

Whole Prayer. A book review Reflection # 62, Sept 10, 2009

In the past few weeks I have been rereading some of the books on prayer that have meant so much to me recently and came across this challenging passage in Walter Wangerin's book Whole Prayer:

"Pray

Understand that praying is its own piety, that the doing of a thing empowers you to do it better and better.

Regularize prayer for yourself.

Pray in private, in the same place, at the same time every day.

Give the act your full, deliberate consideration,

doing nothing else but praying. Contemplate the things of God. 'Contemplate' derives from temple, being in that place where the sacred is made evident. Pray; seek the sacred to ponder it.

you may repeat the same prayer over day after day. I recommend it. No, don't pray the sound only, but concentrate all your spiritual attention upon that prayer each time you pray it.

Live in its large rooms a while then in time find its subtleties, its small corners, its deeper faith and insight.

There is enormous blessing in this repetition ~ especially for people who tend mostly to pray the spontaneous prayers of their hearts.

After a period of time, spontaneous prayers do in fact begin to resemble each other and therefore become a shallow means of communicating with God. but if you choose the prayer of another

*(The Lord's prayer; Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple; **A particular Psalm(italics mine)**; St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Sun')* and if you pray that prayer day after day for an extended period of time, the prayer eventually will speak to you and then for you. Praying the prayers of the faithful will train your whole self, heart and mind and ears, to hear as the faithful heard.

such a regular discipline of prayer, then, is the shaping of your spirit; it becomes for you a way of life; it is, therefore, its own preparation for hearing the voice God.

This is the practice of the 'elect,' those who live in covenant with God,

Just as my morning greeting to Thane (Walter's wife) is a practice of my covenant with her. We give each other the same greeting, day after day; but the day would lack shape without it.

Read the Lord's parable in Luke 18:1-8, which he told to the effect that people ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Let me now elaborate on the details of your regular prayer time: you may make a sort of sandwich of it.

Both begin and end with the same two prayers every day to accomplish what I've noted above, but then fill the time between with prayers for particular people in your community, in the sphere of your knowledge. You need not tell them that you are praying for them; but as you do the private discipline becomes communal, and you submerge yourself in the needs of others and the power of God. You diminish.

This is the humbleness that shall surely hear the voice of God and hears it without shock or surprise; for to pray for others is to strengthen that faith which expects God to respond in love." Walter Wangerin Jr. Whole Prayer Speaking and Listening to God.

Zondervan Publishing House Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998, pages 185-187

Wangerin's book is an encouraging stimulus for private and corporate prayer and would be well worth your time no matter how experienced or not you are with all kinds of prayer. I am currently practicing his suggested sandwich with two of my favorite psalms as the beginning and end pieces. I will let you know more later and if any of you try it please contact me and tell me how it works for you.

Have a great week of communication with our Triune God.

Under God's Great Mercy,

Howie

