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Discovering joy in prayer

Isn't it wonderful to know how to pray, Ros? *Daily Light* for this evening has verses about asking in His name and *getting!* I've discovered that praying isn't a separate part of your spiritual life—it's your very life. It is God's presence. This is what "Christians" are always seeking to grasp, isn't it?

Prayer is problem solving. Prayer is getting back on good terms with Him—when we've let things get out of kilter. . . . And prayer is just daily *everything*, off and on, throughout the whole day. If you haven't learned how to pray, you're stuck! Thank you for showing me how to pray!

This brand new believer is not making a cut-and-dried method out of the four steps of prayer I taught her. She is making them serve to bring God into her everyday life and activities. Her joyous discovery is contagious.

Anna B. Mow, author of *Your Child* (and other books, Zondervan) constantly meets in her travels people who, having read my first book on prayer, started conversational prayer groups in their church,

but have found them sometimes ineffectual. After a few questions, she discovers they are trying to follow a method instead of talking to Jesus as a person—in a spirit of love and freedom.

How do you get into the spirit of love and freedom when you pray?

How can I give you a formula for love? Or for freedom? Or even for prayer? I can only share with you what works for me, what has renewed me and restored to me the joy of living. Read again the two paragraphs at the beginning of this chapter. There is enthusiasm! There is discovery! There is freshness and newness. There is the presence of God and acceptance.

Why not begin anew as a little child, speaking from your heart to Jesus Christ who is present? After you've become at ease with Him, you will know when to address "Our Father," but do start with being as a child at the feet of Jesus.

We have already discovered that a child is both teachable and unself-conscious. Self-consciousness is an adult hurdle which presents a definite barrier. If one is aware of inadequacy in prayer-language, or of inexperience in audible prayer, or of inability to express himself in prayer, these become barriers of self-consciousness. Barriers when recognized can be broken down so that a new highway of expression can be prepared.

Four basic steps

The purpose of these four steps to prayer is to give beginners in prayer a place to start—a workable plan. They will serve as a pattern-breaker to replace previous attempts which ended either in failure or cold conformity. You will find the painful self-consciousness slipping away unnoticed as you begin to

concentrate on the meaning of these four steps. To follow them requires your attention, and this in turn produces fresh interest.

1. Jesus is here. Matthew 18:19-20
2. Thank You, Lord. Philippians 4:4-7
3. Help me, Lord. James 5:13-16
4. Help my brother. Mark 11:22-25

Read them again. There are only three words in each step. Look away from the page now, and repeat them. You will never forget them, and you will find yourself following them at the most unlikely moment—which is the way prayer ought to be offered.

All you may have learned in your own private school of prayer can be fitted into these steps, and once you've used them, you'll find the order is not important. I am not trying to teach you a method. I am attempting to teach you to speak with a Person who loves you. These guide lines are intended to quickly and easily make the "how-to" part both familiar and workable.

You will find these four steps prepared in a brief outline at the close of this chapter. I have them prepared in convenient card form for prayer workshops. My publishers have given free permission to all wishing to reproduce them in mimeograph form for the purpose of teaching prayer, providing they comply with the following: Send one copy with your name, address, church (or group) to me, c/o Zondervan Publishing House, 1415 Lake Drive, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 49506.

Step by step

1. *Jesus is here*

There is no problem praying when God is near. To feel His nearness, you act on the knowledge of the

truth of His presence. You will increasingly learn how to make use of your creative imagination. The Spirit of Christ will be there with you, whether or not you feel Him.

(For the leader: This is a time for silent worship, with participants centering on the thoughts you give them. Read Matthew 18:19, 20. A suggested opening is: "Hear the words of Jesus . . . (read the verses). Let us forget one another and remember we want to be as little children at the feet of Jesus." You may use other ideas or Scripture, but keep the meditation very short, very specific, suggesting *Christ with us*, here and now.)

2. *Thank You, Lord.*

The first step is the beginning of silent worship together. The second step is a continuation of worship in which all participate. Giving thanks is a form of worship which opens not only mouths, but hearts. Let your sentence prayers be brief. If you have two "thank you's" then pray twice, letting others pray too.

(For leaders: These first steps are a unit of worship in receiving love. The next two are a unit in giving love. You may have to remind them several times to give thanks for only *one* thing at a time. This, in the beginning, encourages many to take part who otherwise might remain silent.)

