

Of Seeds and Flowers

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Guide to Prayer

2026 - THE YEAR OF TRUTH, PRAYER AND GROWTH!!

Lent cometh! The perfect season to sharpen our prayer life or begin one. This is the most important issue in the 43 years of writing *"Of Seeds and Flowers"*. Hold on to this issue. Re-read it. Let the Lord lead your relationship! Prayer is a deep relationship with GOD. St. John of the Cross tells us there are many people who think they are praying when they are not, and there are others who think they are not praying when they are. I know this issue is a lot of words but anything worth doing takes time and a sustained effort. LET'S TAKE A LOOK!! - 30 minutes very well spent!! Anything worth doing takes work and time. *"Well begun is half done."* First, some general thoughts.

Recommended beginner books to prayer: I have mentioned the spiritual classic *"The Cloud of Unknowing"* with the *"Book of Privy Council"* in past issues of *"Of Seeds and Flowers"*. The book was written in middle English in the 14th Century by an anonymous monk and translated into easy, understandable, flowing English by Carmen Acevedo Butcher. Shambhala Press. It is a classic!! The introduction begins with these eminently TRUE words. Would you not like to read a book that delivers 110% on these words? ***"This book you now hold is a rainmaker for anyone whose soul has ever felt as dry as a bone. Its nameless author was a gifted teacher. Page after page, he patiently explains what contemplative prayer is and how it can end any spiritual drought-shortages of love, low levels of humility, an absence of peace. Through practical spiritual exercises that he calls the "cloud of unknowing" and the "cloud of forgetting" he teaches us to pray without ceasing and shows us that a dialogue with Mystery is not only possible but in fact "the work of the soul that most pleases God."*** This is a life-changing book. *"Open Mind, Open Heart"* and *"Invitation to Love"* by Thomas Keating will do the same. ***When was the last time you heard a sermon on prayer? Contemplative prayer? Why do you think that is? Those who pray never stray!***

The root of prayer is interior silence, not just the absence of noise but true inner silence. Prayer is spiritual WORK. It doesn't just happen. In our noisy American culture, it takes a genuine commitment. Time, regular time, a serious decision but the results are most worth it. -to come in deep touch with your creator and the creator of ALL things that you see or encounter. AND THE REAL YOU!! It takes serious prayer!

Mother Teresa was once asked by a Western reporter, *"What does God say to you when you pray?"* She replied, *"Nothing."* He came back, *"And what do you say to God when you pray?"* Mother Teresa responded, *"Nothing, and if you don't understand that I can't explain it to you."* MOTHER TERESA WAS TALKING ABOUT HER CONTEMPLATIVE, DEEP PRAYER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, NO WORDS, NO FEELINGS, JUST LOVE, SIMPLE, QUIET PRESENCE AND AWARENESS BEFORE GOD. - a very deep, saintly, relationship with God in prayer, ***THAT CAN BE OURS, YOURS AS WELL.*** "God can't be thought; only LOVED." Meister Eckhardt.

TWO ABSOLUTELY TRUE STORIES THAT SPEAK TO THE POWER OF PRAYER. A missionary on furlough told this **true story** while visiting his home church in Michigan. Have you ever felt the urge to pray for someone and then just put it on a list and said, "I'll pray for them later"? Or has anyone ever called you and said, "I need you to pray for me. I have this need"? Read the following story that was sent to me and it may change the way that you think about prayer, and also the way you pray.

Story 1: *"While serving at a small field hospital in Africa, every two weeks I traveled by bicycle through the jungle to a nearby city for supplies. This was a journey of two days and required camping overnight at the half-way point.*

On one of these journeys, I arrived in the city where I planned to collect money from a bank, purchase medicine and supplies, and then begin my two-day journey back to the field hospital. Upon arrival in the city, I observed two men fighting, one of whom was seriously injured. I treated him for his injuries and at the same

time talked to him about the Lord Jesus Christ. I then traveled two days, camping overnight, and arrived home without incident.

Two weeks later I repeated my journey. Upon arriving in the city, I was approached by the young man I had treated. He told me that he had known I carried money and medicines. He said, "Some friends and I followed you into the jungle, knowing you would camp overnight. We planned to kill you and take your money and drugs. But just as we were about to move into your camp, we saw that you were surrounded by 26 armed guards."

At this point in his sermon, one of the men in the congregation jumped to his feet and interrupted the missionary and asked if he could tell him the exact day that this had happened. The missionary told the congregation the date and the man who had interrupted told him this story: "On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here and I was playing a round of golf. I was about to putt when I felt the urge to pray for you. In fact, the urging of the Lord was so strong, I called men in this church to meet with me here in the sanctuary to pray for you. Would all of those men who met with me on that day stand up?" The men who met together to pray that day stood up. The missionary wasn't concerned with who they were - he was too busy counting the number standing. There were 26.

