

Natural Prayer

For years I experienced a sense of uneasiness before God. I guess I felt I wasn't totally pleasing to Him, so I avoided looking in His face. I wanted to live closer to Him, and even believed that it was possible, but I didn't know how to make it happen. Consistency was always beyond my reach.

I tried self-discipline. My time was organized into tight compartments, and I drove myself to stick to the program. And in the area of temptation, after my frequent failures, I would work out mental techniques to help me gain control the next time it came up. But all I tried only increased my frustration.

Nowhere was self-discipline a greater failure than in my prayer life. Yes, I understood the importance of praying, but that only made me feel more guilty. It wasn't just a matter of making time to pray. Once I started to pray, I couldn't concentrate to save my life. The harder I tried to control my wandering mind, the more it escaped in 80 directions.

And I studied the Bible. I studied it a lot. I guess I hoped the secret to a truly satisfying life in God was in some hidden wisdom He would help me find.

However, He graciously showed me the opposite. The key to the life He offers us is not through strict self-discipline, even though discipline can be good; nor is it through some higher wisdom attainable only by the spiritual elite. All He asks us to do--all He has ever wanted us to do--is to simply trust Him, one moment at a time. As we trust Him, a relationship is formed, a friendship that allows Him to live and work inside us.

Furthermore, He does not ask us to reach out to some God who is high above and far away. God is a real being, and He is constantly, personally with us.

Nothing has made a bigger difference in my life than this simple realization. I walk in His presence. I live with Him face-to-face.

Realizing His constant presence makes the greatest change in my prayer life. Prayer is no longer a routine of struggling to contact Someone way out there somewhere. I don't have to get into the right frame of mind to pray. Prayer is no longer a brief, isolated period of the day. It is wonderful to be able to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

We are never out of His presence, so prayer doesn't have to start and stop. He is always there, so we can talk to Him freely, moment by moment, as to a good friend who is right next to us. When He blesses us--through one of those little daily blessings--we can thank and praise Him on the spot. When a concern arises, we can look in His face and know that He loves us. We can trust the need to Him. Every joy, every problem, every gift from Him can become the seed of a prayer, of a nearer, dearer relationship with Him.

And when we fail, we can ask His forgiveness right there and then, knowing His love for us makes Him anxious to heal and forget completely. If our repentance is immediate and sincere, not even our sins need separate us from Him.

As our needs don't stop, prayer shouldn't stop. We can experience a continual openness, a quickness to turn to Him in everything. It won't happen automatically or overnight, but as we remember that He is there, and as we trust Him, our friendship grows. When it finally sinks in to you personally that He really is there with you, anxious to listen, anxious to guide and help you, prayer will become more natural and free. It will be a "want to," not a "have to."

Remember: always, always talk to Him as to a friend who is right there with you.

Listen...and sing if you want:
Hymn: *Ever Standing in Your Presence*
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