

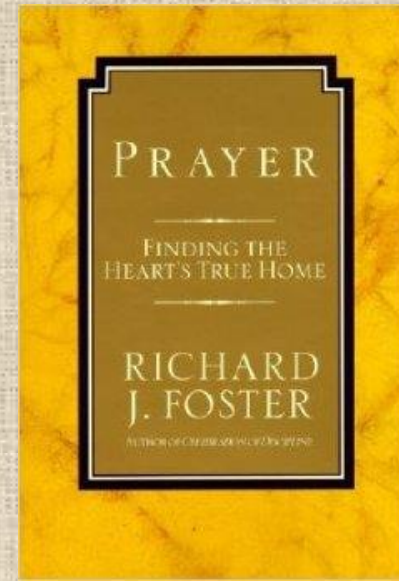
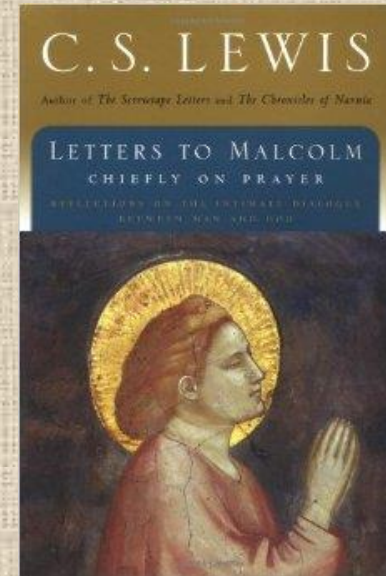
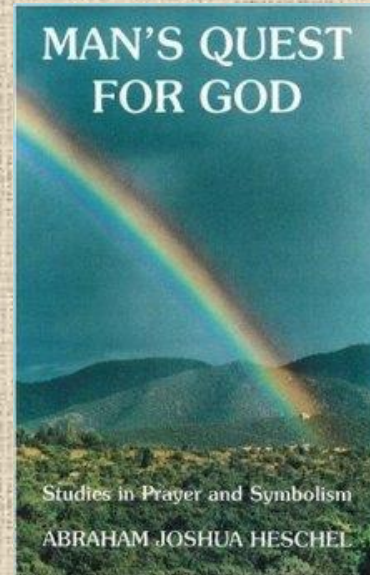
The Way of Love: Prayer



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St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Fall, 2020

Sources

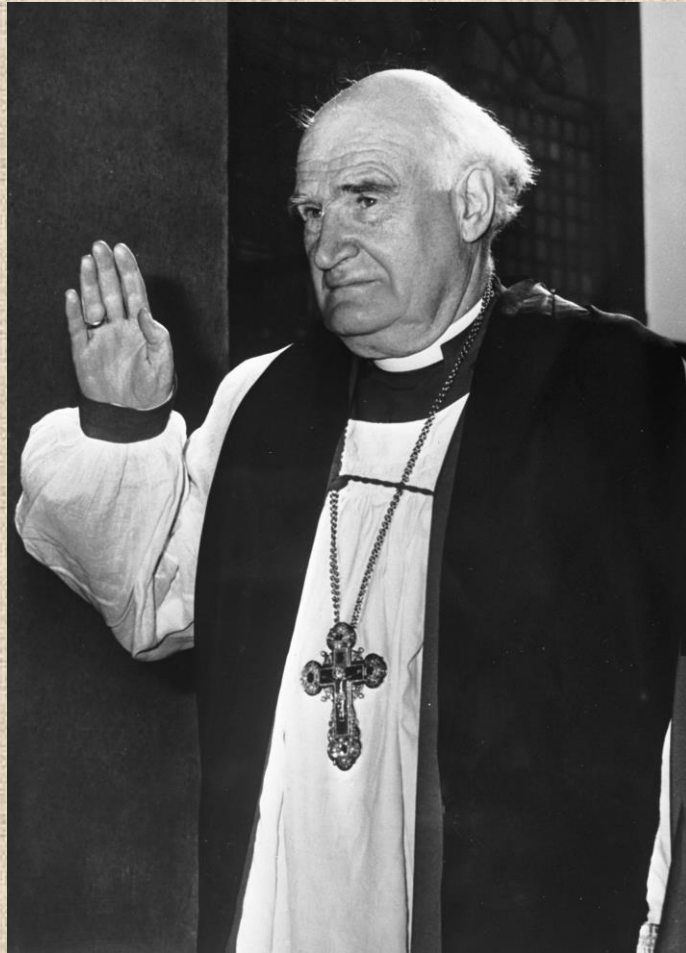
- C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*
- A.J. Heschel, *Man's Quest For God*
- R. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*



