

*WHY DO PEOPLE PRAY?
WHAT DO WE PRAY FOR?
HOW DO WE PRAY?*

Religion writer Jim Castelli set out to answer these profound questions by talking with twenty-six spiritual leaders and practitioners representing the wide spectrum of faith in America today. *How I Pray* gathers these remarkable conversations into a thought-provoking, personal, and deeply meaningful volume.

In *How I Pray* Christians and Jews, Muslims and Buddhists, Native Americans and Mormons, and members of many other faiths describe the intimate and unique ways in which they pray—and what prayer means to them. Catholic priest and novelist Andrew M. Greeley reveals that he prays to a womanly God because it enhances the intimacy of his spiritual encounters. Pollster George Gallup, Jr., considers his prayer life a dynamic two-way conversation with God. Lakota Sioux medicine man High Star shares the fascinating prayer rituals that his people have practiced for centuries.

Infused with honesty and passion, warmth, and a deep reverence for life's spirituality, *How I Pray* is sure to be a source of illumination and delight for readers of all religious backgrounds.

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EDITED BY
JIM CASTELLI
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PEOPLE OF
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THAT MOST SACRED
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FAITH...

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JIM CASTELLI

JOAN BROWN CAMPBELL



The Reverend Joan Brown Campbell is general secretary of the National Council of Churches (NCC). She is an ordained minister in both the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the American Baptist Churches, and is the first woman to serve as NCC general secretary. She has been closely associated with the NCC for more than twenty years and was previously associate director of the Greater Cleveland Interchurch Council and pastor of Euclid Baptist Church in Cleveland. Campbell has three grown children and four grandchildren, and is a member and elder of the Park Avenue Christian Church in New York City.

I think of prayer as a conversation with God. For me it's a deeply spiritual experience. Prayer is always trusting; you open yourself to an immediate intimacy in your relationship to God. I'm a Disciple, and Disciples don't have written prayer books. What is very much part of the Disciple tradition is to pray from the mind and heart.

Prayer is so much a part of my daily life. On occasion I will have an actual conscious time of prayer. But I also realize that many times during the day I will say, almost out loud, "Dear God, take this from me." In my job there are a lot of unsolvable problems. So I will sometimes say to myself, "Dear God, take this, work with this, for I don't know what the answers are; help me to know." And there is a lot of prayer in my life that is much more a kind of conversation that is frequent and often at times of joy. I'm very conscious of my years with the black

church, where people say a deep-felt "Thank you, Jesus" when something good happens. When something happens that has a sort of profound human quality to it, I will find myself saying, "Thank you, Jesus." And I will often pray because I have so much writing to do. To achieve inspiration, I sometimes realize that I am almost in a state of prayer. In fact the writing of a sermon itself is almost a prayer. It's not an academic exercise, but more of a prayer time when you are searching for the inspiration. I feel writing sermons is really a major responsibility, for you are working with the word of God.

Every day I have a kind of disciplined time when I read from the Scripture. And every year at Lent I use a little book put out by the Consultation on Church Union called *Liberation and Unity*, written largely by black church leaders. I have a particular lack of information about the Orthodox churches, so this year I've used a couple of prayer guides that our Orthodox staff have given me. I also use their Holy Week guide. Because I'm out so much speaking on a Sunday, I have very little congregational life of my own. It's the first time in my life I have not had real roots in a congregation, so I follow the lectionary for my own edification. During the week I will sometimes read the lessons that are part of the lectionary because it keeps me in touch with what the Scriptures would be if I were regularly in a congregation; the lectionary takes me through the church year. Oh, and I also use the Episcopal Prayer Book a lot; I'm very, very fond of it. It is their gift to all of us. I have many times in which I must pray publicly, and for those times when I'm without inspiration for a public prayer, the Episcopal Prayer Book never fails to be helpful.

