

Prayer

Finding the Heart's True Home

Based on the book

by Richard J. Foster



The ideas and concepts of this presentation are based entirely on the work of Richard J. Foster unless otherwise stated.



Sacramental Prayer

*The true sacrament is holy
personality.*

P. T. Forsyth



- Incarnational prayer
- God reveals himself in physical elements of creation
- Christianity has unfortunately divided into two camps
 - Liturgical
 - Spontaneous
- God can embrace both



Biblical Ritual

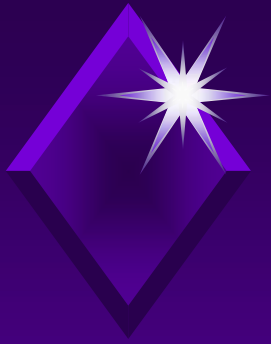
- Priestly directions & instructions for the construction of the tabernacle in Leviticus
- Psalms known to be used in worship by their brief directions at the beginning of many
- Confessional statement of I Tim. 1:17

*To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God,
be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*



Freedom of Liturgical Prayer

- Aids in articulation of our feelings
 - General Confession of BCP
- Unites us with the “communion of saints”
- Brings our focus to God instead of a charismatic leader
- Focuses us on the needs of the community instead of exclusively our own private needs
- Makes us realize the majesty of God



Concerns

- Liturgical prayer is all rote
 - Really a benefit; it frees us from focusing our thoughts on the words we will use
- Liturgical prayer is not relevant
 - Liturgical prayer serves to keep us in the bounds of Christian tradition
 - *“The charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experiments on my rats.”* C. S. Lewis



Concerns

- Liturgical prayer is “vain repetition”
 - Possible that some may fall into the trap of “idolatry of sophistication”
- Liturgical prayer attempts to imprison God
 - Remember that the Spirit of God “blows where it will”
 - Also remember that God has ordained sacraments to communicate his mercy



Psalms

- Both prayer and hymn book for Christians and for the Hebrews who used it before us
- Music reaches us in a way that words alone cannot
- *“The one who sings prays twice”*
- Suggests using *selah* as a time of meditation
 - *Selah* – probably direction to the musician (Notes in Harper Collins Study Bible)
- Hebrew poetic structure of parallelism is an aid to meditation
 - *The earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it,
The world, and those who live in it* Psa. 24:1
- Best introduction to written prayer



The Eucharist – The Most Complete Prayer

- Center of liturgical celebration
- Contains elements of all types of prayer
 - Examination
 - Repentance
 - Petition
 - Forgiveness
 - Contemplation
 - Thanksgiving
 - Celebration



The Eucharist – The Most Complete Prayer

- Appeals to every sense
- *“Christ is truly present among us, and his life is truly imparted to us, but how it all works is a holy mystery.”* St. Maximus the Confessor



The Eucharist – The Most Complete Prayer

- *“God has freely chosen to take the most common elements of the Jewish meal – bread and wine – and somehow impart his life to us through them.”*
- *“In Eucharistic Prayer we are constantly reminded that the Passion is the heart of the Gospel. It forces us to keep coming back to the Great Sacrifice. Jesus’ body broken. His blood poured out. This is how we live. This is how we are strengthened. This is how we are empowered. In Eucharistic Prayer we all come to the table on the same level: the articulate and the wise have no advantage over the illiterate and the immature. We all come with open hands, praying the prayer of the child – the prayer of receiving.”*



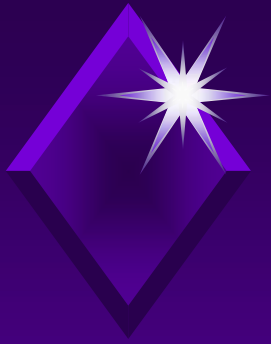
The Eucharist – The Most Complete Prayer

- Our temporary emotional state is not important
- A meal for the unworthy
 - *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. I Cor. 11:26*



The Sacrament of the Word

- The Word includes
 - The living voice of God
 - Jesus, the divine Logos
 - Scripture, the written Word
 - Ordinary people, inspired by God, to speak truth
- Not limited to a church service



The Sacrament of the Word

- Preaching characterized by unction
 - *“Unction is the divine in preaching. It gives preaching its point, sharpness, and potency. It impregnates revealed truth with all the energies of God. It supports, soothes, cuts, confronts, and brings dry bones to life.”*
 - Result of much prayer
- Role of congregation in preaching
 - Engage in holy listening
 - Take on a spirit of teachability
 - Listen for the voice of the Lord



Body Prayer

- *“It is high time we restore a Christian incarnational understanding of the body. God’s grace is mediated to us through our bodies. We worship God with our bodies. We pray with our bodies.”*
- Biblical references to body prayer
 - Moses in the battle with the Amalekites holds his arms high
 - Elisha praying while laying on the body of the Shunemite child
 - David dancing before the Ark
 - Jesus laying hands on many