3. *Help me, Lord.*

At this time (God will guide you) you must decide whether or not you wish to admit a specific fault or need. If you do, those present will pray for you.

(For leaders: You will need wisdom and discernment when you introduce this third step. Much will depend upon those present. Sometimes the group needs to be broken into twos or threes for periods of

five or ten minutes. If this third step is consistently omitted, a lack of personal honesty and healing love is fostered, and the result is a rather "cold" prayer time.

4. *Help my brother.*

As soon as a person prays for himself, another one or two should be applying a "band-aid" of love upon that wounded spirit. Any revealing of the heart calls for immediate response on the part of those who heard the prayer. Let your prayer-response be brief, to the point, with thanksgiving and with love. And without preaching or suggesting! Prayer should involve neither of these. We pray for each other by name, back and forth sometimes, according to the discernment received through listening and through loving. It is important that the group be small so first names—yes, first names—of those present are used. Prayer then becomes a more meaningful act of personal love and concern.

Joy is a gift

Joy in prayer is a gift which comes as a result of loving and being loved. Jesus said in John 15:9, 11, 12 (Amplified N.T.):

I have loved you [just] as the Father has loved Me; abide in My love—continue in His love with Me. . . . I have told you these things that My joy and delight may be in you, and that your joy *and* gladness may be full measure *and* complete *and* overflowing. This is My commandment, that you love one another [just] as I have loved you.

As you continue to read chapters 12, 13 and 14, you will find further instructions on these four basic steps. We are simply outlining a fresh approach on loving one another as Christ has loved us, by praying

together. We can consciously receive His love when we are consciously in His presence; then we have an abundant supply to give away. To learn to give love and care through praying together results in sudden joy springing up in all our hearts.

Our need to pray together

"I have just attended an abysmal prayer meeting," wrote a friend of mine. "Why people even bother to keep coming is beyond me. The spirit was lacking, requests were general, and thanksgiving almost non-existent. The prayers were lengthy and oratorical. How can we be so insensitive to human need all around and within us by calling this a prayer meeting!"

After reading my first book on prayer, a concerned pastor wrote:

My people need to learn to pray with one another. They need to discard old patterns of rigidity and traditionalism. They need to love one another in prayer. They need to be re-born, an experience which comes through prayer.

Do people who are unable to pray become reborn when they pray? Yes, they do. I found when I explain these four steps and announce a demonstration of them, people are eager to learn. I invite those desiring to participate to meet me after the lecture in a certain place. For five or ten minutes we stand together in a circle as I lead them into an actual experience of conversational prayer by following the four basic steps.

After one such demonstration, I received the following letter:

My husband had been having trouble with his nerves due to the tension of starting a new business with his brother-in-law. For about 10 days before

you came, he had been acutely miserable every morning. That Tuesday night after you spoke, my husband, daughter, and I stood in the circle. For the first time in his life, my husband felt the Holy Spirit invade his soul and he spoke aloud saying only, "Thank you, Jesus, for the relief I feel." Following this came my husband's complete conversion. The next morning the three of us had our first prayer time together . . . aloud.

Do you wish to discover joy in prayer?
Open your heart willingly for Jesus to love you.
Follow the suggestions in this chapter.

And start praying now with one other person. If you don't know who that will be, ask God—He'll show you.



True prayer is loving sensitivity.



CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER

We Start with His Presence

(we receive His love)

1. *Jesus is Here* Matthew 18:19, 20
Use creative imagination and silence.
Visualize Christ. Welcome Him.
2. *Thank You, Lord* Philippians 4:4-7
Gratitude is a heart-opener.
Audible. Brief. To the point.
Open-end prayer—don't close it.

COMMUNICATING LOVE THROUGH PRAYER

3. *Help me, Lord* James 5:13-16
Forgive me, Lord . . . be specific.
Pray for yourself . . . be honest.
Then others can pray for you.
Say "I" when you mean yourself.
Say "we" when all present can be included.
4. *Help my brother* Mark 11:22-25
Lord, answer his prayer! This is prayer-response.
Pray for each other by name.
The Holy Spirit will put into your heart what you
should pray for.
Pray briefly, informally, with love.
Give thanks when someone prays for you.

This Is Love in Action

Love one another as I have loved you. John
15:12

Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done. John
15:7

This kind of prayer-from-the-heart is love in action. We become involved in God's purposes, in His viewpoint, and with each other's needs for love's sake. Then the circle may widen to include family, friends, church, our nation, and the world.

by Rosalind Rinker
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