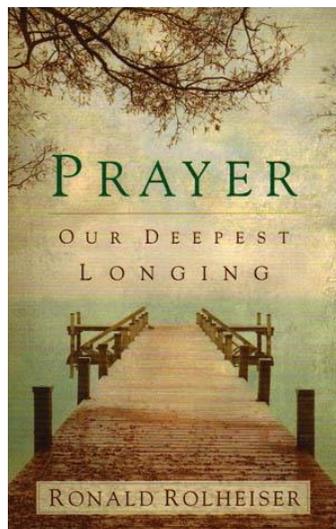


A Life of Liturgy
A Year of Formation and Worship
Lent 2018

*A Collaborative Effort of the Northwest Milwaukee Catholic Parishes
Mother of Good Counsel + Saint Catherine + Saint Sebastian*

A Study Guide for *“Prayer: Our Deepest Longing”* by Ronald Rolheiser



A question to ponder this Lent: What does living freely mean to you?
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Session 1 - Struggling in Prayer

To begin read Luke 10:38-42

As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary [who] sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

Reflect on the passage quietly. Share: Recall a passage or phrase from the Scripture reading, then spend a few minutes silently reflecting on these words and what they mean in your life right now.

Discussion

1. *Most days, we don't pray simply because we don't quite get around to it (p. 1).*
 - What are some of the things that stand in the way of your taking time for prayer each day?
2. Sometimes daily routines get so busy we shut out opportunities for prayer.
 - What have you done when stuck in a rut with prayer?
 - Did you abandon your daily practice or try a new way of praying?
 - How can boredom enrich your prayer?
3. *We tell God what we think God wants to hear (p. 6).*
 - What would you most like to tell God right now, without any boundaries or preconceptions?
 - How do you picture God in your life?
 - A parent who we must satisfy?
 - A judge who looks for right and wrong?
 - A companion who accepts without question?
 - A guide who challenges and encourages?
 - Something else?
4. *In the Hebrew ideal of perfection, to be perfect simply means to walk with God, despite our flaws (p. 9).*
 - What flaws are you trying to accept in your life?
 - How might they become part of your prayer?
 - Compare the concept of perfect in Hebrew and contemporary culture. How can trying to be perfect get in the way of prayer?
5. *Trust and enthusiasm are our nakedness, our bare flesh (p. 11).*
 - How can I develop or improve my level of trust in God this week?
 - Can I make "being more enthusiastic about my faith" a Lenten goal?
6. *We are attentive to so many things that, ultimately, we aren't attentive to anything (p. 12).*
 - Name three things that interfere with your attempts to pray.
 - How can I shut out distractions when I pray?
7. What questions do you have about prayer in general? Hold these for future weeks.

Prayer Practice This Week: In the next week try praying in several different ways

- Take a walk and focus on the presence of God.
- Sit quietly for a while; just be silent.
- Meditate on a holy word or phrase.
- Write a few spontaneous prayers, expressing your feelings to God in an honest way.

Closing Prayer : God of all creation, enlighten me that I may see you in all I do. Send your Spirit into the patterns of my life, that I may find freshness and clarity in the rituals and routines of my days. Your love sustains me, O Lord. Amen.

Session 2 - Hearing God's Voice in Prayer

A question to ponder this Lent: What does living freely mean to you? To begin, read 1st Kings 19: 7-13 *The angel of the LORD came back a second time, touched Elijah, and said, "Get up and eat or the journey will be too much for you!" He got up, ate, and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb. There he came to a cave, where he took shelter. But the word of the LORD came to him: Why are you here, Elijah? He answered: "I have been most zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, but the Israelites have forsaken your covenant. They have destroyed your altars and murdered your prophets by the sword. I alone remain, and they seek to take my life." Then the LORD said: Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will pass by. There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the LORD—but the LORD was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake—but the LORD was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire—but the LORD was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. A voice said to him, Why are you here, Elijah?*

Reflect on the passage quietly. Share: Recall a passage or phrase from the Scripture reading, then spend a few minutes silently reflecting on these words and what they mean in your life right now.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. *We need to discern the unique cadence of God's voice (p. 16).*

What are some of the ways you most clearly hear God's voice?

2. What are your greatest fears concerning God and faith?

- What fears do you associate with prayer?

3. *Experiencing the unconditional love of God is what prayer, in the end, is all about (p. 18).*

- Has there been someone in your life who you felt (or knew) loved you unconditionally?
- How has the love shown to you influenced your attitude toward God?

4. *Faith says that God is real. We are in safe hands (p. 22).*

- Does believing this is true eliminate all fear and anxiety? Why or why not?

5. *The power [the apostles] admired and wanted most was Jesus' power to love and forgive his enemies (p. 22).*

- How is the power to love and forgive connected to prayer?
- Have you attempted or experienced prayer in anger? What happened?

6. *Certain service... in fact... can be prayer. (47)*

- What place does solitude have in your life?
- Have you ever experienced service toward others that, in the end, became prayer for you?
- Discuss ways in which service can be prayer.
- Discuss ways service can be an avoidance of true prayer.

