

## **Directions for the holy spending of every day, by Richard Baxter (1615-1691)**

It somewhat tends to make a holy life more easy to us, when we know the ordinary course and method of our duties, and everything falls into its proper place; as it helps the farmer or tradesman to know the ordinary course of his work, that he need not go out of it, unless in extraordinary cases. Therefore I shall here give you some brief **directions for the holy spending of every day**.

Direction 1. Proportion the time of your sleep aright, (if it be in your power,) that you waste not your precious morning hours sluggishly in your bed. Let the time of your sleep be rationally fitted to your health and labor, and not sensually to your slothful pleasure. The morning hours are the most precious of all the day, for all our duties; especially those who are scanted of time, must take it then for prayer, if possible, lest they have none at all.

Direction 2. Let God have your first awaking thoughts: lift up your hearts to him reverently and thankfully for the rest of the night past, and briefly cast yourselves upon him for the upcoming day; and accustom yourselves so constantly to this, that your consciences may check you, when common thoughts shall first intrude. It will be a great help against the temptations that may else surprise you, and a holy engagement of your hearts to God, for all the day.

Direction 3. Resolve, that pride and the fashions of the times shall never tempt you into such a garb of attire, as will make you long in dressing in the morning; but wear such clothing as is soon put on. It is dear-bought 'decency' as they will needs call it, which must cost every day an hour's or a quarter of an hour's time: I had rather go as the wild Indians, than have those morning hours to answer for, as too many ladies and other gallants have.

Direction 4. You may employ that time in some fruitful meditation, or conference with those about you, as far as your necessary occasions do give leave: as, to think or speak of the mercy of a night's rest, and of your renewed time, and how many spent that night in hell, and how many in prison, and how many in a colder, harder lodging, and how many in grievous pain and sickness, weary of their beds and of their lives, and how many in distracting terrors of their minds; and how many souls that night were called from their bodies, to appear before the awesome God. And think how fast days and nights roll on! and how speedily your last night and day will come! and observe what is lacking in the readiness of your soul for such a time, and seek it presently without delay.

Direction 5. If more necessary duties call you not away, let secret prayer by yourself alone, go before the common prayers of the family; and delay it not causelessly, but if it may be, let it be first, before any other work of the day. Yet be not formal and superstitious to your hours, as if God had absolutely tied you to such a time: nor think it your duty to pray once in secret, and once with the family every morning, when more necessary duties call you off. That hour is best for one, which is worst for another: to most, private prayer is most seasonable as soon as they are up and clothed; to others some other hour may be more free and fit. And those people that have not more necessary duties, may do well to pray at all the opportunities before mentioned;

but reading and meditation must be allowed their time also; and the labors of your callings must be painfully followed; and those who are not at liberty, or that have a necessity of providing for their families, may not lawfully take so much time for prayer, as some others may; especially the aged and weak that cannot follow a calling, may take longer time.

And ministers, who have many souls to look after, and public work to do, must take heed of neglecting any of this, that they may be longer and oftener in private prayer. Always remember that when two duties are at once before you, and one must be omitted, that you prefer that which, all things considered, is the greatest; and understand what makes a duty greatest. Usually that is greatest which tends to the greatest good; yet sometimes that is greatest at that time which cannot be done at another time, when others may. Praying, in itself considered, is better than ploughing, or marketing, or conference; and yet these may be greater than it in their proper seasons; because prayer may be done at another time, when these cannot.

Direction 6. Let family worship be performed constantly and seasonably, twice a day, at that hour which is freest in regard of interruptions; not delaying it without just cause. But whenever it is performed, be sure it be reverently, seriously, and spiritually done. Begin with a brief invocation of God's name, and craving of his help and blessing through Christ; and then read some part of the holy Scripture in order; and either help the hearers to understand it and apply it, or if you are unable for that, then read some profitable book to them for such ends; and sing a psalm, (if there be enough to do it fitly,) and earnestly pour out your souls in prayer. But if unavoidable occasions will not give way to all this, do what you can, especially in prayer, and do the rest another time but pretend not necessity against any duty, when it is but unwillingness or negligence. The lively performance of family duties, is a principal means to keep up the power and interest of godliness in the world; which all decays when these grow dead, and slight, and formal.

Direction 7. Renew the actual intention and remembrance of your ultimate end, when you set yourselves to your day's work, or set upon any notable business in the world. Let HOLINESS TO THE LORD be written upon your hearts in all that you do. Do no work which you cannot entitle God to, and truly say he set you about; and do nothing in the world for any other ultimate end, than to please, and glorify, and enjoy him. And remember that whatever you do, must be done as a means to these, and as by one who is going on to heaven. All your labor must be as the labor of a traveler, which is all for his journey's end; and all your respect or affection to any place or thing in your way, must be in respect to your attainment of the end; as a traveler loves a good way, a good horse, a good inn, a dry cloak, or good company; but nothing must be loved here, as your end or home. Lift up your hearts to heaven and say, If this work and way did not tend there directly or indirectly, it were no work or way for me. Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Cor. 10:31.