Arm Yourself With Prayer



How Much Time in Prayer



Arm Yourself With Prayer

- Most of us have been praying since we were children.
- We ought to be pretty good at it.
- And yet when we try to begin, we find our thoughts empty, our tongues tied, and our souls anything but at rest.



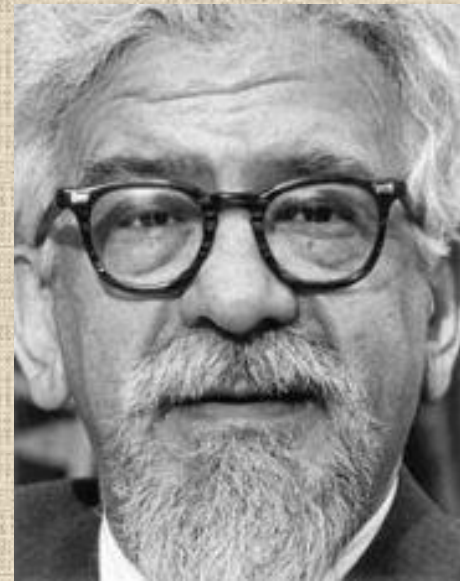
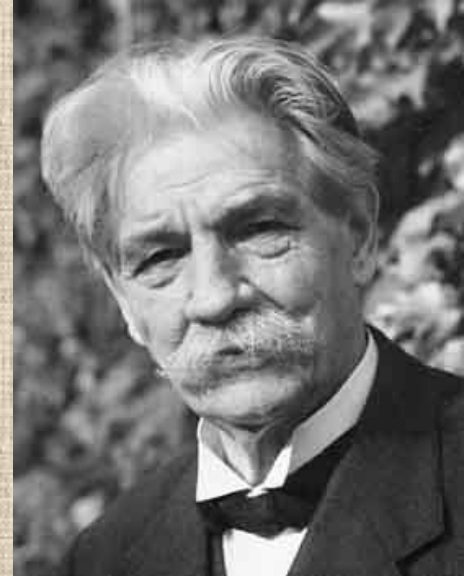
The Purpose of Prayer



- In prayer, we seek to be known by God, and to know God.
- Authentic Christian prayer seeks an intimate conversation with the Triune God, aimed at unity with God.

We Long, God Longs

- Loneliness is the primary emotion of the age.
- As Albert Schweitzer observed, “We are all so much together, but we are all dying of loneliness.”
- “The self is silent; words are dead, and prayer is a forgotten language.” —Heschel



We Long, God Longs

“We do not refuse to pray. We merely feel that our tongues are tied, our minds inert, our inner vision dim, when we are about to enter the door that leads to prayer. We do not refuse to pray; we abstain from it.”

