
INTRODUCTION

This book is about the person who prays, and that pray-er looked at from the perspective of the Enneagram. It is not primarily about prayers, but rather it is intended to help people find the place within themselves where they meet their spirit, and in doing so meet also the Divine Spirit. Finding this presence to Presence constitutes the spiritual life, the contemplative life, the full human life, the life of the pray-er, the life of prayer.

Over the years I have noticed the very limited view many people have of the life of prayer. People often view prayer as something separate from the rest of their lives. Its boundaries of time and place set it apart from everything else, which then becomes non-prayer.

This concept of non-prayer usually gets enlarged to one of non-spiritual, non-sacred, or secular. Life divides into opposites in this area as in so many others. On the one side there is the holy. On the other is what at best we call non-holy and at worst, un-holy. These divisions result in a rigid and static view of life. Prayer in this formulation is often reduced to a dialogue with our current projection of the Divine. If we are not talking to whoever we see God to be, we say we are not praying.

Over a lifetime the One Who Is Without Limit inspires different metaphors depending on changes in the life of the pray-er. In this book I would like to focus on the pray-er that one is rather than the prayers that one says. I suggest that the Enneagram can be a help in this process, since it talks about differing people; and, viewed contemplatively, it increasingly opens up reality to the people who study it.

As Thomas Merton, a great spiritual writer of the twentieth century, got older he became more and more reluctant to talk about prayer. He discovered, as he grew wiser and more whole, that there is no need to knock on the door to get into God's presence. We are, indeed, already there.¹ To develop a life of prayer, a life of contemplation, is the simple task of recognizing that we cannot be out of God's presence. All human beings are meant to be contemplative, whether they farm the land or work in factories, offices, or laboratories; whether they teach in universities or pre-schools or care for homes and families. All human beings are created

to be conscious and aware, to look with wide open eyes at reality. Ever increasing awareness is the human being's destiny. It is this ability to reflect on creation—our own personal creation and that of other people and the world around us—that separates us from the beloved pet that sleeps beside our chair.

We are born with a contemplative bent. Just look at any small child taken up into life, and you will know that is true. Observe a child in some form of activity, be it playing a game or examining a butterfly, and you will see someone enthralled with experience. Along the way of life, however, we lose our innate ability to receive all of life that any given moment holds out to us. We become cautious, separate, distant. We build up boundaries between ourselves and the reality within and around us.

Later on, we need to re-learn the pathway to the fullness of our personal existence, of who we are. As we do this, we let in more of what is outside and around us as well. We discover as adults what we forgot in the time of growing up. We find again a receptive child, and in doing so we reclaim the contemplative attitude necessary to become a pray-er.

I would like to share some analogies that describe this contemplative attitude. One such analogy is that of friendship with ourselves. The people who are dear to us in our lives we treat with respect and reverence. We trust those people; we believe in their goodness and their respect for us. We listen to our friends when they

talk to us, listen to all they have to say without cutting them off or finishing their communications because we have already decided what their message will be. An attitude of contemplation toward our lives leads us to welcome into consciousness whatever presents itself to us. We listen fully, and we listen well. We do not assume we know all there is to know about ourselves or another person or our environment. Newness and surprise are part of every friendship that remains vital, including this one with our selves.

Patience is important in friendship. We do not demand that our friends tell us everything; we wait until our friend is ready, until that friend's time. There is no hurry. We have a lifetime together, and some communications can wait. So, too, when we have a friendly attitude toward our own lives. We invite reality into consciousness, but we do not force it in. As our own friend, we intuitively know what we can bear to hear, how much truth we are capable of handling, what it is time for.

Another image that captures for me this contemplative quality comes from Piero Ferrucci.² He speaks of it as holding a bird in the hand. This attitude has the "feel," if you will, of focused attention, of listening presence. We need to hold this bird, which represents our reality, with some degree of firmness. Otherwise, if we allow our thoughts to wander, they, like the bird, will escape. The discipline of listening is essential to contemplation, and that is what distinguishes it from

mere daydreaming. On the other hand, this focus on whatever reality the moment presents to us, be it some feeling, person, action, or idea, cannot be too intense. Force and strain will kill the awareness as surely as a tight grasp will kill the bird we hold in our hand. Firmness and lightness, seriousness and playfulness, will keep the reality of the moment alive.

Our friendship with our selves, our truth, will prosper in such a contemplative environment. We will gradually learn from the child within us what a lifetime of denial and overlook, of forgetfulness, of insensitivity, superficiality, excessive self-scrutiny, and self-judgment led us to forget.

This attitude of honesty, of humble truth, is the cornerstone of the spiritual life. Major traditions of spirituality center in the reality of creatureliness and limitation. The doctrine of Incarnation refers not only to Jesus' welcoming embrace of earthy and earthly humanity, but to the need of all of us to follow his inspiration into the depths of our own lives.

On the way to growing into greater fullness of who we are and how we are enfleshed, we encounter the Enneagram. Knowledge of our inborn stance and view of life—and of the themes and issues we face because of that unique enfleshedness—is already to change. Knowing is change in itself. Acceptance of what we come to know is to change radically, to become converted, transformed, to let go into the reality of what is so. Gradually in life we are shaped and

formed into prayers, people who embrace God's destiny for themselves, for others, and for the world.

Thomas Merton points out that the prayerer prays as long as he or she exists and does not run away from the center of self.³ The Enneagram helps us see how we back away from and hold ourselves up and out of our center of humble truth. It also points out to us those inborn strengths we have which assist our journey to that interior place where our spirit dwells with the Spirit of Jesus. Such an experience holds at the same time both an awareness of our spirit and beyond our spirit to an awareness of Jesus' Spirit.

