

THE GAME WITH MINUTES

Frank C. Laubach

1953

CHRIST IS THE ONLY HOPE OF THE WORLD

'Disillusioned by all our other efforts, we now see that the only hope left for the human race is to become like Christ.' That is the statement of a famous scientist, and is being repeated among ever more educators, statesmen, and philosophers. Yet Christ has not saved the world from its present terrifying dilemma. The reason is obvious: few people are getting enough of Christ to save either themselves or the world. Take the United States, for example. Only a third of the population belongs to a Christian church. Less than half of this third attend service regularly. Preachers speak about Christ in perhaps one service in four—thirty minutes a month! Good sermons, many of them excellent, but too infrequent in presenting Christ.

Less than ten minutes a week given to thinking about Christ by one-sixth of the people is not saving our country or our world; for selfishness, greed, and hate are getting a thousand times that much thought. What a nation thinks about, that it is. We shall not become like Christ until we give Him more time. A teachers' college requires students to attend classes for twenty-five hours a week for three years. Could it prepare competent teachers or a law school prepare competent lawyers if they studied only ten minutes a week? Neither can Christ, and he never pretended that he could. To his disciples he said: 'Come with me, walk with me, talk and listen to me, work and rest with me, eat and sleep with me, twenty-four hours a day for three years.' That was their college course—'He chose them,' the Bible says, 'that they might be with him,' 168 hours a week!~

All who have tried that kind of abiding for a month know the power of it—it is like being born again from center to circumference. It absolutely changes every person who does it. And it will change the world that does it.

How can a man or woman take this course with Christ today? The answer is so simple a child can understand it. Indeed unless we 'turn and become like children' we shall not succeed.

1. We have a study hour. We read and reread the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels thoughtfully and prayerfully at least an hour a day. We find fresh ways and new translations, so that this reading will never be dull, but always stimulating and inspiring. Thus we walk with Jesus through Galilee by walking with Him through the pages of His earthly history.
2. We make Him our inseparable chum. We try to call Him to mind at least one second of each minute. We do not need to forget other things nor stop our work, but we invite Him to share everything we do or say or think. Hundreds of people have experimented until they have found ways to let Him share every minute that they are awake. In fact, it is no harder to learn this new habit than to learn the touch system in typing, and in time one can win a high percentage of his minutes with as little effort as an expert needs to write a letter.

While these two practices take all our time, yet they do not take it away from any good enterprise. They take Christ into that enterprise and make more result full. They also keep a man's religion steady. If the temperature of a sick man rises and falls daily the doctor regards him as seriously ill. This is the case with religion. Not spiritual chills and fevers, but an abiding faith which gently presses the will toward Christ all day, is a sign of a healthy religion.

Practicing the presence of God is not on trial. It has already been proven by countless thousands of people. Indeed, the spiritual giants of all ages have known it. Christians who do it today become more fervent and beautiful and are tireless witnesses.

Men and women who had been slaves of vices have been set free. Catholics and Protestants find this practicing the presence of God at the heart of their faith. Conservatives and liberals agree that here is a reality they need. People who are grateful for what this booklet has done for them are ordering wholesale quantities to give to friends. Letters from all parts of the world testify that in this game, multitudes are turning defeat into victory and despair into joy.

The results of this program begin to show clearly in a month. They grow rich after six months, and glorious after ten years.

Somebody may be saying, 'All this is very orthodox and very ancient.' It is indeed, the secret of the great saints of all ages. 'Pray without ceasing,' said Paul, 'in everything make your wants known unto God.' 'As many as are *led* by the Spirit of God these are the sons of God.'

HOW WE WIN THE GAME WITH MINUTES

Nobody is wholly satisfied with himself. Our lives are made up of lights and shadows, of some good days and many unsatisfactory days. We have learned that the good days and hours come when we are very close to Christ, and that the poor days come whenever we push Him out of our thoughts. Clearly, then, the way to a more consistent high level is to take Him into everything we do or say or think.

Experience has told us that good resolutions are not enough. We need to discipline our lives to an ordered regime. The 'Game with Minutes' is a rather lighthearted name for such a regime in the realm of the spirit. Many of us have found it to be enormously helpful. It is a new name for something as old as Enoch, who 'walked with God.' It is a way of living which nearly everybody knows and nearly everybody had ignored. Students will at once recognize it as a fresh approach to Brother Lawrence's 'Practicing the Presence of God.'

We call this a 'game' because it is a delightful experience and an exhilarating spiritual exercise; but we soon discover that it is far more than a game. Perhaps a better name for it would be 'an exploratory expedition,' because it opens out into what seems at first like a beautiful garden; then the garden widens into a country; and at last we realize that we are exploring a new world. This may sound like poetry, but it is not overstating what experience has shown us. Some people have compared it to getting out of a dark prison and beginning to LIVE. We still see the same world, yet it is not the same, for it has a new glorious color and a far deeper meaning. Thank God, this adventure is free for everybody, rich or poor, wise or ignorant, famous or unknown, with a good past or a bad—'Whosoever will, may come.' The greatest thing in the world is for everybody!

