

Prioritizing Bible Reading & Prayer When There are So Many Other Things to Do

By Steve Burchett



The son and daughter-in-law of missionary J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) were privileged to spend much time with Taylor in China. They not only saw Taylor's ministry in public, but the kind of man he was in private.

Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow, with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and

another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four A.M. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time when he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God. (Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, Moody Classics, 238-9).

What drove Taylor to such a practice? "To him, the secret of overcoming lay in daily, hourly fellowship with God; and this, he found, could only be maintained by secret prayer and feeding upon the word through which He reveals Himself to the waiting soul."

However, maintaining such a disciplined practice of Bible intake and prayer was not easy. "The hardest part of a missionary career, Mr. Taylor found, is to maintain regular, prayerful Bible study. 'Satan will always find you something to do,' he would say, 'when you ought to be occupied about that, if it is only arranging a window blind.'"

Pastor George Muller (1805-1898) was especially known for establishing and running orphanages in Bristol, England, without ever making needs known to anyone but God. Like Taylor, Muller also understood how critical a steady diet of Bible reading and private prayer were. He even wrote the following to Taylor.

Further, I have in my own experience found it of the utmost moment to make the care about my own soul the chief business of my life. Abundant as my work is, so much so, that if I had strength to work 24 hours every day, I would not accomplish what is ready for my hands, and feet and head, and heart; yet with all this I consider my first business to be, and my primary business, day by day, to get blessing for my own soul, food for my own soul, to be happy in

the Lord; and then to work, and to work with all diligence. Now in your case, with all the many millions of idolaters around you, the temptation is, to be overpowered by the immense quantity of work to be done, to the not minding sufficiently your own souls. But this would only lead to loss. No amount of work can make up for the neglect of meditation in the Holy Scriptures and for the neglect of prayer. Moreover it is not the amount of work we do, at which our Heavenly Father looks, but the Spirit in which we do His work. (georgemuller.org, "George Muller to J. Hudson Taylor Excerpt of Letter")

These men understood the same thing as Daniel did long before them: "In the first year of Darius the Son of Ahasuerus," about 539 B.C., "by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans — in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. Then I turned my face to the LORD God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy . . ." (Daniel 9:1-3a). This is the same timeframe as Daniel 6 when Daniel refused to cease praying to God, but instead, "He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously." We can't know for sure, but it's reasonable to think that Daniel's typical pattern was to read Scripture and let that direct his praying (as we see in Daniel 9). What is also not to be missed is that, just like Hudson Taylor and George Muller, Daniel would have been a very busy man! In fact, Daniel was right at the top under King Darius regarding his political position in the empire (cf. 6:1-3). Nevertheless, Bible intake and prayer were a priority. This prompted Matthew Henry to write the following in his commentary on Daniel.

He was a great politician, and prime-minister of state to one of the greatest monarchs upon earth, and yet could find both heart and time to converse with the word of God. The greatest and best men in the world must not think themselves above their Bibles.

And don't forget about Jesus. We should all agree that he had a full schedule accompanied by many distractions. However, throughout his ministry Jesus quoted and utilized Scripture (for example, when tempted by Satan) proving his dependence on God's word. And Jesus prayed often. In Luke alone, I counted 10 or 11 times in which Jesus prays or it says he prayed. It's no wonder that one translation inserted the word "often" in Luke 5:16, "But Jesus himself would often slip away to the wilderness to pray" (*NASB*).

Hudson Taylor. George Muller. Daniel. Jesus. Meditation on the Bible and private prayer were critical for these men. It's no surprise that they each were very useful for God's kingdom! No matter how full and chaotic and tiring our schedules may be, we would be foolish to think we will be effective and fruitful without the same priorities.

Copyright © 2025 Steve Burchett. Permission granted for reproduction in exact form.
All other uses require written permission. Find more free articles at www.BulletinInserts.org,
a ministry of Christian Communicators Worldwide: www.CCWtoday.org