

...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembly together...but encouraging one another.  
 Heb 10:24-25

Share the teaching  
 Guard the sharing

# Male Call

## December 5, 2008—Our Spiritual PDA—Prayer Described

6:00 – 6:05	Coffee & Donuts Opening Prayer
6:05 – 7:00	<p>Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Revelation 3:20)</p> <p>1) Experiencing prayer</p> <p>a) Prayer experiences are notoriously hard to describe since they occur in our inner lives. It is no easier for me to try to describe a genuine encounter with another person.</p> <p>The interior life, or the life of prayer, is a very mysterious reality...To the beginner, there is still a puzzle and mystery in listening to God. (To the proficient pray-er it is no longer a puzzle, but it will always be a mystery.)<sup>1</sup></p> <p>It is imperative that we learn to experience prayer as encounter and communion [with a person]...We have the opportunity for extraordinary intimacy with God, but it may be an intimacy in which we are distinctly uncomfortable and ill at ease. For [some] Old Testament saints, intimacy in prayer meant that they were often distressed, wrestling with God, perplexed by God and even at some points feeling abandoned by God.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>2) The basis of our description of prayer</p> <p>a) The God of Christianity is a personal God who desperately desires a personal, love-based relationship with us, the crown jewels of his creation.</p> <p>3) Describing prayer</p> <p>Prayer [is] an opening of the mind and heart to God...Perhaps the clearest example of openness is the art of listening...Listening is indeed a real art, which some people never learn. We have all experienced people who cannot or do not listen. They hear but do not understand; their bodily ears pick up sound but their hearts are not attentive to its meaning. You can talk to them, but you can scarcely talk with them...Prayer is essentially a dialogic encounter between God and man; and since God is Lord, he alone can initiate the encounter...At the same time, prayer is a dialogue, an encounter</p>

<sup>1</sup> *Opening to God.* 17, 39.

<sup>2</sup> *The Voice of Jesus.* 162. The saints referred to are Abraham, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jacob, and “other pray-ers of the Old Testament.”

between two persons...since even God cannot speak with us unless we also speak. Even God cannot enter into a dialogue with a man who is interiorly deaf and mute.<sup>3</sup>

4) The goal or objective of prayer

The final objective of prayer is not experienced in our speaking so much as in our allowing God to speak, to have the final word, but more, to have *the* word that speaks into our lives.<sup>4</sup>

The goal of prayer is the encounter with the God of love...[Our love of God] consists, not in the extent of our happiness, but in the firmness of our determination to try and please God in everything, and to endeavor, in all possible ways, not to offend him, and to pray him ever to advance the honor and glory of his Son and the growth of the Church...To love in this way—unselfishly, courageously, and with a genuine passion for God's will “on earth and in heaven”—is the real goal of prayer of our life in prayer.<sup>5</sup>

The ultimate goal of our prayer is not that we would enjoy a good feeling but that we would mature in humility, advance in faith, hope and love, and grow in our capacity to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>6</sup>

5) Our transformation in prayer

St. Paul spells it out when he enumerates the fruit of the Spirit: love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). These are the manifest fruits of a genuine prayer life. If we are growing in these, we are on the right road.<sup>7</sup>

[Our transformation] comes not by act of our will but by an encounter with God himself. And somehow, mysteriously, when our prayers are dry, Christ is present to us in a manner that is transforming. The fruit is known and seen over time; that is, the test of our prayers is not the immediate emotional response but whether we truly grow in faith, hope, and love. And what we learn, experientially, is that Jesus does not just give us food and drink; he *is* our food and drink. What we experience is not the voice of Jesus but Jesus himself.<sup>8</sup>

a) Read Isaiah 6:1-8

6) Questions to ponder:

- a) Do you *believe* God wants to have a vibrant relationship with you?
- b) What has been your experience in prayer?
- c) How would you describe prayer based on your experience?
- d) How have you seen your life transformed?

<sup>3</sup> *Opening to God*. 36-38. Emphasis in original.

<sup>4</sup> *The Voice of Jesus*. 163. Emphasis in original.

<sup>5</sup> *Opening to God*. 38, 113.

<sup>6</sup> *The Voice of Jesus*. 178.

<sup>7</sup> *Opening to God*. 113.

<sup>8</sup> *The Voice of Jesus*. 178. Emphasis in original. In the coming weeks we will examine our role—our act of will—in participating with God in our transformation.

7:00	Closing Prayer

Further reading:

- *The Bible*
- Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith*. Crossway Books. 1994.
- Green, Thomas H. *Opening to God: A Guide to Prayer*. Ave Maria Press. 2007 printing.
- Keirse, David. *Please Understand Me II*. Prometheus Nemesis Book Company. 1998.
- Smith, Gordon T. *The Voice of Jesus*. Intersity Press. 2003.
- Willard, Dallas. *Hearing God*. Intersity Press. 1999.