

The Pastor's Heart, Part 1: Prayer as Personal Examination

It's time to get back to the basics in your inward spiritual practices

We live in a society that demands instant gratification. We are always connected with devices that bring the world to our fingertips. We know more, more quickly, than at any time in human history.

And yet we seem to be satisfied less, just as quickly. Leaders are in a quest for more, but the obtaining more seems to result in just wanting more. It is a vicious cycle not easily broken.

Church pastors and staff are not immune to this; in fact, in some ways they may even be more susceptible. Congregational leaders and promising opportunities pull pastors in multiple directions at once, resulting in almost constant feelings of being overwhelmed by ministry, and by life.

The true, deepest need for leaders today is not to be more intelligent, or more gifted, or even more successful, but to be more connected, more fully to God.

The classical disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration) of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths of communion with a Holy and Living God.

Solution - Understand the inward discipline of prayer as an avenue of personal examination and change

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [Everything Belongs](#), by Richard Rohr

This popular and bestselling book of the renowned Franciscan challenges people to move beyond the comfort of a settled life toward an understanding of themselves that is rooted in their connection to God. Only when they rest in God can they find the certainty and the freedom to become all that they can be. Contemplation has its place at the heart of Christianity, a place that allows people to experience how “everything belongs.”

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

Most of us live on the edges of life. We are happily (for the most part) busy with family, friends, work, and life as we know it. And that is not of itself a bad thing – it is a temporal thing without true acknowledgement of the centering presence of God.

Life is often lived as an escape to avoid reality. We remain happily content to live on the edges of our life for a long time – so long that it starts feeling like the only life available.

The danger is that we live life on the edges and never experience Life in the center.

We cannot attain the presence of God because we're already totally in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness.

Little do we realize that God is maintaining us in existence with every breath we take. As we take another it means that God is choosing us now and now and now. We have nothing to attain or even learn. We do, however, need to unlearn some things.

Prayer is not primarily saying words or thinking thoughts. It is, rather, a stance. It's a way of living in the Presence, living in awareness of the Presence, and even of enjoying the Presence. The full contemplative is not just aware of the Presence, but trusts, allows, and delights in it.

I believe that we have no real access to who we really are except in God. Only when we rest in God can we find the safety, the spaciousness, and the scary freedom to be who we are, all that we are, more than we are, and less than we are. Only when we live and see through God can "everything belong." All other systems exclude, expel, punish, and protect to find identity for their members in ideological perfection or some kind of "purity." The contaminating element always has to be searched out and scolded. Apart from taking up so much useless time and energy, this effort keeps us from the one and only task of love and union.

The purpose of prayer and religious seeking is to see the truth about reality, is to see what is. And at the bottom of what is is always goodness. The foundation is always love.

Richard Rohr, [*Everything Belongs*](#)

A NEXT STEP

Using these seven contemplative thoughts and corresponding prayers, seek to be centered in God today.

The religion of man has lost sight of the presence of God. We create a system and a people who think they have God in their pockets, ready with a quick and easy answer to life's problems.

Prayer 1: Lord, reveal to me where I have lost sight of your nature...

Deep inside, though, as created beings of God, we know the mysteries of life cannot be that simple. A longing for awareness should lead us into paradox, into darkness, and on journeys that never cease.

Prayer 2: Lord, deepen my longing and awareness of your presence in this area...

And that is what prayer is about. Real prayer is something we learn. The disciples spent their entire lives praying, but something about the presence of Jesus made them see how little they

knew about prayer. So they asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

Prayer 3: Lord, reteach me to pray, starting with this next step...

Your learning process of prayer should start with getting into contact with God so that His life and power can flow through you into others. You must first quiet all the activity around you and within you, and listen for the breathing of God.

Prayer 4: Lord, show me what needs to be stilled in my life in order to hear Your voice...

Understanding that we must learn the process of prayer often means we make it too complicated. Jesus taught us to come like children to a father. Children talk to their parents without difficulty or embarrassment – they trust their parents. Is there a greater lesson in trusting our Father while praying?

Children can also teach us the value of the imagination, which is another powerful tool in prayer. Don't lightly dismiss the amazing imagination of a child who expects that wonderful things can happen if they believe them.

Prayer 5: Lord, inspire me to imagine how You desire for greatness through this audacious dream...

Prayer is work, and like any form of work, you may not feel like it, but once you are doing your work, you begin to feel like working.

Prayer 6: Lord, show me the obstacles that could potentially slow progress in prayer...

Prayer and life are not separate, but exist simultaneously. Prayer “takes no time, but it occupies all our time” (Thomas Kelly). We must learn to live our life on the edges, but always seek the center, a constant awareness of God.

Prayer 7: Lord, center me in awareness of You today.

Leo Tolstoy said, “Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself.” The needed change within us is God's work, not ours. The change demands an inside job, and only God can work from the inside. Following the spiritual disciplines prepares your inner being for the change that only God can bring.

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