

How do I develop a more active Prayer Life?

Objective: To develop a habit of daily prayer

Catherine de Hueck Doherty wrote: "Prayer is love. It is love expressed in speech, and love expressed in silence. To put it another way, prayer is the meeting of two loves: the love of God and our love."

Which brings us to a very important question: Why do we pray anyway? If God is all-knowing, as our faith tells us God is, then why bother to pray? After all, God already knows what's on our minds and in our hearts, so why should we waste time telling God what God already knows?

There are two answers to this question. First, God may know what's on our minds and in our hearts, but do we know? Life can get so busy and so hectic at times that we easily lose touch with our thoughts and feelings. Prayer is our "time out" from the busyness of life to reflect on our deeper needs and desires. And why is it so important to get in touch with our deepest needs and desires? Because that's precisely where God usually speaks most clearly to us.

Another reason we pray is not only to discover what we think and feel, but also to learn what God thinks and feels. Prayer is a two-way street. When we pray, we give our all-knowing God a chance to communicate with us. That means we have to LISTEN. This is risky business. All prayer is. By inviting God to speak to us, we risk being changed; that is, we risk having our attitudes altered, our perspectives broadened, our plans modified.

So, Prayer is really just about developing a relationship with God. And, as Thomas Keating said, "The only way you can fail at prayer is to not show up."

Song Suggestion: Prayer of St Francis (Blue 368, Red 721)

Bible and Catechism Readings:

1 John 5:14

And we have this confidence in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

1Thes 5:16-18.

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for all is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:6

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.

Romans 12:12

Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.

Catechism 2567

God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. In prayer, the faithful God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response. As God gradually reveals himself and reveals man to himself, prayer appears as a reciprocal call, a covenant drama. Through words and actions, this drama engages the heart. It unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation.

Catechism 2558

“Great is the mystery of the faith!” ... This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.

Catechism 2560

The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours.”

Saint/Vignette:

When St Teresa of Avila entered the Carmelite convent, she started to learn and practice mental prayer, in which she "tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ present within me....My imagination is so dull that I had no talent for imagining or coming up with great theological thoughts." Teresa prayed this way off and on for eighteen years without feeling that she was getting results.

Then Teresa fell ill with malaria. When she had a seizure, people were so sure she was dead that after she woke up four days later she learned they had dug a grave for her. Afterwards she was paralyzed for three years and was never completely well. Yet instead of helping her spiritually, her sickness became an excuse to stop her prayer completely: she couldn't be alone enough, she wasn't healthy enough, and so forth. Later she would say, "Prayer is an act of love, words are not needed. Even if sickness distracts from thoughts, all that is needed is the will to love."

For years she hardly prayed at all "under the guise of humility." She thought as a wicked sinner she didn't deserve to get favors from God. But turning away from prayer was like "a baby turning from its mother's breasts, what can be expected but death?"

When she was 41, a priest convinced her to go back to her prayer, but she still found it difficult. "I was more anxious for the hour of prayer to be over than I was to remain there. I don't know what heavy penance I would not have gladly undertaken rather than practice prayer." Teresa sympathizes with those who have a difficult time in prayer: "All the trials we endure cannot be compared to these interior battles."

Yet her experience gives us wonderful descriptions of mental prayer: "For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love. Love is not great delight but desire to please God in everything."

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Is daily prayer as vital as breathing? Explain how and why? Describe your relationship with God through daily prayer.

How often do you pray? What benefits can you share from your prayer life that others might learn from?

Do you ever read the Bible? How can the Bible drive your prayer life?

What's the hardest thing for you in establishing a prayer life? Time? Priority?

Do we incorporate gratitude and thankfulness in our prayers to God?

Are our prayers answered? How would we know? Do we recognize that it is God's will be done and not ours?

Action Plan:

1. When – Set a time each day that you will pray – morning, evening, lunchtime, etc. and for how long – 15min, 20min, 1 hour, etc.
2. Where – Find a good place where you can quiet yourself and get free from distractions (but not fall asleep...)
3. What (or how) – Find 1 thing that will drive your prayer - Rosary, Liturgy of the Hours, Lectio Divina, a spiritual book, meditating and journaling, etc.
4. Why – This is your “why” – It is meant to create a relationship, to build a relationship with the true and living God, who is pursuing ME. That is your “why” – To develop a relationship...
5. Go! And just Show Up! Commit to doing this for at least a month, and then adjust as you see what helps build that relationship.

A Final Word: Dr. Peter Kreeft writes: “I strongly suspect that if we saw all the difference even the tiniest of our prayers to God make, and all the people those little prayers were destined to affect, and all the consequences of those effects down through the centuries, we would be so paralyzed with awe at the power of prayer that we would be unable to get up off our knees for the rest of our lives.”

Author: Steve Frazerwith the help of many before me.