

Reflections from My Prayer Journal
Person in Prayer

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10/26/04

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I. Introduction

Through the following summary of my experiences with journaling in prayer during the past seven weeks I will be utilizing insights and examples of prayers that I have written during this time. My goal through this summary will be to provide a record of patterns that emerged during this exercise as well as growth areas, difficulties and successes that I faced during this experience. Next steps following this process will be given along with some concluding words regarding the impact of this endeavor upon my life.

II. Patterns

If one had asked me prior to this experience what things most concern me and drive me to prayer most often I doubt if my answer would have fully matched what I have found to be central issues that burden my prayers. Likewise the things that bring me the most joy and gratitude in life were surprising to see on paper. As one who has spent most of my life praying each day the disparity between what I thought was being communicated and what actually was being said and heard were very different.

My greatest concerns in prayer early on were in the form of simple prayers of petition.

10-24-04 (at work) "Lord help me to be less easily angered, you call e not to be known for having a temper but to be quick about giving grace, and known for being even tempered, calm, trustworthy and fair.
Thank you for your example and help. Amen"

10-25-04 (at home) "Lord help me to know how best to pray for my wife. Help me to see what you want and make me the help-mate that you desire me to be for her. Help our relationship bring glory to you Father. Amen"

Dominating these prayers were petitions regarding concerns for my attitudes at work and my relationship with my wife. Also of note were prayers of petition over my concerns for my parents and my relationship with them. While these prayers were the staple fare of my conversations with God, I often wrote of times during each day when I felt close to God and had memories of past events or friendships, times when my mind was drawn to what I would later begin to understand as a contemplative time of prayer. This leads me to the discussion of my growth through this exercise.

III. Growth

There were several key areas of personal growth experienced in my prayer life during this quarter. One of the largest paradigm shifts for me may be difficult for someone else to understand, but I will attempt to explain it here in a two step process.

In our spiritual formation group I was encouraged by others to not be so afraid of emotions in my relationships and prayer life. Prayers of tears and Love for God (even passionate Love for God!). I was a little unsure of how to relate to God at this level, as my earthly father and I do not hug, cry or experience deep emotions together. I wrote the words Love and Tears at the top of each page of my prayer journal for the next week. Each day I would select either one or the other type of prayer to write down and practice. It was a transforming week for me! By the end of the week I was combining the two

together and experiencing prayers of both Love and Tears before the throne of God. Here is an example of a passionate prayer that I wrote during this week.

11-1-04 "You are trustworthy and your mercy is as sweet as honey. Your Love is as pure as a spring rain. Let us dance sweetly in the meadows, laughing and cherishing our moments together. When you look in my eyes you love me, when I hear your voice I am captivated by it, be the source of all of my longing, you alone fulfill my needs, you alone are truly beautiful. Above all of creation you are my King and my confidant. I truly love you in your beauty and majesty and treasure your true love for me as you created me and called me to your loving embrace. I Love you sweet and mighty God, I Love you."

This was only the first step in God's desire to change the way that I relate to Him. Through this process I began to realize that there are other ways that I ascribe characteristics of my earthly father to my heavenly father. While my earthly father does not generally put effort into our relationship, God is the one who has initiated our relationship. In fact God continues to seek me daily and He regularly initiates conversation with me! God does far more work to keep our relationship current than I do. Through meditative and contemplative prayers I have begun to see God in a different light, allowing God to begin calling me to prayer rather than me to vainly view myself as the sole initiator of our time together. The prayer of Examen assisted in this endeavor as well as the classroom lecture that discussed the whisper of God in the ear of Elijah.

Taking the time to examine my misconceptions regarding God's character and then passionately and emotionally meeting with the father helped me to begin to connect

with Him in a more real way. After experiencing Him in these ways that I had somehow shut off, I was able to see that yet another misconception existed, one that said He is there when you call. While this is true, it is so compelling to me to now realize that He is also there speaking to me even when I have not called on Him, but when He is calling on me.

During the past two weeks I have begun to take time for prayer when I experience the whisper of God, through a memory, a pull at my heart or the sense that He is near. These may not be a time that I was planning on prayer, but at a time when He is calling me to prayer. This has been helpful to me in praying more powerful intercessory prayers for others as well as authoritative prayers regarding what I know His will and word say are the truth.

IV. Difficulties and Successes

The greatest difficulties I experience are still the day to day worries that often cloud my mind and accuse me of being inadequate and insufficient to fulfill the tasks of my life. Am I a horrible husband and a lousy provider of financial security for my family? Fully allowing God to communicate His love for me and listening to Him fully in these areas remain necessary for me.

One helpful guide was found in the daily Examen that was passed out in week two. The final step was turning over the worries of tomorrow to God and trusting Him with them prior to going to sleep. This has been a good practice for me to include in my nightly prayers and has been a successful piece of support. Also lighting a candle as I pray a prayer of intercession or petition and then blowing it out when done helps me to remember that the candle is out, so there is no need to worry, that prayer was seen by God just as I saw the candle.

Another area of difficulty for me is the prayer or relinquishment. Truly giving something over to God and fully letting go is a recurring stumbling block for me. Often I found myself giving something over to God repeatedly in my prayer times. Without a written record I am not sure that I would have become so aware of this difficulty.

V. Next Steps

Due to the many positive experiences I have had journaling for this course I would like to continue this process. Also I have established a simple altar with some artifacts of personal meaning that assist me in meditative and contemplative prayer. I will continue to grow in these areas as I listen for the voice of God to lead me to prayer. I have enjoyed sacramental prayer in serving myself communion and would like to take more time to examine this special time of commitment at even deeper levels. Where could God lead me as we develop our special times and memories together, I don't know, but I am excited to continue to take steps in a direction that will help me to eventually be constantly in communication with God and allow me to explore our relationship as fully as possible. Ultimately the joy of knowing God and allowing Him to show me who I really am is an amazing outcome of this process.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion I would assert that I have found the act of prayer helps me to connect to others in community as well as strengthening my relationship to God. The following prayer is evidence of this and was written after reading Psalm 84.

11-14-04 "Thank you Lord for your house and your people. Thank you for Pastor Frank and our family there. Your church is my home and because of what you have done for me I desire to be among your people

and in your courts. Help me to not be angry with your people, but rather extend grace as you have extended grace to me and to all of your children.

Thank you that your promise of peace begins among your people. Help me to take this to heart and not ever to treat your people with harshness, anger or wrath. Thank you for encouraging me in peace and love today. Thank you for the moments of joy that I experienced in your house today, with your joy in our hearts and songs of praise in our lips your people worshipped you today. I Love you Lord. Amen"

I have been in God's presence through this process and learned much about myself and even more about my Father in heaven. The prayers of David have been a valuable guide as well as the encouragement of other men of prayer (as discussed in class lectures) and the assigned reading. I am excited about the prayers I have yet to practice in my pursuit of knowing God personally and intimately.