



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Equipping & Encouraging Believers
In Prayer

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ISSUE 1

THE MARTHA COMPLEX

Do you have "The Martha Complex?" You may be wondering, "What in the world is The Martha Complex?" It is the attitude that activity is more important than prayer. It is the mindset that working for God is superior to pleading with and waiting on God. A person has the Martha Complex when he or she allows activity for God to replace spending time with God. It is substituting labor for God in the place of time with Him. The person with the Martha Complex says, "I may not spend much time in prayer but at least I'm busy doing many things for the Lord."

In **Luke 10:38-42**, Jesus Christ visits Martha and Mary. Martha is worrying over the big dinner that she is preparing for Jesus. She is busy and occupied with getting everything ready. She then notices that Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus. Mary is listening to what Jesus is teaching. Martha goes to Jesus and complains to Him about Mary, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me" (**Luke 10:40**). She is upset that all Mary is doing is sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Jesus offers Martha a loving but firm rebuke, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (**Luke 10:41-42**). Jesus is declaring that Mary is doing what is truly needed—sitting at His feet listening to Him and adoring Him. Martha's activities were not as important as spending time with Jesus.

I can identify with Martha. You probably can too. I'm guilty of having the Martha Complex. I've been so busy laboring for God that I've failed to spend time with Him. In my study, I have a sign on my desk that says, "You can be so busy doing the work of the Lord that you forget the Lord of the work." That sign is a stark reminder of the danger of the Martha Complex. It is way of remembering that nothing substitutes for prayer—spending time with my God and Father.

In this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, we will examine the Martha Complex. We will look at the roots of this problem. We will also make suggestions on how to deal with it. It is my hope and prayer that you will have a fresh desire to spend time with God along with have the proper attitude concerning prayer and labor for God.

The Roots Of The Martha Complex

Where does this attitude come from? How can one develop this mindset? The Martha Complex flows out of three basic misconceptions.

Misconception #1: Activity for God is a legitimate substitute for spending time with God.

It is unfortunate but believers often feel that you can make a trade between prayer and activity. The attitude is that, if you're busy for God, then

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don't worry about your lack of prayer. Your busyness for God will make up for a lack of prayer. Because you're busy for the Lord, you don't have to be concerned about spending time with God. Your labor for God will substitute for your lack of time before God in prayer.

Sometimes believers feel that if they go to church, give, serve on some committees, and participate in the activities of the church, this will make up for their lack of prayer. In a recent meeting, I was looking over the bulletin of the church. To be honest, I became exhausted just reading about everything that they had going on in the church. It was amazing how much activity they had planned. I asked the pastor when they made time for prayer. I inquired about the place of prayer in the church. He looked at me dumbfounded. He never gave me answer to those questions. You see, activity had become an acceptable substitute for prayer. All their activities had replaced seeking God through prayer.

We must come back to the truth that activity will never substitute for prayer. You cannot do anything for God if you are not spending time before Him in prayer. Prayer is the believer's communication with God. It is his or her lifeline to all that God is and all that God has. There is no possible way that one can serve God if one is not making time with God. One cannot do anything of eternal value apart from spending time with God. A person's labor for the Lord will be wholly ineffective apart from prayer. This is why Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (**John 15:5**). You must spend time with God in order to do anything for God. If your labors for the Lord are going to have impact, they must be saturated with prayer.

Misconception #2: Activity for the Lord is more important than prayer.

Unfortunately this is the attitude of some believers. People might not be willing to admit this, but actions speak louder than words. The lack of prayer in our lives and churches is testimony to the fact that we believe that there are greater priorities than prayer. It is viewed as an attachment, an appendage to the believer's life. It is much more important to be doing something for the Lord than

to spend time with the Lord. Prayer is viewed as secondary rather than as the priority of the believer's life.

In our eyes, the measure of a Christian is how much he or she does for the Lord. If a person is busy in the church, we feel that this person is a "good" Christian. Those who tirelessly serve the Lord enamor people. In order to be a good Christian, one has to be in church every time the doors are open, serve on all the committees, take part in every event, and on and on. Everyone can see how busy you are; nobody can see how much you pray. Therefore, the emphasis is on doing rather than praying. This is why prayer is pushed to the side and seen as a lesser priority.

