

## **Lourine Clark | The Snare of DISTRACTION**

- Excerpt from Snares in Prayer: A Guide for Intercessors, Chapter 1 of 7, Lourine Clark, 2005.

### **How to Use:**

*There are some predictable "snares" we will encounter as we go deeper in prayer. My purpose in writing about these obstacles is to keep us from getting stuck in them. Don't read these pages as you would a book. Read slowly and meditatively so that the truths percolate from head to heart. Then identify only a few ideas which strike you as the most relevant - write those out in your own words - and focus on implementing those on a day-to-day basis. Less will be more!*

**Summary:** *The distraction of busy lives and unrelenting stresses affect our prayer lives in two ways. Distraction and misplaced priorities can keep us from coming to pray at all. Distractions can also plague us while we are praying.*

### **The Snare of DISTRACTION**

***Be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ( 1 Peter 4:7b )***

Several years ago I came to understand something which has been helpful. I was going through what I call 'discombobulation,' a state of extreme distraction and confusion where I make little progress in anything I am attempting to do. That particular day, I became increasingly frenetic, trying to bring something, anything under my control. Of course, my ability to pray or to concentrate on the Word was nil. I felt like a rat on an endless treadmill.

Then it hit me! Just as my stomach signals to me that I am hungry for nourishment, this state signals that I am spiritually hungry. When I looked over the weeks that had preceded that day, I discovered I had been living on spiritual cotton candy--listening to an occasional Christian radio program, sending up prayers on the run. These were good things in themselves, but not sufficient as the primary nourishment of my spirit. They gave me an occasional short sugar high but I was malnourished inside.

What I had to do became clear. I had to go the opposite direction of what I typically do in this condition. I couldn't run faster. I couldn't try harder to bring life under my control. I had to pull away from all tasks and get to a quiet place. I had to surrender control to the One who is Life. I had to feed my starving spirit.

That particular day, I went out of routine for rest of the afternoon and evening. I relaxed in a hot tub, went to a quiet place in the house, listened to classical music and then slowly began to feed on the living Word, psalm by psalm. Through the evening, my spirit calmed down (like the weaned child of Psalm 131) as I was drawn into fellowship with my Lord.

The frantic state ended that evening. I wish I could say that I have never been in such a state again but that's not true. But I can say that as soon I see a relentless distractedness overtaking me, I know that I am spiritually hungry. And that stopping for nourishment from my Lord is a 'meal' I can't afford to miss.

***Self Examination: Select one or two which is most applicable:***

- Am I too busy to quiet myself with the Lord regularly? Am I a poor time manager?
- Do I resist setting boundaries in my life to keep it from becoming chaotic?
- Am I a perfectionist, trying to find perfection in myself or in others or circumstances?
- Am I currently grieving the loss of a person, job, place or dream?
- Is there an idol (i.e., a good thing which has become the ultimate thing) I am worshiping instead of my God?
- Am I allowing myself to become over committed to please others or to cover over pain in my life?
- Do I tend to let the cares of this world choke out the Word's power and help in my life?

***Signs of Spirit Led Focus and Self-Control:***

- In the midst of a full schedule, I enjoy a quieting, inner communion with the Lord.
- Generally, I am able to keep my word. I seldom forget a commitment to pray for a person or situation.
- Increasingly, I can keep a Sabbath discipline, daily times of solitude, and other times of retreat with the Lord.
- I have a growing understanding of activities and people that drain or distract me from the most important things.
- My schedule has more margin in it. And a practical recognition of the seasons of life or of the year.
- I concentrate on the person or task at hand, with enjoyment, instead of trying to do two things at once.

***Meditation from Luke 10:38-41 (Amplified)***

"Now while they were on their way, it occurred that Jesus entered a certain village, and a woman named Martha received and welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister named Mary, who seated herself at the Lord's feet and was listening to His teaching. But Martha (over occupied and too busy) was distracted about much serving; and she came up to Him and said, Lord, is it nothing to You that my sister has left me to serve alone?"

