

# Necessary and Excellent Advice About Some Duties

William Traill

## 1. As to worship

Frequency, rather than length, seems desirable in all acts of private devotion, excepting in cases of extraordinary solemnity. This is sanctioned by Scripture precept and example. “Seven times a day do I praise thee”— “Evening, and morning, and noon, will I praise and cry aloud.” (Psalm 119:164; 55:17).

Reading of the Scriptures, with meditation, should be intermixed with your devotions. Better pray three or four times, when you get an hour or two for such duties, than to spend all the time in one address without intermission. As ideas are not well conceived without the use of words, so employ your voice in a subdued tone, which you will find most conducive to attention, seriousness, and fervour. Lifting up the voice in closet prayer is contrary to the secrecy our Lord enjoined and has a show of ostentation which is greatly to be avoided. Improve occasional opportunities for prayer, and especially seek it when excited by sudden anger, fear, grief, or joy. Strive then to compose your spirit by pouring out your heart before God. Likewise, after the commission or discovery of some new infirmity or sin, or when you are called to enter upon any new business of weight or moment.

## 2. As to your frame of mind

Labour to escape from soul trouble, not so much because it is terrible as because it is sinful. Seek to have the heart established by grace, and to maintain an equal, constant frame of mind, that you may not be soon cast down and affrighted by an unexpected affliction, nor be suddenly puffed up by unlooked-for success. Guard against all passion, and speaking hastily and unadvisedly; but think awhile upon the thing that vexes you before you utter your mind upon it, and when you speak, say not all you think, and be sure not to make the worst of the matter, which only inflames the heart, and excites the feelings. “A fool uttereth all his mind,

but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards." "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips." (Proverbs 29:11; 16:23).

Put a hopeful construction upon those providences that appear to be sad, dark, and threatening, and do not suspect the kindness of God when cross dispensations occur. Believe that "He hath done all things well," and "that all things work together for good to them that love" him. Remember that "all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his counsel and his testimonies." (Mark 7:37; Romans 8:28; Psalm 25:10).

Often, with all solemnity, put your heart into your hand, and pray that God will not suffer you to deceive yourself, nor provoke him. "Search me, O God, and know my heart" (Psalm 139:23). And when you seek to try the sincerity of your faith, love, and other graces, mind to distinguish between the marks of strong faith and of true faith, however weak. If in self-examination your mind is dark and your decision difficult, do not lose time by trying to settle the truth and sincerity of your experience in former times, but set about a direct act of faith upon Christ Jesus, choosing him, and depending upon him as a full, sufficient, and only Saviour for poor lost sinners. Seek to realize anew your own sinfulness and misery, and with a humbled and penitent heart cast yourself again at his feet. Remember your dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and seek "a supply of the spirit of Christ Jesus," (Philippians 1:19) to work fresh and large discoveries of sanctifying and saving grace, and to refresh your soul amidst all the labours and sorrows of this militant state.

### **3. As to the practice of duty**

Follow Christ, by taking up the cross that he has appointed for you, and by faith lean upon him for strength and succour, to bear you up under its burden from day to day. Observe your daily deficiencies and short-comings and press forward that you may know more of the spirit, life, and power of every duty. Keep constant watch against your easily besetting sins, and take heed that, by a sudden surprisal, they do not prevail against you. Particularly inquire whether you are not tempted to unbelief, and calling in question almost every truth—whether you are not sinfully jealous of the love of God to your soul, after the multiplied evidences of his care—whether affected diffidence, impatient haste, rash and uncharitable censures of others, are not found in your heart—whether you regard the proper season for every duty, and daily labour to "redeem the time"—whether in circumstances of difficulty you ask yourself, what

would my Lord and Saviour have done in this case ? and do likewise whether you mind his own blessed rule, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Learn to remember your latter end, "to die daily"- adventure upon nothing but what appears to be your duty, both lawful and seasonable, and such as you would adventure upon, if you had but a day to live.

#### **4. As to your converse with others**

Study to be doing good, or getting good, in every company. Have most intercourse with the godly, but make your visits short, lest they should become trifling. When you receive a visit, lead the conversation, that time be not lost by idle, vain, unprofitable gossip. Then you will be presently quit of your company, if they are carnal, and they will not soon trouble you again; or you will improve the visit by calling forth from Christian visitors things that are for edification. Let not, however, your fidelity lead to rudeness. "Be ye courteous," and in all the civilities of life let no one excel you.

*Abridged from a paper of the Rev. William Traill, minister of Borthwick, Midlothian. He prepared it at the request of a lady, for her own private use, "at Borthwick, Dec. 12, 1708." It was condensed into fewer words by the editor of the Congregational Magazine, 1841.*