We must return to the truth that God longs for a relationship with believers. This relationship takes precedence in your life. Nothing is more important than your relationship to God. It is to be preeminent. At the same time, the church's priority is to pray (**1 Timothy 2:1-2**).

God desires your obedience. He does want you to serve Him. But, He yearns for these things to flow out of your communication with Him. ~~These things must be the result of your spending time with Him.~~

At the same time, we must realize that we cannot earn or merit anything from God. We are made right with God solely through faith in Jesus Christ (**Galatians 2:16-21**). There is nothing that you can add to the finished work of Jesus Christ. We should pray and serve Him out of love for Him and a desire to please Him and not from a motive of attempting to earn anything or prove how "good" of a Christian we are.

Misconception #3: Activity for the Lord is more demanding than prayer.

Sometimes believers feel that activity for the Lord is more demanding than prayer. And, for this reason, that makes it more important than prayer. However, the opposite is true. Prayer is a spiritual service to God and others that costs you and changes you.

Being active in your church may be inconvenient at times. It may require you to change your schedule. It might cause you give up other activities or events. You can take part in all the activities of your church and still stay the same.

You can go through the motions of service and not be transformed.

Yet, prayer is different in that you must deny yourself and seek God. True prayer requires the sacrifice of yourself. It means yielding your will to God's will. It is pleading His promises and waiting on Him. It is earnestly confessing your sin and repenting. It is being still and silent before Him. Prayer calls for you to change. It brings about transformation and renewal.

We must return to the truth that true prayer transforms us. It is not our activity that changes us. It is our time before the Lord that makes us different and then enables us to go out and bless and minister to others. Prayer prepares you to minister by changing you at the core of your being. No outward service or activity will touch you in the inmost part of your being like spending time alone with God. It is only as you yield yourself to God in prayer that you will be made ready to serve God and bless others.

Overcoming The Martha Complex

How can a believer overcome the Martha Complex? How can you confront and overcome this mindset that hinders your prayer life? The following are some suggestions on how you can face and overcome this danger to your prayer life.

➤ *Keep in mind that God desires a relationship with you.* God longs to have a relationship with you. The purpose of His salvation is that you might pursue Him in an authentic relationship, "And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth" (**John 17:3, NLT**). In **Matthew 6:6**, Jesus declares that the Father yearns for you to spend time with Him. God wants you to slow down and focus on Him. You are to cultivate your relationship with Him. This means taking the time to pray and immersing yourself in His Word. It is impossible to develop an authentic relationship with God if your life is filled with activity. Your Father is interested in developing a relationship with you.

- *Receive the gentle but firm rebuke of Jesus.* Read this text over and over again. Meditate on its words. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart. Ask yourself the question, "Who am I more like—Mary or Martha?"
- *Understand that prayer is the channel through which God works in your life.* It is through prayer that God releases His blessings into your life. It is through prayer that He works in your life and through your life. Apart from prayer, you are cut off from the richness of His character and blessings. Prayer is the key to receiving all that God is and has. To fail to pray is to forsake the God-ordained way of receiving from your powerful and wise heavenly Father.
- *The "I need You" Prayer.* In the past couple of months, the Holy Spirit has been leading me to confess my need of God. The way that I have been doing this is by praying what I call the "I need You" prayer. I pray this continually throughout the day. I confess my need of God in whatever I face in the day—"I need You this morning," "I need You for this meeting," "I need You during this phone call," "I need You as I run today," "I need You as I study." This causes me to focus on my need of Him. It also leads me to take time with Him instead of hastily rushing through my day. It helps me to strike at the self-sufficiency that plagues my heart.
- *Confess the sin of prayerlessness.* Prayerlessness is a sin. It is rebellion against God. **Colossians 4:2** reveals that the believer is to be devoted to prayer. The believer is to be fervent in seeking God. When we fail to do this, it is sin. Confess your sin of prayerlessness. As you confess this sin, plead for grace to forsake it. Use your confession of sin as an opportunity to cry out to God for help in carrying out His command to be fervent and devoted to prayer.
- *Ask the Holy Spirit to create within you a passion for prayer.* The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of supplication (**Zechariah 12:10**). He is the One who enables you to pray. Call on Him to create within you a burning, unceasing passion to seek the Lord in prayer. Plead with Him to remove anything from your life that might hinder you from experiencing this passion for prayer. Pray that the Spirit of fire will burn away anything that is keeping you from prayer

