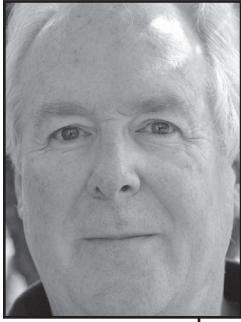


Learning About Prayer



by Rob Curtner, Fellowshipian

As a part of my involvement with the FFT School of Ministry, I have noticed how uncomfortable people are with prayer — uncomfortable taking responsibility for leading a group in prayer by making up a prayer on the spot. This is a key area for ministers and us lay folks to develop our comfort and skills, making prayers for others to come together around giving thanks for food, establishing group intent, but always the basics of giving thanks and asking for help. Come to think of it, few people in my life seemed to be willing and able to focus thoughts towards prayer.

My spiritual journey has taken me towards *A Course in Miracles*. ACIM's messages about prayer are clear. We pray about ourselves. We pray to see past fear, attack thoughts and the boundaries of the ego. We pray to see others through God's eyes. I believe that praying for self-awareness of fear is very important. Healing lies in that direction. We are here to heal the separation and to learn to choose love over fear. (Come on now people, smile on each other...)

I am humbled by the mental bandwidth consumed by fear-based thinking. I have been looking at a book and articles describing the barriers to prayer. With repetition, I can catch myself in this troublesome thought pattern and choose or decide to let the thought go and think about something else, to make a better choice. As an example, I had been praying for help in dealing with my anger and so when another opportunity to learn about this came up, I followed the *Course's* advice to "let it go" and "turn it over to God." I try to go deeper and often see how I am really angry with myself for my own shortcomings and limitations. I prayed for help with anger and got some information about being honest with myself.

Recently, I found an article by Helene Ciarravino on the web called, "Why We Don't Pray." She has written several books, one called *Why We Don't Pray*. Her perspective seems to be Buddhist and not surprisingly, her message contains many spiritual principles familiar to Fellowshipians. She offers an analysis of the reasons why we don't pray.

Some of the barriers she mentions are easy to see, such as: Lack of Faith, Pride, Time Limi-

tations or Fear That Personal Requests Are Too Insignificant. Others require a bit more thought: Fear of Silence and Stillness, Fear of Intimacy, Fear of Being Disappointed, Fear of the Unknown, Fear of Weakness and Failure, Fear of Inferiority and the ACIM favorite, Fear of God's Love.

In my experience, people don't pray for three main reasons, which are included in the lists above. First, they have not resolved the issue of what Ultimate to pray to. The Santa Claus god has not appealed to many of us for some time. The merging of science and philosophy around the oneness theme, the spirit of evolution and other concepts of the divine may not offer a personal link to use for giving thanks and asking for help.

Second, people don't pray because they don't feel worthy. They are semi-aware of their guilt and shame, but need help with self-forgiveness. The judgments I am fond of making about others are just a reflection of my own insecurities and fear of not being or having enough. Is there really enough of love to go around?

The third problem is one of experience. When I am asking, "Am I doing this right?" I am not. As I gain more experience, my expectations improve considerably. I know that prayer works. I know that group prayer feels wonderful. As with meditation, prayer is about practice.

Peace-out-all-ways.

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We know that if we really want to love, we must learn to forgive. Forgive and ask to be forgiven; excuse rather than accuse. Reconciliation begins first, not with others but with ourselves. It starts with having a clean heart within. A clean heart is able to see God in others. We must radiate God's love.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta
from *The Joy in Loving*
by Jaya Chaliha and Edward Le Jolly

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