
How's Your Prayer Life Going?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

So, how's it going? How is your prayer life going?

Oh my, what a question. Some people might respond to that question by claiming it makes no sense. How can one have a "life" of prayer? Prayer, to them, is simply an activity that is part of their greater life. Prayer is like breakfast that way; it is something one might do in the morning and hope that it provides suitable energy for the rest of the day.

Other people might respond that, oh, they don't really pray at all these days. There is simply too much going on, what with schedule after schedule, children (or grandchildren) all over the place. Or, there is always some new business decision to make, or another client to call. Even at the end of the day, there is hardly time to sit back and relax. With so much going on, sometimes simply having a drink—or two—is the only break possible.

Other people are quickly overcome with guilt when they hear that question, "How's your prayer life going?" These people have heard that sort of question from religion all their lives, and the question always seems to guilt them somehow. No matter how diligent they determine to be, somehow prayer has not become part of their life at all. They have seemed unable to set aside a few minutes throughout the day to take time to pray.

There are all sorts of other responses to the question, "How's your prayer life going?" A few people might brighten up when they hear it, saying that they have a set of prayers that is suiting them very well, thank you. They have developed a habit of telling, and asking, God all sorts of things. They have created a habit of saying prayers that somehow seem to soothe them internally, maybe like washing dishes or cleaning the house. One feels proper afterwards.

I must admit that I have experienced each of those responses, at some point or another in my life. Even as a priest (someone who certainly, supposedly, prays!), I have found my prayer life scattered, or inconsistent, or forced, or even non-existent.

My Lenten discipline this year consists of just one word, "Release." My Lenten discipline has been to let go, to release things and worries and issues that I really do not need to be attached to. And when it comes to prayer, when I apply that word "Release" to prayer, something wonderful has happened. I have realized in a new way, that "my prayer life" is really something beyond "me." It may not be what I do, or not do, at all.

Prayer, for me these days, is not about saying the sorts of things that get my soul right. I have certainly heard myself saying such things before, hearing words and thoughts inside me that have energized me. And I have sought to repeat those experiences!

But, for me these days, prayer has become the reverse of trying to create great moments of spirituality. Prayer has been letting go, letting go of external things so that my soul might really have a chance to hear the Holy. Prayer is about something inside me, my soul, being able to hear the Holy.

I know this is another way of saying something that thousands of others have said before. But it bears repeating, for me, in

a new way. And maybe it helps your prayer life, too. Prayer is not about what we do; it is about stopping everything we are doing so that we might see, or hear, or touch, what God is doing. Prayer is making our soul available to God.

Yes, prayer does take time. But prayer may not take the time and the structure that you have thought. I believe that even if you don't think you are "praying," you just may be, in some fashion or another. Each of us really does have a prayer life, of some sort or another. Your prayer life is your interior life, what you are listening to and tending to inside you. It is the life of your soul, that part of you that gives you life and energy.

Prayer occurs when we are able to let go of anxieties about external pressures and to listen instead. Maybe what we hear will be a voice, maybe the voice of a person right next to us, and maybe we will hear only a glorious silence. But prayer is occurring. Prayer occurs when we pause to hear what God is saying to that deep part of us that gives us life, our soul.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip