

The power of prayer is the power of connecting with God, the divine or Holy Spirit. But as the prophet Isaiah says about God: “My ways are not your ways, my thoughts are not your thoughts. This God who is “beyond” us comes to us in many ways, speaks to us in our own language, so it follows that there is also no one way to pray. We could be quiet, or loud... moving, or sitting quietly. The question is, have we made the effort, the intention to connect with God? Yet it is natural to want to hear from others how they have prayed, how they have experienced God; what are some “testimonials” about prayer?

I was pondering with a clergy friend about prayer (you know Chip), and his first comment was that power in prayer lies in the power of **community**. As I often say, sharing our sorrows can lessen the burden.... And sharing our joys can increase or multiply them. When we pray for one another, part of the power is *knowing* that the spirits of others are with us, and we are asking the very spirit of God to be with us as well! We are flooding our minds with what is good, positive and healing.

One power of prayer comes from **Praise**, from thanksgiving and gratitude for blessings, large or small. One form of praise is to sing, and that’s why we usually start worship with songs of praise, like the very upbeat opener we sang this morning. Spiritual leaders of old, have said that to sing is to pray twice. This testimony is that singing often creates deeper emotion and deeper devotion. Somehow music touches places in our spirit or soul that go far beyond rational thinking. I think this is why Jesus started his teaching on prayer with, “Hallowed be thy name!” Holy is thy name... worthy of praise, beyond us, creating awe in us; this is the way to address or view God, with humility and awe; our indigenous people are awed by nature and say Oh Great Spirit!

Sometimes our hymns can feel too wordy, even too intellectual; we can enjoy songs with simple choruses, or we can enjoy a very short **chant**, sung over and over. We know that the Christian faith has done this, principally with the “Gregorian Chants” of the Catholic Church, and more recently the

chanting done in the Taizee' community of France and the Iona Community of Scotland. We know that the Eastern Yogis also have a form of chanting; some of you may have experienced the "Kirtan" (chanting in an Eastern language) which is now common at yoga studios everywhere. Many would give testimony that they feel more peaceful after a session of Kirtan chanting. Honestly, I prefer to do chanting in a language that I understand, but I realize the value of focus on words of peace and light and love in any language or culture.

Some Christian brothers and sisters find communion with God in **Bible reading** (privately or in conversation with others) and are sure to read something in Holy Scripture on a daily basis, letting the most important words sink in deeply. Yes, the power of prayer can come more and more when we make some form of prayer a regular even daily habit. Like many skills, practice counts, practice strengthens, practice increases skill. The spirit of God becomes more familiar with practice, and it benefits us to practice our communion with God - especially in good times, so that when bad times come, we have strength to deal with them.

Let me share an current example of the power of prayer, the power of **communion with God's spirit**; I have permission to share. We have mentioned Bonnie B in prayers. Some of you remember her as a musician friend who loves to play piano, who celebrated her 70th birthday just this past Spring, playing our beautiful grand piano from Helen Hatcher. Bonnie is quite sick right now, has not made much progress after many hospitalizations, and so has made the decision to enter hospice care. She has been in pain, and did try various pain medications. Apparently the pain medications seemed to increase the pain, or add some new kind of pain. So her dear friend Jane, who is a practitioner of Feldenkrais, a type of movement therapy, suggested that they pause the medications and spend more time everyday focusing on being a child of God, welcoming God's unconditional loving embrace, and listening to beautiful music, Bonnie's principal way of experiencing God. Jane reports that most of the pain went away and that Bonnie began to sleep

better and to let go, and even begin to let go of identifying with her body. Of course we would like the power of prayer to heal every physical ill, but for all of us the time will come when the body is too weak to fight. Then we can look to the power of inner spirit, the power of our soul, to continue on. I often say that some degree of healing is possible at all stages of our life, and yet our “final healing” will be in spirit and soul, with the victory of resurrection life.

In another testimony to the power of prayer, Rev. Donnadia Lowre last night included a lot about the value of quiet **meditation**. She lifted up Mary (of the Mary and Martha story) as one who would have learned how to be quiet in Jesus’ presence, and she also said that Mary Magdalene most likely followed Jesus’ example of quiet early morning prayer. Rev. Donnadia’s testimony and conviction was that we ALL can find that inner light and power from God; we all can be more authentic, valuing and expressing who we truly are, without trying to please anyone else, simply knowing we are a child of God, beloved unconditionally by a God of great love and mercy.

Dr. Deepak Chopra you may know is also a big proponent of meditation. In a recent book called *Super Brain*, (subtile: Unleashing the power of your mind to maximize health), he explains why prayer and faith can be so powerful. While no analogy is perfect, he uses the analogy of the well-studied Placebo effect (the power of a “sugar pill” in many research studies)... The word Placebo means “I will please;” in other words, it will make the patient feel better. It means that the mind is helping the body to get well. Deepak Chopra insists that “anything you believe in can act as a placebo; something in your mindset actually “tells the body” to get well. So a key factor is that people TRUST healing will be taking place. He uses the example of a cut or a bruise; we usually do not interfere with natural healing by adding doubts or fears. We *trust* the cut or bruise will go away and it does.

The mindset of trust and peace can induce healing in the body when there is a strong **mind-body connection**. So Dr. Chopra recommends regular healthy lifestyle that deepens the mind-body connection. He encourages and teaches a simple meditation that starts like this: *Sit quietly with your eyes*

closed and simply feel the body. Let any sensation come to the surface. Whether pleasant or unpleasant, just be aware of it, and what part of your body it is coming from.

We know that another simple meditation taught by Eastern practitioners is simply to follow your breathing, to be aware of the rhythm of your breathing and the in-breath and the out-breath. Such simple focus usually will slow your breathing and heart rate, if done with relaxed acceptance. I like to add intentionality and meaning, such as a breathing in goodness and love, breathing out anxiety or anger... breathing in Holy Spirit or Christ, breathing out fear and doubt...

Jesus taught us how to pray in **“The Lord’s Prayer”** We have said that “Hallowed (Holy) be thy name” speaks of a God who is “beyond” us, for whom we have awe and gratitude and praise. “Thy will be done on earth as in heaven” can have the meaning that we need to put love into action, that mission work is a form of prayer; offering the cup of water is a form of prayer. “Give us our daily bread” is a great reminder that our prayers should be continual, asking God and thanking God for daily necessities, and distinguishing between necessary bread and other frivolous things. And of course a key part of the prayer Jesus taught is confession: forgive us as we forgive others... A clear conscience is central to well being, physical or spiritual. Jesus mentioned it in many of his healings. James says, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” We could say: Honestly admit your shortcomings or mistakes to one another, share grace and forgiveness with one another, and this will bring healing.

The Lord’s Prayer is a great summary of how to pray and what to pray for. And remember the saying that when we sing, it is like praying twice!... So please listen prayerfully, or even join in the singing if you wish, as Bill and I sing this central part of our faith.”