Give the group opportunity to share questions, concerns, or significant statements related to this chapter. Work to keep the discussion focused on the topic of this chapter.

Prayer Practice

- Look for ways to find solitude in your life this week.
- Get up a bit earlier in the morning, or leave your work for a few minutes during the day to take a walk or just sit quietly.
- Empty your mind of thoughts and make room for the voice of God to enter. Nurture silence, at least for a brief time.
- Think of Lent as a passage through a desert of solitude.

Closing Prayer:

God of all creation, you delight in me, your flawed yet beautiful child. I will make a place for you in my mind and heart. There I will rest in your peace and celebrate your boundless love and kindness. You are my stream of living water, O Lord. Amen.

Session 3: Understanding Priestly Prayer

A question to ponder this Lent: What does living freely mean to you? To begin, read Luke 11:1-10

He was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test."*

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,' and he says in reply from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.' I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence. And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Reflect on the passage quietly.

Share: Recall a passage or phrase from the Scripture reading, then spend a few minutes silently reflecting on these words and what they mean in your life right now.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Based on your own experience and the author's observations, how would you define the difference between devotional (or affective) prayer and liturgical (or priestly) prayer?
 - At this time in your life, what form of prayer has more power?
2. *Too often we cannot enjoy what is legitimate and given us by God (p. 31).*
 - Think of something you truly enjoy.
 - What prevents us from fully appreciating God's simple gifts?
 - How is it a celebration of God's gracious love?
3. *Good liturgy is good psychology (p. 32).*
 - What is your usual experience of Sunday liturgy here at Saint Sebs / Saint Catherine / Mother of Good Counsel?
 - Is it joyful and uplifting?
 - Uninspiring and rote?
 - A combination of positive and negative?
 - How is this affected by what you bring to the Mass?

4. *The unity within that body (Body of Christ) is not mystical or analogical, it's real (p. 34).*

- What does it mean to be a member of the body of Christ?
- In what ways is prayer an essential element of the Body of Christ?

5. *The most private spiritual and moral battles that go on inside one's conscience have an effect for good or bad on all of humanity. (p. 34)*

- What are the "antibodies" that create a healthy immune system within the body of Christ

Give the group opportunity to share questions, concerns, or significant statements related to this chapter. Work to keep the discussion focused on the topic of this chapter.

Prayer Practice

If we desire to convert the world to Jesus Christ, we must first be converted ourselves.

- What change in your life is necessary so that you can remove the barriers between your prayer life and your daily routine?
- Decide on one small steps can you make to begin integrating prayer into the ordinary routine of your life.

Closing Prayer

God of all creation,

let me be your hands and your heart in the world.

I offer my service to you and to my neighbor,
echoing the love and care you show to all.

You make the sun to shine and the rain to fall on good and bad alike;
help me to be more like you.

Amen.

Session 4 Practicing Affective Prayer

A question to ponder this Lent: What does living freely mean to you?

To begin, read Psalm 139:1-12

*LORD, you have probed me, you know me:
you know when I sit and stand;
you understand my thoughts from afar.
You sift through my travels and my rest;
with all my ways you are familiar.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
LORD, you know it all.
Behind and before you encircle me
and rest your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
far too lofty for me to reach.
Where can I go from your spirit?
From your presence, where can I flee?
If I ascend to the heavens, you are there;
if I lie down in Sheol, there you are.
If I take the wings of dawn
and dwell beyond the sea,
Even there your hand guides me,
your right hand holds me fast.
If I say, "Surely darkness shall hide me,
and night shall be my light"—
Darkness is not dark for you,
and night shines as the day.
Darkness and light are but one.*

Reflect on the passage quietly.

Share: Recall a passage or phrase from the Scripture reading, then spend a few minutes silently reflecting on these words and what they mean in your life right now.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. *After his resurrection, Jesus asks Mary Magdalene: What are you looking for? (p. 38).*
 - If Jesus were to ask you that same question today, how would you answer?
 - What role does prayer play in your answer?
2. *Ultimately, prayer is about love (p. 39).*
 - Describe a time in your life when you have clearly known that God loves you?
 - How did prayer influence the awareness that you are loved?
3. *In prayer you turn your eyes toward heaven (p. 41)*
 - In prayer, what do you see?
 - How do you turn off the distractions so that your vision of heaven is more clear?
4. Recall the Scripture reading in Session 1 (Luke 10:38-42).
 - Is your life at this time more like Martha or like Mary?
 - Share one concrete action you have tried to find balance?

5. *Contemplative prayer is the answer to restlessness (p. 43).*

- In what ways does restlessness effect your life and attitude?
- What kind of calmness do you seek in prayer?
- What happens when restlessness overpowers your attempts at prayer?

Give the group opportunity to share questions, concerns, or significant statements related to this chapter. Work to keep the discussion focused on the topic of this chapter.

Prayer Practice

Contemplation is a way of being present to what's really inside our own experience (p. 44).

During the next few days, try to focus, as often as you can, on being in the present moment. Truly taste your food as you eat; really listen to a friend as she talks to you; be aware of the sounds or the silence around you when you sit for a moment and pray.

