

Reflections

JANUARY 2023

Seize Any Time And Place



Lewis's final book, published three months after his death, was *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. In Letter III, he considers practical issues about finding a time and place for daily prayer. An excerpt follows.

And, talking of sleepiness, I entirely agree with you that no one in his senses, if he has any power of ordering his own day, would reserve his chief prayers for bed-time—obviously the worst possible hour for any action which needs concentration. The trouble is that thousands of unfortunate people can hardly find any other. Even for us, who are the lucky ones, it is not always easy. My own plan, when hard pressed, is to seize any time, and place, however unsuitable, in preference to the last waking moment. On a day of travelling—with, perhaps, some ghastly meeting at the end of it—I'd rather pray sitting in a crowded train than put it off till midnight when one reaches a hotel bedroom with aching head and dry throat and one's mind partly in a stupor and partly in a whirl. On other, and slightly less crowded, days a bench in a park, or a back street where one can pace up and down, will do.

A concentrated mind and a sitting body make for better prayer than a kneeling body and a mind half asleep.



A man to whom I was explaining this said, "But why don't you turn into a church?" Partly because, for nine months of the year, it will be freezingly cold, but also because I have bad luck with churches. No sooner do I enter one and compose my mind than one or other of two things happens. Either someone starts practising the organ. Or else, with resolute tread, there appears from nowhere a pious woman in elastic-side boots, carrying mop, bucket, and dustpan, and begins beating hassocks and rolling up carpets and doing things to flower vases. Of course (blessings on her) "work is prayer," and her enacted *oratio* is probably worth ten times my spoken one. But it doesn't help mine to become worth more.

When one prays in strange places and at strange times one can't kneel, to be sure. I won't say this doesn't matter. The body ought to pray as well as the soul. Body and soul are both the better for it. Bless the body. Mine has led me into many scrapes, but I've led it into far more. If the imagination were obedient, the appetites would give us very little trouble. And from how much it has saved me! And but for our body one whole realm of God's glory—all that we receive through the senses—would

go unpraised. For the beasts can't appreciate it and the angels are, I suppose, pure intelligence. They *understand* colours and tastes better than our greatest scientists; but have they retinas or palates? I fancy the "beauties of nature" are a secret God has shared with us alone. That may be one of the reasons why we were made—and why the resurrection of the body is an important doctrine.

But I'm being led into a digression... The relevant point is that kneeling does matter, but other things matter even more. A concentrated mind and a sitting body make for better prayer than a kneeling body and a mind half asleep. Sometimes these are the only alternatives. (Since the osteoporosis I can hardly kneel at all in most places, myself.)¹

As you think about your life over the past few months and year, where does prayer (and especially your "chief prayers") fit into how you order your day? For days when you have not been able to pray when you preferred to, what has been your strategy for finding a time and place where you can pray with concentration? Would you like to ask God to help you in this area of your life?



"Devote yourselves to prayer..."

COLOSSIANS 4:2 (NIV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, 1992), pp. 16-18.