My prayer life has changed over the years. When I was younger, I sometimes felt my prayers were not answered because, in a way, I did not have enough life experience

to know what it meant for them to *be* answered. God never answers our prayers in a direct way; cause-and-effect are not immediate in prayer. Now as I look back over my life, I can say that my prayers *have* been answered. One of my prayers has always been that I might have a meaningful life, that I might have a full life, that I might be given things to do that make a difference. My father, when I was a child, was always saying, "Much has been given you, much will be required of you." I remember that being said to me over and over again. I suppose the psychiatrists wouldn't like that so much today, but in fact it was for me a constant thing I heard as a child, and it was not negative. *You've been given a lot of gifts, and much is going to be required of you.* Because of that I would always pray that I would find work to do and a life to lead that was worthy of what I had been given.

As I look back over my life, I see the way in which my prayers have been answered, although it's not the way I would have designed it. But they do weave something of a tapestry that makes sense. And I think once you get older, you say, "Thank God that I *wasn't* allowed to design it." I have a much better life for having been guided than if I had myself been able, every step of the way, to do what I thought was the right thing to do. But I only know that in looking back. My father died very young, and I remember praying that he would live. I see now that that was not to be. At the time, though, it feels very much as though your immediate prayer is not answered. So we need to remember something else my father told me. Once after I prayed for something that didn't happen, he said, "Well, this is not the purpose. You don't pray so that you get something, you pray so that you *receive* something—but it's not the immediate thing that you ask for." I have found myself straining to accept that. There are times when I don't want to add to my prayer,

"Your will be done," because I really want it *my* way. And that's pretty normal. But I've certainly learned in my life that God's way is not always my way, and thank goodness it isn't. Still, it's usually in retrospect that you believe and accept this.

I think we do pray our deepest, most profound prayers when much is at risk; it's not an accident that we're very close to God in times of trouble. I have said sometimes in sermons that it's no accident that Jesus prayed in the face of the cross. We pray our "Jesus deepest" prayers and our most heartfelt prayers when we are facing imminent danger. You pray when you feel vulnerable and when you need more than you can bring to a situation. In this job I feel that all the time. In a sense it's such an undoable job that I find myself often saying, "God, this is not doable, help me to see the way through some of this." I think a way is made. You can get discouraged doing ecumenical work because it's very slow and without a lot of rewards. But I've never become desperate or felt like giving up, and that is very much because of my own prayer life. I feel very much that God will be ready for us, and we can tap into that power. What's there pulls us that way. It doesn't matter what we do or don't do, unity is going to come. I couldn't have done this work for thirty years or more if I didn't have some feeling that unity of all life was God's will for this world.

So God is, for me, very much a source of strength and power. There are days when I literally think that I would not get through the day if I didn't have a feeling that I could pray and be heard. It isn't even about receiving an answer, it's about *knowing* that there's a force there. For me it's much more a sense of power-for-good than it is of seeing a person.

I have absolutely felt God's presence when I prayed, but I don't have an image of God in my mind. People al-

ways ask me that as a woman: "Do you think of God as male or female?" and I never really do. I don't call up an image. I do feel a sense of power; there's a presence I can feel. But I've never been so comfortable with the paintings of Jesus that we have, so I never call them up in my mind.

I often think about my father when I pray. He was a doctor and he was very, very rarely at home. But he always was there at night, and he was the one—for reasons I don't even know, now—who would sit with us at night. During the Second World War—I was probably six or seven years old when the war began, maybe older—people got into the conflict gradually. It didn't start with everybody. So my father and I would first pray for the Italians and the Ethiopians. Then I can remember when we added the Germans and the French and the Japanese. My prayer time was sort of like my lesson in world history. Always my father said, "You must pray for both sides; you can't pray for just our side." But the list got very long as more and more countries got involved, and so finally one night he said, "Let's just pray for the Allies and the Axis."

My father taught me so much about prayer. I was not a very big kid when he said, "Let me tell you about prayer. If you're on the railroad track, and you are tied down, and the train is coming, pray to God that that train will stop. If you are on the railroad track and you are not tied down, don't pray to God; get up and move off the track if the train is coming." That lesson has stayed in my mind. *Don't bother God with things you're expected to do with your own human intelligence.* What it results in for me is that prayer comes up at times when I feel that I've used what I've been given and there needs to be a little help beyond what I have to offer.

