

Prayer

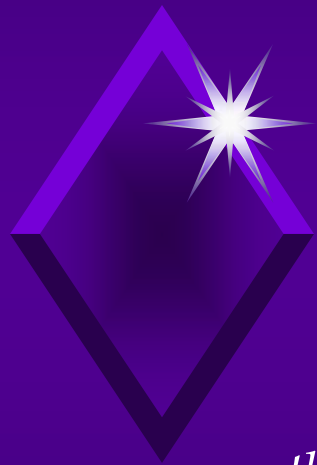
Finding the Heart's True Home

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.



Healing Prayer

Many great and wonderful things were wrought by the heavenly power in those days; for the Lord made bare his omnipotent arm, and manifested his power, to the astonishment of many, the healing virtue whereby many have been delivered from great infirmities.

George Fox



- Part of normal Christian life
- Recognizes the incarnational nature of Christian spirituality
- God uses many avenues to bring about healing



- In ancient times, roles of physician & priest carried by one individual
- Refusal to use medicine often a result of spiritual pride
- Both medicine and prayer are gifts from God



Perplexing Question

- *“He healed all of them”* (Matt. 12:15) only said of Jesus
- Possible explanations
 - We pray for healing of the body when healing of the emotions is needed
 - We refuse to use medicine
 - We have sin in our lives that interferes
- At no time are we to place the blame on the person not healed; blame not really helpful



Perplexing Question

- In the blind man that Jesus healed (John 9:1-12), Jesus dismisses questions about who is to blame
- We are **always** to show compassion for the person who needs healing



Laying On of Hands

- Found in scripture for many uses
- Denotes the tribal blessing
- Imparts the Holy Spirit
- Healing by Jesus and the disciples



A Simple Approach to Healing Prayer

1. We listen — to people and to God
2. We ask — a step of faith
3. We believe — the step of assurance
4. We thank God — the step of gratitude



Prayer of Suffering

*It is the prayer of agony which
saves the world.*

St. Mary of Jesus



“In the Prayer of Suffering we leave far behind our needs and wants, even our transformation and union with God. Here we give to God the various difficulties and trials that we face, asking him to use them redemptively. We also voluntarily take into ourselves the griefs and sorrows of others in order to set them free. In our sufferings those who suffer come to see the face of the suffering God.”



Image of Suffering Love

- Jesus, praying, *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34)
- *I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. Col. 1:24*
- Not a complaint that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was insufficient, but an acknowledgement that we share in that ministry



Redemptive Suffering

- *Unredemptive suffering – “suffering that is utterly cruel and completely meaningless. This we must fight against with all our might for it is always opposed to life in the kingdom of God.”*



Redemptive Suffering

- *Redemptive suffering – “a kind of suffering that has purpose and meaning. It is the kind that enriches the lives of others and brings healing to the world.”*
- *“In redemptive suffering we stand with people in their sin and in their sorrow. There can be no sterile, arm’s-length purity. Their suffering is messy business, and we must be prepared to step smack into the middle of the mess.”*



Value of Suffering Prayer

- Keeps us from superficial triumphalism – *“There is a triumph that is in Christ, but it goes through suffering, not around it.”*
- *“Our hearts are enlarged and sensitized by suffering. We become ‘wounded healers’”* as Nouwen calls them



How Do We Enter the Suffering of the World

- Moses, after the Israelites made the golden calf, says, *“You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”* (Ex. 32:30)
 - Moses says to God, *“If you will only forgive their sin – but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written.”* (Ex. 32:32)
- Daniel prays for his people, identifying with their sin, ends his prayer with *“Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies.”*
Dan. 9:5-19



Passive and Active Suffering

- Passive suffering includes all the normal aspects of suffering that are a part of being human
 - Endure patiently and trust in God
 - Does not require that we passively accept evil and injustice
- *“The active side of suffering involves those times when we voluntarily take into ourselves the griefs and sorrows of others in order to set them free.”*



