

# Prayer: A Dialogue with God

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Prayer has been part of our lives for as long as we both can remember. When we were children we were taught prayers by our parents, at school, or at Religious Education programs at Church. Unfortunately, as time went on these memorized prayers became automatic and had little personal meaning. We were "saying our prayers" out of habit.

The desire to grow closer in our relationship with God has led us to seek answers to some very basic questions regarding prayer. What is prayer? Why should we pray? To whom do we pray? Why should we persevere in our prayer? Does God answer our prayers?

To us, prayer is the language of faith. It is addressing words from the heart to God. It is a dialogue with God, and as in any dialogue, both parties speak and both listen. Probably the most difficult part in our dialogue is listening. Often, we are so intent on what we have to say, we do not make a real effort to listen to the other.

The same holds true in our dialogue with God. We have to make a deliberate effort to quiet ourselves and listen intently for Him to speak to us. He does this in many ways. He speaks to us through nature, the wind in the trees, or a bird singing. He also speaks to us through our minds, He puts thoughts or images there. He may speak to us through others, especially our spouse. All of us have experienced someone speaking the words we needed to hear at just the right time. He speaks to us through Scripture.

No prayer is a true dialogue with God unless we give Him that chance to speak to us. If we don't, our prayer is a monologue not a dialogue. This is not easy to do since we are generally surrounded by noise and distractions, but if we make the effort, God will speak to us. Try going into your Church at some time of the day when very few people are around, and put yourself in His presence. Concentrate on Him; He will let you know He is there with you!

We pray because, through Scripture, our Father calls us to come to Him "Come to the water all you who are thirsty . . . Come to me, listen and your soul will live " (Isaiah 55:1-13) Jesus invites us to pray: "Ask and you will receive" (Matthew 7:7-11) and, "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do" (John 14:12-14.). Our Father is just waiting for us to come to Him in Prayer.

Jesus prayed regularly in the temple. He prayed before He set out on any major event in His life, going into the desert or to the mountains. Before His death He went to the garden at Gethsemane. He prayed for Himself and He prayed for us. "I do not pray for them (the Apostles) alone, I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their word." (John 17:20). If Jesus spent so much time in prayer, who are we to think that we should not do the same? He set the example for us.

**Lenore:** The mystery of the Trinity is three persons in one God. At the Marriage Retorno which we attended a few years ago, something was said that hit me with the impact of a locomotive. It was stated: "It makes no difference to whom we address our prayers, Father, Son, or Holy Spirit' because they are all One " Of course I knew this, I had heard it many times before, but it was what I "needed" to hear right then. (God speaks to us through others!)

I had gone through several stages in my prayer life, praying to the Father, then to Jesus, and then to the Holy Spirit. At this particular time I was completely confused was I slighting God when I prayed to Jesus? Was Jesus hurt when I asked the Spirit to guide me? Perhaps this has never bothered you, but it did me! Those very simple words, "They are One." made all the difference to me. Now when I pray to Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or to God the Father, I am at peace. I am also at peace when others pray to whichever person of the Trinity they prefer. I no longer judge them as "different" for they are praying to one God just as I am!

We must persevere in our prayer. When we receive no immediate answer to our prayers of petition, it seems as though God is not listening to us. Perhaps we think He is not speaking to us. Scripture tells us we should persevere. "He told them a parable on the necessity of praying always and not losing heart." (Luke 18:1-8.) He will answer our prayers; He will speak to us, but in His time and in His way. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." (Isaiah 55: 8.)

We have a relationship with God and, as in any relationship, the more we talk to Him, the deeper that relationship will become. We should be honest with Him; we cannot pretend with Him. He knows us better than anyone else. We must have the confidence in His love for us to share our deepest feelings with Him, our fears and joys, our doubts and deep love, even our uncertainty about what may appear to be His plan for our life.

We should praise Him and thank Him for all He has done for us. Have you ever thought of telling Him what His most special quality is to you on a particular day? His love, gentleness, continuous forgiveness, generosity? This makes a prayer of praise a very special prayer for us.

**Chuck:** As in our dialogue, the attitude with which I go to God is important. Do I believe I am so insignificant that He doesn't care about me, do I bargain with Him, do I put conditions on my prayers, do I turn to Him just when I am in need? These attitudes can all be blocks to a deeper relationship with God through prayer.

I was deeply inspired by the book *With Open Hands* by Henri J.M. Nouwen in which he describes the proper attitude in prayer by contrasting the difference as we come to prayer either with clenched fists or open hands. With clenched fists, I cling very tightly to myself I don't want to let go or give up control. I want to hold fast my fear and apprehension make me reluctant to let go and trust, or as we have heard before, to "let go and let God."

To pray with open hands is a gesture of trust, of acceptance, of surrender. When I open my hands to God I indicate my willingness to put myself in His hands, in His control I open myself to receive what He has in store for me and, in faith, I know He will respond to me with love and kindness.

The best analogy of this prayer relationship with God is my relationship with our children. They reach out for comfort, for understanding, acceptance and love. They trust that I will give them only good things; there is no apprehension. It is not important that all their requests are granted; what is important is that they know they are loved and all will be well. So it is between us and God. We know that all will be well. "If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to anyone who asks Him!" (Matthew 7:11.)

When speaking with God it makes no difference if we use memorized prayer or spontaneous prayer. Although memorized prayers may have become mechanical in the past, the closer we come to God the more personal and alive they become. Jesus taught us to pray. (Matthew 6:5-15.) When the Apostles asked how they should pray, He taught them the most perfect prayer, the Our Father. In it are the different types of prayer: praise, surrender, petition, reconciliation and thanksgiving. Say this prayer aloud and very slowly, think of what you are saying, talk to your Father. Sentence by sentence, "pray" the Our Father and it will become your personal prayer!

**Lenore:** For me, one of the most beautiful prayers of praise is found in the Liturgy of the Eucharist "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." The next time you participate at Mass, listen to yourself as you pray this prayer; you are praising God!

Our spontaneous prayer is less formal, and is more of a personal conversation with God about who we are and where we are in our needs and in our relationship with Him. This began shortly after our Marriage Encounter Weekend when we decided to pray with our children at mealtime, all joining hands and saying whatever we wanted to say to God at that time. Many of you have experienced this and know how awkward it can be at first.

However, as time went on, we became more comfortable with it and now pray as a family without any hesitation. Anyone who is not there at the time knows that he or she is being remembered in our prayers, as we always pray specifically for those who are not present.

We pray spontaneously as a couple, usually before Chuck leaves for work in the morning. It is a very simple prayer: we praise the Lord in all His glory, we thank Him for all He has given us, we remember those who have asked us to pray for them, we ask Him to watch over our family and friends, and we ask the Holy Spirit to guide us through the day.

We pray individually during the day as well. We have discovered that our personal prayer is very important to our couple prayer. When we pray individually, we do not come empty to our couple prayer; rather, we bring the richness of our own personal prayer life to share with each other.

We are two different people, therefore the Lord is going to speak to us and we are going to talk to Him in different ways. When we share this with each other, we are becoming even more of the "one" that He wants us to be. We are sharing our personal relationship with Him with each other and enriching one another because of it.