I was very sick once with a heart attack, and prayer in

such times affects your relationship to God. I was one of those who was technically dead for seconds. I remember waking up and having everybody around my bed. Many people say that once you go through that, you are never again afraid of death. Yet there's a lot you *would* miss; I think you give up life only with very great difficulty. There are children and grandchildren and tasks that have to be completed. Those are things that give you life. But having really faced death made me realize I wasn't afraid of it.

I've spent most of my life on social justice. Many, many of my public prayers—and that doesn't mean that they're not also personal prayers—have been related to the issues of justice and peace, particularly to the issue of race. I found myself, even this morning, thinking about the people in Los Angeles (awaiting the verdict in the second Rodney King trial) and praying that God will provide peace in that city and see that justice is done. I pray for Bill Clinton, because I think he's trying to bring justice to a land where there's been terrific miscarriages of justice. I've been to the Middle East, and I pray for all of them there. You don't forget the people in the Middle East once you've been there and seen their situation. I worked with Martin Luther King, so a lot of my prayers are related to social justice. For me social issues are also personal issues. I don't separate them one from the other.

I think prayer is as important as life itself. I pray for the people around me, for my family in times of sadness or joy. I am invested in teaching my grandchildren to pray—not that their parents aren't also—but I would be very sad if my grandchildren didn't have some knowledge of God and that prayer wasn't part of their lives. I have not had such an easy life, but it's prayer that's made up for it. As I think about it, I'm a little teary; prayer has been in my life a very real source of strength. God is not

indifferent. God is close and intimate. I covet that for everyone, but especially for my grandchildren, where my personal prayer and my special love converge. I guess I believe that prayer is the natural language of love.

SANDRA GOODWIN CLOPINE



Sandra Goodwin Clopine, a former missionary, is Coordinator for the National Prayer Center of the Assemblies of God in Springfield, Missouri. She is also chair of the Women's Commission of the National Association of Evangelicals. She is a member of Delta Epsilon Chi, the honor society for the American Association of Bible Colleges, and is secretary of the North American chapter of the International Pentecostal Press Association. She and her husband, Myron, have five children and fourteen grandchildren.

Prayer is intimate communication with the Lord. To put it in very simple terms, it's just talking with the Lord; we don't need to use high-sounding words or try to structure our sentences to impress anybody. I like to think of the Lord as sitting in a chair near me and I am conversing with Him.

To me the purpose of praying is to move the prayer into God's perspective. Theologian John Huess said that prayer was more a matter of clearing away the underbrush to get a view than it was of making a list of demands. I really feel that way. I think the more time we spend in prayer, the more we begin to see things from God's perspective. By God's perspective I mean that He has the whole view of everything and we see it from one little time frame. I believe that as He sees the whole picture, He knows what is best in each situation. We can't always see it that way, but I think that as we pray, He helps us see more clearly. What we cannot see He helps us accept.

Prayer involves the reading of God's word. I usually like to have the Bible near me, either to read something before I pray or when I feel directed toward a certain passage. Prayer is a two-way communication. Not only do we speak to our Heavenly Father, but He speaks to us. Prayer involves submitting ourselves to God and presenting our requests to Him. As we listen for instruction, we then thank Him for allowing us to be used in some way to help meet the need. We don't assume that God is going to "zap" us with an answer. Rather He will reveal to us ways we can be a part of the answer.

I have different ways of praying. My devotional time in the morning is different from my more structured prayers, when I focus on various aspects of society, my community, my family, and more personal needs, such as the work that I do. For instance on Sunday my prayer focuses on ministry to the Lord: my church's services and pastoral staff, my family's involvement in church, my personal relationship with the Lord, and my expectations for meeting Him in His house. As an ordained minister I pray for ministries the Lord has opened to me. Most of the time I use spontaneous prayers, or at times I read prayers from the Bible. Sometimes I feel impressed to write a prayer, it's as if I am writing a letter to the Lord.

Mondays my prayer focus is about my work needs, our schools, and those who teach our nation's children. Tuesdays I pray about ministry to women. Our denominational women's organization has a day-of-prayer emphasis on Tuesdays for the more than 400,000 women and girls involved. We pray for leadership at all levels and for issues women are burdened with, such as abortion, pornography, family abuse, AIDS, the breakup of the home, and many others.

