

# PRAYING MORE THAN AN HOUR A DAY: MY TESTIMONY AND SUGGESTIONS

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*"If there is no passion in your life, then have you really lived? Find your passion, whatever it may be. Become it, and let it become you and you will find great things happen FOR you, TO you and BECAUSE of you." (T. Alan Armstrong)*

*"Our age is without passion. Everyone knows a great deal, we all know which way we ought to go and all the different ways we can go, but nobody is really willing to move." (Soren Kierkegaard)*

*"The secret of spiritual success is a hunger that persists...It is an awful condition to be satisfied with one's spiritual attainments...God was and is looking for hungry, thirsty people." (Smith Wigglesworth)*

*The worst thing we can do in life is to have a relationship with God that brings nothing to this world. That would be a very shallow relationship indeed. (A.W. Tozer)*

*"Oh, how few find time for prayer! There is time for everything else, time to sleep and time to eat, time to read the newspaper and the novel, time to visit friends, time for everything else under the sun, but - no time for prayer, the most important of all things, the one great essential!" (Oswald Smith)*

*"Why is there so much speaking, yet so little prayer? Why is there so much running to and fro to meetings, conventions, fellowship gatherings and yet so little time for prayer? Brethren, why so many meetings with our fellow men and so few meetings with God?" – (Andrew Bonar)*

*"Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom. If you may have everything by asking in His Name, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is." (C. H. Spurgeon)*

## **The Call to Passionate Prayer**

Shortly after Billy Graham's 80th birthday, Larry King interviewed him and said: "It must be rewarding to you to look back on your life and not have to live with regrets." Here's Dr. Graham's response:

"I am the greatest failure of all men. I was too much with men and too little with God. I was too busy with business meetings and even conducting services. I should have been more with God, and people would've sensed God's presence about me when they were with me."

Let's not wait until we're 80 to say that. You see, in spite of all of Dr. Graham's accomplishments, he sensed there was more.

In the book of Revelation, the Ephesus church is corrected for having forsaken her first love, and the Laodicea Church for not being hot for Jesus. To have a burning passion for God, the kind we all experienced when we first met our Savior, is not an option reserved to a few spiritual warriors; it is the very fire that started our lives, and it is the one that keeps us burning for him. If we do not nourish the sacred flame within us, it may die and eventually we might become useless lampstands that Jesus will have to remove.<sup>1</sup> Passion is certainly expressed in some emotions, but it first has to do with actions. The church in Ephesus was asked to do her first works, and the one in Laodicea to have zeal for him. What keeps couples to still be in love after many years is not necessarily emotions, as they will inevitably change, but the right actions and words for each other. The same applies in our relationship with our heavenly Father. He expects us to do certain things for him if we want to maintain a passionate relationship with him, whether it is, for instance, to diligently study the Scriptures or embrace painful changes with faith.

“Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried”  
(G.K. Chesterton)

In this paper, I would like to talk about one of the most challenging aspects of our relationship with God, which is to build an intimacy through prayer and other spiritual disciplines. Everything starts with this, and if we do not keep it burning, we can slowly lose our edge and the very spice that keeps us excited with him. Interestingly, the same parallel could be applied in our relationship with our mates. To feel intimate with our spouse, particularly after a few years, is not something that comes naturally. We have to find ways to be creative, and sometimes we have to be quite intentional if we want to feel some emotional and even physical closeness with the person we share our lives with. In the same way, I have found that prayer has been both a barometer of my intimacy with my Lord as well as the means to draw me close to him.

This most important discipline offers a wealth of insights. While your intellectual understanding of the subject may surpass your actual motivations, I believe it's crucial to share my theory based on my personal experiences.

