

Weekly Encouragement

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Ready, Aim, Shoot

By Rev. Peter Eng

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"... when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:2-22)

Do you sometimes feel you are not hitting anything in life for all your shooting?

Even if we have never fired a rifle, we know that aiming comes before firing. I need not belabor the obvious, but we may rightly wonder why we persist on shooting before aiming, and still wonder why we don't hit our life targets.

The good news for us is that if we start to aim before we shoot, regardless of how poorly we aim, we will hit our targets better than before! Getting every single target is

difficult, but if we rarely hit our targets, we are simply not aiming — spiritually.

There is a right sequence in life. The wrong sequence cannot produce the right result. When Jesus began his ministry, the first order of the day was for him to be baptized. He did not get baptized as an act of repentance, but he was setting an example for all his future followers that believers should make a public commitment. Other reasons include affirming and identifying with John the Baptist, and giving opportunity for John the Baptist to identify him as the Messiah ([John 1:29-34](#)). Before Jesus set out to do his job, he got himself baptized.

During his baptism, Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, and went on to accomplish more than any other person in history. Luke reminds us that Jesus was praying during his baptism when the Holy Spirit came on him. At Pentecost, the disciples were praying when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit and went on to continue the work Jesus began ([Acts 2](#)).

The right sequence of prayer, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, and fantastic lives that changed the world was true for Jesus and his disciples. But this sequence of prayer before action is not only at inception. It must be the norm in our lives.

Look at Jesus: Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray ([Luke 5:16](#)). Jesus would go out to a mountainside to pray, and

would spend the whole night praying ([Luke 6:12](#)). The disciples would find Jesus praying in private ([Luke 9:18](#)). It was in the context of prayer that Jesus was transfigured ([Luke 9:28ff](#)). In fact, Jesus prayed so much, engaged in it fully, and enjoyed it so naturally that his disciples who, no doubt, already knew how to pray, wanted to learn this all over again ([Luke 11:1ff](#)).

When the going gets tough and God does not seem to be responding, we need to persevere in prayer ([Luke 18:1ff](#)). Prayer is God's way for leading us through temptations, and we need to pray before we face temptations ([Luke 21:36](#); [22:40](#)). Jesus knew Peter would fail, but prayed for him nonetheless, and prayed that Peter will return after his failure ([Luke 22:32](#)). Jesus himself prayed earnestly before he faced the temptation of the cross and asked his disciples to do the same ([Luke 22:41-46](#)). The examples go on.

I am amazed at my own pride when I think of the days I rush headlong into the day without first seeking God in prayer. What can I accomplish without God's blessing? And what can I accomplish with God's blessing?

Just last Sunday, Lily and I were planning to meet a former neighbor for lunch. Being the scatterbrain that I am, I lost her address and phone, but remembered her street. We were at a loss on how to find her. We drove along her street hoping to spot her car, but could not spot it. We continued on to church giving up on our earlier notion. As we were walking into the church, a lady came up to me and said, "I believe we have a mutual friend. My new neighbor is ..." That was the old neighbor we were looking for!

When we commit our day to the Lord, he does wonderful things for us, big and small.

Martin Luther, God's servant in the Protestant Reformation, inspires me to get it

right:

"If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day ... I have so much business, I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer."

When I think I am too busy to pray, I am reminded I am too busy not to pray. My encouragement for you to pray is the result of my own failure is not hitting my targets. But when I pray, things are different. I would like you to avoid my foolish self-reliance — and failure.

Come join me as I return to the joy of dependency on God and to have my day directed and blessed by him.

Note: The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.