

Explorers in Prayer – Lesson One Handout

The Place of Attention and Listening in Prayer

Prayer Principle One - our prayer lives will always be imperfect so we shouldn't feel bad about it. Our motivation for developing our prayer lives should not be guilt, but rather a desire for a closer friendship with God through prayer.

Prayer Principle Two - we must pace ourselves like a long distance runner, not like a sprinter because:

- 1) Our journey into prayer will be as long as the life we live.
- 2) It takes a long time to learn and see the progress we are making.

(This principle will come up again in lessons 7 and 10.)

Prayer Principle Three - if we approach God with **love** and **humility**, and give him our **time** and **attention** in prayer, both we and our relationship with God will grow.

St Anthony did a 20 year retreat in the desert, as referred to in a mini biography of him by Richard Foster in his book **Streams of Living Water**: "Throughout this process of desert temptation the role of spiritual discipline was prominent. In fact, the very purpose of going into the desert was for training in spiritual discipline. This life involved solitude and fasting for the sake of intense, internal focus; meditation and prayer for the sake of deepening spiritual communion; Scripture study and reflection for the sake of the transformation of the mind; and manual labour and exorcism for the sake of doing the works of the Father.

Now, the purpose of these Disciplines of the Spiritual Life was to train the body and the soul in righteousness. This, in turn, produced established men and women who could stand firm in the time of trial.

We find this kind of character formation in abundance in Anthony. His biographer writes, 'It was not his physical dimensions that distinguished him from the rest, but the stability of character and the purity of the soul. His soul being free of confusion, he held his outer senses also undisturbed, so that from the soul's joy his face was cheerful as well.' Anthony became characterised as 'tolerant in disposition and humble of soul'. In fact, so striking was the transformation of his life that 'simply by seeing his conduct, many aspired to become imitators of his way of life'. This was the fruit God produced in him from the years of solitude in the desert."

Individual Exercise: This is an exercise in simply giving God our time and attention (In this case 15 minutes each day). The idea is to find a place where you can sit in silence with God and simply BE there with him. Don't use this time to read anything or to think about chores that need to be done. By all means pray if there's something you want to say to him, but don't feel like you need to say anything. Some people may find it helpful to imagine themselves sat on a park bench with Jesus, just quietly enjoying the view together. Others will find they prefer to actually spend their 15 minutes sat on a bench in a public place.

Read Invitation and chapters 1 & 6 of the course book.

Prayer Triplet Exercise: Spend about twenty minutes in silence, waiting on God. If anyone feels God is prompting them to say something they should say it. Keep it brief. No one should respond to this, but wait for their own thing to say. Responses can come after the silence is over (this exercise is very similar to what Quakers do in their meetings, only they usually have a period of an hour in silence).