## **Losing Ministry—and Gaining Intimacy**

For many years, prayer had always been a challenging task for me. At best, I would

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. 2:5 I find interesting the parallel that Jesus makes between our fire for him and being lampstands for him

practice it with great irregularity, dedicating no more than 40 minutes a day to it. However, one day, I discovered that David Yonggi Cho, the leader of the largest church in the world<sup>2</sup>, dedicates an astonishing three hours a day to his master. This revelation deeply impressed me, and I became determined to emulate his dedication to prayer. If prayer produced such results, I thought, I may well give it a try to see what kind of numerical growth it would have on my own church. As you can see from this motivation, I did not have a biblical understanding of what prayer is all about, and this is why my attempt did not last very long. My prayer time was often organized around my ministry's priorities. I prayed for church problems, successful projects, and even problematic people or concerns. In essence, my ministry dictated my prayer life.

But in 2002, a radical change came that not only changed the course of my whole ministry, but the way I approached God. Due to a "charismatic conversion", I lost the emotional and financial network of all my churches, and with it my ministry and every other financial security that was bound to this. From the mission field, I had to come back to my hometown, Geneva. Since I could not find a job neither in churches nor in the secular world, my wife found a fantastic job she really liked, while I was reduced to stay at home, taking care of the children.

For right and wrong reasons, no pastor in Geneva was willing to take with him a zealous evangelist who had planted numerous churches all over the world, and in my righteous zeal, certainly mixed up with the pride and the hurt of being treated with so much indifference, I did not know what to do with most churches.

I could not even find a secular job, and as God clearly forbade me to start a church, my frustration slowly became a depression that bordered rebellion. Months became years, and even if I got to be exposed to amazing experiences in the supernatural, which is the very reason I had made a "conversion" in that direction, inside of me I was hurting and feeling very confused. I had no church that was "mine", no ministry and I felt completely useless, even if today in retrospective, I know it was not true.

Jeremiah lamentation was very much mine as I felt that God had "*walled me in so I cannot escape*; he has weighed me down with chains. Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help... I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is"<sup>3</sup>

A man is often defined by his work, and when his work encompasses his entire life, as is the case with pastors, then everything within him is tested when it is taken away. He feels like a

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<sup>2</sup> 830,000 members in 2007 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoido\\_Full\\_Gospel\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoido_Full_Gospel_Church)

<sup>3</sup> Lamentations 3

bird trapped in a cage, wondering why he has wings he cannot use. When our entire identity is tied to what we do for God, and when suddenly we no longer have any “to do” for him, then we lose our sense of self.

This is where prayer becomes the real test of how much the Comforter means to us, and I believe it the reason that from time-to-time God throws his best men in prisons. It makes indeed no reason to put apostles like Paul, who could “do” so much for God, to be forgotten in prisons<sup>4</sup>. It goes against every human logic that a prophet like Elijah, who could “do” so much for God, is isolated for years in deserts and exile. But it makes sense for those who are willing to give a sense to the uselessness of their situation. In such dry times of isolation and internal captivity, whether our walls are physical or only mental, we have to decide what sense God is going to make to us if we cannot do anything for Him. In my “prison” of Geneva, I had no world changing request to bring, I had no future and no past to turn to, I did not know when the doors would open, and so I was forced to decide how useful prayer would be to me.

"The great battles, the battles that decide our destiny and the destiny of generations yet unborn, are not fought on public platforms, but in the lonely hours of the night and in moments of agony." - Samuel Logan Brengle

I know it seems almost blasphemous to consider whether it is useful to talk to God or not, since He is far more than a push button to be pressed on when we have needs. But in reality, when we only give him a few cheap minutes of prayer because we need some practical directions to keep on doing what we have always been doing, we are viewing it this way. Myself I had practiced this mercantile dimension of prayer for years, and even if my request seemed more “noble”, since they were for ministry purposes, I needed to learn to come to God for Him, and not just for his church. I needed to take time for Him, and not just for my ministry.

In other words, I needed him for my being and not for my doing. Or to be more precise, I needed him for HIS being and not so much for his doing. This is the ultimate essence of what prayer is all about, and this is why the most direct expression of our desire to BE with him is how much time we give him.