Tell her then to help me—to lend a hand and do her part along with me. But the Lord replied to her by saying, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; there is need of (but a few things, or) only one. Mary has chosen the good portion (that which is to her advantage), which shall not be taken away from her.' "

- What is the Lord saying to you through this passage? Be still and allow Him to speak.

- Where in this current season of my life do I tend to become "over occupied and too busy" or "distracted about much serving?"

- What am I to do specifically to refocus my priorities? Is this an opportunity to develop a spiritual discipline, e.g. taking a weekly Sabbath rest?

### ***More Wisdom from God's Word: 1 Corinthians 9: 24-27***

"Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win. All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified." (NLT)

### ***Wisdom from Others:***

"I know it takes time to develop a life of prayer: set-aside, disciplined, deliberate time. It isn't accomplished on the run, nor by offering prayers from a pulpit or at a hospital bedside. I know I can't be busy and pray at the same time. I can be active and pray; I can work and pray; but I cannot be busy and pray. I cannot be inwardly rushed, distracted, or dispersed. In order to pray I have to be paying more attention to God than to my clamoring ego. Usually, for that to happen there must be a deliberate withdrawal from the noise of the day, a disciplined detachment from the insatiable self." Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*.

### ***An Example:***

My friend Judy shared this story with me.

"My husband and I were in our third year of marriage, pregnant with our first born, and in vocational Christian service. My distraction in prayer happened subtly. I can't remember when or how it started, but I do know it started with my attitude. Little resentments were creeping in toward others and God. I was angry that I wasn't getting the recognition I thought I should be for the work I was doing. How could they not recognize my great service? Why did God put me here? Gradually, my quiet times became empty exercises, and my prayer life dried up. I continued to go through the motions but my heart was cold. I felt distant from God and from others. I had no joy in my work. Everything was an effort. I remember clearly walking outdoors

one day, feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders, desperately wanting relief. I called out loud, 'Where are You, Lord?'

That day, God spoke to a friend who was listening to Him and asked her to give me a gift. The gift was \$20 specifically to be used to buy maternity jeans. Her comment was, 'God asked me to give this to you to buy maternity jeans with.' I was speechless. You see, only God could have given that gift to me. We had very little money at the time, none for new maternity clothes that were to be used only a few months. I had secretly been longing for a pair of maternity jeans. In that gift, God said, 'Judy, I am right here. I have been here all along. I know what's in your heart, and I'm crazy about you.' My eyes filled with tears. God reached out in a most tender and personal way to say, 'I'm right here.' The weight I had been carrying fell from my shoulders as my heart flooded with joy, gratefulness and awe.

I learned a great lesson that day. I had had a wrong or immature understanding of God and what He wanted from me. He didn't want all my good works; He wanted me! He wanted me to see Him, enjoy Him, rest and delight in Him. And to point others in His direction that they might do the same. Since I have come to better understand my Lord and His love for me, I am more naturally drawn to Him. I want to take the time to talk to Him about things in my life and to listen to what He has to say. Distractions to prayer are far less in my life now. It's simply too exciting to miss out on experiencing God's love in action!"

***A Prayer:*** Father God, how I need Your truth in my innermost parts today. I am distracted and rushing about as if the world wouldn't run without me. Help me, please, to quiet myself before You. Increase my desire for You and Your ways of living. Let all the things I let distract me from You and leave me empty, hold no more sway over me. I ask Your forgiveness for living as if I didn't have You in my life. I ask Your forgiveness for believing I can't change my ways and become a disciplined person. I claim Your truth that I am a new creation in Christ. Thank You that I John 1:9 is true, and that You have forgiven me and are now cleansing me from unrighteousness. I start anew with You now. May I walk before You with an undivided heart in Your ways and truth. In Christ's Name, with thanksgiving, Amen.