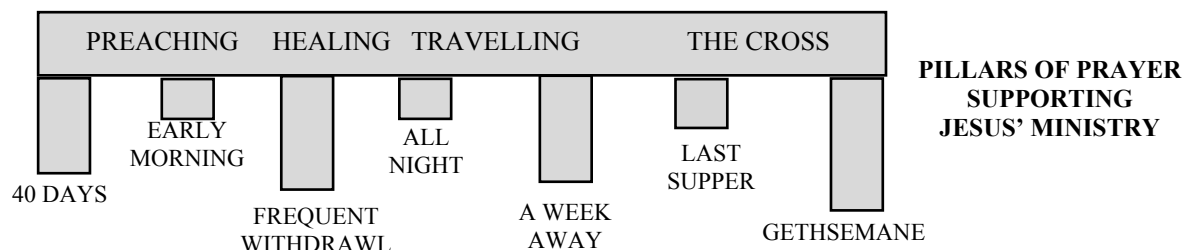


Jesus led a busy life. We may infer this about his early years from the fact that he was born into a typical Galilean home in which he would not have been allowed, and neither would have wished, to shirk the responsibilities of providing for family needs. When eventually he gave himself to his ministry, we do not need to infer a busy life - it is written all over the gospels. He had a ministry which involved a lot of preaching, a lot of healing, a lot of discipling and a lot of walking and travelling. He was given the whole of Galilee to cover as well as frequent activity in Jerusalem. All this was to be accomplished in some two or, at the most, three years. So time was short. Its ultimate success was due to the fact that everything was envisioned by the Spirit and undergirded by a mind saturated in Scripture. However, one other factor also kept his life and ministry together - his constant seeking of and conversation with his Father. This was the glue of his spiritual life. Despite the incessant busyness, prayer was never short-changed. Prayer was work, and this fellowship with his Father was the primary work on which all other work was built. Prayer was his third spiritual foundation of his life.

We know nothing of Jesus' "daily routine" as far as prayer is concerned. Tired, hungry, living with disciples and pressured by crowds he doubtless found such a "routine" difficult. He may have prayed as he travelled from one village to another, taking whatever chance offered itself. What the gospels do show us, however, is a series of blocks of time which Jesus dedicated to prayer and fellowship with the Father and which he kept well away from all distractions. These "block times" can be seen to be absolutely crucial for him and his work, and they represent a pattern which gives a very practical solution for putting a solid prayer foundation into our own lives. The diagram below gives a quick summary of those occasions, and indicates how varied they are in their nature.



1. The Forty Days - Praying and Fasting (Lk.4:1 ff)

The first of these "block times" was the longest, and an occasion of immense importance. It took place immediately after his baptism and anointing, at the very beginning of his ministry, and its importance lay in the fact that he was processing before his Father the nature of the ministry which he was now about to start. This seems evident from the fact that Satan's temptations at this time were clearly intended to misdirect his ministry and give it a worldly flavour. This indicates to us how important it is even though we have both the envisioning of the Spirit and the undergirding knowledge of scripture that we should take time to reflect at depth, unhampered and unhurriedly with the Father on whatever lies before us. We need to think things through in his presence, praying until they are deeply embedded and fully clarified in our hearts. It was the Spirit of God himself who impelled him into the desert for precisely this purpose, and we should expect such impulses also in our own prayer life. When he emerged from the desert, Jesus had found great clarity of purpose and firm resolve, fully grasping the principles of ministry that were to guide him, and having fought off very powerful temptations to act in ways contrary to those true principles. Luke describes him as returning from the desert "*in the power of the Spirit*". Thus it is precisely in the place of prayer, where we have time to wrestle and overcome the darker thoughts of Satan, that the work of the Spirit and the word is established, albeit recognising at the same time that such wrestling deeply involves both the Spirit and the scripture. Prayer and fasting is the key part of spiritual warfare. **This secured the integrity of his ministry.**

2. Early Morning (Lk. 4:42 ff & Mk. 1 35:ff)

This "block" followed intensive ministry in Capernaum, ministry that was very effective and widespread. There was great hunger in the city for more of such ministry. However, despite the draining effects of his work, Jesus rose very early for prayer in order to assess the situation. As previously in the desert, he obviously felt the Spirit's impulsion to such a review. In those quiet and undisturbed hours he reached a clear decision that he would turn his back (at least for the time being) on all the seemingly legitimate calls in Capernaum and move on to "*the other villages*". The reason he gave his disciples for this was simply, "*because that was why I was sent*" (Lk 4:43). Thus he made a critical decision in which he accepted the Father's plan that he should cover all Galilee, a plan which he saw clearly outlined in Is 9:1ff, and so did not allow himself to get tied down in his strategy. It is very instructive that such a decision cost him several hours of early morning sleep and several hours of prayer. He would have felt deeply the needs that there were in Capernaum and was doubtless rejoicing in the response of the people there. He would have struggled with these feelings over and against an impulsion of the Spirit, through the scriptures, to press on to meet other needs in other parts of Galilee. The early hours of prayer enabled a right decision before the situation overtook him. It was, of course, a great challenge to his physical, mental and spiritual strength, a challenge that will come our way also. But, happening as it did at the beginning of his great Galilean ministry, **this secured the right direction and full extent of his ministry.**

