

# **PRAYER - FINDING THE HEART'S TRUE HOME**

*by* Richard Foster

God has graciously allowed me to catch a glimpse into His heart, and I want to share with you what I have seen. Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. He *aches* over our distance and preoccupation. He *mourns* that we do not draw near to Him. He *grieves* that we have forgotten Him. He *weeps* over our obsession with muchness and manyness. He *longs* for our presence.

And He is inviting you - and me - to come home, to come home to where we belong, to come home to that for which we were created. His arms are stretched out wide to receive us. His heart is enlarged to take us in.

For too long we have been in a far country: a country of noise and hurry and crowds, a country of climb and push and shove, a country of frustration and fear and intimidation. And He welcomes us home: home to serenity and peace and joy, home to friendship and fellowship and openness, home to intimacy and acceptance and affirmation.

We do not need to be shy. He invites us into the living room of His heart, where we can put on old slippers and share freely. He invites us into the kitchen of His friendship, where chatter and batter mix in good fun. He invites us into the dining room of His strength, where we can feast to our heart's delight. He invites us into the study of His wisdom, where we can learn and grow and stretch and ask all the questions we want. He invites us into the workshop of His creativity, where we can be co-laborers with Him, working together to determine the outcomes of events. He invites us into the bedroom of His rest, where new peace is found and where we can be naked and vulnerable and free. It is also the place of deepest intimacy, where we know and are known to the fullest.

The key to this home, this heart of God - is prayer. Perhaps you have never prayed before except in anguish or terror. It may be that the only time the divine name has been on your lips has been in angry expletives. Never mind. I am here to tell you that the Father's heart is open wide – you are welcome to come in.

Perhaps you do not believe in prayer. You may have tried to pray and were profoundly disappointed and disillusioned. You seem to have little faith, or none. It does not matter. The Father's heart is open wide – you are welcome to come in.

Perhaps you are bruised and broken by the pressures of life. Others have wronged you, and you feel scarred for life. You have old, painful memories that have never been healed. You avoid prayer because you feel too distant, too unworthy, too defiled. Do not despair. The Father's heart is open wide – you are welcome to come in.

Perhaps you have prayed for many years, but the words have grown brittle and cold. Little ever happens anymore. God seems remote and inaccessible. Listen to me. The Father's heart is open wide – you are welcome to come in.

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Perhaps prayer is the delight of your life. You have lived in the divine realm for a long time and can attest to its goodness. But you long for more: more power, more love, more of God in your life. Believe me. The Father's heart is open wide – you too are welcome to come higher up, and deeper in.

If the key is prayer, the door is Jesus Christ. How good of God to provide us a way into His heart. He knows that we are stiff-necked and hard-hearted, so He has provided a means of entrance.

Jesus, the Christ, lived a perfect life, died in our place, and rose victorious over all the dark powers so that we might live through Him. This is wonderfully good news. No longer do we have to stand outside, barred from nearness to God by our rebellion. We may now enter through the door of God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

Loving is the relationship of prayer. To be effective pray-ers, we need to be effective lovers. In 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner,' Samuel Coleridge declares, "He prayeth well, who loveth well." Coleridge, of course, got this idea from the Bible, for its pages breathe the language of divine love. REAL PRAYER COMES NOT FROM GRITTING OUR TEETH, BUT FROM FALLING IN LOVE. This is why the great literature on prayer is frankly and wonderfully sensual. "The Trinity," writes Juliana of Norwich, "is our everlasting lover." "Jesus, lover of my soul," pleads Charles Wesley, "Let me to thy bosom fly."

One day a friend of mine was walking through a shopping mall with his two-year-old son. The child was in a particularly cantankerous mood, fussing and fuming. The frustrated father tried everything to quiet his son, but nothing seemed to help. The child simply would not obey. Then, under some special inspiration, the father scooped up his son, and holding him close to his chest, began singing an impromptu love song. None of the words rhymed. He sang off key. And yet, as best he could, this father began sharing his heart. "I love you," he sang. "I'm so glad you're my boy. You make me happy; I like the way you laugh." On they went from one store to the next. Quietly the father continued singing off key and making up words that did not rhyme. The child relaxed and became still, listening to this strange and wonderful song. Finally, they finished shopping and went to the car. As the father opened the door and prepared to buckle his son into the car seat, the child lifted his head and said, simply, – "Sing it to me again, daddy! Sing it to me again!"

Prayer is a little like that. With simplicity of heart we allow ourselves to be gathered up into the arms of the Father and let Him sing His love song over us.