Each Wednesday my focus is on national, state, and local government. I pray for legislators, pending legisla-

tion, economic conditions, and current events. Scripture admonishes us to pray "for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:2, NIV).

Thursdays are structured for praying about winning the world to Christ. I pray for foreign missionaries, Bible schools around the world, and governments that hinder the spread of the Gospel. On Fridays I pray for my own denomination, its executive leaders, pastors and congregations, and departmental programs for children, youth, and adults. On Saturdays my prayer focus is Mission America: home missionaries, intercultural ministries, inner cities, ministries on our college campuses, ministries to people of various addictions, new churches that are being established, and my own neighbors.

My morning devotional time, which averages about fifteen minutes each day, is a time in which I do not use a notebook. During my longer, more structured prayers I often use a simple spiral notebook to write down things that come to mind while I pray. People's names may come to my mind and I like to make note of them, for I feel those people may need special prayer. I also like to write down those Scriptures that come to mind. Later I can go back and be reminded of what I felt at the time of prayer. I also may write a couple of lines, or sometimes a whole page, about my feelings at the time.

In my devotional time each morning I like to use what I call the ABCs of prayer:

A. Adore Him for who He is. In other words, worship Him as God Almighty rather than come to Him with a big list of wants.

B. Believe Him for what He says. Have faith in His word.

C. Confess my need of all He has; commit my will to His.

Sometimes I read one of my favorite prayers, the Lord's Prayer or the prayer in Saint John, chapter 17. I also read other prayers, such as the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Besides my morning devotional time I pray at other times throughout the day. For example I have on my desk at work the birthdates of our church women's leaders across the nation. I pray for them from time to time. There are times while driving the car that I ask for the Lord's protection or pray for something that comes to my mind during the day. For me it is not a matter of going somewhere to kneel and pray but of just being impressed with something and praying at that very moment.

As a Pentecostal I sometimes pray out loud. I don't mean with a screaming voice, but just talking to the Lord, focusing on the Lord Himself. Many times it is more appropriate to pray silently. In our church services the corporate body often prays together. That can be done with one person leading and others standing in agreement with the prayer being prayed. Sometimes we are asked to break into groups of four to six and each share a request. We will either all pray together about that request or one by one. This may be done silently or it may be done by all of us together praying out loud. We feel it is helpful to personalize each need that is presented. I have been involved in what we call Prayer Walks, where we walk around a certain area or building with another person and pray in conversational tones as though we are talking with each other; actually we are talking to the Lord.

Often I pray with other people. We have a prayer meeting in our home about once a month for people in

our subdivision. Usually that involves praying with families about special needs in their homes and in our community. My husband and I pray and read the Bible together each day, and we usually pray with guests who come to our home to visit. Before they leave, we join hands and offer a short prayer. We also attend prayer meetings at our church.

In my private prayer time I sometimes pray in tongues. It's very uplifting and builds me up in my faith, as the Scripture indicates in the Book of Jude, verse 20: "But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." I feel I am drawn closer to the Lord in those times. Other times I feel a special heaviness on my heart, a burden for somebody or some situation. Many times I do not know what the situation is, and without planning to do so I begin praying in tongues. When we don't know what the problem is, the Bible tells us that the Spirit knows and prays through us: "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom. 8:26, NIV). After praying I feel a great satisfaction in my heart that the Lord has met the need in the way that He sees it even though I may not even know the details. Those prayers seem to have a special unction, an added dimension through which the Lord ministers to me, the pray-er, and to the one(s) for whom I am praying.

Prayer gives me a sense of peace even when I am in the midst of turmoil or something I cannot understand. At the conclusion of prayer I feel a peace in my heart, knowing that God has it all in His control. I have had those times when I have been completely overwhelmed in prayer by the simple fact that I was in the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I have been humbled by the fact that a human being can approach the

God that created the Universe, the God of total perfection. Sometimes I have been so completely overwhelmed that I find myself weeping, not even able to form words, and have prostrated myself on the floor with a sense of total unworthiness. I have never seen lights flashing, and never heard an audible voice speaking to me at those times, but they have been stamped on my heart as times that God met me in a very significant way.