The Korean challenge of prayer came back from the past, and at this time I was ready to accept it. I decided that I would go for two hours every morning, and I quickly understood that the only way I would be able to effectively do so was by being away from home. To stay there left me at the mercy of the phone and all

Find yourself a place that will help you to separate yourself from your “home” life

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 24:27

sorts of mental projects, and even when I tried to go down to the basement, I still felt emotionally and spiritually connected to my home.

A physical separation was absolutely needed, and I instinctively looked for a place somewhere in the woods or mountains that were not far, not only because I like nature, but because it seemed more like the “Master style”. The two disadvantages of that environment was the unpredictability of the weather and to find a place that was far enough so I could be entirely by myself.

## [The Chapel in the Countryside](#)

One day, while driving, I stumbled upon a charming chapel nestled amidst the countryside. As I peered inside, I couldn’t help but feel a sense of divine connection. It was as if God had specifically created this place for me. The chapel was open to the public, inviting anyone to come and worship. Surprisingly, despite its beauty, it was rarely visited. Built in the tenth century, it held the history of John Calvin’s preaching. The chapel’s unique semi-circular design allowed me to walk in a continuous circle, echoing my own whispers throughout the entire building. (See the pictures below, the building was always empty!)



This little chapel became my “Korean mountain of prayer”<sup>5</sup>, and for years I went regularly every morning to spend two hours with my God. (It is called “Temple de Satigny”)





## How I Learned to Pray for Hours

At first, I was at a loss for words after praying for more than an hour, feeling quite helpless. One can only pray for whatever comes to mind and what's written on their prayer list. Gradually, over the next few months, I learned to transition to a dimension where time almost ceases to exist. This is the realm of lovers, the realm of infinity, where we no longer glance at the watch because pleasure is all that matters. It's the "quality time" that only quantity time can provide. It's the time to "stop and breathe the air of eternity."<sup>6</sup>

It took me many weeks, possibly between two or three months, to reach that level and it did not come naturally and easily. It seems that Jesus's statement about violent men seizing the kingdom by force could be relevant in this situation. Just as an athlete trains their physical body to align with their objectives, we must initially cultivate a high level of discipline to establish such a stringent regimen. Before we can attain a sense of momentum in our prayers, we must first acknowledge our limitations, just like Hudson Taylor said: "an easy-going, non-self-denying life will never be one of power."

Have "physical tricks" to keep you alert, and start forcefully to focus on God right from the beginning. After this, and only after this, you can let go and let God

Tiredness was certainly one challenging aspect. Feeling bored and going on and on in the same negative moods was another. Wandering thoughts that flew "outside" was certainly another subtle enemy. Being so self-conscious that I was not focusing on God, but on how I was praying was another danger as well. Through many dangers, toils and snares, I had to learn that the grace of prayer does not come so easily! As John Wesley said: "Have you any days of fasting and prayer? Storm the throne of grace and persevere therein, and mercy will come down".

Now, I am not saying that such an agonizing state of our prayers is what we should have all the time. What I am saying is that spiritual dullness, discouragement or a sweet spiritual laziness are very real enemies in our prayers, and the only way to fight them is through vigilance and perseverance. Jesus warned us "to watch and pray"<sup>7</sup>. We must do both. If we are not watchful in what personally prevents us to pray, which Jesus called the "flesh" in Gethsemane, we will be defeated in our prayers. We must develop a natural discipline in order to be supernaturally empowered.

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality- Unleash a Revolution in your Life in Christ*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 2006, p.153

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 26:41

Personally, I have found two things that have helped me to fight against the lethargy of prayer:

**First of all**, there are all sorts of practical things that can be done. For instance:

I have discovered that when I am tired or “not there”, it is good to speak in a voice that is loud enough so that I would not mumble to myself, but not so loud that I would be distracted by own “preaching to God”.

For me, to sit down and be motionless are gentle killers, particularly when I am physically tired, so I force myself to stand and walk.

I’ve also discovered that if I can walk very slowly in an endless circle and move my arms freely without worrying about objects or walls around me, it helps. It’s ideal to be in a kind of walking motion where I can close my eyes and yet unconsciously open them from time to time to see where I’m going.

