

# A STRUCTURE FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

(Excerpt from *Companions of the Cross* by Fr. Bob Bedard, CC, pp. 76-79)

It is good to be as spontaneous as possible in prayer with the Lord, to speak to him in our words rather than somebody else's. But, at the same time, some kind of structure or procedure will be helpful. Different programs will work for different people. Here is one that I find works most of the time for me:

- 1) **Thanksgiving.** The psalm writer suggests that we "enter his gates with thanksgiving" (Psalm 100:4). I begin by thanking God for or in all the events of the previous twenty-four hours. I thank him for all the good things and thank him in all the things that weren't so good. St. Paul says that "all things work together unto good for those who love God." (Romans 8:28). As we consciously turn everything over to the Lord, he is able to draw forth his purposes.
- 2) **Repentance.** This will again require going over the day before. It is important to 'own' our sins, to acknowledge them before God, to repudiate them, and to tell the Lord we are going to take whatever steps are necessary to avoid them. This makes our repentance effective.
- 3) **Forgiveness.** Jesus again and again urged forgiveness. He said: "Whenever you stand in prayer, forgive" (Mark 11:25)... Forgiveness is not a feeling. It's a decision. As we take people before the Lord quietly in prayer and tell him we want to forgive them, God is freed up to deal with our feelings. It is good, too, from time to time, to ask the Lord to reveal to us anybody we still haven't really forgiven. He's very good at popping names and faces into our heads.
- 4) **Praise.** The decks should now be cleared for us to give glory to God. We can use every word or phrase we can think of to render the honour to him that is his due. When words in our own native tongue seem to dry, we can just make up sounds, something he can turn into the little gift of tongues. We can sing songs or make up little tunes of our own. Praise is a very active form of prayer. There is no listening here. It is good for us to really turn it on at this point. Praise takes us entirely out of ourselves and turns us fully to God.
- 5) **The Holy Spirit.** I can now invite the Holy Spirit to do his work. I tell him the red carpet is down for him to move in and accomplish the Father's purposes. The Holy Spirit's main work is bringing forth the kingdom of God. I give him leave to do it in me, in all those with whom I am in relationship, and in the tasks the Father has assigned to me within the Church.
- 6) **Rebuking.** In the realm of the Spirit, it's the Holy Spirit I want or the angels of God sent in Jesus' name by the Father. I'm not interested in any others. I want no truck or trade with spirits of evil. Because we live in a sinful world, they can, however, harass us. Jesus tells us to do what he has

done. He rebuked the evil spirits and drove them away. He says: "I have given you power to tread upon snakes and scorpions" (Luke 10:19). St. Paul puts it this way: "The weapons of our warfare are mighty. With them, we have power to pull down strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4)...

- 7) **Surrender.** I then will invite the Lord to take over in my life completely. I will consciously give him all I am and have. I specifically include my positions, my priorities, my plans, and my possessions. I opt for the stewardship system Jesus calls for. He becomes the owner. I do his bidding. I tell him I want to surrender to him completely.
- 8) **Trust.** This is not a gift. It is something we must decide to do. As we make the decision, the Lord strengthens us with his grace. It is particularly important for us to tell the Lord we are trusting him on the bad days, the days when everything seems to have messed up, the times when we see no way out of some dilemma, in all trials of whatever kind.
- 9) **Availability.** I will renew here my daily offer. I will tell the Lord that, whatever he might have in mind for me, I will do it. Or, if he happens to have some plan on the go and can't find anybody to take it on, I'll tell him I'm available. This one has got me into trouble a few times, but I'm convinced it's what God wants.
- 10) **Scripture.** I will ask the Lord to lead me to some places in the Bible which may be important for me to read right now and, having read them, sit back and ponder over them. This will involve me in the listening time of my prayer. I will wait upon the Lord for a while.
- 11) **Journal.** If anything has occurred to me, I will jot it down in my log book. Going back over this from time to time is a good way to check up on what the Lord has been, perhaps, saying to me and how he may have been leading me.
- 12) **Petition.** I customarily finish my quiet time with the Lord by placing intentions before him.

The structure I use for my personal prayer time usually works reasonably well for me, but I have learned that the Lord wants me to be flexible enough to change it to suit his particular purposes for any given day. It may involve leaving out some, many, or all, of my carefully constructed sections.

In any case, God wants a commitment from me to spend daily time with him. It is only in this way that he can effectively deal with me, straighten me out when I need it, and keep me reasonably on track. Jesus calls us into friendship with Him, with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. To be friends, we have to spend time together.



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