Growing up, I knew only a little about prayer, but the two prayer meetings each week in my home church really helped establish me in the Lord and in prayer. Up until that time all I knew about prayer was that if you were in a very desperate circumstance, you could cry out to God, "Help me!" Later I learned that prayer was such a privilege and that as I prayed, I wanted to do more praying. I found that the Lord was a friend whom I wanted to be with often, and that strengthened my prayer life. And I learned that prayer was much more than a list of requests. Prayer has become a time of real enjoyment and personal fulfillment. When I was widowed at the age of twenty-six, I learned that prayer was not something I had to go someplace to do; there was an intimacy with the Lord so that anytime, day or night, I could look up to Him with a prayer for forgiveness or whatever else I felt at the particular moment. This kind of spontaneous, unplanned prayer has become a pattern of my life, and I have enjoyed it so much since then.

The newspaper and the TV news are real good sources of information to help us pray. Families can use some of those terrible news tragedies as opportunities to gather their children together and say, "Let's pray about what we've just seen (or read); let's pray for those people in that foreign country or city far away. Let's pray about some of the decisions being made in Washington, D.C. Let's pray about what's happening in Congress."

In speaking to others and in helping myself concerning prayer, I have used these three facts to keep on target:

1. Make a decision and share it. In other words let someone know you intend to pray today. My husband knows of my early-morning prayer time and helps me have that time available for prayer.
2. Make an appointment and keep it. Find a time that suits your schedule and be faithful to it each day. It may be early morning, it may be late at night, or it may be during the children's nap time. The time you choose is not important. The important thing is meeting God.
3. Make an expression and write it. You should keep fresh in your mind the things you were impressed with during your prayer time. I look back over prayer notebooks and find things long forgotten are great blessings today.

I feel that I have had some very definite answers to prayer. For instance when I was on the mission field, there were situations that held danger. At those times I prayed, and the Lord gave me His peace. He saw me through some situations that were pretty hectic. I have a personal feeling, however, that God answers *every* prayer, even though He may not do it the very way I have it programmed in my mind. Sometimes the answer may be "Not now." I may look back a month from now and see that God did answer the prayer I prayed, but maybe not exactly the way I had it planned. He did, however, through time, work it out, and only now can I see that His way was best. Or sometimes the answer may be a definite no. At the time it may be very difficult for us to see it as no. Yet we can go away from that prayer time having placed the request in God's hands and letting Him be in control of it.

I know very definitely I faced this when I lost my husband in Africa. We were new missionaries on the mission field just six weeks and were having our welcoming service when there was an explosion of a portable generator. My husband was severely burned. We placed him in a makeshift hospital room in a small village facility. There we learned he had a rare type of blood, and his life was much in jeopardy. I felt strongly that God would take care of him, for hundreds of people in Africa and in the States were praying for his healing. But he died one week after the accident.

That was of course the greatest crisis of my life and one that was very difficult to understand. We felt we were doing God's work and had gone where He had sent us. It took me some days to really see through that and to recognize in prayer that the Lord had another plan I knew nothing about. I realized I could not prevent what happened; neither could I let anger and bitterness possess my heart. In prayer the Lord enabled me to give this whole drama to Him and agree that He could make something good out of it. I saw it as total disaster, but He saw it with possibilities that only a wise, loving Heavenly Father could have.

God answered my prayer, but it took time. It also took a different direction from what I had hoped for. After staying in West Africa for about two years, my young daughter and I came home to the States. We remained here for nearly six years, then went back to work in the eastern part of Africa. Toward the end of our first term there we were invited to return to the area where we had previously served. We journeyed to West Africa for the dedication of a library that was a memorial to the fallen missionary. I met numbers of Africans who were involved in pastoral ministries and some in official capacities who told me that as youngsters, they had knelt at

my husband's grave to commit their lives to the Lord's service. They were grateful to God for the missionary who died in the line of duty. Although it was some years after the accident, I began to see God's answer to my prayer. He had indeed fashioned something significant out of what I considered to be total chaos.

