

Last time, we considered how one might begin to **pray constantly**—at recurring intervals through the day as needed. Morning, noon and night, for example. This way of praying is like eating, small portions scattered throughout the day being more manageable than trying to get all your calories in one meal.

Think of this as establishing the breadth or width dimension of prayer. It's the best place to start when working daily prayer into your life--smaller touchpoints through the day. But there is another dimension to prayer: the depth dimension. Once you have these touchpoints of prayer through your day, the hankering or the invite comes to go deeper. Maybe in the morning, maybe at night—your choice and His.

How do you go deeper? Note the question is not, “how do you pray better?” Prayer is all about intimacy and nothing about performance. Until we get clear in our hearts about this, prayer will always be a chore. It will always be a performance. We will pray to prove that we're worthy to pray and nothing could be a more foolish way to go about praying to the God of grace. So we will just have to get over that, and the sooner the better. Because prayer is all about intimacy and nothing about performance, or did I already say that?

[Intimacy is **tasted** in a given time of prayer but intimacy **develops** over a lifetime of prayer. So keep a long view on what follows]

To respond to the invitation to go deeper, add stillness, silence, and solitude to prayer. “Be still and know that I am God” Be still in order to know... I discovered new depth in prayer with practice of silence-solitude 5 years ago.

This doesn't require a monastery. This can happen in the **shower**. This can happen in the **bathroom**. In a **car** in a parking lot. In your **bed**. This can happen in a little **prayer room** or prayer corner of a room in your house or apartment. This can happen in a **crowd** that allows you to be alone. That little room to the side is a lovely place (Katherine Anne Porter Place of Prayer)

Anthony Bloom says the stillness you want is that of a **bird watcher at dawn** who wishes to maximize his chances of seeing a bird alight nearby.

Silence and stillness happens outside-in. Begin with what you can control: your body. Practice physical stillness. Start easy, small doses, increase capacity. If too fidgety, try walking.

Inner stillness is the next step. The mind is a **two year old**. You can't just tell him to hold still. You've got to give him something to occupy him. A watch to look at, for example.

For your mind the watch might be a verse of holy scripture to **meditate** on. Meditation is a biblical practice. The word "meditate" is found 5 times in Psalm 119 alone. Heb verb form: to rehearse, go over in one's mind.

Meditation is a form of savoring: "my meditation will be sweet" (Ps. 104:34) Word picture for meditation: "*they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb*"(Ps.19:10); honey is a sticky-lingering kind of thing isn't it?. Psalm 19 ends "***may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight***" (Ps. 19: 14)

Meditating on Scripture is a pondering, a swishing around in your mind and your heart. "***Be still... and know... that I... am God***"

Simple prayer-verse: "**Lord Jesus Christ, son of God** [Peter's confession] **have mercy on me a sinner**" [tax collector in Jesus' parable] The Orthodox Christians (mainly of the East) call this the Jesus Prayer. Meditate on that for 5 minutes. Pray it over & over. Add it to your breathing. [This is not the '**vain repetition**' Jesus warned against in the Sermon on the Mount. That was a pagan practice that held that if you repeat something long enough it will exert a magical effect He warned against vain repetition, not repetition itself. The Bible is filled with repetitive prayers: Holy, Holy, Holy! Meditative prayer involves repetition: for same reason you feel a need to repeat "I love you"]

So to go deeper, add silence-stillness: in fits & starts at first, like anything new. Pray as you can, not as you can't! easy does it! Start somewhere and "***Do not despise the day of small beginnings!***"

Silence & stillness provide space for intimacy to occur.

Now here's the catch: you knew there'd be one, didn't you?

Touchpoints for prayer through the day provide a **framework** for intimacy. Silence provides **space** for intimacy. But intimacy itself is a **mystery** of the **heart**. We don't control intimacy, we allow it. And we are speaking of intimacy with God. Prayer is the pursuit of God. The engagement with God. Who is, after all, God.

Ongoing intimacy requires a willingness to surrender to God, especially in our broken relationships, when it comes up. And it will, if you are engaging God with your heart. Your anger with your parents will come up. Your frustration with your kids. Resentment toward boss. Your hatred of yourself. 1 Peter says,

“Husbands cherish your wives...so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Intimacy with God is relational; it involves us in our relationships

The spiritual realm **originates** in God who is Father-Son-Holy Spirit, who is love, who is irreducible relationship. If the spiritual realm is a **network**, the **nodal points** on the network—the **knots** that make the net work—are relationships.

Love doesn't flow through space. It flows through **relationships**. It's the **fire in the gap between two persons**, effecting a connection.

To pray in Jesus is to step into the network of Love. And when there is something **amiss** on the network, a nodal point in need of repair, the Spirit has every right to go to that nodal point and attempt repair. By the way, it isn't fascinating that biological life is loaded with repair mechanisms? The cell of example, is replete with repair mechanisms. Things are breaking down in the structure of the cell all the time and getting repaired. Without the repair mechanisms life couldn't happen. The same is true in our DNA. The same repair mechanisms are a work in the realm of Spirit. Jesus himself came to launch a massive search and repair mission.

The happens in your heart. And when the Spirit arrives for repair, you either surrender (with struggle) or you say, “Reign (of God), go away; come again another day”

Prayer that won't go there is not prayer to the God of Love. It may be meditation of some other sort. It may lower your blood pressure and give you chills, make you feel like you're flying to the moon and back. It may fill with joy and peace. But it is not authentic engagement at depth with the God of love.

I'm not saying every time you pray God is going to **rub your nose** in your broken relationships. The devil, or course, will try that. And you may do it to yourself. But God won't.

But it will come up...and when it does are you still in?

I have a **daughter** who decided some years back that she didn't want to be a Christian. And she even went through a stage where she seemed to **relish** not being a Christian. I took it as personal rejection, for obvious if distorted reasons. Some months ago in prayer, after a time of silence, there was a time of intimacy with God, prayer for my daughter, and a **miracle** happened: the Spirit gave me a sympathetic understanding of my daughter over this particular issue. Something in my heart made a mysterious adjustment and I was able to admire her moxy in striking out on her own as she did. **And I knew the Lord wanted me to tell her that and I didn't want to.**

Which brings us to other demand of intimacy with God. **We must be willing to heed a mother's advice: "Do whatever he tells you."**

So eventually we talked, my daughter and I over this. I was able to share what I had come to see. I didn't frame it as a prayer experience. I didn't want to muck it up by bringing God into it. I owned it as my own, because he had made it my own, or I had or we both had, after months of prayer.

The thought of saying such a thing, I'm embarrassed to admit, was a painful thought. Until I actually said it, and then it was the most natural thing to say in the world. I wish I could say I did this because I'm such a healthy person, but the truth is I knew **I had to let him be the boss of me to allow intimacy with him continue in this realm of His.**

So there you have it: Touchpoints with God through the day are the **framework** for intimacy. Silence allows **space** for intimacy. And the demand of ongoing intimacy is surrendering ourselves in our relationships, heeding a mother's advice: "Do whatever he tells you."

Oh, and one last thing...

If anyone tells you prayer is anything less than this, tell 'em to take their snake oil and go find themselves another sucker.

Here endeth the series.