

An Excerpt From ...

A Private House Of Prayer

by Leslie D. Weatherhead

I want to suggest that, since there is no limit to our imagination, no limited quota of building material, we can have not just one room but a whole house. I will tell you about my house of prayer and offer you a month in it, and then you can build your own and furnish it with some of the glorious truths and promises of our faith. And you can use this house of prayer whenever you have a mind to do so. It is easy to memorize the names of the rooms, and you can enter any or all of them as you sit in the corner of a railway coach, or in the bus or subway on the way to work, or between your home and the station, or even without getting out of bed. This, so far from being lazy, can be a useful place to pray because relaxation is of value, and it is easier to relax there. By this method you can give as long or as short a time as you wish to devote to prayer, but of course, a "room" suggests a place in which you tarry. Do not rush through all the rooms looking for God. He can be found in every one. Some may desire to use some rooms in the morning and leave others-particularly the sixth and seventh-for the evening. Some may have so little time that they can use only one room per day. For myself, I find half an hour before, or just after, breakfast the best time. There are seven rooms in the house, and they are all prayer rooms. Here they are then:

Room 1. This is the room in which we ***Affirm the Presence of God.*** A common objection to prayer is that it "feels like talking to nothing," or that "there is no one there." We cannot engineer feeling, but in the first room let us assert the fact that God is present. This by repeating some of the great texts of the Bible. All through the Bible, God asserts his presence with his people, and it is real prayer to remember the sentences which recall this to our mind. "Enoch walked with God." "Abraham was the friend of God. To Moses God promised his presence, and to Joshua he said, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." David feels he can face the dark valley "for Thou art with me," and our Lord not only promised the "Lo I am with you always even until the end of the world," but promised the Holy Spirit "that He may be with you for ever." In this first room I repeat those great words "with you." By printing them have drawn attention to them throughout Part Three.

With such passages we "furnish" this room, and of course, we can add to them from the hymnbook and from the poets.

Room 2. When we have asserted the fact of the presence of God, we can pass into the next room in which we ***Praise, Thank, and Adore God.*** It is a good thing to imagine this room full of morning sunshine: is the room of thanksgiving. Each of us has something for which to praise and thank God. Indeed it is a revealing thing to write down a list of those things for which we should thank God. We should adore him for all he is in himself - and as we do so, we should call to mind his attributes and remember his love, his splendor,

his power, his beauty, his wisdom, his holiness. Then we can thank him for the way he has led us and for all he has done for us. We are to keep our mind - in this room at least - away from our worries and fears and weaknesses and sins. We will look at them later, but, first of all, let us resolutely turn our minds away from preoccupation with them. First we will look at God in this mental room dedicated to praise, gratitude, and adoration. We can furnish this room with hymns like the Te Deum and other great hymns of praise from the hymnbook and the poets.

Room 3. Now we are ready for a room rather dim and shadowy as we enter but brighter as we move across it to the window. It is the room of ***Confession, Forgiveness, and Unloading***. Here we confess our sin, not just in a general way but really being honest. Most of us are sometimes jealous, malicious, unkind, proud, irritable, intolerant, impure. We pull off the slick business deal and feel a little bit ashamed. We disparage another's good name. In a hundred ways we do what we know to be wrong and fail to do what the inner spirit prompts us as right. Terribly often we are indifferent to another's need. Here we recognize and put away from us our secret resentments, our arrogant self-importance, our refusals to forgive, our jealousy and envy, our hate and malice, and that terrible desire to hit back, which, if retained, block the entry of God's peace into our hearts. Here we part with the secret fear that our self-esteem is being undermined or that we shall be found inadequate. If we really are inadequate, we must accept the fact. God understands and accepts us as we are. But, of course, we must not pretend to him or to ourselves. Nor must we try to make the world think us wiser, or cleverer, or better, or younger (or whatever it is) than we are. All deception blocks the path to God's peace.

But God is always ready and willing to forgive us. We can move toward the window, pull up the blind, and let the streaming light of loving forgiveness and acceptance flood the room. We are loved, understood, forgiven, and accepted.

In this room part of Ps. 51 would be a suitable piece of furniture -- the psalm in which David pours out his soul to God and finds pardon. Before we leave this room, too, we must make sure that we are ready to forgive others who may have sinned against us. Nothing is clearer in the New Testament than the fact that God asks as a condition of his forgiveness, not so much a penitence that is complete, as a spirit that will forgive another. "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive them that trespass against us." "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:15.)