As a widow I continued in missions and other areas of the Lord's service. I prayed many times for a godly companion with whom to share my life. God answered that prayer with a resounding yes. Twenty years after my loss He gave me a wonderful Christian husband who had lost his first wife to terminal illness. Our spouses had been related, so we knew each other well. Twenty years was not too long to wait for God's perfect will!

Let me be quick to say I have not learned everything I need to know about prayer. But I am enjoying my time with God, and I learn something new each day.

RICHARD J. FOSTER



Richard J. Foster teaches widely about spiritual life. He is founder and chair of Renovare, a spiritual-formation organization based in Wichita, Kansas, and Jack and Barbara Lee Distinguished Professor of Spiritual Formation at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California. He is the author of Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth (1978), which has sold more than one million copies and been translated into eight languages; The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex, and Power (1983); and Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home (1992). Foster, a Quaker, was professor of Theology and writer in residence at Friends University, in Wichita, from 1979 to 1992. He, his wife, Carolyn, and their two children Joel and Nathan live in Wichita.

Prayer is interacting with God about what God and I are doing together. This morning, for example, I went out and jogged; often I pray when I jog, and become aware of God. After a half an hour or so of that, I end up in a little prayer chapel I use while I'm staying at the university here. First I open my mind to the Scripture for a while and then I pray for my family, prayers of protection for them. Then I try entering what French author Madame Guyan calls beholding Lord—in other words, being open to God's presence. That means listening and interacting in any way that seems appropriate. The idea of course is to bring prayer into every experience in life. That is the larger sense in which prayer goes with you

throughout the day—it's in the meeting that I just had, in the class that I'll have with students tonight. Missionary Frank Lawbouch said, "I want to learn how to live, so that to see someone is to pray for them."

I try to bring the experience of prayer into the ordinary experiences of life. As I move through the day, I'm trying to be aware of God's presence—trying to be centered in his life and ways, seeking to view each situation as "the sacrament of the present moment," to use French author Jean Pierre de Caussade's phrase. De Caussade describes the life of prayer this way: "The soul, light as a feather, fluid as water, innocent as a child, responds to every movement of grace like a floating balloon." It is Brother Lawrence's idea of "the practice of the presence of God." So I try to bring myself to embrace that reality throughout the day, and then I also seek to enter the night with God. Brother Lawrence said, "Those who have the gale of the Holy Spirit go forward, even in sleep."

But we do all of this with a kind of lightness. I know as I've described it, it sounds a little heavy, but it really isn't. There's a lot of laughter and a lot of fun. A lot of enjoyment of life goes on as we're walking with God through the activities of the day.

I pray to God, the Creator of all things, the Sustainer of all things, and the Redeemer of all things. It is a personal I-Thou relationship. I am entering into an interaction between the Infinite Spirit of the Universe and a finite human spirit. And how that works we don't fully understand, but that it does work is something that has been witnessed by centuries of people.

I use both spontaneous prayers and set prayers. Right now I'm actually writing prayers myself as a spiritual exercise. Let me share one with you. I call this one "Prayer in the Night":

I'm wide awake and it's three A.M., Lord.
 I'm unable to turn off my mind.
 I keep going over and over the events of the day.
 I worry about what I said and did
 Reconstructing conversations and encounters in a thousand
 different ways.
 I wish I could turn off my mind.
 I need sleep but it's like the accelerator of my mind
 Is racing, racing, racing.
 God, why don't you let me sleep?
 I guess I'm supposed to feel pious at a time like this and pray
 But I don't want to pray, I want to sleep.
 Why can't I turn off my mind? I'm so tired.
 God, can't you simply induce sleep, the great cosmic
 tranquilizer?
 I guess I wouldn't want that, even if it were possible, but
 I do want to sleep.
 God, why can't I sleep? Why can't I sleep?

Then a little later in the morning these words came to me:

Shalom, my child, Shalom.
You are anxious for many things.
Rest. Rest. Rest in my love.
Sleep is not necessary if you will
Rest in my love.

Now, did God speak to me? Well, I don't know exactly, but it did seem like a right response to my situation, and it taught me to rest in God. I suppose if people were really to press me on it, I would say that God truly does communicate with us, but exactly how I don't know. I mean, I cannot fully answer the whole question of how a finite spirit can be in communion with the Infinite Spirit of the Universe. But I, and many others have experienced it.