At this I laughed and said that I was certainly all alone out in that jungle campsite. The young man pressed the point, however, and insisted, "No sir, I was not the only person to see the guards. My five friends also saw them, and we all counted them. It was because of those guards that we were afraid and left you alone."

Isn't this a wonderful story! Prayer makes things happen. Prayer changes things; and not just any prayer but your prayer. Prayer is power. Any time you come in touch with the **Infinite**, all things become infinitely possible. Tennyson once wrote, "There are things going on with prayer that the world can't dream of." Poor world but lucky us!

Story 2. Are We Able to Affect the future and the past, through prayer? This is an excerpt from a great book: "**Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself**" by Joe Dispenza. Page 17. See if you can allow the following to seep in and slowly take hold in your head, heart and **YOUR PRAYER LIFE**. "**Whence is that goodly fragrance?**"

"I think most of us have seen studies that show the wonderful results of intercessory prayer. However, the following amazing study shows surprising results, but, when you think of it, with God, the past present and future IS NOW!!

In July 2000, Israeli doctor Leonard Leibovici conducted a double-blind, randomized controlled trial involving 3,393 hospital patients, divided into a control group and an "intercession prayer" group. He set out to see whether prayer could have an effect on their condition. Prayer experiments are great examples of mind affecting matter at a distance. But stay with me here, because everything is not always what it seems.

Leibovici selected patients who had suffered sepsis (an infection) while hospitalized. He randomly designated half the patients to have prayers said for them, while the other half were not prayed for. He compared the results in three categories: how long fever lasted, length of hospital stay, and how many died as a result of the infection.

The patients that were prayed-for benefited from an earlier decrease in fever and a shorter hospital stay; the difference in the number of deaths among the prayed-for and not-prayed-for groups was not statistically significant, although, still better, in the prayed-for group. That's a powerful demonstration of the importance and benefits of prayer. However, there's one additional element to this story that you should know. Did it strike you as slightly odd that in July 2000, a hospital would have more than 3,000 cases of infection at once? Was it a very poorly sterilized hospital, or was some kind of contagion running rampant in the hospital?

Actually, the people praying weren't praying for patients who were infected in the year 2000. Instead, not known to the prayers, they were praying for lists of people who had been in the hospital from 1990 to 1996-**four to ten years prior to the experiment**. The 'prayed-for' patients actually got better during the 1990's from the experiment conducted years later. Let me say this another way: the patients who were prayed for in 2000 all showed measurable changes in health, but **those changes took effect years before**.

A statistical analysis of this experiment proved that these effects were far beyond coincidence. This clearly and scientifically demonstrates that our prayers can not only affect the present and future, but they can actually affect our past as well.

*The quantum law (temporal mechanics) states that all potentials exist simultaneously. Our prayers can affect **all aspects of life, beyond both space and time**. - the past, the present and the future. However, when you think about it, it is God's past, present and future, so why not? In God there is no past, present or future just AN ETERNAL NOW. He is the Great I AM. GOD IS PURE BEING."*

*"Society depends for its existence on the personal solitude of its members. When society is made up of people who **KNOW NO SOLITUDE** (Centering Prayer, Contemplation) it can no longer be held together by love. No amount of technological progress (AI) will cure the sickness that eats away at the vitals of a materialistic society like spiritual cancer. The **ONLY CURE** is, and must **ALWAYS** be, spiritual. The ears with which one hears the saving message of the Gospel are hidden in people's hearts and these ears **DO NOT HEAR ANYTHING UNLESS THEY ARE FAVORED WITH INTERIOR SOLITUDE AND SILENCE**." Thomas Merton, Trappist*

The 4 kinds of prayer: According to the Baltimore Catechism, "*Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God.*" In using this ancient formula, it is important to keep in mind that it is not WE who do the lifting. In every kind of prayer, the raising of the mind and heart can be **ONLY** the work of the Holy Spirit. In prayer inspired by the Holy Spirit, we let ourselves flow with the lifting movement and drop all reflection. - Like mother Teresa in the story above!!

Reflection is an important preliminary to prayer but it is NOT PRAYER. Many people use the words MEDITATE and CONTEMPLATE as synonyms. In terms of prayer, however, it is helpful to think about **EACH SEPERATELY**. These concepts teach us about two keyways **TO LISTEN**. If prayer is not already a meaningful joy for you, then start slowly. If you force yourself, you will get discouraged and give in to weakness and give up. You don't want that to happen. It takes practice, and a clear soul to be aware of God's presence when you pray.