Here also we confess our fears and put down our worries and our dark anxieties. They are not necessarily sins. Some of them we cannot help. But here we tell God about them and let the sunshine of his love and purpose shine upon them. Our confusion we put down here, too, our bewilderment as to what we ought to do and which way we ought to go. In this room we tell God everything that troubles us.

Room 4 is set aside for ***Affirmation and Reception***. Cleansed by forgiveness we are ready now to receive. This prayer of positive affirmation is important. We are no longer to dwell on the depths to which we have fallen but on the heights to which God will lead us. God is waiting to give. Jesus put the matter in an unforgettable sentence: "What things

soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."
(Mark 11:24.)

So, quietly, with body and mind relaxed, I may say to myself in this room: "The peace of God is mine. God is giving me his power now. In God I am one with the spirit of love. I am caught up into his mighty purposes now. I am safe within his care. The everlasting arms are round about me and will not let me fall." Each sentence should be murmured aloud slowly again and again.

The twenty-third psalm is suitable furniture for this room. It does not ask, "O Lord, be my Shepherd." It affirms that he is. It does not ask for guidance. It rests in the affirmation that the soul is being guided. "He is leading me in a true path for his name's sake, and he is restoring my soul." One should say the words quietly and confidently, repeating each sentence over and over. Some may wish to visit this room just before sleeping at night. I can think of no more valuable way of falling asleep than to do so repeating some great affirmation about God, such as, "I will be quiet, resting in thee, thou Spirit of peace within me." This thought will sink deep into the unconscious mind, creating and storing an inward peace upon which to draw on difficult days when the temptation is to take our reaction from the storm around us, to react in bad temper or ruffled feelings, in worry and anxiety, instead of taking our reaction from the stores of peace laid by through prayer for just such occasions.

It might help us to remember that if God were not willing to give, then we could wrest nothing out of his hands. But if he is willing give, then we have only to take. The Bible says he is more willing to give than we are to ask. How can I take? I take by affirming that his love and peace and power are at my disposal and that his peace is flooding my heart, even while I bow in this inner room.

It is important to remember that the act of affirmation must not made merely by the intellect and carried out by the will. One of the causes of spiritual inefficiency is that while mind and will concur -- the mind accepting truth and the will trying to carry out its implications - - yet the deep emotional levels are unreached.

For instance, I may *know* intellectually that resentment is wrong and may even make me ill. I may do my best by means of my *will* not be resentful. Yet the emotion remains. I *feel* resentful.

To alter that condition I must get the opposite, positive emotion into my deep mind, and to do *that* I must repeat a score of times or more some positive statement such as, "God is love, and his love fills my heart and overflows to all men, forgiving and loving all for his sake."

Someone has said that "the subconscious is an ass," and I think I know what he means. Ideas presented to it by repetition during relaxation are accepted by it almost without the intellect being consulted, and the emotional color of the deep mind is altered. Coué knew this, and I system rested on its truth. His pupils were to say the famous words over and

over again: "Every day in every way I am getting better and better." "Say it parrot fashion," said Coué, and added, with unconscious humor, "Don't think about it. Say it as you say the Litany."

I myself found immense help from repeating as I sought to sleep "Through the inpouring of thy love, thou art healing me of all that is contrary to thy Spirit." I believe that the healing process goes on during sleep for "He giveth unto his beloved in sleep." (Ps. 127:2 E.R.V. margin). Did not Brother Lawrence say, "The barque of the soul goeth forward even in sleep"?

Room 5 is the place for *Purified Desire and Sincere Petition*. We know what our dominant desires are. In this room we purify them by looking at them again in the light of God. Maybe we shall see that in that light our prayer to become manager of the bank, or principal of the school, to make money, achieve fame, or be a social success is not so important as to be used by God in some way that helps others.

It is found that some of our thoughtless and selfish prayers that begin, "I want," die on our lips by the time we get to this room in the house of prayer. Probably by this time we want to love more deeply both God and our fellows and promote God's interests even more than our own. We stop saying, "Give me," and start saying, "Make me" and "Show me" and "Use me." This is the place where we ask for renewed trust and stronger faith and more tolerant love for those who differ from us.