Repenting on Behalf of Others

- *“Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that when we pray for our enemies, ‘we are taking their distress and poverty, their guilt and perdition upon ourselves, and pleading to God for them. We are doing vicariously for them what they cannot do for themselves.’”*



Repenting on Behalf of Others

- Prayer of a child at Ravensbruck: *“O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not only remember the suffering they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we bought, thanks to this suffering: our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this. And when they come to judgement, let all the fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.”*
- This type of prayer seems to facilitate repentance by those who need it



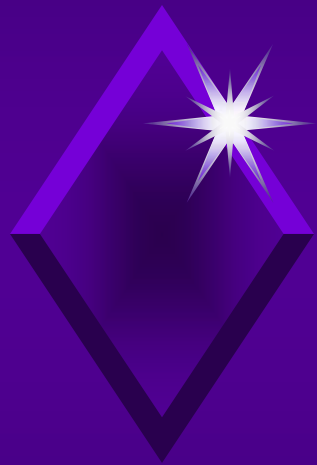
Groanings of a Struggling Faith

- Like Jacob wrestling with the angel
- *“We argue with God so that his justice may be overcome by his mercy. It is only because of our intimacy with God that we can thus wrestle with him.”*
- *“This wrestling is a hard image for us to accept. We much prefer the image of restful harmony. Our difficulty is due, in part, to our culture’s inability to reconcile struggle with love. We assume a loving relationship by its very nature must be peaceful and harmonious, and yet even on a human level those things we care about the most deeply we argue for the most passionately. Struggle is consistent with love, for it is an expression of our caring.”*



Suffering With the Body of Christ

- The suffering of the church, as the body of Christ, becomes the suffering of Christ
- *“These sufferings are redemptive; they are actually used of God to change and transform and draw people into the way of Christ.”*



Authoritative Prayer

God has instituted prayer so as to confer upon his creatures the dignity of being causes.

Blaise Pascal



Some Definitions

- *“Using the authority of God to command something done.”*
- *“Prayer that God uses to invade enemy territory and establish his kingdom. This is the kind of prayer that is under consideration here.”*



Authority Wedded to Compassion

- Has potential for abuse
- Authoritative prayer must grow out of compassion
- *“Authority needs compassion to keep it from becoming destructive. Compassion provides the environment in which authority can function.”*



Guardrails of Discernment and Prudence

- Discernment and prudence are the proper guides for the exercise of authoritative prayer
- Discernment means being able to understand a situation properly and to know what needs to be done to address the situation



Guardrails of Discernment and Prudence

- People of discernment
 - Will not call attention to themselves
 - Will be the individual sought out for guidance
- *“Prudence means practical common sense.”* C. S. Lewis
 - Knowing when to speak and when to be silent
 - Acting in ways appropriate to the situation



Biblical Context

- *Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, “Be taken up and thrown into the sea,” and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. Mark 11:23*



Biblical Context

- Example of healing a child with a demonic spirit in Mark 9:14-29
 - Disciples had failed in their attempts to heal the child
 - Jesus speaks directly to the evil spirit, commanding it to come out
 - In response to the disciples' questions, Jesus said, *"This kind can come out only through prayer"*
- Jesus delegated this authority to his disciples
 - In sending out the twelve, Jesus *"gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal"* Luke 9:6



Commonsense Counsels

1. Most uses of authoritative prayer will not be used against cosmic evil
2. The power of God's presence does not require theatrics
3. We have the resources of the Holy Spirit and the light of Christ to aid us in situations where authoritative prayer are appropriate



Commonsense Counsels

4. Remember to treat the individual with compassion; evil is our enemy
5. Not a substitute for disciplined Christian life
6. Stay connected with a Christian community
7. Be mindful that while being bold for God we are limited human beings



Prayer from Heaven to Earth

- *“William Law declares that prayer is a mighty instrument, ‘not for getting man’s will done in heaven’ but ‘for getting God’s will done on earth.’”*



Prayer from Heaven to Earth

- *God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come....God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Eph. 1:20-21, 2:4-6*



