

Prayer

(Slide #1)

Now I lay me down to sleep

I pray the Lord my soul to keep

If I should die before I wake

I pray the Lord my soul to take!!!!

Can you believe that? It is a child's bedtime prayer that someone taught us and some of us taught our children!!!

I am horrified that I did this! I wonder if this bedtime prayer frightened me.....probably!

Some of us learned to pray from our parents or even grandparents. Some of us learned to pray at Sunday School or

church. How did you learn to pray? As I alluded to last week, we have some un-learning to do.

I grew up in a home where faith and church were important. I grew up thinking that prayer is something that happened at bed time, or special occasion meals, church, or tragedy. That's it, that's all.

Eyes were to be closed. Head bowed. Often times hands in the 'praying hands' position.

I was taught to pray for things – a good night's sleep, sick people, safety, and food. I had a long litany of God Blesses.

God bless Nana and Grandad, Mum and Dad, my sister, Uncle Ben and Aunt Joan, and then by name each of my 8 cousins, and then by name all our horses and ponies and dog. Prayer

was a shopping list of Thank You and Please Bless and Protect.

Amen

Does that ring any bells with you?

Then there was a period of time when I was taught the correct way to pray.

(Slide #2) Quiet yourself

(Slide #3) Read Scripture

(Slide #4) Prayer of Adoration - Oh God you are amazing

(Slide #5) Prayer of Contrition - Lord forgive me

(Slide #6) Petition and Intercession - Please heal my friend

(Slide #7) Thanksgiving - Thank you Lord

We were taught that those were the essential ingredients and the order of an authentic prayer.....the only kind that God would respond to.

When were we ever taught that we could pray any time, any where, under any conditions? When were we ever taught that prayer is simply a conversation with God? Conversations can be gentle and quiet or quite lively. Is your relationship with God such that you can talk to God anywhere, anytime in the midst of anything? Do your eyes need to be closed? Your hands folded? Quiet all around?

Think for a moment about your conversations with a close friend? What factors limit those? Why should your conversations with God be any different?

Some say that God always answers our prayers, it is just that His answer might be (Slide #8) Yes, No, or Not Now. What do you think of that? Why would God ever say, “No I will not heal your cancer?” Why would God ever say, “Yes, I will end your suffering....but not now?”

Traditional Western religious philosophy teaches us to pray to a God outside of ourselves, external. We ask Him to come down from on high and do something for us. (Slide #9)

Western religious philosophy - God is external, on high

Eastern religious philosophy teaches us that the Divine is already in us. Our job is to acknowledge His presence and ask that power to manifest **in us** and **through us** to give us the strength to do whatever it is we need to do...to know what to do. (Slide #10) Eastern religious philosophy - God is within us

Do you believe that God lives within you?

Think about your prayer life for a moment. How many of your prayers would you say are 'results oriented'? There is something you want so you pray in order to get it. Are many of the prayers you pray like that?

So after a significant amount of 'unlearning', I now understand Prayer differently than I used to. I might not be right, but it is where I am on this leg of the journey.

I begin by acknowledging to myself and to God, that I am a sinner. I am flawed. I am filled with imperfections and there are so many times during the day that I fail or refuse to live according to God's will for my life.

I work from the position that my definition of God is Divine Mystery. That somehow, part of what God is lives within me -

lowly, imperfect me. I pray to a God that is out there in the universe somehow, in every other living being, somehow, in the beauty and wonder of creation, somehow, and yet somehow, also in me. I can't see or hear or smell or touch God. I can't prove anything I believe with a mathematical equation, or irrefutable logic. But in faith, I believe it.

Somewhere in that conversation, which is how I pray to God, it could be the beginning or middle or end, I thank God for loving even unworthy me. God knows my strengths and my weaknesses. Somewhere in the conversation, I assure myself that God knows me, and knows the desires of my heart, that God somehow knows what I want and what I need. All the while I have a strong sense that I am not alone. That I am never alone. That God accompanies me closer than my closest friend. God is always somehow with me and I am somehow always in

God's presence. I can't prove any of this, but I have faith this is so.

And then with words or just thoughts, I share what is on my mind and heart. I thank the Divine presence. And then I shut up. I allow there to be quiet, and hopefully peace. And I go about my day.

For me that conversation, spoken or unspoken, is prayer -a deep conversation with a deep friend who, in Spirit lives within me.

A person goes to a psychologist, "Here is my problem, what should I do?" The counsellor says, "This is what you should do. Now go and do it. And don't forget to pay me for my time and expertise." But that is the psychologist's solution to the client's problem. The client's circumstances are unique

to them. They are supposed to apply someone else's solution using their unique and limited skill set. What are the chances of that having any success? Almost always, the client knows already what they should do - how to resolve their dilemma. What they don't know, is that they know. The solution is already there within them. They don't know that, but a good therapist can help them get there.

I believe prayer is mulling something over with that inner spirit, asking the questions, stating the situation, or the problem, and then just sitting quietly, knowing that the answer will come. It is already there. Spirit just has to quiet our hearts and minds that we might become aware, and come to terms with the answer.

The conversation I call prayer, requires the quieting of mind, body, and spirit...that we might allow the voice of the Divine within speak to us.

God bless you on your journey

Amen