Sometimes I use written prayers, such as the Book of Common Prayer, and other books of writings. I have a class right now in which students are using John Baillie's *Diary of Private Prayers* as a way of leading them into their own prayers. I suppose if I were to list one prayer that is a key prayer for me, it would be the Jesus prayer: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." That is the most basic prayer, and I use it often. Of course there are many other prayers—the Serenity Prayer, the Saint Francis prayer—that are very good prayers, but personally I like the Jesus prayer.

In one sense we are praying always, but I do have a set time of prayer—perhaps thirty minutes to an hour. And there are other times when I might take a little day of prayer in solitude. Often I'll connect that to the seasons: winter, spring, summer, fall. Or I'll do it in connection with some trip I'm taking: I'll stay a couple of days extra and spend the time in private retreat.

I pray both silently and out loud. Certainly there is silent prayer, the prayer of quiet. I think of Kierkegaard's famous sentence: "A man prayed and first he thought that prayer was talking, but he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer was listening." Certainly prayer often goes beyond words, but many times words are used. Today I did both. Prayer in silence and then spoken out loud. It doesn't really matter, does it? I mean, God isn't hard of hearing.

Meditation is one of the most basic forms of listening prayer. Usually it's tied to a passage of Scripture. Other times it can move more deeply into what is usually thought of as contemplation, in which, as French author J. N. Grou prayed, "Oh Divine Master teach me this mute language that says so much." So, there is silence, listening prayer, and meditation. These must be a regular part of our prayer experience because it isn't just a mat-

ter of us talking, it's a matter of listening to God's voice in his wondrous, loving, all-embracing silence.

During the experience of prayer I often gain focus, sinking down into the life of God in such a way that I can become comfortable in that posture. And out of that I seek to live my day. I find I am more on target and have a greater sense of confidence and strength in what I am doing, so that I am living the day out of the guidance that prayer gives me.

When I pray, I ask for guidance, blessings, forgiveness—many things. And I allow the prayer experience to flow out of my living experience. This isn't an inferior way to pray. Jesus, for example, in the Lord's Prayer, taught people to ask, and so we do. But our prayer work is also disciplined by the Spirit so that it isn't selfish—that is, filled with the self.

The way we know it is God who is working with us is this: God draws and encourages; Satan condemns and pushes. Let me give you a little story about that. When I was at another university, I brought a group together to debate a big issue. They arrived and debated the problem, and I thought that we would settle it in one meeting, but we didn't. The problem got worse and worse and worse. I went back to my office afterward and thought to myself, "This is terrible; it is going to take months to solve this problem." So I started a prayer of complaint to God. "God," I prayed, "I don't have time for all of this. It'll take months to solve this problem." Then I entered a time of listening, and it was as if God was saying, "I didn't ask you to solve this problem in the first place. Relax, and this matter will be cared for in time." Now, letting go of it saved me an immense amount of work. And after a few years the issue has been resolved. So we live in that guidance, that sense of rightness in which we've heard the *Kol Yahweh*, the voice of the Lord.

People who really pray—not people who just analyze prayer or dissect it, but who actually *do* it—become more loving, more sensitive to other people. I've watched this happen, and I think I'm reflecting not only my own experience but the experience of many other people. Prayer enlarges our ability to embrace other people. The class I'm teaching right now, for example, is an incredibly cross-cultural group. We have Afro-Americans, we have Anglos, we have Koreans, we have Japanese, we have Latinos. The mix is wonderful and because these people pray, their hearts are enlarged toward one another, even with all the cultural differences. I guess, to put it in a phrase, we become more loving toward others.

Of necessity, love of God eventuates in love of neighbor. The two great commandments are really one. Prayer *always* has a social dimension to it. Prayer, to be real prayer, does not take us out of the world; it sends us *into* the world and excites our endeavors to heal the world. I had a prayer group for three years in Wichita, Kansas, and the task we undertook was to pray for the city. Doing so made many change the kinds of things they did, especially for the poor. Learning how to pray for areas of crime, areas of drugs, areas of prostitution was really interesting. In the third year, I told the group I'd been asking God to give us some special direction. I told them we ought to pray to reduce the crime rate by 10 percent—just by the work of prayer, and the action would come out of that. Well, around Christmas someone did a special three-year study of crime in the city, and it had dropped 33 percent. On television they asked the chief of police why this was so, and he couldn't figure out why. Who knows why? I can't prove that our little prayer group had anything to do with reducing that crime rate, but it is amazing sometimes what will happen when people actually begin to pray.

