

BOOK THREE - Angel's Story  
THE FIRST PRINCIPLE: Prayerwork



The next morning he met Angel at a fast food restaurant across from the high school. The place was filled with teenagers laughing and talking as they ate a last minute breakfast. Some worked on last minute homework. A few of them stopped by the table to say hello to Angel before heading over to school.

A few minutes later the restaurant emptied out as all of the students left for school. "I love coming here," Angel said.

"Why?"

"It reminds me of what I have lost and gained through my experience of burning out. Before I tell you that, however, how did you sleep?"

"Fine, I guess. I did wake up in the middle of the night."

"What did you do then?" she asked.

"I normally watch television," he said, make the remote control channel changing motion. "But I couldn't at Frank's house."

"So what did you do?"

"There was a bible on the night stand," he confessed. "I picked it up and began to read it. After about 20 minutes I was ready to sleep again."

"Would you say that was a good choice of using your time?" she asked.

“You mean one of the vital 20%?” he joked.

“Exactly,” she smiled.

“Well, I'm not sure what makes something part of that vital 20%, but I know it was better than watching TV.”

“Making a better choice is what it is all about.”

“Is that the first concept?”

“No,” she said. “But I would like to tell you my story first. Remembering the pain of my poor choices helps me to make better choices today.”



She took a deep breath and began.

“You see, before I hit bottom, I was married. Then I wasn't. It's not a very original story on the surface, and I could have used it as an excuse for years. Two busy parents, one teenage daughter. Two people busy in their careers, and too busy to notice that we were drifting apart. My ex-husband just drifted into somebody else's life. I was devastated, and for a while I clung to the excuse that I was the wronged woman. It's so convenient to blame everyone else for our problems.”

“What happened with the church?”

“Well, they weren't happy but part of his drifting included drifting out of going to church. Most people saw me as the victim, and so I had a lot of sympathy. As I began to look at my life, however, I started noticing that frequently, when I had a choice, I chose to spend my time doing something without him. I had meetings at night, but more

nights than my work actually required. It was just easier to schedule my time to not be with him. And he was the same way, but I had to own my part of the problem. I was using my work, my busyness, to avoid my husband; I made time for our daughter, but I took that other relationship for granted.“

“He did too,” the minister said loyally.

“That’s true,” Angel said. “But it’s my decisions that determine my life, and when I took a good look at my habits of how I was using my time, I didn’t like what I saw. That’s why the first concept is so important to me.“

“You mean to take care of relationships?“

“No,” she said. The first concept is this: *when I spend a minute with God, I learn what is important.*”



“When we live the first concept,” Angel said, “we take time to be with God.“

“You mean pray.“

“Yes, but more than that. This is not a spiritual discipline where people focus on a particular activity. This is a minute where we come to a stop and just simply be with God.“

“*Be still and know that I am the Lord,*” the minister quoted.

“Exactly. Psalm 46:10. So take your watch off and hand it to me.” She held it in her hand. “We’re going to be still for a minute, but I want you to tell me when a minute has passed. Starting ... now.“

After a while the minister said, "Now."

Angel smiled. "Thirty-five seconds. Don't be surprised. When we run at 90 miles an hour, a minute at that speed seems to take less actual time. Now I will do the minute, and you reach out to your God and share your thoughts."

He became still, closed his eyes and a calmness filled him. He became more aware of the sounds in the restaurant in his silence, but he was also aware of a core of peace somewhere inside of him. He began to think of his wife, their young son, and his yearning for life to be more meaningful. It came to him that he also made choices to exclude them and be busy away from them. Why did he do that?

"Time," Angel whispered softly.

"That was only one minute?" he asked in disbelief.

"It doesn't take long," she said. "The harder question is why a minister, or anyone with faith, would ever do something without taking a minute to pray about it and hear from God." The stillness lingered; he felt as if he was on the shore of a vast, calm lake of sadness.