— Heschel



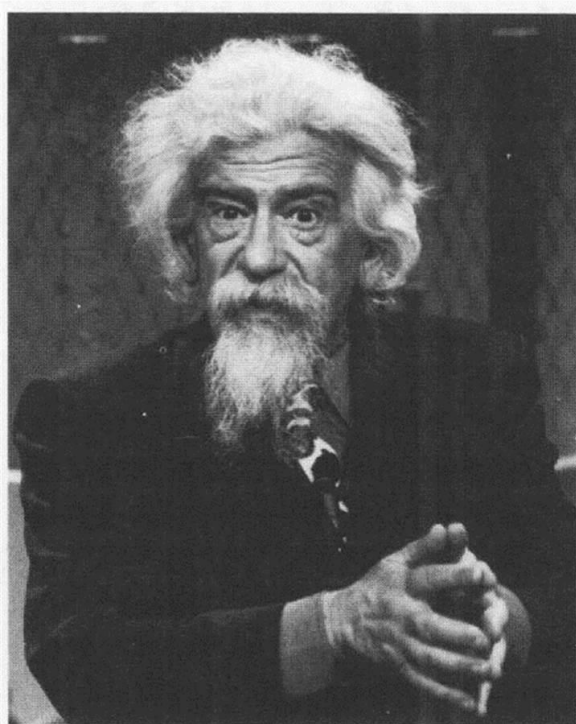
Abstaining From Prayer

“Well, let’s now at any rate come clean. Prayer is irksome. An excuse to omit it is never unwelcome. When it is over, this casts a feeling of relief and holiday over the rest of the day. We are reluctant to begin. We are delighted to finish.” —Lewis



The Nature of Prayer

- “We dwell on the edge of mystery and ignore it, wasting our souls, risking our stake in God.”
- “To pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living.”



Abstaining From Prayer

We abstain from prayer through:

- Busyness
- Forgetting
- Distractions



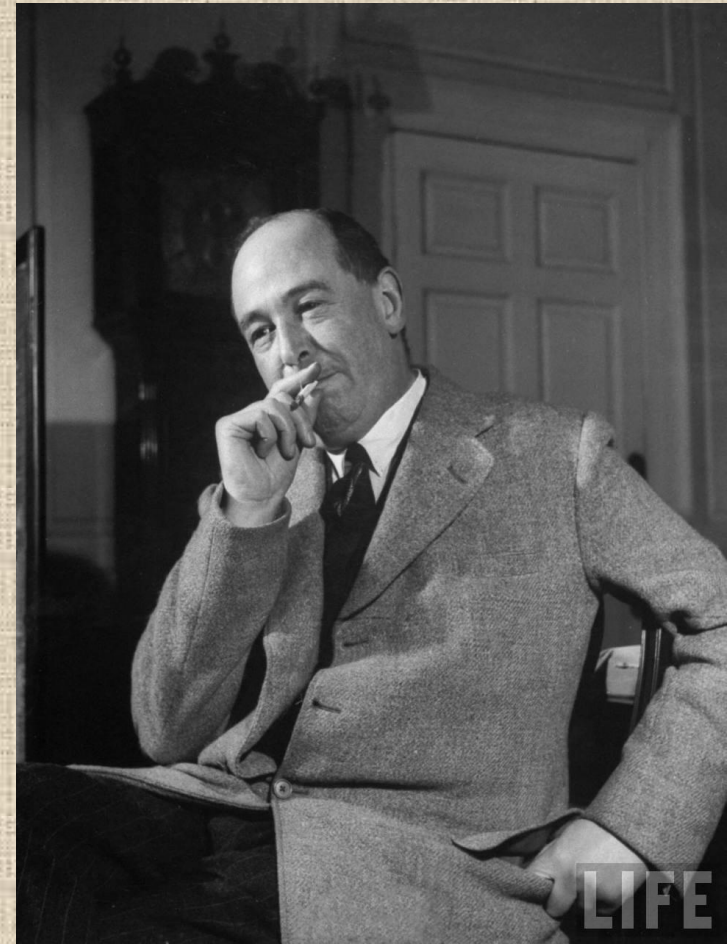
Obstacles to Prayer



- Time
 - Don't know what to say (don't know how)
 - Fear of God (intimacy)
-
- Uncomfortable with silence (study at Virginia and Harvard Universities)
 - We see prayer as a “chore”

Obstacles to Prayer

- Many of us keep our prayer lives separate from the rest of our lives.
- “There is a sort of water-tight bulk-head between our ‘religion’ and our ‘real life’....”



- Consider fixing a set time of day for prayer
- Quiet place, quiet time
- Monkey-mind
(anchor prayer)
- Consider tactile
prayer
- Consider praying
with icons



Dealing With Monkey Mind

- I recommend using an “anchor prayer” (short, brief sentence to refocus).
- Try using the Jesus Prayer or “Oh Lord, make speed to save me. Oh Lord, make haste to save me.”