Direction 7. Follow the labors of your calling carefully and diligently. From hence will follow many blessings:

1. You will show that you are not sluggish, and servants to your flesh, as those that cannot deny its ease; and you will further the mortification of all fleshly lusts and desires, which are fed by ease and idleness.
2. You will keep out idle thoughts from your mind, which swarm in the minds of idle people.
3. You will escape the loss of precious time, which idle people are daily guilty of.
4. You will be in a course of obedience to God, when the slothful are in a constant sin of omission.
5. You may have the more time to spare for holy exercises, if you follow your labor closely when you are at it; while idle people can have no time for prayer or reading, because they lose it by loitering at their work.
6. You may expect God's blessing for the comfortable provision for yourselves and families, and to have to give to those who have need, when the slothful are in need themselves, and cast by their poverty into abundance of temptations, and have nothing to do good with.
7. And it will also tend to the health of your bodies, which will make them the fitter for the service of your souls. Slothfulness wastes time, and health, and estate, and wit, and grace, and all.

Direction 9. Be thoroughly acquainted with your corruptions and temptations, and watch against them all the day; especially the most dangerous sort of your corruptions, and those temptations which your company or business will unavoidably lay before you. Be still watching and working against the **master sins** of unbelief, hypocrisy, selfishness, pride, sensuality, or flesh-pleasing, and the inordinate love of earthly things. Take heed lest, under pretense of diligence in your calling, you are drawn to earthly-mindedness, and excessive cares or covetous designs for rising in the world.

If you are to trade or deal with others, take heed of selfishness, which desires to obtain money from others, as much as you can for yourselves and your own advantage; take heed of all that savors of injustice or uncharitableness in all your dealings with others. If you converse with vain talkers, be still provided against the temptation of vanity of talk. If you converse with angry people, be still fortified against their provocations. If you converse with wanton people, or such as are tempting those of the other gender, maintain that modesty and necessary distance and cleanness of speech which the laws of chastity require. If you have servants that are still faulty, be so provided against the temptation, that their faults may not make you faulty, and you may do nothing that is unseemly or unjust, but only that which tends to their amendment. If you are poor, be still provided against the temptations of poverty, that it brings not upon you an evil far greater than itself. If you are rich, be most diligent in fortifying your hearts against those more dangerous temptations of riches, which very few escape. If you converse with flatterers or those that much admire you, be fortified against swelling pride. If you converse with those that despise and injure you, be fortified against impatient, revengeful pride.

These works at first will be very difficult, while sin is in any strength; but when you have got an habitual apprehension of the poisonous danger of every one of these sins, and of the tendency of all temptations, your hearts will readily and easily avoid them, without much tiring, thoughtfulness, and care; even as a man will pass by a house infected with the plague, or anything that would hurt him.

Direction 10. When you are alone in your labors, improve the time in practical, fruitful (not speculative and barren) meditations; especially in heart work and heaven work. Let your chief meditations be on the infinite goodness and perfections of God, and the life of glory, which in the love and praise of him, you must live forever; and next let Christ, and the mysteries of grace in man's redemption, be the matter of your thoughts; and next that your own hearts and lives. If you are able to manage meditations methodically it will be best; but if you cannot do that, without so much striving as will confound you, and distract you, and cast you into melancholy, it is better let your meditations be more short and easy, like ejaculatory prayers; but let them usually be operative to do some good upon your hearts.

Direction 11. If you labor in company with others, be provided with matter, skill, resolution, and zeal, to improve the time in profitable conference, and to avoid diversions.

Direction 12. Whatever you are doing, in company or alone, let the day be spent in the inward excitation and exercise of the graces of the soul, as well as in external bodily duties. And to that end know, that there is no external duty, but must have some internal grace to animate it, or else it is unacceptable to God. When you are praying and reading, there are the graces of faith, desire, love, repentance, etc. to be exercised there. When you are alone, meditation may help to actuate any grace as you find most needful. When you are conferring with others, you must exercise love to them, and love to that truth about which you do confer, and other graces as the subject shall require. When you are provoked or under suffering, you have patience to exercise.

But especially it must be your principal daily business, by the exercise of faith, to keep your hearts warm in the love of God and your dear Redeemer, and in the hopes and delightful thoughts of heaven. As the means are various and admit of deliberation and choice, because they are to be used but as means, and not all at once, but sometimes one, and sometimes another, when the end is still the same and past deliberation or choice; so all those graces which are but means, must be used thus variously, and with deliberation and choice; when the love of God and of eternal life must be the constant tenor and constitution of the mind, as being the final grace, which consists with the exercise of every other mediate grace. Never take up with lip-labor or bodily exercise alone, nor barren thoughts, unless your hearts be also employed in a course of duty, and holy breathings after God, or motion towards him, or in the sincere internal part of the duty which you perform to men. Justice and love are graces which you must still exercise towards all that you have to deal with in the world. Love is called the fulfilling of the law, Romans 13:10; because the love of God and man is the soul of every outward duty, and a cause that will bring forth these as its effects.