3. Frequent Withdrawal (Lk. 5:16)

Luke, who is the main chronicler of Jesus at prayer, notes that he often withdrew to "*lonely places*" and prayed (Lk 5:16). This comment comes right in the midst of his great ministry of mighty works and teaching, and clearly indicates the place of prayer in sustaining it. He reminded his disciples of the need of such prayer when later he had to tell them that their failure to

heal a demonised boy was because, “*this kind comes out only by prayer and fasting*”. Such works called for sustained faith, and time in the presence of his Father alone could nurture that. Constantly he refreshed himself in the truth that he was doing the Father’s works and that they would be effective. Such times provided the spiritual food which was so crucial to him. The enabling of the Spirit and the strengthening of the scripture were the stuff of these times, but he still had to apply himself in prayer. **These times secured the power of his ministry**

4. All Night (Lk. 6:12 ff)

One of the most important decisions Jesus made was in his choice of his apostles. As the ministry grew, he knew that he needed to send into ministry some of those who had been with him for some time in order both to extend and to consolidate the work. The choice was all important, particularly since they would become the future leaders of the church. Once again he found a lonely place to pray, this time a mountainside. Once more it was in the midst of a ministry flow, calling for personal discipline on his part and making big demands on all his resources. It is frequently the case that praying calls on our human resources in a way more demanding than any other activity - as many have experienced.

Prayer secured the Apostolic band and the Leadership of the Church

It is not difficult to imagine the process of that night of prayer: First he had to get assurance that it was the right time to branch out with his disciples, and then he had to choose, each candidate no doubt being offered to the Father and held up before him. Perhaps there was also a process in which he needed to receive confidence to entrust them with the work, accepting their limitations and counting on the Father to keep them. This was, once again, therefore, a process of careful thought, reflection, praying and waiting to hear. By the morning the process was complete, the choice made. **This secured the Apostolic band and the Leadership of the church.**

5. A Week Away (Lk. 9:28 ff)

After many months of ministry with his disciples Jesus challenged them to say who they thought he really was (Lk 9:19ff). Peter declared him to be the Christ. Jesus immediately began to speak to them of a Christ who, contrary to prevailing belief, must suffer, be killed and rise from the dead (9:21). Clearly this was in his mind when he posed the question. He knew the time for such happenings in his life was fast approaching and it was time both for himself and for his disciples to face up to this next stage. Eight days later he took Peter, James and John with him for a journey onto a mountain to pray over the issue. As he prayed two remarkable things happened: Jesus was totally transformed by the bright glory of God, and he discussed with Moses and Elijah, also gloriously attired, the events of his last days that were to come in Jerusalem. The disciples witnessed all this, and it was undoubtedly the most remarkable experience of prayer that they ever had - for Jesus it may not have been unknown, but still remarkable. It was all well worth the long and hard journey (it is always worth while taking time to get away and alone!). Being transformed by prayer and being given revelation through prayer - these were the massive gains of that journey. Jesus knew the divine glory rested in and on him, but here it became wonderfully manifest; Jesus knew he had to face the cross in Jerusalem but here fresh contact with that truth was given to him in the most astounding and strengthening of ways. The whole scene concluded with a manifestation of the divine cloud and a voice affirming Jesus’ Sonship and calling for the disciples to listen to him. **This episode secured his final and most important ministry direction.**

6. The Last Supper John 17

In John’s record of this occasion we have something that is quite unique in the gospel records. Whereas in most of the sequences showing us Jesus at prayer we only have the story of him praying and are obliged to infer exactly what he was praying from the context, here in John’s account of the Last Supper we actually listen in to his praying. We hear the prayer with which Jesus concluded the supper. He spent a great deal of time teaching them and preparing them for the coming of the Comforter and the lifestyle of love he expected from them, but then he prayed. It was an intimate occasion, secluded and unhurried and powerfully focused on the disciples. The prayer began with a petition asking that the Father would glorify him, and enable him to complete the work that would glorify the Father. He then interceded for the disciples. He acknowledged they were the Father’s gift to him, and that they had heard and received the Father’s word. He prayed for them because, unlike him, they were to remain in the world. He prayed that they would remain as one, united; and he prayed that they might be kept from the evil one. He was deeply aware of the dangers they faced, much more so than they. He prayed for those who were to believe through their witness, and he prayed that they all might come to be with him and see his glory. It was direct, methodical, earnest and necessary. Here was Jesus through his intercession bringing down upon his disciples everything that the Father wanted to give them. **This secured his disciples survival.**

Luke records (22:31) a further moment when Jesus, aware of an oncoming sifting by Satan that would accompany his death, prayed specifically for Peter that his faith would not fail, but that he would be able to strengthen his brother disciples. This is why Peter, though denying his Lord, survived to exercise leadership in the church.

7. Gethsemane (Lk. 22:39 ff)

Jesus’ struggle at Gethsemane was the ultimate struggle of humanity - he faced the horror of complete spiritual darkness and separation from God. Every fibre of his human frame shrank from such a prospect, but he knew this was the price that had to be paid on the cross for humanity’s salvation. It was prospect that made him sweat blood. There was only one place to face it and that was in his Father’s presence. There he wrestled with it, desperately seeking another way out (“*if it be possible*”). This was a real, genuine, human struggle. His Father was deeply aware of the struggle and its depth and importance. An angel came to strengthen him. We little realise how much we need (and how much we receive) such kind of strengthening. Angels hover in the Father’s presence as we seek it. His disciples could not keep pace and slept, but the angel did not. The struggle was resolved, he accepted the cup and he set his face unflinchingly toward the cross. Thus **Gethsemane secured the victory of Calvary.**

The lessons are clear from the above incidents. **Every major step in the life of Jesus was secured by prayer.** It was prayer with space and time providing an uninterrupted focus. It had to be built into the busy life. It involved much thought, meditation, petition, intercession and thanksgiving. It was an absolutely essential spiritual foundation in the life of Jesus. We neglect such at our peril.