make an appointment with me to discuss prayer.

C. S. Lewis writes, “It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.”

Every morning I strive to have my first thoughts be a prayer of thanksgiving. I give thanks for five things, happenings, or people for which I am grateful.

There are at least three aspects of prayer, speaking, listening and silence. Reading scripture, listening to music, viewing art, mindful eating, seeking spiritual advice are all ways to listen to God. Silence, being still and knowing God is refreshing.

If we rely on our own strength we will faint, become weary, and fall exhausted. If we connect ourselves to the unlimited anytime, anywhere power of prayer, we will be renewed.

Besides the strength and renewing power of prayer one other word in our scripture jumps out at me—wait. “Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength”. This reminds me of swimming with Spencer and Abigail when they were toddlers. Both loved to swim. As soon as they saw the water, they would get so excited they bolted for the water. Until they learned to swim, Leslie and I were always saying wait, wait, and catching them before they jumped in. They were so eager to swim; but if we were not there to help them, they would have sunk and drown. Because Spencer and Abigail waited for us to help them, they had a fun time swimming.

Before any day, especially a busy or stressful day, before you jump in, wait for the Lord to give you strength. God will give you a strength, a peace, and a perspective that passes all understanding. When we wait for the Lord we have supernatural strength giving us a more complete perspective. None of us can physically fly but if we wait for the Lord we can spiritually fly like eagles.

Just as our physical bodies need water or soul needs prayer. **“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. God does not faint or grow weary; God’s understanding is unsearchable. God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there Jesus prayed.”** Amen