and that He will kindle the flame of passion to pray in your heart.

- *Find an accountability partner.* Find another believer that will hold you accountable concerning prayer. This accountability partner can help you and encourage you to stay faithful in prayer. You can confess your weaknesses and discouragement concerning prayer to this person. This partner can pray for you and with you. This person can also ask you the hard questions that will help you to stay focused and to not develop the Martha Complex.
- *Pray that John 15:5 will become a living reality in your life.* A lack of prayer means a lack of dependence on God. It is only as you grow in your dependence on God that prayer will become preeminent in your life. **John 15:5** states our need to depend on God. It is impossible to bear fruit for God apart from this abiding. Plead that the Spirit of God will burn this truth in your heart. Ask that **John 15:5** will be true of your life.
- *Schedule appointments with your Father.* **Matthew 6:6-8** reveals our need to make time with our Father. You are to get alone and to get with God. This means making time for Him. You must be intentional about spending time with God. If you do not plan to spend time with Him, you will not. If you wait until you have time to spend with Him, you will not have any time. You must commit yourself to carve out space in your day for Him. Determine that you will spend time with Him. Schedule daily appointments with Him.
- *Use every opportunity that you can to pray.* Make prayer a moment-by-moment experience. Pray throughout all the activities of your day. Use everything that you face to talk with God. Let all the activities of your day to prompt you to pray.
- *Ask God to strip you of self-sufficiency.* The root of the Martha Complex is self-sufficiency. Let's face it: we don't pray because we don't feel that we need God's help. We might not be willing to admit it openly. But that is the attitude that fuels prayerlessness. That is what leads us to place prayer as a lesser priority in our lives. Plead with God to strip you of your self-sufficiency. Ask that He would show you your need of Him. Pray that you will come to

the place of brokenness where you see that prayer is an utter necessity.

- *Plead that you will see the limitless power of God available through prayer.* The power of God is released through prayer. The life-changing, almighty power of God flows into our lives and situations when we pray. This is why prayer is so crucial. The impossible becomes possible when you seek God (**Jeremiah 32:17**). This is why prayer must be the priority in our lives. It has to be preeminent over our service and labor for the Lord. Prayer grants life and power to our service and labor for the Lord. We must remember that when we work, we work. Yet, when we pray, God works. Plead that you will learn this valuable principle. Ask that you will see that the power of God is unleashed through prayer. Pray that you will not be content with what you can do in the flesh but will only be content with what God can do when you pray and labor for him.
- *Have a "Martha Complex Page" in your prayer journal.* In my prayer journal, I have what I call a "Martha Complex Page." On this page, I have recorded some Scripture prayers to help me face and confront prayerlessness. These Scripture prayers are designed to keep me from developing this attitude. On a regular basis, I go to this page and pray through these Scripture prayers. You might consider using these prayers for yourself. Or you could develop your own from them. The crucial issue is to be on your guard against this attitude. The following are the Scripture prayers that I have on that page:

O God, I ask that I would desire You above all other persons. I pray that I would not love or desire anything in this life above You. You are my God and my Desire. You are the strength of my heart. You are mine forever. I plead that my relationship to You would be the single most important part of my life (**Psalms 73:25-26**).

Living God, I pray that nothing in my life would take the place of my spending time with You. Deliver me from exalting anything above You and my time with You. Set me free from believing that activity can substitute for prayer. Grant me the spirit of Mary—a willingness to be