Types of Prayer

- Confession (prayer of the examen)
- Petition (supplication)
- Intercession
- Thanksgiving
- Praise and worship
- *Lectio Divina* (praying the scriptures)
- Contemplative prayer (prayer without words)

Incarnational Prayer

“Creation seems to be delegation through and through. He will do nothing simply of Himself which can be done by creatures. I suppose this is because He is a giver. And He has nothing to give but Himself. And to give Himself is to do

His deeds— in a sense,
and on varying levels to
be Himself— through the
things He has made.”

—Lewis



Incarnational Prayer

“In the Incarnation, God the Son takes the body and human soul of Jesus, and, through that, the whole environment of Nature, all the creaturely predicament, into His own being.”



Methods of Prayer

“You first taught me the great principle “Begin where you are.” I had thought one had to start by summoning up what we believe about the goodness and greatness of God, by thinking about creation and redemption and ‘all the blessings of this life.’” — Lewis



How We Pray

- Suggest we begin with the present moment:
- this place, this day, these troubles, this pain or this moment's joy;
- Our families, our jobs, our neighbors and friends.
- Avoid formal or even beautiful language (begin with the conversational).



How We Pray



- And so, we begin simply.
- As St. Teresa of Avila said, “There is no stage of prayer so sublime that it isn’t necessary to return often to the beginning.”

How We Pray



- We should avoid the temptation of bringing only the holiest side of ourselves to prayer.

“God is big enough to receive us with all our mixture. We do not have to be bright, or pure, or filled with faith, or anything. That is what grace means, and not only are we saved by grace, we live by it as well. And we pray by it.” — Foster

Beginning Simply

- We begin where we are, in part, as consequence of the incarnation.
- We need to avoid an ethereal, disincarnate spirituality.
- We “worship a God who was born in a smelly stable, who walked this earth in blood, sweat, and tears, but who nevertheless lived in perpetual responsiveness to the heavenly” Father. — Foster

What We Are Doing in Prayer

- So, why do we pray?
- “The change is in us. The passive changes to the active. Instead of merely being known, we show, we tell, we offer ourselves to view.” — Lewis



The Prayer of the Examen

- The Psalmist declares, “Yahweh, you examine me and know me” (Ps. 139:1)
- The Apostle Paul reminds us that “the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor. 2:10).
- God will not refuse “a broken and contrite heart” (Ps 51: 17)



What Should We Pray For?

- “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”



- “To forgive for the moment is not difficult. But to go on forgiving, to forgive the same offence again every time it recurs to the memory —there’s the real tussle.”
—Lewis

Penetential Prayer

- Pagan penitence: “the attempt to placate a supposedly angry power— ‘I’m sorry. I won’t do it again. Let me off this time.’”
- Christian penitence: “The attempt is, rather, to restore an infinitely valued and vulnerable personal relation which has been shattered by an action of one’s own, and if forgiveness, in the ‘crude’ sense of remission of penalty, comes in, this is valued chiefly as a symptom or seal or even by-product of the reconciliation.” —Lewis

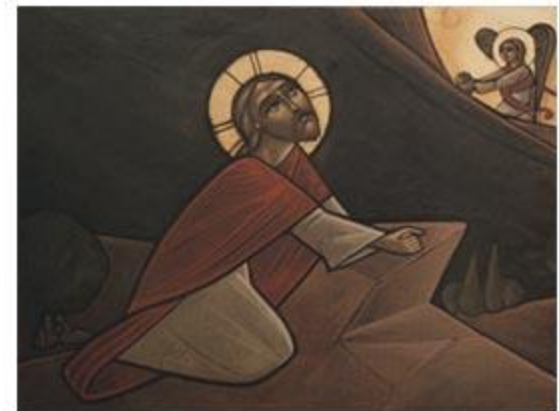
The Prayer of Relinquishment

- “Thy will be done.” What might that mean?
- “It seems to me that we often, almost sulkily, reject the good that God offers us because, at that moment, we expected some other good.”
- “We are too often trying to tell God ‘Encore!’ Do that again!” “These other occasions, I now suspect, are often full of their own new blessing, if only we would lay ourselves open to it.” — Lewis

The Prayer of Relinquishment

The Prayer of Relinquishment (“thy will be done”) is a bona fide letting go, but it is a release with hope. We have no fatalist resignation. We are buoyed up by a confident trust in the character of God. Even when all we see are the tangled threads on the backside of life’s tapestry, know that God is good and is out to do us good always.”