"The busier I got," she said to him, "the less time I spent praying, until I was so busy that I did not pray at all. And it just got worse and worse. I had become the worst sort of liar."

"Liar?"

"Yes. Do you pray the Lord's prayer?"

“Yes.”

“Every week in church?”

“Yes.”

“And other times?”

“Well, yes.”

“Do you mean it?” she asked

“Yes.”

“What about the part, *Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*? Do you mean that?”

“Well, yes.”

“If you mean it, how often do you take a minute to seek the will of the Lord before you do something?”

“Well, never.”

“That’s the first concept. You always take a minute to seek the will of God. If you believe in God, you would naturally do this before doing anything important, wouldn’t you?”

“Well, yes.”

“So if you don’t, either what you are about to do isn’t important, or what God wants you to do isn’t important, or both.”

“But I’m too busy!” he protested.

“Too busy to pray? Even for a minute,” she said in a tone of mockery, and then smiled. “I said the same thing at first, but it makes an extraordinary difference. Before anything important, take a minute to pray and consider what might be the will of God.

Listen. Visualize the best outcome you can consider; prayers don't have to be verbal. Remember that prayer is not just what you say to God; you are seeking an answer.“

“Pray before doing everything?” he asked with not a little bit of disbelief.

“Well not everything. It's not that necessary perhaps to pray before doing the 80% of what you do that is unnecessary, frivolous and a waste of time. But if you don't know the difference between what is important and a waste of time, you'd better pray before it all.“

“OK,” he said slowly.

“And as a minister,” she said, “who after all should you be asking to tell you what is important and what is a waste of time?”

“Of course,” he said guiltily.

“That's the first concept. Take a minute to pray. Seek guidance, visualize outcome, find clarity. There is always a minute for that, no matter how busy someone is. And seeking the will of God, by definition, absolutely has to be in that vital 20% - unless we have no interest in knowing what God wants, or unless we have no intention to obey God. I assume,” she said dryly, “that as a professional minister this concept of obeying God is not a problem for you?”

“It is,” he admitted.

“Me too, but not now. I practice the first concept; I take a minute to pray. If you pray, you will more and more choose to use your time in a way that is pleasing to God and beneficial for you. It's what we do automatically, without thought or prayer, that leads us into trouble. The outcome of my prayer is a clear plan for my day.“

“Thank you,” he said. It was really quite simple.

## 5

“The underlying foundation of these One Minute concepts is that how you invest your time and energy controls the results you are receiving. You are after all reaping today what you sowed in previous days. If you don't like what you are reaping, then you need to pay attention to what you are sowing in your life. That's why everyone who doesn't have a supervisor constantly telling them what to do has some sort of system to manage their activities. What do you use?”

“Well, I have a calendar on my desk. Somewhere. And I make to do lists.”

“Do you like the results you are getting with that system?”

“No,” he admitted.

“In a bad system, outside events control you; in a good system, you know what seed is best to sow in the present.”

“Then I have a bad system,” he admitted. “I don't like the results.”

“Your own time management system is a very personal choice. Mine is rather unusual, but historically significant. I keep a journal, in the manner that John Wesley did.”

“The founder of the Methodists?”

“Yes, exactly.” She opened her purse and took out a bound notebook of the type one would buy in a business store for accounting. It said *Record* on the front and held lined pages like a notebook. “John Wesley would record his daily activities in the front of the book, and keep his accounts in the back. When the two met in the middle, he

would start a new book.”

“I've tried journaling, but haven't been able to stick with it.”

“Once it is a habit, anything is easy. I do three simple things in journaling.”

“First, I often use Julie Cameron's method which she calls 'Daily Pages.'<sup>1</sup> When I get up in the morning, I just write anything that comes to my mind until I fill three pages.” She briefly showed him pages filled with doodles and little paragraphs of thoughts. “And of course, I am praying during this time as well.”