Body Prayer

- Prayer postures in the Bible
 - Most often, complete prostration
 - Hands lifted, palms up
- Sacred dance a Christian tradition
 - Tripudium – 3 steps forward, 1 step backwards, repeatedly



Unceasing Prayer

When the Spirit has come to reside in someone, that person cannot stop praying; for the Spirit prays without ceasing in him. No matter if he is asleep or awake, prayer is going on in his heart all the time. He may be eating or drinking, he may be resting or working – the incense of prayer will ascend spontaneously from his heart. The slightest stirring of his heart is like a voice which sings in silence and in secret to the Invisible. Isaac the Syrian



Why Consider Unceasing Prayer

- Practiced by many in the past and present
 - Brother Lawrence and his “practice of the presence of God”
 - Juliana of Norwich: *“Let the membory of Jesus combine with your breath.”*
 - Kallistos: *“Unceasing prayer consists in an unceasing invocation of the name of God.”*
 - St. Francis
 - Frank Laubach
- Is this impossible or undesirable?



Why Consider Unceasing Prayer

- This type of prayer takes practice, like playing tennis
- Practice allows us to develop intimacy and ease in the presence of God

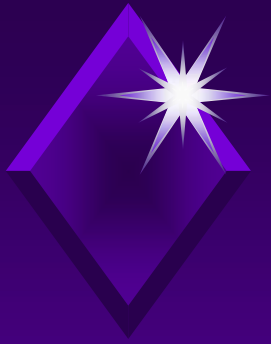


Biblical Basis

- *Pray without ceasing. I Thess. 5:17*
- *Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.” Rom. 12:12*
- *Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.” Eph. 6:18a*
- *Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. Col. 4:2*
- *Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. John 15:4*



- Unceasing prayer brings our focus to “a new Center of Reference”
- Result is peace, stillness, serenity, life orientation



Breath Prayer

- May be either more formal and liturgical or more spontaneous
- Grew out of the Eastern Orthodox hesychastic traditions (a mystical prayer tradition)
- Jesus Prayer is well-known example
- Can be very personal
- Usually requests to live a life more aligned with God's will



Discerning Your Breath Prayer

- In your prayer time, hear God call your name
- Then allow God to ask you, “What do you want?”
- Various answers may surface: peace, faith, “to understand your truth”
- Connect this to your most comforting way to address God



Discerning Your Breath Prayer

- Example: Help me understand your truth, Lord.
- Use your breath prayer often; it may change to “Help me live your truth, Lord.”
- Continue praying your breath prayer until you sense that God has finished his work in that area for the time being



Practice of the Presence of God

- Most associated with Brother Lawrence and his book by the same name
 - *“The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.”*
- Frank Laubach speaks of the contentment , joy and connection with God this type of prayer brings
- Takes years; Brother Lawrence needed 10 years before this type of prayer was second nature



How To Practice

- Practice the discipline outwardly, even if it seems artificial
- Allow this work to become part of the subconscious framework of your day
 - Usually accompanied by behavioral changes
- Allow the prayer to move into the heart
 - Increased sensitivity to the suffering of others
- Allow the prayer to permeate your entire personality
 - Madame Guyon says that our prayers and meditations “*are not the end. They are a way to the end. The end is union with God.*”



Potential Problems

- Is this constant repetition the 'vain repetition' we are warned against
 - Prayer for public display is a problem
 - Prayer as magic is a problem



Potential Problems

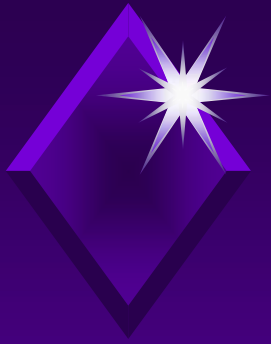
- How can we practice when we are feeling most unspiritual?
 - *“Rather than try to fool myself by piously pretending constant communion, what I do in such situations is to ask God for a timeout. He is gracious as always and understands our frailty....The question is not whether we fail again and again – that is a given; the question is whether over a period of time we are developing a practiced habit of divine fellowship.”*



Prayer of the Heart

Heart speaks to heart.

John Henry Newman



“The Prayer of the Heart is the prayer of intimacy. It is the prayer of love and tenderness of a child to Father God. Like the mother hen, who gathers her chicks under her wings, we, through the Prayer of the heart, allow God to gather us to himself – to hold us, to coddle us, to love us (Luke 13:34).”



“It is the heart that prays, it is to the voice of the heart that God listens and it is the heart that he answers.”

