

Home Prayer: Place and Space

POWER

The fact that prayer can change the world is beyond dispute. But how does it do this? One of the most important ways is that it changes the one who is praying, and when we change from our prayers, the world changes. We are in the world, and the world is in us. It is through prayer that we reconnect with God, "regrounding" if you will.

PLACE

Jesus was diligent about getting his time for prayer, usually going off to a secluded spot when he needed to reconnect. His guidance for personal prayer included what was recorded in Matthew 6:5-6: "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, that they may be seen by others. They have their reward; but when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Since our Community members are dispersed, they are encouraged to find a special spot in their home (or someplace nice outside when the weather permits) for their personal prayer sessions. It is to be a special place, reserved just for prayer, meditation and contemplation, and used for nothing else. It can be as simple as a chair in the corner of the room, perhaps with a reading lamp. Choose a quiet spot, if possible, such as in a bedroom or study. A small end table can be useful to hold books and journal when not in use.

If the space is available, a slightly larger table can serve as a home altar. Here other items to set the tone for prayer can be added: Bible, candles, incense holder, and crucifix, as desired. Some home prayer spaces have kneelers as well. Add other items that help enter the Presence of God. Perhaps some icons, small bell, or angel statues. Things that attract the attention of your eyes, ears, smell and sense of touch will help bring you into the present moment. The present moment is where God resides for us; it is where He becomes accessible. Some people add soft music as a background. I often use some Gregorian chant music to create a solemn and yet joyful experience.

PREPARATION

The basics of preparing for personal prayer time follow the same thoughts as expressed in a recent article, "Early Morning Prayer." When you enter this personal prayer space, you do so both physically and mentally. It is easier to achieve physically, of course, because you simply go there. It can be a bit more challenging mentally, however, because we often carry with us the concerns of the past and the worries and busyness of the day ahead.

Therefore, when we enter our sacred prayer space, allow some time for the mind to settle down. The thoughts of the day that demand our attention will eventually find their way out. Don't push at them or prevent them from passing through, just gently show them the way out of the room. Your worries and concerns can be dealt with later, so remind them that this is not their time.

Begin to replace these thoughts with the senses and images of the things in your prayer space. These are reminders that you are a child of God, and are deeply loved by Him. You soon arrive in His Presence, and as with any dear friend, this calls for your full attention and respect.

You may want to tap a little bell signifying the start of the session, or light a candle (be sure to extinguish it after the session!). Some people, like me, will wrap themselves in a prayer stole or shawl upon entering the prayer space. I have several designs and styles, depending on the season and occasion. Wearing one reminds

me of being wrapped in the loving arms of God. It also reminds me of the shield against those things in my life that are not of God. For now, during this special time, He and I are one, and we are going to have a conversation together.

PRACTICE

Once our minds have settled down we can begin our prayer routine. This can range from a structured prayer book with assigned readings for each day, to simply sitting and enjoying His presence. Some people go for a walk in the woods, sitting in a boat, or taking a swim (probably without a prayer shawl). Some people explore the symbols, features and colors of a religious icon. Others read Biblical stories and imagine themselves a part of it; they live the sights and sounds of the time, gleaning some new understanding or just relishing the presence of God. Include prayers for others, and for yourself, as the need arises.

Journaling your prayer experience can be helpful, too. Sometimes answering a set of questions about the day just past help to make us stronger for the next day. Some questions you may consider include:

- How was God present in the events of this day?
- What are your key feelings of this day?
- What did you feel God was guiding you to do today?
- How did you respond to God's call today?
- The particular event or situation of this day that I want most to be healed is...

As you review your journal from time to time you may learn what works best for you and what doesn't. Discuss the results with your spiritual director, counselor or trusted friends. End your prayer session with a short prayer of thanks, asking God to remain Present with you as you reenter the world.

PEOPLE

Like Jesus returning to the people after each of his prayer times, we, too, must reengage the world as it presents itself to us. Hopefully, we are a little bit better equipped to do so just having spent some time with Our Father. The ultimate goal of personal prayer time, or course, is that you carry this sense of His Presence with you all the time. Each moment of the day becomes a prayer session of words, thoughts and actions. We begin to see the image of God in other people, we see things as being gifts of God, we see nature as sacred, and we see each of our movements as sacraments to His love.

Go in peace, to love and serve each other, one moment at a time!

Brother Daniel-Joseph Schroeder
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Community of the Gospel

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