

HOW TO MAINTAIN PERSONAL WORSHIP WITHOUT RELAPSES

Mary had read my material on Personal Worship and attended one of my seminars on the subject. She felt this met the largest need in her life. She committed herself without reservation to meet her Lord in the closet of prayer. For several weeks — yes *more* than twenty-one days she found joyful fulfillment in worship. She was sorely tempted at times to let other things interfere and take control — but she resisted — gradually such distractions seemed to disappear.

Then one morning she awoke in an unaccountably miserable mood, she had treated her children in a most unchristian manner, but she had forgotten that fact. She simply turned over — shut off the alarm clock and went back to sleep. She, right there and then, broke a promise and a flawless record of personal worship!

Guiltily, she thought about what she had done. She hesitated and then sank deep into despair and continued to sleep in. “Oh, I will never be able to be the person I want to be, anyway,” the evil one whispered in her ear. “I might as well enjoy myself,” she said — not willing to admit her highest joy was in those days of intimacy with her Lord.

Relapses are our biggest enemy — Mary had done this before and she was about ready to “throw in the towel” forever! *Wait, wait* — there *is* a reason — please, please give me a little of your time. 80% of those who begin Personal Worship have some type of relapse within 90 days. This is true, according to psychologists, with any life-style change. It makes but little difference what the change is: smoking, drinking, gambling, overeating, compulsive shopping or overworking. (See the October issue of *Reader's Digest*, p. 165.) We, the “children of light” have much to learn from other people. Here are the facts — let's let these facts get a hold of our hearts:

It is NOT your inability to have personal worship. You have overcome the physical and psychological desires to sleep in or just drop the thought of self-denial. But a surprising number of people like Mary backslide when the worst seems to be over — *Why? Why?* Just when you seem to be reaping the benefits of privately worshiping the Lord you drop out — *Why are we threatened on the threshold of success?*

It is because of your anger — your anxiety — your depression — it is when you are bored you become an easy prey for the evil one. When you feel lonely you are a real pawn for the devil.

We have told you over and over again that “*a habit is an involuntary action*” — it is “automatic behavior

that provides pleasure and comfort” (*ibid*, p. 166). “A bad habit has long-term negative consequences, but it still gives immediate comfort, and under stress the automatic tendency is to revert to it.” I refer to the “*laid-back*” — “*relaxed*” lifestyle that simply does not include personal worship. It has always been easier not to have a time and a place to worship our Lord than to have one.

To permanently rid yourself of this habit of not disciplining yourself for your quiet time you *must* “simultaneously unlearn certain behaviors and replace them with new ones that also provide gratification” (*ibid*, p. 166). This is not easy, but who said it was easy? Denial of self for a better self has never been easy. It takes practice and persistence.

Suppose you were trained as a spy for our government on an essential, crucial mission, and you were given an entirely new identity. You had a *new* name — a *new* address — a *new* family — a *new* purpose. At first it seemed almost impossible to be able to remember you were no longer your old self. Instinctively you would revert back to your old identity. But in time — and under the desire to fulfill your vital job you did become your new self. However — in an emergency you were all too likely to lapse back to your old self. We are indeed strangers and pilgrims in this land. As the song writer so beautifully said: “I am a stranger here within a foreign land — my home is far away upon a golden strand — Ambassador to be from a land across the sea — I'm here on business for my King.” Yet in spite of all the stress and difficulties some people *do* overcome — they *are* the victors not the victims — how do they do it? The steps taken by those who overcome drinking, drugs, smoking, overeating, etc., are just the same — there is no magic, it is not mysterious. Here are the essential steps we can all take in being the overcomer.

1. *Plan ahead.* It is a foregone conclusion: we will be sorely tempted to slack off — to drop the ball — to “quit the whole thing.” I know — I know — I have been there many times. Such times come unpredictably and seem overwhelming. However since we know they are coming we can be prepared for them. We are not ignorant of our enemy's devices. *The urge to quit never lasts longer than ten minutes.* We can put up with it — we can resist it that long! Plan ahead what you are going to do when the temptation comes. Here are some things I have done — and do right now:

(1) *I sing a song.* *Day by Day* is one beautiful song to use to chase the devil away. Just look at these words!

Better yet, *sing it right now:*

*Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.*

The second verse reads:

*Every day the Lord Himself is near me
With a special mercy for each hour;
All my cares He fain would bear, and cheer me,
He whose name is Counsellor and Power.
The protection of His child and treasure
Is a charge that on Himself He laid;
"As thy days, thy strength shall be in measure,"
This the pledge to me He made.*

(2) Go for a walk in an area where God can speak to you from his other book called "creation." I have purchased some books on trees, birds, shells and butterflies. I read them so I can think God's thoughts as I contemplate what he made. Others have done this — this is what they said:

My faith is all a doubtful thing,
Wove on a doubtful loom,
Until there comes, such showery spring,
A cherry tree in bloom;

And Christ, who died upon a tree
That death had stricken bare,
Comes beautifully back to me,
In blossoms everywhere.
—David Morton

The kindest thing God ever made,
His hand of very healing laid
Upon a fevered world, is shade.

