

The Pastor's Personal Relationship with His Lord

Walter A. Diehl

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"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Tim. 2:15. Thus our personal relationship with our Lord was made known to us at our ordination and installation. Rightly dividing the Word of truth includes remembering how every Christian has a relationship with his Lord. We need to keep in mind that we too belong to those of whom Scripture says: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. 2:14. Acts 17:24-28 shows what God has planned for all men, including pastors: "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing; seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things, and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from everyone of us: FOR IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring." This is a good definition of the Pastor's Personal Relationship with His Lord and our theme: "IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING."

Relying upon the Lord letting us live and move and have our being in Him I began this essay on a day when I was extremely blue and depressed. This led to a chronological outline, beginning the discussion at the beginning of a pastor's week, Monday morning. Then I shall try to describe a day in a pastor's life, considering: arising, morning, noon, afternoon, evening, and retiring.

From reports of other pastors also Monday morning is often depressing. A few take it as a day off, but comments are that it is the poorest day of the week to be gone, or away from regular work, for much invariably piles up over the week end. A personal relationship with God and studying to be an approved workman would lead one not to be absent when most needed. How each awakens is varied. I normally awaken before my radio snaps on at 6:00 A.M. Frequently I awaken at 5:15 or 5:30 A.M. I try to relax and stay in bed until the radio comes on. For me this is an expression of personal relationship with the Lord, for He says in 1 Cor. 10:31: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." I am convinced the body needs rest, the spine, the eyes. Hence I try to lie there. Particularly Monday mornings have been difficult. I often had a feeling of dread and depression. It took a long time before contemplation revealed to me that my soul dwelt in a body and used physical powers to carry out the Lord's work. Often Sunday meant two or three services, a meeting or two, sometimes special services with travel by plane of 300 to 500 to 1,000 miles or 150 to 350 miles by car after the morning schedule. It dawned on me that my body and nerves were drained. I was convinced I was a failure; that no one loved me; that there was nothing I could do correctly. In other words, I was at the end of my ministry. Then God's Word of truth gave strength, as Matt. 28:20: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," or Heb. 13:5: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Particularly Phil. 4:13 was comforting and encouraging: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." I tried to stop all planning and decisions. I would arise and put on the coffee, get my Testament, commentaries, and sermon file, and start to study for the next sermon. Searching the Scripture gave the revelation of God's grace and reminded me it was His work and strength and not mine that counted. If there were mornings I would awaken without that blue or depressed feeling, especially the few where one felt you could lick the world, memory would naturally lead you to thank God for the special privilege of a good start.

By this time breakfast would come. Naturally we began with prayer. Especially poignant to me is the companionship at breakfast, for as a bachelor, widower, and traveler I have often had to eat alone. Practically

every morning we mention some special blessing of the Lord concerning the fine grapefruit or orange juice, the papaya, or even the fact that after thousands of eggs for breakfast, my mouth waters at the thought and sight. If you have ever called upon people who are nauseated; you definitely thank God that you have appetite. This does indicate the personal relationship that God gives power to live and move and have our being in Him, for it follows Ps. 103: "Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." We also have the devotion with "Meditations" then, and frequently comment how good the Lord is that He is making this a part of our life. Possibly a comment about the rush that often starts the day would bring consideration whether we ought not rise a bit earlier and avoid this horrible dash in the morning. We found early in my ministry that fifteen minutes earlier rising gave youngsters and us a chance to get things done without a mad flurry and usually tears and anger. This is also a way of "redeeming the time."

Most times our work then demands that we get to the desk or to an instruction class. However, it would be well, if one can arrange it, to do something physical to take care of our bodies and even relax the mind and the nerves. Presently I usually help clear the table and do the dishes. Even there the feeling of God's goodness strikes, for I had two years as a bachelor and two as a widower. Companionship is a blessing, as God tells us: "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a help meet for him." Gen. 2:18. Occasionally my spouse brings up a task or subject that does not please me. Sometimes a sharp retort springs out. Either then or a bit later it hits me: "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." James 1:20. Sometimes I apologize in word, normally by pleasant action. Then, intimate and vulgar as it may seem, the blessing of intestinal regularity does bring an expression of gratitude to the Lord for that gift also. Constant reminders that others have difficulty in this essential function brings thanks that the Lord thus preserves our health.

By this time a sort of schedule of calls or study or preparation or appointment claim my attention. As often as possible I take physical exercise by digging in the garden, burying garbage, pulling weeds, irrigating, mowing the lawn, cleaning the garage, anything to keep me active for at least three-fourths of an hour up to three hours, as weather and schedule permit. Often during that time you remember: "In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread." Gen. 3:19. At 80 to 100 degrees with 80% humidity you really perspire. One cannot help but wonder what heaven will be like without heat or cold, or what perfect work without thorns and thistles was like and will be like.

One then has to get ready for public appearance, if you have not done so before. Shower, shaving, and dressing leads either to correspondence or more frequently to sick calls, pastoral visits, or evangelism calls. As I drive to the place I try to think what Word of God will fit best. Frequently it will be some portion of last Sunday's or next Sunday's text. As I read or hear Scripture I try to find the comforting passages. Often on the way I pray for special blessing on that particular call. I may do this inwardly but frequently in the car I pray out loud. My experience has been that Scripture looks into and reveals man's heart. Thus I try to start prayers with a Scripture passage, such as Ps. 130, v. 1: "Out of the depths I cry unto Thee, O Lord." Or it may be awareness of my spiritual weakness that leads me to Matt. 11:28: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Then our own words will admit the weight of sin and the futility of laboring to get rid of them and the weariness that is wearing us down. Then how joyfully we can appreciate: "I will GIVE you rest." Or how glorious to hear from Ps. 130: "But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." The words of the General Confession are amazingly comforting as they admit our guilt and helplessness and proclaim the mercy of God through the innocent suffering and death of Jesus. Thus cleansed and strengthened one can "in Him live and move have our being."