Jean-Nicholas Grou



Prayer to God as Our Parent

- Abba prayer
- Biblical basis
 - *And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Gal. 4:6*
 - *As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him. Psa. 103:13*
 - *As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you. Isa. 66:13*
 - Jesus experienced God as his Father from the time he remained in the temple as a child until he prayed in the Garden of Gethsamane



What is Prayer of the Heart

- The Holy Spirit praying in us
- 3 stages of prayer
 - Prayer of the lips
 - Prayer of the mind
 - Prayer of the heart
- George Buttrick called this type of relationship with God “friendship held in reverence”



Manifestations of Prayer of the Heart

- Rhema – the word in the Word
- Glossolalia as a spiritual prayer language
- Resting in the Spirit as a time of healing & rest



Manifestations of Prayer of the Heart

- Holy laughter
- Generally more passive form of prayer
- *“Often there is a simple warming of the spirit toward the things of God. We feel more in love with God, more desirous of his presence, more eager to learn his ways. With God as our companion, we become all the more ready to face the demands of the day: Looking forward to meetings with others, anticipating work with associates, eagerly awaiting time with children and spouse.”*



Response of Love

- *“The first way of coming into the Prayer of the Heart is by simple love. Love is the response of the heart to the overwhelming goodness of God, so come in simply and speak to him in unvarnished honesty.”*
- May use a special name for God that expresses your love, e.g. Abba, Father



Response of Love

- Falling asleep in prayer is to rest in God's presence
- If you find this love of God difficult, ask God to touch your heart
 - Use the prayer of John Donne: *"Batter my heart, three-personed God. Bend your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new."*



Meditative Prayer

*Meditation is the tongue of the
soul and the language of our spirit.*

Jeremy Taylor



Meditatio Scripturarum

- Meditation on scripture is the basis of all Christian meditation
- Enables us to become one whose *“delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night”* Ps. 1:2
- Meditation on scripture is different from exegesis



Meditatio Scripturarum

- God's Word becomes God's word to us as individuals
- *"Just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did."* Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Meditate on one portion of scripture (or pericope) for a week
- Allow the biblical text to speak to you in your present circumstances



Sanctifying the Imagination

- Simplest way to begin meditation on scripture
 - *“As I could not make reflection with my understanding I contrived to picture Christ within me. I did many simple things of this kind. I believe my soul gained very much in this way, because I began to practice prayer without knowing what it was.”* Teresa of Avila
- Imagination assists us to focus our attention
 - *“By means of the imagination we confine our mind within the mystery on which we meditate, that it may not ramble to and fro, just as we shut up a bird in a cage or tie a hawk by his leash so that he may rest on the hand.”* Francis de Sales
- Involves our emotions in our understanding of scripture



Sanctifying the Imagination

- *“To believe that God can sanctify and utilize the imagination is simply to take seriously the Christian idea of incarnation. God so accommodates, so enfleshes himself into our world, that he uses the images we know and understand to teach us about the unseen world of which we know so little and find so difficult to understand.”*



Living the Experience of Scripture

- Imagination allows us to identify with the people of the Bible
- *“Our task is not so much to study the passage as to be initiated into the reality of which the passage speaks.”*



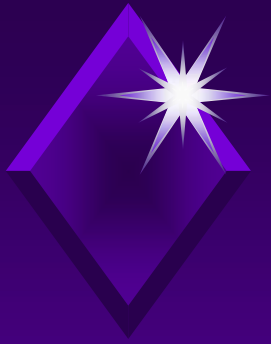
Living the Experience of Scripture

- *“In Meditative Prayer God is always addressing our will. Christ confronts us and asks us to choose. Having heard his voice, we are to obey his word. It is this ethical call to repentance, to change, to obedience that most clearly distinguishes Christian meditation from its Eastern and secular counterparts. In Meditative Prayer there is no loss of identity, no merging with the cosmic consciousness....Rather, we are called to life-transforming obedience because we have encountered the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Christ is truly present among us to heal us, to forgive us, to change us, to empower us.”*
- *Called lectio divina*



Use of Devotional Writings

- Strive to use devotional writing that has stood the test of time
- *Confessions by Augustine*
 - *Who can disentangle this most twisted and most inextricable knottiness?*
- *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*
- *The Life of Moses by Gregory of Nyssa*
 - *We regard falling from God's friendship as the only thing dreadful and we consider becoming God's friend the only thing worthy of honor and desire.*



Use of Devotional Writings

- *“Sayings of Brother Giles”*
 - *You do right in grieving for your sin. However, I advise you to grieve moderately. For you must always believe that God’s power to forgive is greater than your power to sin.*
- *Revelations of Divine Love by Juliana of Norwich*
 - *Our lover desires that our soul should cling to him with all its might, and that we should ever hold fast to his goodness.*
- *The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis*
- *John Woolman’s Journal*



“Anyone who imagines he can simply begin meditating without praying for the desire and the grace to do so, will soon give up. But the desire to meditate, and the grace to begin meditating, should be taken as an implicit promise of further graces.”

Thomas Merton