

The Ways of Prayer: An Introduction

by Michael Pennock

Prayer, like life, is a unique journey. No one else has walked my exact path. The special people in my life are different from those persons who are precious to another. The significant events in my life will inevitably be different from the key happenings in another person's life.

Prayer too is personal. In fact, a common definition of prayer is *the deepening of one's personal relationship with God*. How the Lord meets and speaks with each of us is deeply personal; God relates to each of us in a special way.

In a certain sense, we too are prayers. We are in relationship to God merely because he has made us and keeps us in existence. Each of us is a word of God, speaking God's love and goodness to the rest of the world. Each of us prays—relates to God—in special and deeply personal ways; each of us is a unique prayer God has given to the human family.

This idea of being a prayer is new to most of us. We often think of prayer as a conversation with God. Prayer, of course, involves talking with and listening to the Lord. But prayer, like life, is much more; we can never exhaust its meaning. By praying, we continuously discover what God has already given us. Prayer deepens what we already have—a life with God—and helps us appreciate it even more.

Many of us have difficulty praying. We find the important things of the world claiming so much of our attention and time that we are diverted from the essential things in life. "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." What is essential to praying, and living life to the full, is also invisible to the eye; it is a matter of loving.

To materially oriented minds, this statement at first appears absurd. Yet as I strike the keys on my word processor, words mysteriously appear on the screen. They appear because of the complex internal workings of my computer, a process I don't understand. I can't see what's going on behind the scenes, so to speak, but I know that what I can't see is essential to words appearing on the screen.

"What is essential is invisible to the eye." The years of hard work in school merit the lawyer the knowledge and skill to defend her client. The powerful memory of a deceased parent often takes the adult son or daughter to the cemetery to pay regards.

That which is unseen provides powerful motivation. A mother goes through the same routine on behalf of her family for what appears to be the ten-thousandth time. What could possibly motivate her behavior? The material, visible rewards certainly aren't at all evident. Love is the essential ingredient which empowers her to be faithful to her family.

Some people say that seeing is believing. The reverse is true where love and prayer are involved. Believing is seeing. Love is essential for a full human life. Love is a spiritual reality which can't be measured using ordinary human instruments of perception. It can be sensed only with the heart.

Prayer is like love. It is a matter of the heart, a heart which longs for greater union with God. God loves me—that is the most essential truth of all. Realizing this truth and reminding ourselves of it can motivate us to pray. And even wanting to pray, to deepen our life with God, is itself a prayer. Prayer helps us realize and enjoy ever more deeply the Lord and the wonderful life of friendship to which he calls us.

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