To have a large print Bible available nearby, where a verse or passage is all of sudden needed to receive a scriptural revelation in order to “plead” with God or “claim his promises” can be useful as well.

**Secondly**, the key is to “engage” God in prayer as soon and as intensely as possible, because, eventually, if I do not pay attention, I can easily and quickly waste two hours in self-pity, self-worry, daydreaming or spiritual apathy. If, on the contrary, I have a routine of “initial forcefulness” to focus everything within me on God, then I can almost always count on having the following two hours in ongoing good communion with God.

Usually, just like an initial warm-up before some intense training, the first 10 minutes prove to be crucial. You will find out in your first few weeks of starting this whole discipline of prayer that it may take a bit longer to “warm up”. It’s possible that even the first twenty minutes won’t make you feel connected to God. Usually, this initial forcefulness is initiated either by praising Him or repenting from any negative feelings. It can be a combination of both. In any case, starting our prayers by immediately jumping to all our self-centered requests will not help.

Again, I want to repeat that the most crucial aspect for me in starting a two-hour marathon of prayer (or one hour, or whatever length is enough for you) is to not “be left behind” or drag myself into all sorts of moody or useless feelings. What is true in sports is really the same in this area. We must start with determination and zeal. Once we have passed this warm-up time, when we feel the boat is sailing under the Holy Spirit, then we can gently take it easy and just hold the bar, and He does the rest. The famous saying of Hudson Taylor certainly



applies to how we approach the daily challenge of a long time of prayer with God: "I have found that there are three stages in every great work of God: first, it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done."

## **Five Dimensions of Deep Prayer (PG-3R)**

I have learnt over time that they are five different areas in my prayer life, which can be formulated in the following acronym:

### **PG – 3 R:**

- 1) **P-raise**
- 2) **G-ratitude**
- 3) **R-epentance**
- 4) **R-equests**
- 5) **R-evelations**

<p>“We cannot attain the presence of God. We are already totally in the presence of God. What is absent is awareness” (Richard Rohr)</p>
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Obviously, we can categorize with even more subdivisions (or less), and there is no set formula or particular order in which to go. All I know after a few years of taking a lot of time with God is that all those different “categories” appear in my prayers.

### ***1) Praise***

Praise is different than thankfulness and I did not understand this right away. When I was a young Christian, I thought that because I had covered the throne of God with all my gratitude that I had been worshiping him. This is not so. Thankfulness is basically recognizing all what God has done for us, while praise is focusing on all the attributes and qualities that God has.

Gratitude would be like saying “thank you” to a friend, while praise is to give him a compliment, independently of what he might have done or not done for us. For instance, we can praise God for being wise or powerful, even if we have no direct reasons to be thankful for these attributes in our lives.

I have observed that usually whenever I praise God, I will always have some thought of thankfulness attached to it, while the opposite is not always true. This is why I would encourage you to develop this habit of praise by remembering all his attributes. If you take a bullet-point list and praise God for all his various qualities, you will eventually develop a richness of praise that will naturally flow from within.

## *2) Gratitude*

In your gratitude, there are countless reasons to be thankful for the people, circumstances, and things you've received. However, don't forget yourself. Thank and praise God for what He's personally given and how He's created you.

## *3) Repentance*

A sensitivity to repentance is the attitude of listening both to your conscience and what God is trying to show you during your prayer, in such a way that you can ask God to forgive you and to change you. If, every day, you are willing to approach the throne of grace with the position that you have nothing to prove and everything to improve, you will develop a great sensitivity to easily and quickly recognize anything the Lord shows you.

So ask him not only to show you how much He loves you, but at the same time, how much he hates your sins. It is a paradox and a difficult balance that only He can give us, but our prayers can be full of joy and sadness at the same time. The more we are in his presence, the more we should see ourselves as we truly are, which keeps us sober, and see him as he really is, which keeps us in his peace and joy.

