

Why prayer?

"This, then, is the beginning of my advice: make prayer the first step in anything worthwhile that you attempt. Persevere and do not weaken in that prayer. Pray with confidence, because God in his love and forgiveness, has counted on us as his own sons and daughters...at every moment of our lives, as we use the good things he has given us, we can *respond* to his love only by seeking to obey his will for us."
St. Benedict in *Prologue to the Rule*

God's desire to grow the 2-way nature of our love relationship with God, involves directing our prayer life, including listening prayer – from the spiritual journey of Tom Ashbrook, an engineer turned ELCA pastor, professor, spiritual director and coach.

Ashbrook's book, Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth, p 115, is written for protestant Christians and congregations wondering:

what is the spiritual *journey* like?

"is this all there is" to being a Christian, to my relationship with Christ?

How, as leaders and congregations, are we to make disciples who *continue* maturing?

Ashbrook's readable book draws upon scripture, his experience as a Lutheran pastor and Teresa of Avila's writings about the 7 stages/mansions of growing closer to Christ, in union with Christ, provides a Lifelong roadmap, a paradigm for ongoing spiritual formation. This continues to help and guide Christians since her transformative leadership and ministry in the 1500's. Teresa was the superior, administrator, spiritual director, author, and founder of the Reformed Carmelites, the 'decalceds/shoeless', with their vow of poverty. She wrote *The Interior Castle* and was a close friend of St. John of the Cross, who wrote *The Dark night of the Soul*.

"God's desire to direct my prayer life came to me most vividly while visiting the Monastery for one of my monthly retreats. As I started a time set aside for prayer, God planted this message in my heart:

'Tom, for all these years you have told Me when we would talk, what we would talk about, how I was supposed to run the universe, and you asked Me to bless what you had decided to do. Then, you would dismiss Me, when you had decided we were done. Because I love you so much, I have been willing to meet you, in your presumption, and bless your ministry. But now, I would like us to develop a new pattern. I would like to tell you when we are to talk, what we are to talk about, what I would like you to do, and when we are done. '

It was a humbling experience! " p. 115

For reflection:

What feelings and thoughts came to you as you first read this?

What do you hear, see about God's relationship with Tom through this interaction?

As you pay attention to these responses, what might the Holy Spirit be saying to YOU?

Why Listening, Abiding Prayer - practicing our abiding in, responding to God

1. STOP! Be silent, be still, cease striving

Ps 46:10 "Be Still/Cease striving/stop/ enough and know that I am God..."

Ps. 62:1 "For God alone my soul waits in silence; from [God] comes my salvation."

"If we center down...and live in that holy silence which is dearer than life, and take our life program into the silent places of the heart, with complete openness, ready to do, ready to renounce according to His leading, then many of the things we are doing lose their vitality for us...There is a reevaluation of much that we do or try to do...and we know what to do and what to let alone."
Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*

2. Focus on our Triune God in whom we live and who lives within us by the Holy Spirit. Our primary 'activity' is attentiveness to God as we let go of our thoughts, desires, agendas... Some find deep, focused breathing can assist them.

3. Rest in and Wait on God with attentiveness on our relationship of love with God, letting go of our thoughts, a practice that can feel awkward at first but that develops over time, like learning a sport or piece of music. This is an exercise in being rather than doing.

4. At the end, write any thoughts, impressions, notes

"There remains one single duty. It is to keep one's gaze fixed on the master one has chosen and to be constantly listening so as to understand and hear and immediately obey his will."

From John-Pierre de Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, Intro by Richard Foster, translated by Kitty Muggeridge p. xiii

Eph. 5: 17 "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand/discern what the Lord's will is."

Rom. 12:1,2

Teresa of Avila believed that "your prayer life is most diagnostic of your spiritual growth."

Watch for dates of mini retreats coming soon around the presbytery regionally for clergy and laity, including spiritual practices and fellowship, starting in Lewistown.

Resources drawn upon

R. Thomas Ashbrook, *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth*,
Introduction by Eugene Peterson

Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence; Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*
" ", *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, book & DVD series
" ", *Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups*, book &
video series @ <http://www.transformingcenter.org/in/pgwt-book/resources-video-series>

John-Pierre de Caussade, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, Introduction by Richard Foster,
translated by Kitty Muggeridge, *Renovare* Edition

Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*

Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (translated from Spanish)