In a university common room a number of lecturers were chatting together. Someone asked the question, "What do you want to be?" The others replied in turn, and the answers were not unworthy. One wanted an academic distinction, another an athletic prize, another a professor's chair. One man, shy and sensitive, said quietly, "You fellows will laugh at me, but I want to be a saint." They did not laugh at him. I know this man and can sincerely add that he is a saint and one of the most healthy influences at a large university. When we can sincerely say, "I want to be a saint," we are purifying our petitions.

Room 6 is that of *Intercession for Others*. It has never seemed to me practicable to spend a lot of time on each person for whom I wish to pray, and if the other rooms in the house of prayer have been conscientiously visited, it seems enough to me to say the name of the person slowly, calling him to mind in as vivid a picture as possible, and then *imaginatively watching him emerging from his difficulties*, being made well --if we are praying about his health -- being made confident, courageous, serene, joyous, or whatever it may be.

The words italicized are very important. Our minds at the moment of intercession can be so filled with pity, or negative sympathy, or fear, or even horror, that we cannot help and may hinder another. Miss M. V. Dunlop writes:

It is the power of our thought for ill that is so overwhelming, the knowledge that by our states of worry, despondency, fear and other forms of faithlessness we are not only laying up a more or less miserable future for

ourselves, but -- far worse -- are making life harder for those we love and want to help; harder because our mental state is actually intensifying their belief in the power of illness or some misery, and so giving their condition a stronger hold over them. We do not always remember that, far from bearing another's burden, we are binding it on more firmly by much of our sympathy. If we did, we should make far more effort to conquer our own "natural" grief for someone else's affliction than is at all common. The conquest of grief lies not in suppressing it but in holding our minds still before the Lord (to use an old Quaker phrase) till we are filled with the realization of His Life and Power. Then, and only then, is our longing to help the other and lighten the burden made possible of fulfillment.

I remember a friend of mine asking me not to pray for him in church, When I asked why, he said that the feelings of horror which would be called forth when I told the congregation what had happened to him would hurt him more than the prayers would help him. His words pulled me up and made me take greater care about the way in which, I described the person for whom public prayers are offered.

My own plan in praying privately for friends is to have four lists numbered one to thirty-one and against each numeral to pencil four names. (See pages 40-41.) Then on the day of the month I am praying, I think of the four people whose names are opposite the number which represents the date. In this book a space is left at the end of each day's "Room 6" also, so that names can be penciled in. Of course, some must be mentioned daily and urgent situations will arise. But I have never felt that "God bless all my friends" is a sufficiently focused prayer, nor can I feel much reality in praying for causes. "God bless the missionary society," let alone "God bless India," would seem to me less valuable than to think of someone-if possible personally known and whose difficulties are real to one-who is working in that field. By some such plan as this one can really pray for one's friends, if it be only once a month, with some sense of sincerity and reality. Paul said he would "mention" his friends in his prayers (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16). George Macdonald says, "I will not say that I will pray for you, but I shall think of God and you together."

Room 7 is a big room at the top of the house set aside for *Meditation*. Here we sometimes take an incident in the Gospels and try to do what Ruskin said he did, "to be present as if in the body at each recorded act in the life of the Redeemer." We might indeed work steadily through the Gospels in this way, imaginatively watching the incidents happen and especially "looking at Jesus." Some examples are given in the following pages, and our meditation should end in dedication. The will should be strengthened by all that the imagination has contemplated. Some of the meditations which follow are poems which are worth reading repeatedly and brooding upon.

This sevenfold way may not prove attractive. All that matters is that we should find some way of praying that is real, and neither dull or burdensome, nor so unarranged and desultory as to waste time and be unrewarding.

We are all troubled by "wandering thoughts." Sometimes it is a good thing to note just where they do wander, to ask why they wander there, and to pray about the situation to which they drift. Sometimes we are like A. A. Milne's Christopher Robin:

God bless Mummy. I know that's right.
Wasn't it fun in the bath to-night?
The cold's so cold, and the hot's so hot.
Oh, *God bless Daddy* - I quite forgot.