St. Benedict, who founded Western monasticism in the sixth century, begins his exploration of the spiritual life with the word "Listen."⁴ I borrow this exhortation from him. I encourage you, the listener, gently and reflectively, to attend to these words in an attitude reminiscent of the firmness and flexibility with which we might hold a bird in our hand. Unless we have this attitude about the contents of this book, we will go away with facts about saying prayers and methods to use during prayer periods rather than experience which reveals and describes the self as prayerer.

Another image I like to use to describe this contemplative attitude is that of a paper ball with which Japanese children sometimes play. This ball has a hole and is blown up through this hole by a person's breath. Once the ball is inflated it remains so until some aggressively jarring blow either tears the paper or

forces out all the air. If the players touch it lightly, it will remain inflated and capable of being hit back and forth through an entire ball game. This is the “touch” I suggest you reach for as you read the following chapters. An aggressive pursuit of information in an effort to make one’s self a better pray-er will only result in frustration. The best way to use this book contemplatively is to bring one’s personal historical experience alongside what people say has revealed the pray-er they are to themselves, and lightly—almost playfully—to let one’s own experience interact with theirs.

All of our experiences are unique. That being so, you may not always agree with what these people have said about themselves as pray-ers. The oral tradition of the Enneagram underlines the ever-changing and flowing quality of human life described here. It is the true contemplative within you, the deepest word you are, the inner child without lies or pretense or caution or defense who can at best lightly and playfully engage with the many people whose shared spirituality I will attempt to describe in the pages that follow. I hope this material offers something of meaning for your prayer life, for your life as pray-er.

As I have done in my other books,⁵ I invite you to contribute to the growing volume of descriptive research as you interact with this material, focusing and refining it as you do so. It is this continually evolving tradition that makes the Enneagram so alive. May you find yourself, your pray-er, either because

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you see yourself described here or because these words have led you to nuance or distinguish more accurately your own truth. Your contemplative inner child will know that truth. Let that child sit beside you now as we continue.



APPROACHES TO THE
INTERIOR LIFE

APPROACHES TO THE INTERIOR LIFE FOR THE 8/9/1 TRIAD

How do people in this triad view living the interior life, the life of the soul, the life of the spirit, the spiritual life? For 8/9/1 people, the approach to reality is simply to be, and it is that approach of “simply being” that they also bring to the life of prayer and interiority. The spiritual masters and mistresses call it just “being in prayer.” Teresa of Avila, herself most probably in this triad, described such prayer as what might be termed a loving attention.¹ Prayer of loving attention involves a centering, being at

the center of one's person just who and as one is in God's presence.

This form of prayer needs no thinking, no feeling, no moving, no content. Simple being is a healing, quieting, calming experience. By emptying and detaching the self from all content one comes to this centered place, this stillness, this uncluttered simplicity. This is a peaceful place, a place of joy and of grounding. In it one lets God be God. This is a prayer of union, of oneness, and of freedom. There is a nourishing kind of stillness in this form of prayer, in this attitude of interiority.

People in the 8/9/1 spaces, in place of their usual stance in life which is struggling between self and God, flesh and spirit, learn to let go of the dividing boundaries and surrender. This is a courageous prayer activity for them for there is fear to let go into God; what will happen to them if they do so? They may get swallowed up; they may disappear; they may never get back. Such fear impedes what is their natural way to pray: simply being in the present. One way they control this fear of slipping away is to become a watchful self. This watchful self acts as a control. When this self stands next to themselves, monitoring themselves, they feel less frightened about giving in to the flow of life which might obliterate the boundaries of who they are as a separate individual. In reality, there is nothing to fear. They will not become so one with the Divine that they lose their being. They bring their being to that surrender and remain themselves even as they give

themselves in prayer to God. This is what they need to learn in prayer: that God does respect and value their existence.

People who are drawn to this kind of prayer often feel guilty about it. They wonder if they are doing anything. They know their own tendency to be lazy at times and to avoid interior work. They realize that they tend to just forget things that are frightening and conflictual or else too much for them to look at in any given moment. They know they can sometimes blot reality out so it is simply not there anymore. Because of this tendency, they wonder if that is what they are doing when they take time for prayer. The test for them is in the outcome of the time they spend. If it is alive and active presence that results, they know they are, indeed, praying.

A man in this space expressed such a concern to me. I asked him what he did during the time he set aside for prayer. He answered that, after he dressed in the morning and went down to the kitchen for a cup of coffee, he would bring it back to his room and sit in his comfortable chair for about an hour. His concern was that, while sitting there, he did nothing. I asked him what it was like after that hour was over. He described himself as awake and alive and ready to begin the day, to take on whatever it would offer. I encouraged him to trust that kind of energy. The outcome of his time spent each morning was to be present

in the moment, something I consider to be the essence of any kind of praying.

People in the 8/9/1 triad need energy to center and quiet themselves and meet their lives awake and alert. Rather than criticizing and judging themselves, they need to give themselves to this experience. This is not the quietism that spiritual writers talk and write about. This is neither inertia nor deadness. On the contrary, it is an experience full of life. Neither is it a fake oneness. It is not a merging with all that is around so that no responsibility exists for what is going on. Nor is it a blotting out or losing the boundaries of self. It is presence meeting Presence with all of the vitality of such an encounter.

Even those who are not in this triad will recognize what is described here as something they know at times. Nevertheless, this is the reality most consonant with 8/9/1 individuals and natural to how they are incarnated in this world. They turn to this approach frequently and find it is what best makes them pray-ers.