“Second, I use Bill Hybels concept of reflecting on yesterday in my daily pages.<sup>2</sup> At the top of the page I write "Yesterday?" What I write after that may have nothing to do with yesterday - it depends on where my prayers take me. But frequently I have significant insights that are very valuable to me.”

“Third,” she opened to a page marked with a paper clip and headed by the question, “Today?” “I keep a to-do list on two pages - left page for vital 20% and right page for everything else. When the crossed out items get too disorganized, I recopy the remaining tasks to a new list further on in the book.”

“Why is time management so important?”

“It's not really time management. It's life management. When the clock is ticking it's ticking away your life. Tick, tock. And 80% of your life is poorly invested.”

“One other thing about Bill Hybels' method,” Angel continued. “He writes a prayer that reflects his understanding of his time with God in journaling, then kneels and prays

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<sup>1</sup>Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way*.

<sup>2</sup>Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not To Pray*.

it. The prayer is a record of his time with God. This is not about journaling or writing; it's a way to create time with God that is focused and meaningful, and then allow that time with God to create a life that is focused and meaningful."

"What appeals to you, then," she asked. "The loose freedom of 'daily pages' or focusing on yesterday with a concluding prayer?"

"Let me think about it."

"Think all you want; invent your own way. Develop your own questions; 'Yesterday?' and 'Today?' are simple enough for me. But in the next seven days find some way to practice the methods you choose. Don't just think; experiment a little"



"Life is made up not of what we promise to do but what we actually do," Angel continued.

"What do you mean by that?"

"When you write as a regular part of your life, you can notice your anxiety levels piling up, higher and higher. One acronym for fear is *False Expectations Appearing Real*. The problem is not what happens - that's usually pretty innocent. It's how we emotionally react to what happens that determines whether there is damage or not. And the worst damage is when we begin to allow our feelings to rewrite reality. We project onto other people emotions that we need them to feel, in order to justify and explain to ourselves our own feelings."

"I think I know what you mean. When I'm angry, everyone is perceived as

provoking me?”

“Exactly. But when you journal, you make a snapshot in time. When you come back to it in a different mood, you begin to be able to see the patterns of your actions. And you particularly see how you are deceiving yourself.”

“Denial?”

“Denial is the worst sort of problem in any kind of addiction.”

“Addiction? I thought we were talking about burnout.”

Her laugh was bittersweet. “Burnout is the consequence of addiction. No, don’t frown at me like that. I’ve been there. If a person drinks too much, there are consequences that are physical, emotional and relational. At one level the addiction brings some sort of pleasure, and at another level harm is being done to all concerned. The purpose of denial is to hide the pain and hurt so that you can continue longer on the path of self destruction without being aware of what you are doing. You may not be drinking, but your life is falling apart just as if you were.”

“OK, but I don’t know what I am addicted to...”

“Think of addiction here not in terms of the substance that you can’t quit; think of it in terms of choosing to live in a way that is destroying your health, your marriage, your life, while pretending that there is no problem, that you have everything under control. I’m not sure what is destroying your life, but it is the denial, your avoiding the truth, that allows it to take place.”

“So don’t look for the bottle, look for the hangover?”

“The hangover is just the part you can’t deny, but that’s the idea. Look for the damage; pray about it. There is a goal with the first concept: **Journal Clarity**. We write

as we pray and sit with God in order to achieve a clear picture of our life. That clear picture includes the picture of our life as we want it to be, our differentiation, and our current reality.”

“Differentiation? What does that mean?”

“In the psychology of Family Systems theory, the health of a family is measured by the degree of differentiation in each of the members. Your differentiation is knowing who you are and being faithful to yourself while at the same time remaining in touch with the other members of the family. Rabbi Edwin Friedman applied this theory to churches as extended families. Your use of time reveals clearly who you are in your relationships with others, so a *Time Inventory* can also help us get that clear picture.”

“What’s a Time Inventory?”

“A Time Inventory is a very powerful time management tool described by Peter Drucker.<sup>3</sup> It’s very simple. An inventory is a written list of resources; a time inventory is nothing more than recording what you do all day, item by item at the time you did it.”