I. Vocal or Word Prayer: We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. (Hail Mary's, Our Father's, rosary or Sunday Worship word prayers, or our own made-up word prayers) but this is **ONLY ONE EXPRESSION** of prayer. Most people are familiar **ONLY** with this kind of prayer since, "*Now I lay me down to sleep..*" This first kind of prayer is called VOCAL OR WORD PRAYER. -a good beginning but there is SO MUCH MORE!

II. DISCURSIVE PRAYER OR MEDITATION: Meditation, in general, is to consciously mull over something. - a passage from a book a phrase. In prayer, when we meditate, we do this for one purpose: to try to discover what God might be saying to us. For example: let's say I were to meditate on this saying of Jesus: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5. I'd begin by thinking about vines and branches: how branches grow out of the trunk of the vine and no fruit can grow on the branch if it isn't connected to the vine. **NOTHING** is a lot of something!! **NO-THING!!**

I'd move on to filling out the analogy: Christ is like the trunk, and I am a branch. And then I'd begin to ask question like these: What are the ways I "remain" in Christ? What more can I do to experience his presence in my life? What part of my spiritual life is lacking right now? Prayer? Worship? Church? Loving others? What part needs the greatest attention? After thinking like this, I might conclude that I've not been spending enough time actually reading the life and teachings of Christ, that I need to spend more time reading about the One whom I call Lord so that I can better understand how I might live my life. -read the Bible!

Meditation may seem unspiritual because it seems so deliberate. But our thoughts, our reason, and our ability to discern insights are gifts from God, and are the ways in which God speaks to us. Some days the Lord speaks loud and clear; -other days not. Don't force things. It is an ongoing process and learning to hear God -to really hear! Some days nothing specific comes to mind. OK!

Discursive meditation can begin simply reading the Scriptures, (often called "Lectio Divina") reflecting on the words and making acts of the will that are suggested by the text. -Acts of love, thanksgiving, praise, forgiveness, asking for needs, etc... In a very short time, many people are ready to move on from this form of prayer. Discursive Meditation can grow thin and rather quickly and if you don't know there is a deeper union prayer with God you can get discouraged and give up praying. And so, we go deeper in what is commonly called **CENTERING PRAYER - A SILENT, HEART TO HEART, SILENT, NON-WORD UNION WITH God. CENTERING**

PRAYER OR CONTEMPLATION -Like Mother Teresa was, with frustration, trying to explain to the journalist in the above story.

III. Centering Prayer: A working definition might be the development of one's relationship with God to the point of communing beyond words, thoughts, feelings and the multiplication of particular acts of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, supplication; a process of moving from the simplified activity of waiting upon God to the ever increasing predominance of the gifts of the Spirit as the source of one's prayer.

CENTERING PRAYER: How do you do it? EASY! EASY!

1. Choose a sacred word as the SYMBOL of your intention to consent to **God's presence and action** within you. e.g. God, Love, Peace, joy. God, yes God living and truly in YOU since your baptism. "Live on in Me as I do in you." Jesus, Last Supper John 15,4.
2. Sitting comfortably, and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word in your imagination as if you were laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton. It is not meant to be repeated continuously. When you are aware you are thinking of some other thought, return to the sacred word as the expression of your intent. Thoughts are inevitable. (thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images and reflections. Two 20-30 minutes sessions a day will do it. "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you." (MT 6:6))
3. In Centering Prayer we are going beyond the sacred word into union with that to which it points, -the Ultimate Mystery, the Presence of God, beyond any perception that we can form of Him.
4. When extraneous thoughts* arise return, ever-so- gently, to the sacred word.
5. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. THAT IS IT! * Check Contemplativeoutreach.org for more information. They have 300,000 hits a year from around the world. Next month, February, we will include a very good insert on CENTERING PRAYER from Contemplative Outreach. * thoughts include feelings

CENTERING PRAYER is a renewal of the traditional prayer of the church LEADING TO CONTEMPLATION.

Dom Marmion, a spiritual giant, believed that by the end of his or her novitiate, (a few years) a religious was ready for contemplative prayer. How long have you been praying? Are YOU ready? Why not? Contemplation is a prayer method that sounds like only monks and Carmelite nuns should know how to practice. NOT SO! A positive attitude toward contemplation characterized the first fifteen centuries of the Christian era. This method of prayer proposed for lay persons and monastics alike in the first Christian centuries was called "Lectio Divina", literally "divine reading" a practice that involved reading scripture, or more exactly, listening to it. (books were scarce). The reflective part, pondering upon the words of the sacred text, was called "Meditatio, "meditation". The spontaneous movement of the will in response to these reflections was called *oratio*, "affective prayer". Many people use the terms *meditate* and *contemplate* as synonyms. In terms of prayer, however, it is helpful to think about each separately. In some ways they are two keyways TO LISTEN. If we employ our intellect and will in meditation, then in contemplation, **we try to let go.**

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