

A Spiritual Life That Takes You
Deeper Than Daily Devotions

LIVING CLOSE TO GOD

WHEN YOU'RE NOT GOOD AT IT

GENE
EDWARDS

Author of A TALE OF THREE KINGS

LIVING
CLOSE
TO
GOD

WHEN YOU'RE NOT GOOD AT IT

Many Christians find it difficult to have a spiritual life. This is the story of one such Christian. By the book's end, you will find many practical helps, even if, like me, you are a Christian who is not endowed with a natural spiritual aptitude.

A Spiritual Life That Takes You
Deeper Than Daily Devotions

LIVING
CLOSE
TO
GOD

WHEN YOU'RE NOT GOOD AT IT

GENE
EDWARDS

Author of *A TALE OF THREE KINGS*



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

LIVING CLOSE TO GOD (WHEN YOU'RE NOT GOOD AT IT)

PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

All Scripture quotations are taken from the author's English translation from Hebrew and Greek sources. Any similarities in wording to existing modern English Bible translations are coincidental.

ISBN 978-0-307-73019-0

ISBN 978-0-307-73020-6 (electronic)

Copyright © 2011 by Gene Edwards

Cover design by Kristopher Orr

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

WATERBROOK and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Random House Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Edwards, Gene, 1932–

Living close to God (when you're not good at it) : a spiritual life that takes you deeper than daily devotions / Gene Edwards.—1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN 978-0-307-73019-0—ISBN 978-0-307-73020-6 (electronic)

1. Spiritual life—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4501.3.E393 2011

248.4—dc23

2011020647

Printed in the United States of America

2011—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook Multnomah books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com or call 1-800-603-7051.

IN MEMORIAM



She was a missionary to China. She wrote to her mission board asking them to no longer consider her a foreign missionary. She became part of the Little Flock of China. With the outbreak of the Japanese-Chinese war, she was imprisoned by the Japanese. After the war she returned to the United States, where I met her in Louisville, Kentucky. I learned more about walking with the Lord just by watching her than from anyone else I knew or from any books I read. I often said, “You could sense the presence of the Lord in her, even if she was on the other side of a brick wall.”

TO BETA SCHEIRICH (1893–1967)

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
---------------------------	----

1 Spiritually Handicapped	1
-------------------------------------	---

PART I: A BEGGAR LOOKS FOR BREAD

2 The Search	7
------------------------	---

3 The Simplicity of God	12
-----------------------------------	----

PART II: FROM PRAYING TO GOD TO FELLOWSHIPING WITH HIM

4 A Psalm That Opened a Universe	21
--	----

5 There Could Be No Two-Way Conversation. Or Could There Be?	27
---	----

6 Heaven Speaks in First Person	32
---	----

PART III: THE ACID TEST

7 Did the Lord's Ministry Hold the Secret?	41
--	----

8 Out of the Heart of Christ Came Revealing Words . . .	46
---	----

9 How Breathing Can Become Both Physical and Spiritual	55
---	----

10 The Walk That Changed My Life (Real Hope for an Unspiritual Man)	64
--	----

PART IV: UNTETHERED

11 It Begins in the Morning 73

12 Out into the Grind 77

PART V: REVISITING THE HELPS

13 Revisiting the Psalms: Turning Scripture
 into Fellowship with Christ 85

14 Revisiting the Walk 89

15 Revisiting the Morning 93

16 Revisiting the Eighteen-Hour Day 98

17 Begin with a Very Sincere Talk with Your Lord 103

18 A Help for Spiritual Failures—Not Yet Discovered . . . 109

PART VI: THINGS YOU MAY NOT
WANT TO KNOW

19 Getting to Know Christ Can Be Dangerous 115

A Closing Word to Scott 119

A Request: Please Do Not Place This Book Back
 on the Shelf 122

Postscript: The Witness of the Ages 126

Study Guide: A Seven-Session Guide to *Living Close*
 to God (When You're Not Good at It) 130

Your Personal Guide to Walking with Christ 149

Notes 176

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was a chance remark made by a friend that marked the genesis of this book. Scott Kurkian was describing a day at his office: “The phone rings constantly. I live in a state of constant interruption. I receive two hundred e-mails a day, and everyone wants an instant answer. I do not have a moment to turn to the Lord.”

Perhaps I should have written this book several decades ago. Nonetheless, it is our age of incessant noise that makes the content of this book so acutely needed today.



To those who made this book possible by means of a labor of love: Diane Mercer, Kathy McGraw, and Helen Edwards. Thank you!



SPIRITUALLY HANDICAPPED

I consider myself to be spiritually handicapped.

Christians who know the Lord well seem to have a natural spiritual bent. I am not so endowed. As to things spiritual, I have always thought of myself as being some kind of rare case because of my nonspiritual nature. If you happen to fall into this same “rare case,” then join me in this journey in search of a spiritual life for Christians who are not naturally spiritually inclined.

