

Prayer 101

Finding the Heart's True Home

Simple Prayer

- We today yearn for prayer and hide from prayer. We are attracted to it and repelled by it. We believe prayer is something we should do, even something we want to do, but it seems like a chasm stands between us and actually praying. We experience the agony of prayerlessness. (11)
- But for now there is one “something” that needs immediate attention. It is the notion—almost universal among us modern high achievers—that we have to have everything “just right” in order to pray. (12)

- But when praying, we come “underneath,” where we calmly and deliberately surrender control and become incompetent. (12)
- The truth of the matter is, we all come to prayer with a tangled mass of motives—altruistic *and* selfish, merciful *and* hateful, loving *and* bitter. (13)
- We will never have pure enough motives, or be good enough, or know enough in order to pray rightly. We simply must set all these things aside and begin praying. (14)

- In Simple Prayer we bring ourselves before God just as we are, warts and all. (14)
- In a very real sense *we* are the focus of Simple Prayer. Our needs, our wants, our concerns dominate our prayer experience. (15)
- In fact, sometimes Simple Prayer is called the “Prayer of Beginning Again.” (15)
- In Simple Prayer the good, the bad, and the ugly are all mixed together. (17)

- Simple Prayer is necessary, even essential, to the spiritual life. (18)
- Very simply, we begin right where we are: in our families, on our jobs, with our neighbors and friends. (19)
- [T]he only place God can bless us is right where we are, because that is the only place we are! (20)
- C.S. Lewis counsels us to “lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.” (21)

- We will discover that by praying we learn to pray. (22)
- My first counsel is simply a reminder that prayer is nothing more than an ongoing and growing love relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (22)
- [W]e must never be discouraged by our lack of prayer. [...] In time the desire will lead to practice, and the practice will increase the desire. (23)

- An opposite but equally important counsel is to let go of trying too hard to pray. (23)
- If prayer is not a fixed habit with you, instead of starting with twelve hours of prayer-filled dialogue, single out a few moments and put all your energy into them. (24)
- [W]e should learn to pray even when we are dwelling on evil. (24)
- Finally, I would suggest that in the beginning it is wise to strive for uneventful prayer experiences. (25)

Prayer of Examen

- It is actually possible today for people to go to church services week in and week out for years without having a single experience of spiritual examen. What a tragedy! What a loss! No wonder people today are weak. No wonder they are barely hanging on. (45)

- So what is this Prayer of Examen? It has two basic aspects, like the two sides of a door. The first is an *examen of consciousness* through which we discover how God has been present to us throughout the day and how we have responded to his loving presence. The second aspect is an *examen of conscience* in which we uncover those areas that need cleansing, purifying, and healing.(46)
- In the examen of consciousness we prayerfully reflect on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of our days to see how God has been at work among us and how we responded. (47)

- The examen of consciousness is the means God uses to make us more aware of our surroundings. (47)
- God wants us to present where we are. He invites us to see and to hear what is around us and, through it all, to discern the footprints of the Holy. (48)
- [In the prayer of examen] We are raising our own personal Ebenezer and declaring, “Here is where God met me and helped me.” We are remembering. (48-49)

- In the examen of conscience we are inviting the Lord to search our hearts to the depths. Far from being dreadful, this is a scrutiny of love. (49)
- I want you to know that God goes with us in the examen of conscience. (49)
- If the examination is solely *self*-examination, we will always end up with excessive praise or blame. (50)
- The Prayer of Examen produces within us the priceless grace of self-knowledge. (51)

- Through faith, self-knowledge leads us to a self-acceptance and a self-love that draw their life from God's acceptance and love. (54)
- We practice it by turning inward. Not outward, not upward, but inward. Anthony Bloom writes, "Your prayer must be turned inwards, not towards a God of Heaven nor towards a God far off, but towards God who is closer than you are aware." (55)

- No, it is not a journey *into* ourselves that we are undertaking but a journey *through* ourselves so that we can emerge from the deepest level of the self not God. (55)

- Common ways of turning inward:
 1. Spiritual journal
 2. Inviting God to do a spiritual inventory of the day
 3. Luther: prayerful meditation on Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer
 4. Personal retreat time to review lives