You will find this just as easy and just as hard as forming any other habit. You have hitherto thought of God for only a few seconds or minutes a week, and He was out of your mind the rest of the time. Now you are attempting, like Brother Lawrence, to have God in mind each minute you are awake. Such drastic change in habit requires a real effort at the beginning.

Many of us find it very useful to have pictures of Christ where our eyes will fall on them every time we look around. A very happy hobby is to collect the most friendly pictures of Christ, pocket size, so that we can erect our own shrine in a few seconds.

HOW TO BEGIN

Select a favorable hour; try how many minutes of the hour you can remember God at least ONCE each minute; that is to say, bring God to mind at least one second out of every sixty. It is not necessary to remember God *every second*, for the mind runs along like a rapid stream from one idea to another.

Your score will be low at first, but keep trying, for it constantly becomes easier, and after a while is almost automatic. It follows the well known laws of habit forming. If you try to write shorthand you are at first very awkward. This is true when you are learning to play a piano, or to ride a bicycle, or to use any new muscles. When you try this 'game with minutes' you discover that spiritually you are still a very weak infant. A babe in the crib seizes upon everything at hand to pull himself to his feet, wobbles for a few seconds and falls exhausted, Then he tries again, each time standing a little longer than before. We are like that babe when we begin to try to keep God in mind. We need something to which we can cling. Our minds wobble and fall, then rise for a new effort. Each time we try we shall do better until at last we may be able to remember God as high as ninety per cent of the whole day.

HOW TO TRY THE EXPERIMENT IN CHURCH

You have a good chance of starting well if you begin in church—provided the sermon is about God. When our congregation first tried it, we distributed slips of paper which read:

GAME WITH MINUTES

Score Card

During this hour I thought of God at least
once each minute for.....minutes.

Signed.....

At the opening of the service the pastor made this announcement: 'Everybody will be asked to fill this score card at the end of one hour. In order to succeed, you may use any help within reach. You may look at the cross, or you may leaf through your hymn book or Bible, looking for verses that reminding you of God.'

The sermon that Sunday explained how to play the game. At the end of the hour, the Score cards were collected. The congregation reported scores ranging from five to sixty minutes. The average was forty-four minutes, which meant 73 percent of the hour. For beginners this was excellent. Such an experiment, by the way, will encourage the congregation to listen better than usual, and will remind the preacher to keep his sermon close to God.

If you score 75 per cent in church, you can probably make a rather good score for the rest of the day. It is a question of being master of every new situation.

Never use a score card more than an hour, and not that long if it tires you. This is a new delight you are learning, and it must not be turned into a task.

WHILE GOING HOME FROM CHURCH

Can you win your game with minutes while passing people on the street? Yes! Experiments have revealed a sure way to succeed: offer a swift prayer for the people at whom you glance. It is easy to think an instantaneous prayer while looking people straight in the eye, and the way people smile back at you shows that they like it! This practice gives a surprising exhilaration, as you may prove for yourself. A half-hour spent walking and praying for all one meets, instead of tiring one, gives him a sense of ever heightening energy like a battery being charged. It is a tonic, a good way to overcome a tired feeling.

Some of us walk on the right side of the pavement, leaving room for our unseen Friend, whom we visualize walking by our side, and we engage in silent conversations with Him about the people we meet. For example, we may say: 'Dear Companion, what can we do together for this man whom we are passing?' Then we whisper what we believe Christ would answer.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR CHRIST

We have a right to use any aid that proves useful. One such aid is to think of Christ as in a definite location. To be sure, He is a spirit, everywhere at once—and therefore anywhere we realize Him to be. Many of us win our game nearly all of some days by realizing His unseen presence sitting a chair or walking beside us. Some of us have gazed at our favorite picture of Him until it floats before our memories whenever we glance at His unseen presence, and we almost see Him. Indeed, many of us do see Him in our dreams. Others, like St. Paul, like to feel Him within the breast; many, like St. Patrick, feel Him all around us, above, below, before, behind, as though we walked in His kindly halo,. We may have our secret ways of helping us to realize that He is very near and very dear.

ON A TRAIN OR IN A CROWD

We whisper 'God' or 'Jesus' or 'Christ' constantly as we glance at every person near us. We try to see *double*, as Christ does—we see the person as he is and the person Christ longs to make him. Remarkable things happen, until those in tune look around as though you spoke—especially children. The atmosphere of a room changes when a few people keep whispering to Him about all the rest. Perhaps there is no finer ministry than just to be in meetings or crowds, whispering 'Jesus' and then helping people whenever you see an opportunity. When Dr. Chalmers answers the telephone he whispers: 'A child of God will now speak to me.' We can do that when anybody speaks to us.

If everybody in America would do the things just described above, we should have a 'heaven below.' This is not pious poetry. We have *seen* what happens. Try it during all this week, until a strange power develops within you. As messages from England are broadcast in Long Island for all America, so we can become spiritual broadcasters for Christ. Every cell in our brain is an electric battery which He can use to intensify what He longs to say to people who are spiritually deaf to hear Him without our help.