If I open my fingers a little bit more,
I can see Nanny's dressing-gown on the door,
It's a beautiful blue, but it hasn't a hood,
Oh! *God bless Nanny and make her good.*

It isn't only the child Christopher Robin who experiences this difficulty. Listen to Benjamin Jowett, a famous master of Balliol College, Oxford:

Nothing makes one more conscious of poverty and shallowness of character than difficulty in praying or attending to prayer. Any thoughts about self, thoughts of evil, day dreams, love fancies, easily find an abode in the mind. But the thought of God and of right and truth will not stay there, except with a very few persons. I fail to understand my own nature in this particular. There is nothing which at a distance I seem to desire more than the knowledge of God, the ideal, the universal; and yet for two minutes I cannot keep my mind upon them. But I read a great work of fiction, and can hardly take my mind from it. If I had any real love of God, would not my mind dwell upon Him?

The scheme I have devised offers help to wandering minds like my own.

One could, of course, fill the scheme out to last an hour or more, or shorten it to a few minutes. It is really rather fun to gather passages from the Bible, the hymnbook, the poets and the essayists and biographers, to make more pictures and furniture for each room. One could in time change the pictures and the furniture in every room.

At any rate, I pass on the scheme for what it is worth. We need God. The masters of prayer teach us that all the factors I have mentioned such as adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition, intercession, and meditation have their place, and yet some of their books are so advanced that they frighten beginners like me.

The order seems important to me. I want to assert first the Divine Presence and realize the fact, if not the feeling, that there is "Someone there." Then I can adore, worship, praise, and thank him. To do that makes me terribly conscious of my own unworthiness, so I turn then to forgiveness and the unburdening of my heart. Having, as it were, emptied my heart, I want to fill it with what God will give me if I take it by the method of repeated affirmation. By this time I have passed what I want through the sieve of his will, "through

Jesus Christ our Lord," if I may so put it. I ask in a different way and for different things than would have fled my lips if I had burst into his presence with my petitions at the beginning. Some may think it odd to put intercessions or others so late, but it is when I have myself got nearest to God and asked him in petition to do things for me and in me that I can be of maximum help to others. Then last of all, I want to meditate by "looking at Jesus" or contemplating some great truth which has come to me from him. In this way imaginative communion with him can have -- as nearly as possible -- the results of being with him in Galilee. That communion is surely the strongest transforming power in the world. What it did for Peter and John, it can do for me.

We must each find the way. "God," said Emerson, "enters by a, private door into every individual." "Come down Thine own secret stair," cries George Macdonald. But we can help by making an imaginative house with many doors and stairways and open them all to him. He will come in his own way and by his own route. As long as God comes, it does not matter how, but we must give him a chance. "Behold," he says, "I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him *and will sup with him*, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20)-in the East an unmistakable offer of friendship from which there will never be any turning back.

I have always found prayer difficult. So often it seems like a fruitless game of hide and seek in which we seek and God hides. I know God is very patient with me. Without that patience I should be lost. But frankly I have to be patient with him. With no other friend would I go on seeking with such scant, conscious response. Yet I cannot leave prayer alone for long. My need drives me to him. And I have a feeling that he has his own reasons for hiding himself, and that finally all my seeking will prove infinitely worth while. And I am not sure what I mean by "finding." Some days my very seeking seems a kind of "finding." And of course, if "finding" meant the *end* of "seeking," it were better to go on seeking. I suppose no one ever finds all there is to find or can rest satisfied as if he had arrived at a journey's end. I long for more satisfaction, but I cannot cease from questing. Jesus sometimes found prayer difficult. Some of his most agonized prayers were not answered. But he did not give up his praying. I frankly have little to show for all my, prayers, but I cannot give up, for "my soul longeth for God," and know that outside God there is nothing at all but death.

Let us then make a house of prayer and, if possible, open the door every morning, for to commune with him may well be the cause for which we were created. It is a very private house. We will not open the rooms to another unless he or she is closely allied in desire. There is One who "seeth in secret."

"When thou prayest," said Jesus, "enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." A reward, surely, which shall be a new quality of life, full of serenity and joy and love, a worthy reaction to all life's demands, and in the end, a communion with God worth all our present disappointments, a communion which shall be a tiny part of his own glory and the whole of our bliss.

Open House

A Seven-roomed House of Prayer for a Month

DAY 1 - ROOM 1

The Affirmation of the Divine Presence

Whither SHALL I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in ell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. Ps. 139:7-12

I here and now affirm the presence of the inescapable God. I here and now rejoice in the presence of the everywhere-available, omnipresent Friend.