Prayer from Heaven to Earth

- Paul also reminds us of the resources we have for spiritual struggle in Eph. 6:10-20
- Recognition that *“Behind absentee landlords of ghetto apartments are the spiritual forces of greed and avarice. In back of unreasoned and excessive resistance to the Gospel message are demonic forces of disobedience and distraction. Underneath the organized structures of injustice and oppression are principalities of privilege and status.”*



Exercising Our Authority

- A prayer of action
- *“Many have condemned themselves with inner vows of sickness and failure and death. Seeing these things and knowing that it is not good for people to be in such bondage, we speak the word of authority that breaks the curse.”*



Exercising Our Authority

- *“By taking authority over the sicknesses of mind and body and spirit.”*
- *“Whenever we find evil forces at work, we firmly demand that they leave.”*
- *“By coming against all social evil and institutional injustice...We oppose unjust laws that demean and dehumanize those for whom Christ died.”*



Radical Prayer

*To clasp the hands in prayer is
the beginning of an uprising against
the disorder of the world. Karl Barth*



Definition

- From the Latin, *radix*, for root
- “It’s aim is the total transformation of persons, institutions, and societies.”



Prophetic Messenger

“These are the ones who can envision a new future, a future of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. They are being taken over by a holy power to do right. They are being brought out of bondage to human beings. They cannot be bribed or manipulated or flattered. They love their enemies and pray for those who despise them. In time their very presence and actions will bring down those structures that are sustained by greed and pride and fear. Their simple noncooperation with the oppression, prejudice, and class strife of modern culture will transform the world almost beyond recognition.”



Spiritual Defiance

- *“The true prophetic message always calls us to a spiritual defiance of the world as it now is. Our prayer, to the extent that it is fully authentic, undermines the status quo. It is a spiritual underground resistance movement. We are subversives in a world of injustice, oppression, and violence. Like Amos of old, we demand that ‘justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream’ (Amos 5:24).”*



Spiritual Defiance

- Follow example of
 - Abraham arguing with God on behalf of the city of Sodom (Gen. 18)
 - Moses arguing with God on behalf of the Israelites (Exod. 32)
 - Esther pleading with God for her people (Esther 4)



Social Holiness

- Breaks down all class and status distinctions
- Will necessarily lead us outside our “comfort zones”
- *God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. Acts 10:34b-35*



Embracing the Whole World

- *“In holy boldness we cover the earth with the grace and the mercy of God. This is a great task, a noble task. God has placed into our hands the destiny of the world, and by means of our prayers we hold back the divine wrath.”*
- Will involve prayer on behalf of nations
- Begin by repenting for the sins of our own nation
- Bring to all the liberating message of the Gospel



Christian Community

- This commitment brings us back to the Christian community
 - To reform the church as an institution
 - To participate in communal life
 - To nurture and be nurtured spiritually as in spiritual direction/mentoring and small groups



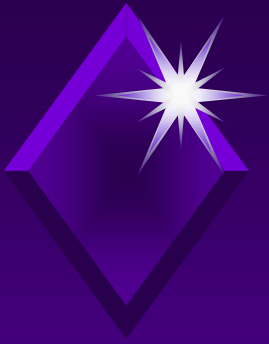
Christian Community

- *“It is of utmost importance that we pray in community. While prayer is often private and personal, it is never outside the reality of the worshiping, praying fellowship. In fact, we cannot sustain a life of prayer outside the community. Either we will give it up as futile, lacking the support and watchful care of others, or we will make it into a thing of our own.”*



The Royal Law

- Agape love is the foundation for prophetic, radical prayer
- Love of God and love of neighbor are inextricably intertwined



The Royal Law

- *“It is only through the royal law of love that our deeds of mercy and compassion become a blessing. Without it, try as we might to do otherwise, our serving will always be tinged with condescending arrogance.”*



The Royal Law

- *“It is only because of your love, only your love, that the poor will forgive you the bread you give them.” St. Vincent de Paul*
- At the end, we have returned to the beginning
 - *“True, whole prayer is nothing but love.” St. Augustine*