I usually try to be home at noon. My wife and I have been accustomed to our heavier meal then. I have promised myself that I will not eat alone or make my wife eat alone more often than necessary. Again Bachelorhood and widowerhood showed me what "a help meet for me" means. This is a way of showing the personal relationship with our Lord, showing gratitude for His gift.

After dinner I am usually exhausted. Normally I rest 20 to 30 minutes. This began when treatments for my first wife made me drowse as I tried to study and wait for her heat treatment to end. I fought sleep so hard, that I did not accomplish anything. It seemed a sin to rest during the day, but then Scripture reminded me that Jesus went apart several times. I am convinced I am a better worker breaking the day. When there are Board

meetings or conferences the Lord seems to pour in special energy, so that I do not doze most of those times. This is my personal relationship with the Lord, but I would urge others to consider it too. Most often I only relax, yet surprisingly I do sleep on occasion. The first five minutes after arising are miserable, but from then on you receive dividends of energy and alertness.

Again desk work or calls would come. As I drive it often amazes me where I am. Places I used to read about in history have been my home or area of work for 30 years. It reminds one: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want....He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Ps. 23. It makes one think of our ancestors who came from overseas and how much Ps. 90, 1-2 meant to them: "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." He is with us at all times and all places. Often as I drive I think of what you, my brethren, are doing. I marvel at the innovative ways you work. Particularly conference leaves me with a feeling of inadequacy and helplessness. As I drive I think of the sermon work, evangelism, stewardship, instructions, and counseling as described by you. Then I need the comfort: "Moreover it is required in a steward that a man be found faithful." 1 Cor. 4:2. I plead with the Lord that I follow the good example you show me. I supplicate Him not to let me be lazy or indifferent but to work up to my potential according to His gifts to me. I also ask Him not to let me try to imitate where I would make a fool of myself, yet not to overlook ways of improvement.

As I return to supper I try to relax. Often I tell my wife I may be a bit late. Normally we like to eat about 5:00 P.M., but it can be 5:15 to 6:30 P.M. Stewardship of time and treasure by doing more with one trip, especially if it involves quite a distance, is also "In Him we live and move and have our being."

Prayer before and after the meal is normal. We do the dishes and like to watch national and local news. This is also a time to read the paper. Again it is a personal relationship to the Lord. Wars are fought, murders and robberies take place, statesmen turn out to be politicians while I vacation or attend meetings or conferences and do not have occasion to read the news. One almost wishes one could hide from the sad realities. But the Lord tells us: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world....But these are in the world." John 17:11b, 16. We have an obligation to stay aware of the world and its developments. We should remain alert to observe the world's false solutions and keep ourselves and our people on guard against these.

The evening will vary greatly among us. At times one has a meeting or class almost every evening. Also one would like to contact people when the whole family is home. My one regular activity now is a Wednesday evening Bible Study outside of Advent or Lenten season. I try to relax and run over the lesson after the news. Lately we have been getting the Ziebarths who at both 85 years of age and 64 years of marriage have not missed a service or Bible Study for over a year. This is again a personal relationship with the Lord. My own grandparents were far away and now my parents are gone. I think I can carry out my privilege of being a dutiful son with someone else's parents or grandparents.

Otherwise I make evening calls only two or three evenings a week. Again I pray on the way for guidance what to say and how to present it. Personal or even congregational survey and evangelism calls have brought almost a zero response. However, this again is "In Him we live and move and have our being." He tells us "GO!" Often where we see no result from our efforts, we do notice gain that the Lord sends in on His own. If I go on calls I normally am home at 9:00 P.M. or shortly thereafter. Then I read a bit or watch TV. If the whole evening is free, I begin the reading earlier. I try to catch up on Quarterly, Northwestern Lutheran, Generations, Synodical literature, religious periodicals, Reader's Digest, and some modern novels. Pastors must be alert to what is going on within and without the church. Also we need relaxation. At this time it is quite regular to fix a drink and nurse it for an hour to an hour and a half. Also my wife and I play a two-handed pinochle game, three games of four hands each. Here I find a struggle. Normally I can contain my frustration and anger. Possibly it is only a reflection of my youth where we had no regular playing cards in our home, for they were "Teufelskarten." I even debate whether we should stop playing cards. Up to now I am hoping the Lord will teach me to control my anger and sarcasm. I even wonder whether teaching me to lose is not part of His plan. Occasionally I lose gracefully or win without gloating. Anger has been a battle all my life, and like the alcoholic

I am aware it is there. I count few victories, many defeats. Yet by God's grace I strive to conquer this sin also. How often I must turn to the Lord and say: "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

We usually retire about 11:00 P.M. We have the custom that I speak a Bible verse and use a hymn verse containing the thought as our closing bedtime prayer. I might use Eph. 2:8-10: "By grace are ye saved etc." Then I could use the verse: Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness, etc.

Most often I fall asleep quickly, but when drowsiness disappears I try to go through Psalms and hymns from memory. If nothing helps, I get up and read or study. Again it reminds one that we need rest and should use God's good judgment in planning to obtain it.

Frankly, this paper sounds stuffy, pious, and flattering, almost an autobiography. Yet the Lord does not force me to confess my sins publicly. There is an emphasis here that is exaggerated. It sounds as though I am like the Pharisee talking to myself and not to the Lord. I hope you are aware that is not true. The best conclusion I can give is that which the Lord led St. Paul to make in Rom. 7:22-25: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I THANK GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD." May this be the pastor's personal relationship with His Lord! "IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING."