

A Sunday Forum on Prayer | December 17, 2023

1. Spirituality is the experiential element of a religion, in contrast to beliefs. Enabled by practices, it is usually supported by community.

2. Christian Belief about God and Us: Christianity at the level of belief, is about God initiating relationships with human being, graciously drawing us into a shared life with God, and into a shared work of making reconciled community with God and each other.

- The work is initiated and done by God, but we can learn to cooperate with it. Our purpose in life is to be collaborators in God's dream, even if it is just accepting God's mercy.
- This is progressive, life-long, and never completed.

3. Christian Belief about Jesus and Spirit: Christianity says there are two fundamental and irreducible ways in which God puts Godself in relationship to us: Jesus of Nazareth and the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus is God showing up in history as something that can be seen, touched, that is over against us, that makes a demand on us, and that forces a choice. It is correlated to all the ways in which God shows up in history, within and without Christianity.
- The Spirit is God affecting our subjectivity from within, not showing up in history but changing the subjective mode of how we experience what is in history. The Spirit always leads to fidelity to Jesus; it is Jesus' Spirit. Because the Church is not identical to Jesus the Spirit can point away from less true offerings of Church. And the Spirit is active even where specifically Christian belief is not claimed.
- Being in Jesus by the Spirit always establishes a loving, open relationship to the Ground of our Being, the Holy Mystery, This is infinite in possibility and is never plumbed in this life or the next. It is joy and savor and fullness. This is life in the Trinity.

4. Christian spirituality is thus about our experience of our yielding to the movement of the Holy Spirit, drawing us into Jesus as God's Word, gradually conforming us to Christ, opening up a new relationship to God and the world. We share in the inner life of Jesus and God's mission to us and in us and in the world.

5. Struggle. There is an element in struggle and confusion in this process because we are under the power of Sin in a fallen world. We will experience opposition and resistance in ourselves to the way of the Spirit, and opposition from the world.

6. Prayer. Since this theology and spirituality is fundamentally relational, prayer for Christians is the cultivation of a relationship with God.

- This involves a hearing of the Word and a surrender to the movement of the Spirit, allowing God to shape and direct us inwardly and our lives outwardly, conforming us to Christ.

- It demands working through that which resists grace in ourselves.

7. Elements of Prayer. What might be elements of our life of prayer? Introducing *The Prayer Cycle*: fundamental elements to a life of prayer. Like a healthy diet of different food groups.

- Letting go of self, allowing Jesus life of surrender to become a mystery at the center of our lives.
- Giving loving attention to the Word, and allowing this to challenge and shape us.
- Giving loving attention to self and world as places of God's working and engagement.
- Action in attempted cooperation with God

8. What is required for a life of prayer?

- Time consistently given. Nothing grows without the gift of ourselves and attention in time.
- Basic minimal sanity to be able to give our steady attention to something other than ourselves, a life not our own. Basic classical virtues like prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude.
- A self capable of relationship, and relationships making the self capable -- a chicken and egg situation. Characteristics of such a capacity: humility, honesty, patience, a capacity for discomfort, unknowing. Capable of going for the long haul.
- A community of support

9. What can I expect?

- To be surprised. When you give time and attention to anything, it blossoms in unexpected ways. This is especially true of the life of prayer. You will change. Your relationships will change. You will make different choices.
- Dissatisfaction with how things are, in yourself, your living, the world around you.
- The gradual emergence of meaning, rooting, an liveliness in relationships with others.
- Resistance in yourself and from around yourself.

10. Prayed Christianity is a life held open to God in prayer, surrendering ourselves, consistently and painstakingly attentive to God's word, sharing all the ins and out, ups and downs of daily life with God. Ever gradually getting a sense of how one is to cooperate with the movement of God's Spirit in one's life.