“Logging your time like an attorney does for billing?”

“Yes. As the data piles up, patterns begin to emerge and you get clarity about what you are doing. It gets harder and harder to be in denial about what you are doing. You see when you are in control of your life and where you’re life has become unmanageable, as described in the 12 steps.”

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<sup>3</sup>Peter Drucker, *The Effective Executive*.

## 7

“What do the 12 steps have to do with managing my time?”

“The 12 steps are an excellent resource. Are you familiar with them?”

“Not to any great extent. I’ve heard of them.”

“Here, she said, showing him a page taped in the front cover of her journal. Take a look at the first three steps.”

- 1) *We admitted we were powerless over \_\_\_\_\_ ---- that our lives had become unmanageable.*
- 2) *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*
- 3) *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.*

“Why is the line blank?”

“Because the addiction itself can be anything and can be different for each person. But the principle is the same: no matter what the addiction, it is time to yield to God. Now, isn’t that prayer? To yield yourself to God entirely? And that’s why the first secret is so important. No matter what you have to do today, there is nothing so important that a minute in prayer before you begin will improve it.”

## 8

“I guess that means the minute to pray is the most important part of the task.”

“Yes. Prayer, however, can mean think, review goals, information, plans; the idea is that we look before we leap, and we ask God to look with us. It’s here in my favorite Psalm, Psalm 1.” She pulled a *New Testament with Psalms* out of her purse and read in a clear voice:

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

*He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*

*The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

“There is a way that is a life of blessing”, Angel said firmly. “We learn that path by continually and consciously letting God teach us the rules, principles or laws that should guide us in this life. The first concept of the One Minute System is to open up our life minute by minute to the beneficial influence of God. To do so is not only moral and ethical, but profitable; notice, *‘in all that he does, he prospers.’*”

“That’s like batting 1000.”

“What does this Psalm teach you about your situation?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Do you know the image of the threshing floor? The chaff and the seed? The seed has weight, substance, and it falls to the ground; the chaff is has no weight, so the wind blows it away. The righteous or whole person gains weight, literally through the moisture of the roots that go deep into God. Burnout empties a person out, until any little breeze blows them away, like ashes.”

“I feel like ashes, sometimes.”

“So how much time do you spend sitting with the scoffers, as the Psalm says? Or standing in the path of sinners, so that you can be swept along into their activities? How much advice from the wicked have you absorbed? All those activities are the opposite of prayer. All of that will burn you into ashes. I know. I’ve been there.”

“I hear that,” he said.

“Well, then write about it. Journal for clarity. And practice the first secret to a meaningful life; take a minute to pray. That’s the first thing, and it only takes a minute to get back on course.”



At the next Solomon's Porch:

"The strange thing about being a human being," the One Minute Minister said, "is that we shift our focus regularly from what is important to what is not. The whole concept of idolatry is that we lose sight of the importance of God as a person and shift our attention to God's things, to what is created: money, cars, houses, designer jeans, etc. It's just basic idolatry when God's created things become more important than God."

"Romans 1:25, where people worship the creation more than the creator," Bill said.

"Matthew 6:33, on all these things the Gentiles seek," said Frank

"Mark 12:30, you shall love the lord your God with all your heart and mind and strength," Angel said.

"That's why our *Prayerwork* is so important."

"Prayerwork." The troubled minister tried out the new word.

"That's the name we give to the first secret," the One Minute Minister answered.

"You have work to do, but the most important part of your work is to pray. It only takes a minute to get back on course and refocus on the creator rather than the creation."

"When Jesus said, '*Follow me*' we believe that He wasn't kidding," Angel said.

"And if what we are doing during the day is following Jesus, that implies that there is a path laid out for us. When we plan our day, we attempt to discern that path. You have a

choice: try to figure it out by looking at the roadway, at all the possible choices you can make ... or turn to One who makes the path. Which is more efficient? Which is more effective?"