His glorious company of trees
Throw out their mantles, and on these
The dust-stained wanderer finds ease.
Green temples, closed against the beat
Of noontime's blinding glare and heat,
Open to any pilgrim's feet.

The white road blisters in the sun;
Now half the weary journey done,
Enter and rest, O weary one!

And feel the dew of dawn still wet
Beneath my feet, and so forget
The burning highway's ache and fret.

This is God's hospitality,
And whoso rests beneath a tree
Hath cause to thank Him gratefully.

—Theodosia Garrison

(3) Talk with someone who shares your desire to overcome. In doing this you will not only help yourself but the person with whom you share your concern. Be open and honest with your friend. There is something wonderfully therapeutic in lifting someone else up — you find yourself flying. As Paul said to Timothy: "Give yourself to this for in doing so you will save yourself and those that hear you." Just

a ten minute call on the phone can mean the difference between continuing and stopping.

2. Reinforce your habit of personal worship. You must get an emotional response in and from this tryst with your Lord. Read this verse from II Timothy just as if you had never read it before:

No soldier on service entangles himself in the affairs of this life so he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier (II Tim.2:4).

Mark it down as a fact: *our Lord is emotionally involved — he is pleased with our choice to enlist in his army.* He is happy over our willingness to actively oppose our enemy. We fail in personal worship because we forget *we are in a war* — the enemy is all about us! This is a battle of life and death. Jesus *hears* us — Jesus *sees* us — Jesus is *personally responsive* to our every choice — our every effort. *Can we be less?*

If it would help you to set a vacant chair in the area where you worship and imagine Jesus sitting in that chair, *do it!* Let it be his throne. Your emotional needs must be met — yea, they will be met! Let Jesus satisfy your heart!

Please review often the specific heart-needs this time with your Lord meets in your life — such as:

a. *Peace* — a tranquility of spirit you cannot have and do not have in any other way.

b. *Confidence in your Lord* — when Jesus is so *real* — so *alive* — so *near* — so *powerful* confidence in him comes easy!

c. *Confidence in your acceptance by him.* "Blessed assurance, *Jesus is mine* — oh, what a foretaste of glory divine." If ever this song takes on reality it is in the closet of prayer!

It is easy for me to write these words because I have felt them so many times (like this morning). You can, too — but you must act out of deep desire and consistent practice. You *can* do it. He will *help* you!

3. *Enlist your friends in personal worship.* It is one thing to talk with them about your need — it is quite something else to recruit them as fellow-worshippers with yourself. I am not suggesting a daily group prayer — this would not be *personal* worship — but I am suggesting you need to commit others to private prayer. AND to keep track of their progress. A group meeting once a week for the first six weeks could be wonderfully beneficial to all involved.

The most effective method to prevent relapse is to seek to support others in their commitment. This is the principle upon which *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *Weight Watchers* are built! It works, it works! Let's use it!

Right now — list 3 of your friends you can enlist for Personal Worship — ask them to join you once a week for a time of questions — encouragement and prayer.

Please be open with your loved ones — your commitment to personal worship has not all been positive. There have been times when you were much less than you wanted to be — or expected to be. Be honest and

candid with others about this.

When you meet your friends talk about your victories — testify about how precious the Lord is to you. It is what you emphasize that will be remembered longest.

4. *You must avoid high-risk situations.* You most likely will need to break your habit of just drifting into the routine of the day without a thought of spending an hour with your Lord. You know ahead of time that this attitude will put you into the routine of your day without personal worship! Avoid it — reject it — resist it!

Do not — I repeat *DO NOT* talk with people who are not committed to personal worship and actually are opposed to it. Evil companions will (not “*might*”) corrupt your resolve to meet our Lord. There are a multitude of people who just do not understand or care — avoid them! It is tension and frustration that could defeat you — avoid situations where you know such tension will be present!

5. Set goals within your goal — your one glorious goal is to spend at least an hour in intimacy with your Lord. But small steps to this goal will help *so much*! Such as:

(1) “*One day at a time, dear Jesus,*” is so very very much to the point. How will you do in personal worship for tomorrow? Surely you can plan your schedule to get this done — and what about the day after tomorrow?

(2) Reread what you have written about personal worship or your words spoken to the Lord, if you write your worship. Have you anything in hand from yesterday that relates to your goal? Read it! Can you remember the day when you committed yourself? Review that day and decision in your heart!

(3) The Bible seems to have a preference for certain numbers — such as *three* — *seven* — and *forty* — commit *three* days at a time — *seven* days at a time. When you have reached one or more of these lesser goals reward yourself. There are some precious rewards that will lift our spirits and move us into a deeper commitment. Here are a few I have used:

a. Listen to praise music on a good cassette player. This truly transports you into a new realm.

b. I have a VCR of the Gospel of Luke — I watch a segment of my Lord’s life — and hear the inspired words of Dr. Luke.

c. There are times when a nap is a real reward. I need to say that if you reward yourself with something that does not relate to the cultivation of your relationship with your Lord it is self-defeating. It is no reward, it is a postponement. It is like rewarding yourself with a drink if you are an alcoholic.

6. *Be totally honest with yourself!* Accidents do not “happen” — they are planned — i.e. subconsciously or on purpose. In a very subtle way we “make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.” We can deceive ourselves *so easily!* — and so effectively.