Closing Prayer

God of all creation,
you animate my being with your goodness and love.
I praise you for your wondrous world
and the generosity of your gifts to us.
You are God of all;
open my eyes to see you in everything.
Amen.

Session 5 Growing to Maturity in Prayer

A question to ponder this Lent: What does living freely mean to you?

To begin, read Genesis 32:23-29

That night, however, Jacob arose, took his two wives, with the two maidservants and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he got them and brought them across the wadi and brought over what belonged to him,

Jacob was left there alone.

Then a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. 26*

When the man saw that he could not prevail over him,

he struck Jacob's hip at its socket,

so that Jacob's socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him.

The man then said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob said, "I will not let you go until you bless me."

Reflect on the passage quietly.

Share: Recall a passage or phrase from the Scripture reading, then spend a few minutes silently reflecting on these words and what they mean in your life right now.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. *God, as a Jewish axiom puts it, is never in a hurry (p. 50)*
 - How do you reconcile the prevailing culture which tells us we should have everything now with the promises of a God who asks us to live in a lifelong patience?
2. When have you wrestled with God?
 - When have your desires come into conflict with God's plan?
3. *We live lives of tortured complexity. In each of us there is both a saint and a sinner... (p. 53)*
 - Which of the demons mentioned on p. 53 (or another you experience) is most troubling to you at this point in your life?
 - How can prayer affect the way you deal with this demon?
4. *Real despair is the belief that nothing new can happen to us (p. 57).*
 - Have you ever found yourself feeling this way – in a way, trapped?
 - If so, how did it affect you?
 - What brought about a change?
 - Did prayer have a role in the change?
6. *God is our real mother (p. 64).*
 - How might seeing God as both father and mother change your images of God?
 - Do you relate more to one than to the other? Why?
 - In what ways does your image of God effect the way you pray?

Give the group opportunity to share questions, concerns, or significant statements related to this chapter. Work to keep the discussion focused on the topic of this chapter.

Prayer Practice

As you pray this week, consider different images of God.

- Try to find an image of God that is different than how you usually view God.
- Use a piece of artwork or a holy card as inspiration, or look through Scripture (the Psalms are wonderful inspiration) for other imagery.
- Contemplate on this image as you pray this week.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God,
you are my rock and my salvation.
Hear me when I cry to you,
in sorrow and in joy,
in celebration and in mourning,
in darkness and in light.
Guide me in your paths,
and teach me the ways of your wisdom and truth.
Amen.

Session 6 Listening to God's Heartbeat

A question to ponder this Lent: What does living freely mean to you?

To begin, read John 13:20-26

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

When he had said this, Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, "Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me."

The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant.

One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved,⁵ was reclining at Jesus' side.

So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant.

He leaned back against Jesus' chest and said to him, "Master, who is it?"

Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I hand the morsel⁶ after I have dipped it."

So he dipped the morsel and handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot.

Reflect on the passage quietly.

Share: Recall a passage or phrase from the Scripture reading, then spend a few minutes silently reflecting on these words and what they mean in your life right now.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. *The ideal disciple is the one who is attuned to Christ's heartbeat (p. 65).*

- What does being a disciple of Christ mean to you?
- Have you ever listened for Christ's "heartbeat" in your prayer?
- What was the experience?
- How would your prayer – and your life – change if you were more attuned to Christ's heartbeat?

2. *To be mild is not necessarily seen as an admirable trait in our culture. Yet John of the Cross says: "We will begin to remember the primordial touch of God when, through solitude, we empty our hearts of all that is not mild." (p. 66).*

- What is your first reaction to this statement?
- In what ways would your life be different if you could "empty your heart of all that is not mild"?

3. *We need to connect with God. We need prayer (Preface - p. viii).*

- In what ways has your reflection and discussions helped you connect more deeply with God?
- What more do you need to do?

4. *You have to show up for prayer and you have to show up regularly. (Preface - p. viii).*

- How has your reading and your involvement in discussion effected your attitude toward prayer?

5. What deep longing in your heart do you want to bring to God in prayer?

Prayer Practice

- This week, take some time to explore the deep place inside you where God first touched your spirit.
- Listen closely for God's heartbeat, and bring it to the surface as you can.
- Sit with Jesus as you reflect on his Passion and Death.
- Make plans to celebrate Holy Thursday – Good Friday – Easter Vigil!
- Celebrate with Christ the power of Resurrection.

Closing Prayer

Lord, God,
I stand before you as a child of the earth.
See in my openness, the world's openness;
in my infidelity, the world's infidelity;
in my sincerity, the world's sincerity;
in my hypocrisy, the world's hypocrisy;
in my generosity, the world's generosity;
in my selfishness, the world's selfishness;
in my attentiveness, the world's attentiveness;
in my distraction, the world's distraction;
in my desire to praise you, the world's desire to praise you.

I stand with you under the cross,
affirming my love for the one who gave all for me and for the world.
I ask you to bless and to stretch my heart so that it can,
like you, hold and bless everything the world you love so much.

Amen.