

“In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught to see things from his point of view.”

Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 33

Ordinary time - The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer

Praying, which many of us have done since childhood, is still something we need to be continually learning how to do more deeply and intimately.

Scripture: Luke 11:1-4

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.

Voice of wisdom:

“Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father. Meditation introduces us to the inner life, fasting is an accompanying means, study transforms our minds, but it is the Discipline of prayer that brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing. ‘Prayer - secret, fervent, believing prayer - lies at the root of all personal godliness,’ writes William Carey.

“To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ. William Blake tells us that our task in life is to learn to bear God’s ‘beams of love.’ How often we fashion cloaks of evasion - beam-proof shelters - in order to elude our Eternal Lover. But when we pray, God slowly and graciously reveals to us our evasive actions and sets us free from them.

“‘You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions’ (James 4:3). To ask ‘rightly’ involves transformed passions. In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught to see things from his point of view.

“All who have walked with God have viewed prayer as the main business of their lives.... For those explorers in the frontiers of faith, prayer was no little habit tacked onto the periphery of their lives; it was their lives.... Many of us, however, are discouraged rather than challenged by such examples. Those ‘giants of the faith’ are so far beyond anything we have experienced that we are tempted to despair. But rather than flagellating ourselves for our obvious lack, we should remember that God always meets us where we are and slowly moves us along into deeper things.” Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline*, pgs. 33-35

Study 40

Contemplation:

What key words and ideas stand out to you? How do they help you take a deeper look at your pray life?

Since “God always meets us where we are,” take some time to think honestly about where you are in your prayer habits, and also about where you would like God to “slowly move” you along.

Are there ways you are evading God’s “beams of love” in prayer, perhaps by not including listening as part of your conversation with God? How could you be more receptive to God’s slow and gracious revelations?

Practices:

Write down one or two of the key phrases that are important to you. Hold them (literally) before God and wait silently on him. Record any further thoughts he may give you.

Richard Foster also says: “Real prayer is something we learn. The disciples asked Jesus, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’ (Luke 11:1). They had prayed all their lives, and yet something about the quality and quantity of Jesus’ praying caused them to see how little they knew about prayer. If their praying was to make any difference on the human scene, there were some things they needed to learn. It was liberating to me to understand that prayer involved a learning process. I was set free to question, to experiment, even to fail, for I knew I was learning.” (p. 36)

This week, take some extended time with the Lord’s Prayer - which is Jesus answer to the disciples’ request. Really think about each phrase as you pray it, perhaps expanding on the wording so it relates specifically to your life and circumstances. Question! Experiment! Learn!

If this whets your appetite for learning more about prayer, I would encourage you to get a copy of *Celebration of Discipline* and/or *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, both by Richard Foster.

©sharonracke These contemplative studies are the result of the thoughtful and transformative teaching I have received both at The Dwelling Place (dwellingplaceindy.org), and as a student of The Renovare Institute (renovare.org). I pray that as you use them, you will experience the presence and love of God, and learn more about living with Christ daily. Sharon Racke (recess.racke@gmail.com)