

First steps in prayer

LIVINGTHEWORD

I'M NOT SURE HOW TO PRAY

its helpful to be aware of a few basics and then just 'start praying'

I'm not sure how to pray?

A number of years ago, a reporter asked Cardinal Basil Hume why it is that the modern person today has difficulty in finding God. The response was immediate: 'people today have trouble sitting still and listening, God is found in the quiet.' Admittedly, we can pray and find God in many ways, inside, outside, experience God in our family and friends, in our Christian family. For the person serious about prayer it will mean establishing a pattern of stillness and quietness. And from listening to God in prayer you will be challenged to act upon what you hear in prayer. Prayer will lead you into the world. You will become a follower of Christ both in name and action.

An attitude to have in prayer— listening

Anthony De Mello invites us to think about our attitude as we approach prayer. Imagine the world is on fire and many people are in danger. Are you going to try and run around shouting instructions, or are you going to report to Jesus for duty? That is a helpful question to think of as we enter into a time of prayer: am I going to report for duty? Am I going to listen?

Consider this little story

Once upon a time, at a military base, a job opening was posted on the bulletin board. It was for a telegraph specialist—someone specialized in Morse Code. Those interested in applying for the job were to report to the Captain's office the next morning at 0900.

At 9 the next day, soldiers had already filled the Captain's waiting room. They were male and female. Fat and thin. Short and tall. High school graduates and college graduates. Black, white, brown. Rich and poor. They filled the room and spilled out into the hall. This job they were seeking was a very desirable one. THEY ALL WANTED IT! So, there they sat. Some of them read magazines. Some of them listened to music in their own little-headset world. Some carried on conversations among themselves. There was a cough here, a laugh there, the turning of pages, the deep sighs of boredom, a chomp into an apple, the low steady hum of voices. Just the quiet buzzzz of cooped-up humanity ----- EXCEPT for the sound of dots and dashes coming from a telegraph machine somewhere. Suddenly a soldier stood up – walked quickly across the room— opened the door to the Captain's office, and disappeared behind the door as it closed. Inside – the Captain had been

expecting him. He stood, saluted the soldier, shook his hand and without an interview or even a question asked, the Captain said – “Sit down, soldier, I want to talk with you. What made you come in here?” The soldier replied, “Sir, I heard a Morse Coded message that said ‘This is your Captain. If you’re reading this message, come into my office immediately.’” “That’s exactly right,” said the Captain. You were listening, you heard, you knew the message was for you and you responded. Very good, soldier. The job is yours.”

As Christians, if we aren’t careful, we can get caught up in the surface. Caught up in the surface noise of daily life and also the surface noise of our own lives while we are in prayer! If we had 100 Christians, even 100 Christians who pray daily, how many would make it into the Captains office?

The invitation is to an attentive listening. We may have a real desire to do this, but it is helpful to have some tried and true thoughts and methods, some simple ideas and ways to begin prayer.

Meditation and Contemplation

If someone was to ask you whether you ‘meditate’ what would your answer be? Some may think, no that is only what seriously religious people do. What if I told you the origin of the word ‘meditate’ simply means to repeat a text over and over—to think over, to ‘chew’ on something in particular—in an attempt to gain its meaning. Now you might say, ‘Yes, I do that daily! I chew over things often with God!’ Another term for meditation is ‘mind prayer’.

If someone was to ask you whether you were ‘contemplative’ what would your answer be? The origin of the word ‘contemplation’ simply means to be in the presence of, or in the observation of. ‘Templum’ is the latin for ‘place for observation.’ Contemplation then is when we find ourselves resting quietly in God’s presence. We might be able to respond now with confidence, yes, I am contemplative, a number of times and in different ways I find myself resting in awe of God, feeling close to God’s presence. Another term for contemplation is ‘soul praying’.

STARTING STUFF

Preparation

know what time you have set aside for prayer, pick a scripture passage beforehand and reflect briefly.

Place

be alone, in a place where you will be uninterrupted and be able to respond to God’s presence

Posture

our bodies connect with our spirit, find a way of relaxing and becoming peaceful. If we lie down or pray in bed – its quite possible that we will just fall asleep!

Presence of God

be consciously aware of God, intentionally invite God into your life and prayer time and acknowledge his presence

Passage of Scripture

– Read slowly and thoughtfully (possibly twice). Notice any words or ideas or feelings stir up in you... begin your conversation with God

You might like to note down places and times that you find really work for your prayer time