Eventually, if we cultivate this kind of humility and ask him to reveal all the areas of our lives that need improvement, our lives won't require the major revisions that were created by our stubborn refusal to acknowledge anything about ourselves. We will learn to live with the minor pain of daily adjustments, and on the long run it will be much better! As the famous quotation of Phillip Brooks says so well "Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be the miracle"

## *4) Requests*

We can ask things for ourselves, for others, for the Church and for the entire world, whether it the president of the nation, or the dog of our next door's neighbor (no parallel☺), for revivals or for the persecuted Church, we have unlimited areas available. It can be done with every possible feeling imaginable, from agony to empathy, from rage to grace, from

resting to wrestling, the repertoire is absolutely endless. Because of this vast choice, it is very important to ask within the perspective of this final category:

### *5) Revelations*

We should wait and feel the Lord's leading so fully that he can give us revelations. And the most important revelation is to discover all who God is and who we are in all this. Prayer is not a spiritual shopping list; it is a relationship. As Oswald Chambers said, "Prayer is not getting things from God, that is the most initial stage; prayer is getting into perfect communion with God".

There are all kinds of practical revelations that we can receive:

It can be revelations as God brings back passages of his word to your mind and heart.

It can be new strategies of how to go about in your next project.

It can be desires he puts in your heart, warning concerning others, or gifts he wants you to start praying about.

It can be revelations from the past about yourself that all of sudden explain everything.

It can be amazing revelations of his future plans years ahead.

It can be visions far beyond your earthly situation.

It can be in the "natural" or in the "supernatural". It can be something so important that all of sudden you need to write it down quickly on a piece of paper (keep one available, you never know when God will call you to "write down the revelation"!).

This means we have to listen and discern. We can do this while being completely still or while we walk; we can be prostrated on the floor or standing still with our arms lifted up; it can be any position, the important principle here is that we must develop such a sensitivity until we have heard his whisper and "know" he has spoken.

I wish I had a "trick" to tell you how to receive such revelations, but unfortunately I have only two tips to give you:

First of all, always expect God to speak to you, in whatever ways he chooses to, because if you don't have this kind of expectation, than you will receive little.

Secondly, take enough time until you can clearly hear him. If you rush and want instant

solutions without learning the process to “be still and know that I am God<sup>8</sup>”, then you will only have what you are willing to pay for. This is why I have started this whole chapter on prayer with the most important key: take time and you will see that the best things of God are hidden and wait to be fully revealed IF we give ourselves enough time to seek them. As Prov. 25:2 describes so aptly, “it is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings!”

## Praying Until Eternity Breaks In

If you include those five categories during the one or two hours that you want to take for Him, you will see that time can go very quickly. Forgive me for taking such an example, but I still remember the very first night I spent with my wife: I could not tell you whether I had spent one hour or six hours with her. It is only when the sun came up that I realized I had not felt my own tiredness and the circumstances around. Time had stopped and eternity has stepped in. In the same way, I have personally experienced many times this foretaste of eternity in my prayers and this why I tell you that time is not the issue. Once you have learnt to be in love with your God, you will discover another dimension of time such that one or two hours in prayer can pass very quickly.

Personally, the results of this daily immersion in the presence of God eventually started to pay off. My situation did not right away change, but my heart did. Because I took the time to praise God every day, I started to replace my spirit of despair for a garment of praise<sup>9</sup>. There’s a place for others to pray for our freedom from oppressive spirits, but there’s no substitute when we’re in our own prisons to emulate the attitude of praise that Paul and Barnabas had in theirs.<sup>10</sup> It opens doors!

After a few weeks, I not only started to experience the unshakable peace that transcends all understanding<sup>11</sup>, but I started to feel empowerment in the way I was ministering to others. I knew that there was a direct relationship between my prayer life and the power and grace that was flowing in my ministry. Just like Charles Finney said, "Unless I had the spirit of prayer I could do nothing... I found myself unable to preach with power and efficiency, or to win souls...".

