

PRAYER, FASTING, AND ALMSGIVING

A cute antidote I've heard for living a full and happy life is to "slide into heaven sideways in a cloud of dust", completely worn out and proudly exclaiming "WooHoo!!, what a ride". It sounds fun but I really don't like its message. It implies that I took the gift of my life, indulged my own desires, and returned it to **GOD** thoroughly worn out... not necessarily serving **HIM**. I guess I'm not convinced my **Heavenly FATHER** wants me "rode hard and put up wet". Just a thought. I think I just heard someone moan at what a dud I am. So, how does my **Creator** desire for me to live the life **HE** has given to me. Obviously, **HIS** plans for all of us are different, but what I want to focus on here is the process to un-cover our plan as opposed to the specifics of our purpose. I also want to keep introducing the idea that we belong to **HIM**. I can almost hear **HIM** saying, "If I told you outright, you would neither understand or believe me". He's right (that's why He's **GOD**). So, what is the way to gain this understanding? **Prayer...Fasting...Almsgiving**. If you are like me, you would be asking "why" to questions such as this. I started asking "why" when I was a three-year old and I've been pestering adults ever since. It has to make sense for me to "enlist" as they say. It is my desire to explore these commands in some depth so I cannot do this in one blog. It will take three most likely, but it should give us the opportunity for powerful reflection during this "**time of reflection**". There are no abstract words from **Jesus**. He means what **HE** says and every word is for everyone. Sometimes the truth in **HIS** message is camouflaged in cultural or historical contexts, but everything **HE** says is meant for all people and all time. We should start with **Prayer**.

The subject of **Prayer** could fill a thousand blogs. **Prayer** is the most under-utilized and misunderstood activity in **Sacred Scripture**. How often do we say "I will pray for you", or "I pray all goes well". "You better pray I don't catch you slacking off" or the popular "Pray for rain" and "Pray for a win". Whatever. We struggle finding time to do it properly or forget it completely. And these are prayers of petition, which is a nice way of saying we always have our hand out. What if our prayers sort of removed us from the **wish-list** approach and simply asked **GOD** to **open our hearts** and minds to the movement of the **Holy Spirit -GOD's Will-** and then follow it up with enough silence to hear the reply. What if our desire was **HIS** desire, and all we needed was an awareness of when to "get out of the way" or become a conduit for **HIS** plan. You see, we tend to see things on a myopic plane instead of a three-dimensional understanding that we are either being helped or being used to help someone else. It is all a picture too big for us to comprehend, but it is imperative that we recognize that **GOD** is **perpetually in motion Loving HIS**

People. Everyone. Prayer, as in a deep intimate conversation, is what unlocks this awareness and removes the “scales” from our eyes. “Lord, help me to pass this test” is not a prayer...at least not a meaningful one. “Heavenly Father, I have tried to prepare for this test as best I can but I know I could have done more. Be with me, guide my thoughts. Calm my soul so I can reclaim what I have studied and reveal what I know to the best of my ability. Help me to accept the outcome and to learn from this experience for I offer it all for your Glory...Amen”. This is closer to what the scriptural references to prayer inferred. Read Matthew’s version of the “Our Father”. It is initiated from a spiritual posture of **humility**. If you notice in the Jewish Scriptures, while various rituals were used at times, in every instance this interaction with **GOD** was very personal and intimate and resembled more of a phone call home to our parents when we were lonely and away at college. While we needed some “things” (mostly money), we also talked about our challenges, successes, and our worries. This is prayer of the Hebrew bible. *“Hear O ‘Israel, the Lord your GOD is one...”. “You are my hiding place O’ GOD”. “O’ Lord you have searched me and you know me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; **YOU** discern me from a far”* (Psalm 139). Magnificent praise and affection. Always reflecting a sincere and respectful awareness of who was being addressed. Always mindful that this was not an ordinary conversation. This is what Jesus refers to because this was how **HE** was formed in **HIS** faith, experience that produced the “Our Father” prayer and image. Intimacy, respect, and humility. Our world has reduced prayer to a “fast-food” menu of what We want on the run. Put this Blog down and read Psalm 51 right now. Do this and you will have prayed the only prayer necessary...despite our physical, emotional, and material needs. This psalm (and the previous one) reflect a heart focused, humble, and open to the **Creator of All Things**.

This is how we discover our discipleship. This is how we discern **HIS will**. This is how we become aware of those around us who are in need, this is how we become the version of ourselves we were created to be, this is how our lives find **purpose** and **meaning**. It all starts here. Without prayer in our lives we are throwing “darts in the dark”. There is a simple quote I do like. It is attributed to a Tibetan Proverb, but has been said by many others and represents a divine wisdom for a life well-lived. It says... Eat half, Walk double, Laugh triple and Love without measure. Pray on this a while.

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Comments, Questions, Random Thoughts?

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