

Preface

Even a casual visit to a bookstore will impress a viewer with the many “how-to” or self-improvement books that are available today. *How to be happy, be healthy, be successful, be a good parent . . .* and the list goes on.

But what are the “how-to’s” for an effective spiritual life? Are there daily practices that Christians should pursue?

First and foremost, *there needs to be an appreciative awareness of God’s amazing grace in our lives*: grace that adopted us as sinners and made us members of the heavenly kingdom; grace that sustains and directs our daily steps; and the grace that will ultimately usher us to our eternal home.

Secondly, let me suggest the following key words that also need to be a vital part of every believer’s daily experience:

Praise—Prayer—Love

- A daily life of praise, thanksgiving, and the adoration of God.
- A daily life of prayer, fellowship, and communion with God.
- A daily life of love, a delight in the personal assurance of God’s love, and a desire to share His love with others.

Two basic resource books are available to help us in this spiritual well-being: the Bible and the church hymnal. Regular study of the Bible, God’s infallible rule of faith and practice, is an absolute essential for Christian living. Nothing ever replaces our daily need for His trustworthy Word. Through the ages, however, devout believers from every Christian community have responded to God and His inspired revelation with their own expressions. The church hymnal, a most important heritage of the Christian church, is one of the finest collections of man’s thoughts and feelings about God. When these choice responses are further enhanced with appropriate melodies, harmonies, and rhythms, there exists a reservoir of unusual spiritual strength and encouragement.

Spend time each day with the two resource books now blended together into these daily devotionals. Allow God to speak directly to you through the Scriptures. Also, consider thoughtfully how other sincere believers have related to God with their “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Then respond to Him with your own expressions of *praise, prayer, and love*. Carry a musical truth with you throughout each day. Let the non-Christian world observe a living demonstration of a joyful faith. And as you do, you will become increasingly aware of God’s amazing grace and His power that enables you to live an effective and victorious Christian life. Perhaps these words, written more than two centuries ago, will begin to have new meaning for you:

*Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.
’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.
The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.
Thru many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come;*

'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

—John Newton, 1725–1807

(See p. 164)

“I am in myself, incapable of standing a single hour without continual fresh supplies of strength and grace from the fountain-head.”

—John Newton

Hymns breathe the praise of the saints,

The vision of the prophets,

The prayers of the penitent and the spirit of the martyrs.

They bring solace to the sad, assurance to the perplexed,

Faith to the doubter and comfort to the oppressed.

They span the centuries of history and bridge the barriers of denominations.

Study them to be pure in heart;

Sing them to be joyful in spirit,

Store them in the mind to possess a treasury of worship.

—Unknown

It is always challenging to approach a new year and to realize anew that our days upon this earth are so rapidly passing. How important it is that we pause with the psalmist and pray for a “heart of wisdom” that will enable us this year to live each new day in a way that brings all glory to our God.

I with Thee would begin, O my Savior so dear,
on the way that I still must pursue; I with Thee
would begin every day granted here, as my
earnest resolve I renew—To be and remain
Thine forever.

—From the Swedish

In January of 1874, the many friends of **Frances R. Havergal** received a New Year's greeting with the heading, "A Happy New Year! Ever Such May It Be!" Following this greeting appeared her text, still considered to be one of the finest New Year's prayers of consecration ever written.

*Another year is dawning! Dear Father, let it be,
in working or in waiting, another year with Thee; another year of leaning upon Thy
loving breast;
another year of trusting, of quiet, happy rest.*

*Another year of mercies, of faithfulness and grace; another year of gladness in the
shining of Thy face; another year of progress, another year of praise,
another year of proving Thy presence all the days.*

*Another year of service, of witness for Thy love;
another year of training for holier work above.
Another year of dawning! Dear Father, let it be,
on earth, or else in heaven, another year for Thee.*

One can well imagine that those who received this greeting card from Miss Havergal that year read her words thoughtfully. They were written by one who had already become widely known throughout England as "the consecration poet." It was said of her that she always lived her words before she wrote them. Her life was one of constant and complete commitment to God. Miss Havergal—an accomplished pianist and vocalist, proficient in seven languages, possessing a keen mind (having memorized Psalms, Isaiah, the Minor Prophets, and the entire New Testament)—dedicated her talents to serving God and others during the new year. May that be our challenge for this new year as well!

I asked the New Year for some motto sweet,
Some rule of life by which to guide my feet.
I asked and paused; it answered soft and low,
“God’s will to know.”

—Unknown

The beginning of the new year is usually a time for reflecting on and evaluating the past as well as for setting serious goals for the future. Because it is so easy to get caught up in a blur of daily sameness, special days and events are important in life. We need these highlights for our growth and development.

“O Jesus, I Have Promised” was written by the English clergyman **John E. Bode** on such a special day. It was penned especially for a confirmation service in which his own daughter and two sons were making their life’s vows of commitment to God and His service. Bode told his three children: “I have written a hymn containing all the important truths I want you to remember when you are fully confirmed.”

Without doubt, the three children of John Bode never forgot that confirmation service and their father’s concern for them as they sang these words throughout their lives.

*O Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;
be Thou forever near me, my Master and my Friend.
I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if Thou wilt be my guide.*

*O let me feel Thee near me—the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear.
My foes are ever near me, around me and within;
but, Jesus, draw Thou nearer and shield my soul from sin.*

*O Jesus, Thou hast promised to all who follow Thee,
that where Thou art in glory, there shall Thy servant be.
And, Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend.*

Do you need to stop today and do some reflecting and evaluating?