DAY 1 - ROOM 2

Adoration, Praise, and Thanksgiving

MY SOUL doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:... He that is mighty hath done to me great things;

AND HOLY IS HIS NAME.

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He bath ... exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich [complacent] he hath sent empty away. Luke 1:46-53 I adore and praise and give thanks to thee, O God, because, though:: I am what I am, thou art

UTTERLY HOLY

I adore thy splendor, and I cast myself in lowly worship at thy feet,, awaiting, like Mary, thy holy will.

This is that blessed Mary, pre-elect
God's virgin. Gone is a great while, and she
Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee.
Unto God's will she brought devout respect,
Profound simplicity of intellect
And supreme patience. From her mother's knee
Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;
Strong in grave peace; in pity circumspect.

So held she through her girlhood; as it were
An angel-watered lily, that near God
Grows and is quiet. Till, one dawn at home
She woke in her white bed, and had no fear
At all, yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed:
Because the fullness of the time was come.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

DAY 1 - ROOM 3

Confession, Forgiveness, and Unloading

HAVE MERCY upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.... Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. . . . The sacrifices of God; are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Ps. 51:1-3, 7, 9-12, 17

DAY 1 - ROOM 4

Positive Affirmation and Reception

THE LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my

head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Ps. 23

I note that the psalmist says "he" until he speaks about the shadowed valley. Then he says "thou." He speaks about God. Then he turns and speaks to God. The Friend has *come* and is *there*.

I note that "hast," that "is," and that "shall." Let me also use the past to fortify the present and use the past and the present to help me face the future in confidence and in trust. Because of all that God has done for me in the past; because he brings me through each day as it becomes the present, let me affirm and receive his power, so that fear for the future may fall away from my heart.

DAY 1 - ROOM 5

Petition

IF INDEED it be necessary, O Lord, to bury the workman that my work may be finished by other hands, help me never to think myself indispensable. May I be content to die with my work undone, knowing that my task is to work at the fulfillment of thy purposes, not to work them out.

God buries His workmen, but He carries on His work.
John Wesley

Let me rest, O God, in the thought that all that matters is that I should rejoice to be thy child, a child who can never fall out of thy care, and let me be willing to follow the pathway of thy will in each circumstance that arises without chafing to be here or there or to do this or that.

So, I pray thee, bring me to the end of this day without dishonor and to my journey's end in peace. Amen.

DAY 1 - ROOM 6

Intercession

FOR THE President, his wife, and his family.
For those who are working for the peace of the world.
For all who serve in the Cabinet and in the Senate and House of Representatives.

For all who hold positions of responsibility in universities and colleges.
For all who teach in schools.
For all ministers of the gospel.
For all fathers and mothers and guardians of children.
For all whose written words in books and newspapers influence the thoughts and actions of others.
All who bear responsibility. All who contribute to either peace or strife.
Grant, O Lord, that their influence may be used always to bring peace to the world, peace within the
Church, peace in the life of the home, and peace in the hearts of men.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.

Today I lift up my heart in intercession for:

DAY 1 - ROOM 7

Meditation

And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not find the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Luke 19:1-10

I see this little man who was despised and who despised himself. I watch his undignified ascent of the sycamore tree. I watch and hear Jesus call him. He descends. Jesus' arm is across his shoulders, "brothering" him. There is no condescension or heavy attempt to do him good. Jesus wants to be with him, really loves him. All the gospel is here. I want Jesus, but incredibly, he wants me. Jesus utters no word of criticism. Jesus sees the best in him, a son of Abraham. It is Zaccheus who judges himself. So it will ever be. Jesus came not to condemn but to save, but in his presence how can I help condemning myself?

Then supper, the unmistakable sign that Jesus wants to be his friend and eat with him. In the East this is a sign of a friendship from which there will be no going back: a friendship which roused holy desire in Zaccheaus and a new determination to lead a different life.

If Jesus did this for Zaccheaus, he will do it for me. He is ever the same. My past life is full of sin, but I do sincerely want Jesus. I have lost much of my idealism and been content with lower standards. I have lost much of my faith, and sometimes I have lost hope. I have lost much of my love for my fellow men. I have lost much of my desire to serve them at cost to myself.

Let me meditate upon the wondrous words "The Son of man came to save that which was lost."

Dear Lord, let me have communion with thee now and bring the salvation of thy friendship to my longing heart.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. Jude 1:24-25

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