"The pathmaker is wiser than we are," Bill said, "and available to us through prayer. Any minute we spend in prayer is a wise investment of our time. So the first part of any task, any work, is the work of prayer."



Frank opened his organizer and took out a single page. "Read this out loud," he asked. The minister read:

- 1) *We admitted we were powerless over \_\_\_\_\_ ----  
that our lives had become unmanageable.*
- 2) *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves  
could restore us to sanity.*
- 3) *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the  
care of God as we understood him.*

"These are from the twelve steps," the minister said. "Angel showed them to me."

"Now turn it over and read the first paragraph on the other side," Frank requested.

Matthew 22:35-40

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, [36] Master, which is the great commandment in the law? [37] Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. [38] This is the first and great commandment. [39] And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. [40] On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

“Our purpose here in this life,” Angel said, “is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. To love God with our emotions, our identity, our intellect and our physical bodies. To love God first, with a priority. Exodus 20:3, ***Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*** God must come first, or everything else is out of order.”

“Loving ourselves and loving our neighbor comes later. And you will notice,” Bill said with a wink to Frank, “that we are nowhere commanded to love our paperwork.”

“So when things are not going right,” the One Minute Minister said, “the first place we look is the first commandment. There are many little things, like a flat tire, that can be fixed without reference to God. All the big things, however, go astray because divine principles are ignored.”

“Then the yielding to God represented by the first three steps is a way to return to the priority of the first commandment,” said the troubled minister.

“Exactly. It is essence of repentance.”

## 12

The minister felt a flush of anger. “Are you saying that my problems are the result of sins? Sins that I have committed?”

Four people looked at him with compassion and sorrow.

“That’s what we have found to be the case in our lives,” Bill said. “When I was in

rebellion against God's way for me to live my life, I thought I made mistakes, and I made excuses because everyone makes mistakes. Now I know they are sins, and that sets me free because sins can be forgiven. You're stuck with your mistakes; sins can be washed away."

"When I made choices, they were ways that I thought I expressed my freedom," Angel said. "Not including God in my choices by not taking time to pray was a mistake. Now I see it as a sin because it excludes Jesus Christ from his proper role in my life as a partner in all things. I only hurt myself when I don't consult with my partner. I only hurt myself when I make no record of what I learn through prayer."

"The first three steps remind us that we cannot control everything," the One Minute Minister said. "That's why we need to choose to submit ourselves to God so that we work with God instead of excluding God. So prayerwork heals us by bringing our life back to the proper order: God first. If God is our partner, we need to consult with our partner. If we value that partnership above all else, we will consult with our partner *first*. To do anything else is a sin against the partnership."

## 13

"Isn't there a danger that you will spend too much time praying and not do anything?" the minister asked.

"It doesn't take too long to plug in a power saw," Frank said. "It works as it should only when it is connected to a source of power. It's the same with us."

"Once the task is clear, it is a sin against the partnership to avoid the work to be

done,” Bill said. “True prayer is never a place to hide from work to be done. Avoiding work is avoiding obedience.”

“It is in our prayerwork that we plan our work,” Angel said. “The difference is that we allow God through prayer to influence our plan so that by faith we make a better plan. A better plan yields better results.”

“And at the root of every failure is a failure to adequately plan,” the One Minute Minister said. “We live amid great uncertainty, instability and constant change in our environment. Therefore we say with regard to our plans as James 4:15 says: *For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*”

That night as he settled himself down to sleep at Frank’s house, the minister thought over what he had learned that night at Solomon’s porch. His several attempts at a Time Inventory in the past month showed that his life was not the smooth flow he thought it was before he started keeping track. It was unmanageable; what he wound up doing in a day had little resemblance to any plan he made, or even any principle he valued. But how could you manage all of it, keep everything under control? Certainly breaking any one of the commandments involved putting a priority on things that was higher than the maker of all things. He wondered what Bill would have to say about it in the morning.