Direction 13. Keep up a high esteem of time; and be every day more careful that you lose none of your time, than you are that you lose none of your gold or silver. If vain recreations, dressings, feasting, idle talk, unprofitable company, or sleep—are temptations to rob you of any of your time, accordingly heighten your watchfulness and firm resolutions against them. Do not be more careful to escape thieves and robbers—than to escape that person, or action, or course of life, which would rob you of any of your time. And for the redeeming of time, especially see, not only that you be never idle, but also that you be doing the greatest good that you can do, and prefer not a less before a greater good.

Direction 14. Eat and drink with temperance and thankfulness; for health, and not for unprofitable pleasure. Most carefully avoid excess. Never please your appetite in food or drink, when it tends to the detriment of your health. God calls us to deny our unnecessary, sensual delights, and use the body so as it may be most serviceable to the soul and him. "Eat at a proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness." Ecclesiastes 10:17

Take heed of intemperance and excess. Let your diet incline rather to the coarser than the finer sort, and to the cheaper than the costly sort, and to sparing abstinence than to fullness. I would advise rich men especially, to write in great letters on the walls of their dining-rooms or parlors these verses: "Sodom's sins were pride, laziness, and gluttony, while the poor and needy suffered outside her door." Ezekiel 16:49. "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed and who lived each day in luxury. . . Remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony!" Luke 16:19, 25.

Paul wept when he mentioned those "whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things, being enemies to the cross," Phil. 3:18, 19. O live not after the flesh, lest you die! Romans 8:13; Gal. 6:8; 5:21, 23, 24.

Direction 15. If any temptation prevails against you, and you fall into any sin, presently lament it, and confess it to God; and rise by a true and thorough repentance, immediately without delay. Spare not the flesh, and daub not over the breach, and do not by excuses palliate the sore, but speedily rise, whatever it cost; for it will certainly cost you more to remain impenitent. And for your besetting sins, make not too light of them, but confess them, and daily strive against them; and examine what strength you get against them, and do not aggravate them by impenitence and contempt.

Direction 16. Every day look to the special duties of your several relations: whether you are husbands, wives, parents, children, masters, servants, pastors, people, magistrates, subjects; remember that every relation has its special duty, and its advantage for the doing of some good; and that God requires your faithfulness in these, as well as in any other duty. And that in these a man's sincerity or hypocrisy is usually more tried, than in any other parts of our lives.

Direction 17. In the evening return to the worshiping of God, in the family and in secret, as was directed for the morning. And do all with seriousness, as in the sight of God, and in the

sense of your necessities; and make it your delight to receive instructions from the holy Scripture, and praise God, and call upon his name through Christ.

Direction 18. If you have any extraordinary impediments one day to hinder you in your duty to God and man, make it up by diligence the next; and if you have any extraordinary helps, make use of them, and let them not slip away.

Direction 19. Before you betake yourselves to sleep, it is ordinarily a safe and needful course, to take a review of the actions and mercies of the past day; that you may be specially thankful for all special mercies, and humbled for your sins; and may renew your repentance and resolutions for obedience; and may examine yourselves, whether your souls grew better or worse; and whether sin or grace increased; and whether you are any better prepared for sufferings and death.

But yet waste not too much time in the ordinary accounts of your life, as those that neglect their duty while they are examining themselves how they perform it, and perplexing themselves with the long perusal of their ordinary infirmities. But by a general (yet sincere) repentance, bewail your unavoidable daily failings, and have recourse to Christ for a daily pardon and renewed grace. And in case of extraordinary sins or mercies, be sure to be extraordinarily humbled or thankful. Some think it best to keep a daily catalogue or journal of their sins and mercies. If you do so, be not too particular in the enumeration of those that are the matter of every day's return; for it will be but a temptation to waste your time, and neglect greater duty, and to make you grow customary and senseless of such sins and mercies, when the same come to be recited over and over from day to day.

But let the common mercies be more generally recorded, and the common sins generally confessed (yet neither of them therefore slighted); and let the extraordinary mercies, and greater sins, have a more particular observation. And yet remember, that sins and mercies, which it is not fit that others be acquainted with, are more safe committed to memory than to writing: and methinks, a well humbled and a thankful heart should not easily let the memory of them slip.

Direction 20. When you compose yourselves to sleep, again commit yourselves to God through Christ, and crave his protection, and close up the day with some holy exercise of faith and love. And if you one who lies awake in the night, let your meditations be holy, and exercised upon subjects which are profitable to your souls.

I have briefly laid together these twenty directions for the right spending of every day, that those who need them, may at least get these few engraved on their minds, and make them the daily practice of their lives; which if you will sincerely do, you cannot conceive how much it will conduce to the holiness, fruitfulness, and quietness of your lives, and to your peaceful and comfortable death.