

Devotional Refreshment

With Spurgeon and the Puritans

“At their best, Christians have saturated themselves in the Bible. They say with Job, ‘I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread’ (Job 23:12).” – D.A. Carson

I. Why Has our Devotional Life Fallen on Hard Times?

- A. Regular sins of laziness or lack of discipline
 - B. Sheer pace of life
 - C. Constant sensory input from all sides
 - D. Accustomed to being entertained and diverted
 - E. Rising biblical illiteracy in the West makes Bible a closed book
- All the MORE reason...

II. Isaiah’s Guardrails for the Devotional Life

- A. “If I just do this, God will bless me!”

Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?”² All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.³ “He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig’s blood; he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. (Is 66:1-3)

- B. “Let’s not be too legalistic. God will bless me anyway!”

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? ...⁶ “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near...¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Is 55:1-11)

- Which pitfall do you lean towards (or fall into!)? Why?

III. The Prince of Preachers: Charles H. Spurgeon's (1834-1892) *Morning and Evening*

June 29 – Morning Reading

“Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.” (1 Thess 4:14)

LET us not imagine that *the soul* sleeps in insensibility. “To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise,” is the whisper of Christ to every dying saint. They “sleep in Jesus,” but their souls are before the throne of God, praising Him day and night in His temple, singing hallelujahs to Him who washed them from their sins in His blood. The body sleeps in its lonely bed of earth, beneath the coverlet of grass. But what is this sleep? The idea connected with sleep is “rest,” and that is the thought which the Spirit of God would convey to us. Sleep makes each night a Sabbath for the day. Sleep shuts fast the door of the soul, and bids all intruders tarry for a while, that the life within may enter its summer garden of ease. The toil-worn believer quietly sleeps, as does the weary child when it slumbers on its mother’s breast. Oh! happy they who die in the Lord; they rest from their labors, and their works do follow them. Their quiet repose shall never be broken until God shall rouse them to give them their full reward. Guarded by angel watchers, curtained by eternal mysteries, they sleep on, the heritors of glory, till the fulness of time shall bring the fulness of redemption. What an awaking shall be theirs! They were laid in their last resting-place, weary and worn, but such they shall not rise. They went to their rest with the furrowed brow, and the wasted features, but they wake up in beauty and glory. The shrivelled seed, so destitute of form and comeliness, rises from the dust a beauteous flower. The winter of the grave gives way to the spring of redemption and the summer of glory. Blessed is death, since it, through the divine power, disrobes us of this work-day garment, to clothe us with the wedding garment of incorruption. Blessed are those who “sleep in Jesus.”

1. According to Spurgeon, what is a misconception regarding the biblical concept of “sleep” (1 Thess 4:14)? What does the concept imply for Christians who die?
2. What Scripture could have been on Spurgeon’s mind when he wrote, “*The shrivelled seed, so destitute of form and comeliness, rises from the dust a beauteous flower*”?
3. Why do you think Christians find it difficult to believe in their future bodily resurrection? What do we lose when we minimize this clear biblical teaching?

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died (NOTE: not ‘sleep’; J endured horror of death to transform death into sleep!) and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.” (1 Thess 4:13-18)

“Irene to Taonnophris and Philo, good comfort. I was as sorry and wept over the departed one as I wept for Didymas. And all things whatsoever were fitting, I did, and all mine, Epaphroditus and Thermouthion and Philion and Appollonius and Plantas. But nevertheless against such things one can do nothing. Therefore comfort ye one another.”

– 2nd Century Egyptian Papyrus Manuscript Letter

“The letter. The death of N. N., now blessed, has grieved us exceedingly and constrained us to mourn and weep; for of such an earnest and altogether virtuous friend have we been bereaved. Glory then and praise be to God, who in wisdom and incomprehensible power and providence governs the issues to death (Ps 68:20), and, when it is expedient, receives the soul unto Himself (John 14:3).” - Ancient Greek Letter of Consolation