We all know this connection of power from great men of God, and this is why we have

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<sup>8</sup> Ps. 46:10

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 61:3

<sup>10</sup> Acts 16:25

<sup>11</sup> Phil. 4:7

to make a choice. We can either lament our lives lacking power due to our neglect of seeking God diligently, or we can seize the opportunity to make the most of any “desert times” we may be experiencing, drawing strength from Jesus’ example and emerging victorious with the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> There is no other way; we must discipline ourselves to take time every day with him, and results will surely follow. As Watchman Nee experienced it himself, “Our prayers lay the track down which God’s power can come. Like a mighty locomotive, his power is irresistible, but it cannot reach us without rails.”

## **The Power of Praying Together, Fasting, Solitude, and Silence**

Now, if you do not know how to pray, or lack the motivation, take time to do it with others. I find fascinating that in the eight first chapters of Acts, there are eight mentions of prayer<sup>13</sup>, and every time it has to do with Christians praying together! There is obviously a place to do it on our own, but the collective dimension is very useful for those of us who have less self-discipline and motivation. There is power as well in taking entire nights of prayer or get up early in the morning to pray with other believers.

Praying TOGETHER  
is the dominant  
characteristic of the  
book of Acts

Finally, along this road less traveled, a few other disciplines have also proven to be highly beneficial. For me, fasting has been the most challenging yet most effective in terms of results. I can’t count the number of times I’ve witnessed direct consequences of praying and fasting for either three days or forty days. Nothing enhances my sensitivity to hearing God and gaining empowerment in prayer more than solitude and fasting. As Andrew Murray described so accurately, “Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.”

If you want to go even deeper in this discipline, isolate yourself in a place where you can experience solitude and silence. The latter can be particularly frightening, because as Dallas Willard wrote, “it strips us as nothing else does, throwing us upon the stark realities of our life. It reminds us of death, which will cut us off from this world and leave only us and God”<sup>14</sup>.

"The secret  
of life is  
the life in  
secret"

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 4:1 and 14

<sup>13</sup> In almost every chapter: Acts 1:14, 24; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 6:4; 7:60; 8:24

<sup>14</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, p.63

Usually, the best places for me to experience this have been in nature, maybe in a retreat facility or a monastery, where there is little comfort, no phone and no distractions. Just take a Bible, a journal where you write whatever you wish, and avoid spending too much time listening to worship music from your phone! Learn the discipline of silence, meditation and contemplation, and you will be amazed how much God can speak. Those kinds of disciplines can be extremely challenging for some of us, as we live in a fast-paced culture of noise and distractions, but they have the power to deeply transform us.

## **Conclusion: A Daily Choice to Seek God**

The best time to pray is when we do not feel like praying. For some of us, this may mean quite often! In fact, when we go through dry times or nothing goes our way, then we can make the choice that like Jacob, we will fight with God and not let him go until he has blessed us<sup>15</sup>.

This is what I did in ones of the darkest spiritual times of my life, and it changed my whole prayer life. I discovered a passion for God that did not come because I had all the answers and everything was going my forceful way. It came because I dared to believe that God always rewards those who earnestly seek him from all their heart. It came because I accepted the gruesome work of praying every day for one to two hours. It came because I faced the challenge of fasting and solitude. It came because I finally agreed with Andrew Murray that “As long as we look on prayer chiefly as the means of maintaining our own Christian life, we shall not know fully what it meant to be. But when we learn to regard it as the highest part of the work entrusted to us, the root and strength of all other work, we shall see that there is nothing that we so need to study and practice as the art of praying aright”

Finally, that passion persisted with me because after a few months, I became addicted to this daily ritual of prayer. It endured because I experienced a supernatural power in performing miracles and a peace that I was certain was a direct consequence of this daily discipline. It persisted because I was aware that my passion could leave me as swiftly as it had come. Our God, unlike any other, never compels us to seek Him. Instead, He leaves us with the daily choice of doing so. The way we approach prayer each day will shape our lives. What will be your choice?

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 32:26