WHILE IN CONVERSATION

Suppose when you reach home you find a group of friends engaged in ordinary conversation. Can you remember God at least once every minute? This is hard, but we have found that we can be successful if we employ some reminders. Here are aids which have proven useful:

1. Have a *picture* of Christ in front of you where you can glance at it frequently.
2. Have an *empty chair* beside you and imagine that your unseen Master is sitting in it; if possible reach your hand and touch that chair, as though holding His hand. He is there, for He said: 'Lo, I am with you always.'
3. Keep humming to your self a favorite prayer hymn—for example, 'Have Thine Own Way, Lord, Have Thine Own Way.'
4. Silently *pray* for each person in the circle.
5. Keep *whispering* inside: 'Lord, put Thy thoughts in my mind. Tell me what to say.'
6. Best of all, tell your companions about the 'Game with Minutes.' If they are interested, you will have no more trouble. *You cannot keep God unless you give Him to others.*

WHEN AT THE TABLE

All the previous suggestions are useful at mealtime. If possible, have an empty chair for your Invisible Guest, who said, 'Wherever two or three are gathered together, I am in the midst.' Another useful aid is to recall what the Quakers believe about every meal. Jesus told us: 'Eat this in remembrance of me.' They think that He meant, not only consecrated bread, but all food so that every mouthful is His 'body broken for you.'

You might read and discuss this booklet. It helps immediately if others at the table agree to try to win this mealtime together.

WHILE READING A BOOK

When we are reading a newspaper or magazine or book, we read it to Him, or at His picture and continue a running conversation with Him inwardly about the pages we are reading. Kagawa says scientific books are letters from God telling how He runs His universe.

Have you ever opened a letter and read it *with* Jesus, realizing that He smiles with us at the fun, rejoices with us in the successes, and weeps with us at life's tragedies? If not, you have missed one of life's sweetest experiences.

WHEN THINKING

If you lean back and think about some problem deeply, how can you remember God? You can do it by forming a new habit. All thought employs silent words and is really conversation with your inner self. Instead of talking to yourself, you will now form the habit of talking to Christ. Many of us who have tried this have found that we think so much better that we never want to try to think without Him again. We are helped if we imagine Him sitting in a chair beside us, talking with us. We say with our tongue what we think Christ might say in reply to our questions. Thus we *consult* Christ about everything.

WHEN WALKING ALONE

If you are strolling out of doors alone, you can recall God at least once every minute with no effort, if you remember that 'beauty is the voice of God.' Every flower and tree, river and lake, mountain and sunset, is God speaking. 'This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears all nature sings...' So as you look at each lovely thing, you may keep asking: 'Dear Father, What are you telling me through this, and this and this?'

If you have wandered to a place where you can talk aloud without being overheard, you may speak to the Invisible Companion inside you or beside you. Ask Him what is most on His heart and then answer back aloud with your voice what you believe God would reply to you.

Of course we are not always sure whether we have guessed God's answer right, but it is surprising how much of the time we are very certain. It really is not necessary to be sure that our answer is right, for the answer is not the great thing—He is! God is infinitely more important than His advice or His gifts; indeed, *He, himself, is the great gift*. The youth in love does not so much prize what his sweetheart may say or may give him, as the fact that she is *his* and that she is *here*. The most precious privilege in talking with God is this intimacy which we can have with Him. We may have a glorious succession of heavenly minutes. How foolish people are to lose life's most poignant joy, seeing it may be had while taking a walk alone!

But the most wonderful discovery of all is, to use the words of St. Paul, 'Christ liveth in me.' He dwells in us, walks in our minds, reaches out through our hands, speaks with our voices, **IF** we obey His every whisper.

BE MY LAST THOUGHT

We make sure that there is a picture of Christ, or a Bible, or a Cross or some other object where it will greet our closing eyes as we fall asleep. We continue to whisper any words of endearment our hearts suggest. If all day long we have been walking with Him, we shall find Him the dear companion of our dreams. Sometimes after such a day, we have fallen asleep with our pillows wet from tears of joy, feeling His tender touch on our foreheads. Usually we feel no deep emotion, but always we have a 'peace that passeth all understanding.' This is the end of a perfect day.

MONDAY MORNING

If on Sunday we have rated over fifty per cent in our game with minutes, we shall be eager to try the experiment during a busy Monday. As we open our eyes and see a picture of Christ on the wall, we may ask: 'Now, Master, shall we get up?' Some of us whisper to Him our every thought about washing and dressing in the morning, about brushing our shoes and choosing our clothes. Christ is interested in every trifle, because He loves us more intimately than a mother loves her babe, or a lover his sweetheart, and is happy only when we share every question with Him.

MEN AT WORK

Countless thousands of men keep God in mind while engaged in all types of work, mental or manual, and find that they are happier and get better results. Those who endure the most intolerable ordeals gain new strength when they realize that their Unseen Comrade is by their side. To be sure, no man whose business is harmful or whose methods are dishonest, can expect God's partnership. But if an enterprise is useful, God eagerly shares in its real progress. The carpenter can do better work if he talks quietly to God about each task, as Jesus certainly