I did not grow up in a devout family. I was raised in the home of a laboring man—a “doer” by nature. So was his father before him: like father, like son. I am a natural *doer*.

I broke horses, played football, and began working in the oil fields as a roughneck at age fourteen. Roughnecks are plain-spoken, practical, tough, down-to-earth men. That was my world. Being a doer was, and is, my nature.

No, I am not a spiritual person. The only thing I had in my favor, spiritually, was a spectacular conversion to Christ. I was converted while in college. I graduated from college, was called to the ministry, and entered seminary all in the same week.

What was instilled in me by my denomination was the imperative of winning others to Christ. That fit the doer in me perfectly. Evangelism was my consuming passion. Further, I was still an oil-field roughneck at heart. A public display of piety was beyond me. It still is. I also found that I was a most unlikely candidate for being a pastor. (My parishioners soon made the same discovery!) My sole interest was to turn the world upside down and win everyone on earth to the Lord Jesus Christ.

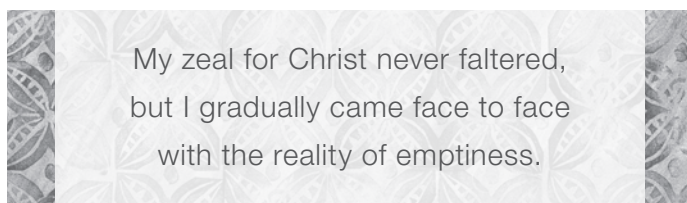
Then came...

A RISE TOO SOON

No young believer should ever rise quickly in the ministry. I became a pastor at age twenty-one, a seminary graduate at twenty-two, and by age twenty-four, I had written a book on personal evangelism. That book became a bestseller, and not only was the book well received, but so was its author. In a skyrocketing ascent, I was soon conducting citywide campaigns, sending Christians out to knock on every door in the city in an effort to lead people to Christ. This much notoriety, this much leadership, this furious pace could have easily been a stew for disaster.

My zeal for Christ never faltered, but I gradually came face to face with the reality of emptiness. In the midst of a national, many-layered ministry, my spiritual desperation grew. I reached the point where I had to choose between two paths: either continue in my ministry or come to know Christ better. I could not do both.

One day I wrote myself a note: “It is far more important to me that I come to know my Lord in living reality than it is to be in ministry without it.” Finally, I sat with my family and shared my desperation. I then cancelled all my campaigns. I had become a pilgrim traveling in uncharted lands.



But just where would I begin this pilgrimage? I began by searching for books that might help provide answers, something that would show me how to have some kind of a spiritual life. I could find no such helps. Nor did I find any Christian who could help this desperate beggar. As noted already, I was convinced that I was a special case.

I know the evangelical world. (I have spoken in hundreds of churches and worked with thousands of ministers while conducting citywide campaigns.) In the evangelical world I knew I would find much being said about prayer. I knew a few men who spent an hour or more in prayer every day. Some of them evidenced some spiritual touch; in others, no such evidence was apparent. Few of them testified of a practical relationship with the Lord Jesus. As for me, I could not see myself praying for an hour every day.

PRAYER, OR FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LORD?

I knew by instinct there was a great distinction between praying and fellowship with the Lord. The difference is vast. (It is entirely possible to be fully devoted to prayer and never actually fellowship with the Lord.) As to the many books I read, virtually every one was centered on the subject of prayer. Sadly, those teachings did nothing to address my desperation to know the Lord better. Their advice led to the very thing I was trying to escape. (Remember, I am naturally a doer.)

Some people reading this may think I lack some kind of special experience—one that would cure my spiritual longings. My response is this: I have had the Pentecostal experience, the Easter experience, the Christmas experience, the Passover experience, and the “exchanged life” experience. I have even had the Fourth of July experience and many other such experiences.

Herein lies the problem. I was *not* looking for an experience; I was seeking a walk. Here was a Christian who had spent ten years in the ministry, yet who had become a desperate, hungry, rapacious seeker—seeking to know his Lord better. I was a beggar looking for bread. I also was beginning to wonder if I was such a rare case that I might never be able to have a meaningful walk with Christ.

Was there hope for this woefully ill-equipped believer? Knowing Christ in living reality and in simplicity had become the first pursuit of my life. I was desperate, yet not even remotely qualified for such a spiritual quest.

So it was, the search began.

PART I

A BEGGAR LOOKS
FOR BREAD

THE SEARCH

Having found no book written by evangelicals that even remotely helped me, I dug out the pre-Reformation and Reformation classics written on the subject of Christian spirituality. Virtually every one of those books addressed one subject: prayer. Other books I investigated were filled with maxims and clichés.