—Foster



The Prayer of Relinquishment

“Little by little we are changed by this daily crucifixion of the will. Changed, not like a tornado changes things, but like a grain of sand in an oyster changes things. New graces emerge: new ability to

cast all our care upon God, new joy at the success of others, new hope in a God who is good.” —Foster



Petitionary Prayer

“In crisis, in moments of despair, a word of prayer is like a strap we take hold of when tottering in a rushing street car which seems to be turning over.” — Heschel



Petitionary Prayer

- Our prayer probably doesn't change God's mind.
- Or, as Lewis said, "Now I am going to suggest that strictly causal thinking is even more inadequate when applied to the relation between God and man."



The Prayer of Suffering

- When we come to share in the suffering of the world through prayer, we find moments of redemption, and perhaps share in that redemption.
- We pray in suffering, and we are changed.

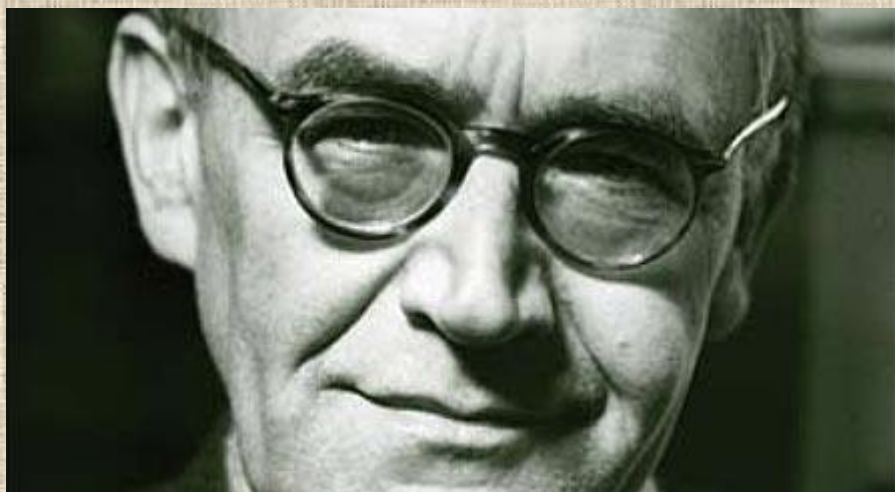


The Prayer of Suffering

We begin to set aside the question, “Why is there suffering in the world?” We turn instead to the question, “How do I enter into the world’s suffering in a way that is healing and redemptive?”



- In the prayer of suffering, we come to see that prayer isn't passive at all.
- Rather, as Karl Barth said, we learn that "To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world."
- The Church, which has become stale and institutional, needs "holy prayers in order to dream new dreams and see new visions."
—Foster



Petitionary Prayer

- Suppose prayer (even petitionary prayer) doesn't have anything to do with getting what we want?
- Suppose that prayer doesn't so much change God as it changes us?
- Suppose that it opens up a conduit through which we might understand, accept in, and even be drawn to participate in God's will?

Intercessory Prayer

- “Our prayers for others flow more easily than those we offer on our own behalf.”
- “But perhaps we too often pray for others, when we should be *doing* something for them. And if I pray for God to take away my own ‘besetting sin’ (as opposed to yours), then I am compelled to do something about that.”



Intercessory Prayer

- Intercessory prayer may include and be reflected in our action.
- For example, Rabbi Heschel said that “When I marched with Dr. King, I was “praying with my feet.”



The Prayer of Gratitude

- “If the only prayer you ever said during your whole life was ‘thank you, that would be enough.’”—Meister Eckhart
- Regular review of those things we are grateful for: friends, family, laughter, books, ideas, music.
- Discourages worry and reminds us of what’s important.



Dear Jesus, how desperately I need to learn to pray. And yet when I am honest, I know that I often do not even want to pray. I am distracted, stubborn, and self-centered. In your mercy, Jesus, bring my desire more in line with my need for You so that I can come to want what I need. In your name and for your sake, I pray. —Amen.

(based on Richard Foster)