I also gave my class ideas such as going to the

schoolgrounds of their city and walking around, praying prayers of protection for the children. We know where the areas of real need are, so I would urge the class to go there and be with people and see what happens. All the time they would be praying. For example, they would get on the bus and ride anonymously, praying to the backs of the heads of people. We tried lots of things; they were all fun. Prayer doesn't have to be stuffy, in a church, or formalized. I would encourage people as they go jogging to bless the homes as they go by and the people in them, to ask for the good to rise up and the evil to dissipate.

There is a lot of work that I do that's unrelated to prayer: committee meetings, writing, lectures. I strive to bring prayer into all of those experiences. For example, when I wrote *Money, Sex, and Power*, I decided that I wanted to see how the actual writing experience itself could be sacramental. So I would take communion each morning, and then would try to see how my hands on the keyboard and the flow of ideas could be a sacramental act, God's life coming to me through that process. I think I moved through that experience with greater power, and a greater sense of the presence of God, than any I had done before that time.

One time I was in a committee meeting. I decided I wanted to learn a little more about prayer in that meeting. Now we were just talking business, but there was one lady in the group whose shoulders were kind of slumped. I decided she would be a "special intention" for prayer. So I prayed for her silently throughout the meeting. While we were carrying on business, I noticed that she kept speaking in these barbs at one young couple in the group, and I thought to myself, "I'm not doing very good." Well, the meeting lasted about two hours, and when we finished and were ready to break up, this woman turned to the group and, breaking into tears,

said, "Would somebody pray for me before we leave?" And then out came the need. And what was especially tender was that this young couple she had criticized came over to her and placed their hands on her and prayed for her. I felt like taking off my shoes, for it was holy ground.

Over the years prayer has moved from me being the actor, the talker, to more and more me being the receiver, the listener. There is still plenty of talk, and I'm still an active participant, but I've become more and more interested in receiving and in being available to kind of waste time for God. I don't have to produce, I don't even have to say anything; I can just rest in God's presence.

Recently I was with a group of writers on the Pacific Coast of Canada. We took our mid-morning break, and there were some canoes on the shore, so I got in one to go over to a tiny promontory—it was too small to call an island. I paddled out there and docked this little canoe. It was full of trees, so I explored it for a while. I was just having a good time; I wasn't trying to be religious. Up on top of this little island somebody had built a platform, and there was an old chair on it. So I sat in the chair and I was just being quiet, just enjoying the beauty of the trees and the sky and the water and so forth. Then I remembered what Carolyn, my wife, had said to me as I left on this particular trip. She said, "I want you to come home refreshed." So I prayed and said, "God, refresh me." And there was this response, "I want to teach you Sabbath prayer." I leaned forward and said, "Oh, I don't know exactly what that means. You'll have to teach me." And there came these words: "Be still. Rest. Shalom." Those three phrases. So I tried to enter into that for a period of time. And then I began to worry about getting back to start the meeting. And again there

were the same words: "Be still. Rest. Shalom." So I settled back in listening prayer, resting prayer, what one writer calls the prayer of quiet.

After fifteen minutes or so I had this hyperresponsibility that I've got to get back; people are going to wonder where I am, they're going to be worried that maybe I tipped over in the canoe. And again those words came over me: "Be still. Rest. Shalom." Then, as a writer, I got to thinking, "This experience is so wonderful, I've got to write it down, I've got to capture it; I can't remember it all." And then again those words: "Be still. Rest. Shalom." So I entered back into Sabbath prayer. So finally, when I felt that the experience had finished, I went back, and it was funny because the group had gone right on with the meeting without me. They didn't even notice I was gone! It was a lovely experience of learning the prayer of rest, in which I don't have to be so worried about accomplishment.