So I turned to biographies—life stories of great Christians such as Adoniram Judson, John Wesley, Charles Finney, Hudson Taylor, and John of the Cross. Again, reading about the lives of these men was of little help. John of the Cross could find rapture in hearing a song. I was not such a man. Neither was I a Fénelon, a Guyon, a Francis of Assisi, nor any of the noted saints.

I know from experience that an unspiritual believer does not easily find answers—not in spiritual books or in biographies of saints or in the strange writings of Catholic and high-church mystics.

Virtually all of the books I read focused on the subject of prayer. For me, prayer per se was not the answer to my hunger to know my Lord better.

Was there not something out there to help a ditchdigger, a

truckdriver, a hardworking waitress, a typist, a janitor, an oil-field roughneck? Was there nothing for a person who is not a natural-born saint? Must a spiritual life be confined to great leaders and sensitive believers with mystical tendencies? Was there not help for a believer like me?

THE AGE OF CYBERSPACE

For all of us the world moves at a dizzying speed. The computer-digital age has caused many Christians to wonder when they ever will be able to find a quiet time to be with Christ. If new inventions that speed up life continue to be developed at the present pace, there will be millions of believers in the same spiritual dilemma I have experienced.

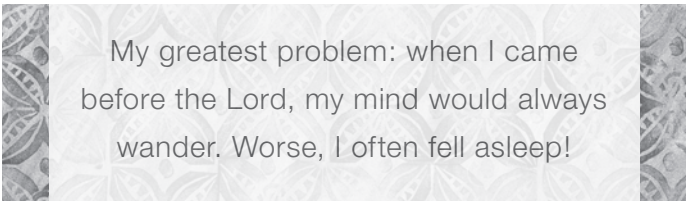
Surely there is a way out! Can you or I not have a semblance of a walk with Christ? Can that be possible in an age with this much static?

I made a list of the problems I faced—problems that stood between me and a spiritual life. Here is the list. I believe you will identify with at least some of these barriers. Perhaps many of them will ring true with your own experiences.

BARRIERS TO A CONSISTENT WALK WITH CHRIST

A person who is not spiritually inclined faces insurmountable hindrances. Here is my list. But are there solutions?

- Despite all my efforts I could never establish a consistent, specific time of day to be with the Lord. I worked at this, but I always failed. I found having a certain time and a certain place to be beyond me. (I have never solved this dilemma, but I found a way around it!)
- My greatest problem: when I came before the Lord, my mind wandered.
- Worse, I often fell asleep!
- After a few minutes, I ran out of anything to say to the Lord.
- My time with the Lord was always a one-way conversation. I never heard the Lord say anything to me! A monologue is never as effective as a two-way conversation. Was one possible? Not likely.
- Finally, I would drive off to my job, and during the crush of eight hours at work, I would never remember the Lord.



My greatest problem: when I came
before the Lord, my mind would always
wander. Worse, I often fell asleep!

There they are: six problems that defy solution in a world that moves at lightning speed. This was not a failure caused by disinterest or lack of commitment. I longed to turn to the Lord. This all boiled down to two simple problems. First, I had trouble remembering to

turn to Him. Second, I did not have the remotest idea *how* to turn to Him. I later came to understand most of my problems stemmed from pure ignorance, ignorance of a spiritual life.

WHAT ABOUT GETTING ALONE WITH THE LORD FOR A YEAR?

I often have heard Christians say, “If I could get alone with the Lord for a year, then I could get to know Him.”

I did not so learn Christ.

The solution to my problems must be learned amid the rush of the day. You and I will not learn to walk with Christ while living alone and uninterrupted on top of Mount Sinai or in a hut in the Alps. We will come to know the Lord, to walk with Him, by learning to fellowship with Him in the worst and busiest of days. You and I will find Him in the crush of life, not in sequestration.

Further, who among us can take a year to be alone with God? You and I live and work down here in the blur of daily life. The solution we find has to be one that works right here. I had to have a solution that would teach me to find Him regardless of what was going on in daily circumstances, be it in an office or halfway up an oil derrick.

START IN QUIETNESS

Here is a starting point.

Even as a newer Christian, I knew intuitively that if I would

ever touch my Lord in a meaningful way, I would have to begin in quietness. I was to learn that the Spirit of the Lord, the One indwelling me, comes to me in a moment of pause. Whatever fellowship you and I have with the Lord, any time spent with Him that is real will not flow from a racing mind.

This I knew. But, finding a way to do this... That was another matter.

It has been said that even the most complex problem has a simple solution. The same is true of a Christian's spiritual life. Walking with Christ must be the very essence of simplicity. Repeat: simplicity is a must! This Lord of ours is Himself simple! It is therefore very likely that He is fully prepared to give us simple solutions.

Could all my inadequacies be resolved in such simplicity?