



Experiences and Explorations in Prayer

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Prayer for me is . . .

A question or concern I from my experience of prayer is . . .

What thoughts, feelings or images come to mind as you complete these sentences?

I have used this exercise in numerous retreats on prayer and have heard a whole range of responses. On the personal definition of prayer, people have described it as “talking to God,” “listening,” or “asking for things.” Questions or concerns about the prayer experience include “if prayer is so important, why is it so hard to find time for it” and “what do I do if I get sleepy,” and “why does it seem like nothing is happening?”

For me, prayer is essentially loving attention. The central question about prayer for me is “what are the essential practices that foster quiet, stillness and attention of mind, body and spirit?”

Over many years of prayer experience, I have identified principles and practices that support growth in prayer. There are an unlimited number of ways to pray, but many of us are “stuck” in the methods of prayer we were taught and have used since childhood. Frequently these have consisted of prayers of petition, asking for things.

I remember when I was in eighth grade or so, the rote prayers I had grown up with were losing their meaning and I felt like I was losing my faith. I eventually realized that I was being called to a deepening experience and expression of the faith relationship. Just as we grow and mature as human beings, shouldn't our prayer life also grow and mature?

The ultimate goal for growth in prayer is to “pray unceasingly,” as St. Paul exhorted in I Thessalonians 5:17. But how can one live a life of constant prayer and still have a life? We hear a lot about the power and the importance of prayer, but very little on how to go about it.

Over many years of practice I have come to identify some essential principles and practices I have found helpful for growth in prayer. These include:

- Place: find a particular location in the home and office that is conducive to prayer
- Environment: create a calm and appropriate space; this could include a candle, a plant, a meditation bowl, etc.

- Physical preparation: get out of your head and into your body – stretch, relax
- Posture: sit in a comfortable and alert position
- Dealing with distraction: develop the practice of attention, of befriending the breath, develop the anchor of conscious breathing
- Time! Time!! Time!!! Making time for prayer: it is said if you are too busy to pray, you are too busy.
- Patience & perseverance: these are two critical ingredients that are developed over time if one is faithful and persistent in the practice of prayer.
- Regularity – how frequently do you pray: just like any other area of our life, we grow in proficiency as we are more regular and consistent in our practice.
- Intensity: how focused is your attention and how do you refocus when your attention wanders?
- Duration: how long is your period of prayer?

These principles and practices also provide a framework for people to evaluate their experience of prayer. On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being a practice of regularly communing with God and 1 meaning your prayer life barely has a pulse, how would you rate yourself?

Want to grow in your prayer life? Contact Tom Reid or Carol Guenther at The Reid Group, 425-450-4949, info@TheReidGroup.biz.