

The Prayer-Filled Life

This week, we are going to continue with the Devotional Classic sermon series. The subtitle of the book is “A Renovaré Resource for Spiritual Renewal”.

“Renovaré” is a Latin word that means, “to make new”. It is where the English word “renovate” comes from. “Resources to make our spiritual journey new”. The book is divided into six different Christian traditions and helps us to be spiritually renovated. This week we begin with the contemplative tradition, the prayer-filled life.

For me, the timing for reading this book is perfect. This is because after a recent meeting with one of my friends, I felt challenged by her faith and was longing to find a way to renew my spirit.

I would like to share this encounter with you. Not too long ago, I heard the news that my good friend had been hospitalized. Then I heard more news that someone in her work place had made terrible accusations about her and she had lost her job. All of these things happened simultaneously and I was very worried about her. So I decided to take her out for dinner and a movie to cheer her up. (I even thought about taking her to the saddest movie I could find, so that she could cry in the theater without being embarrassed...)

When I went to meet her, I expected her to be discouraged and depressed. Who wouldn't be? But to my surprise her appearance was far from what I expected. Yes, she was very sad and sorry about what was happening, but she was not depressed or shaken up by the situation.

She appeared to be strong, calm, confident and very hopeful.

“How are you doing?” I asked. She said, “Strangely, I am very well.”

Her dreadful situation had not changed, but she was calm and at peace. It seemed nothing was able to shake her confidence. Then she told me that she just returned from a personal prayer retreat.

She said she had just spent an entire week where all she did was cry out to God until there were no more tears left. At the end of the week she felt at peace and accepted the situation she was in without any harsh feelings towards anyone.

Her face was literally glowing with peace. As I looked at her face, this Bible verse came into my mind:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7.

Witnessing her tremendous strength, I found myself admiring her peace.

It was not her, but it was the Lord who was holding her so tight. There was nothing that could cut her off from that strength because Jesus and my friend were so attached to each other. Her peace was beyond the circumstance... it was something that surpasses all understanding.

Jesus said the night before he was hung on the cross, a very important lesson: “Abide in me, as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” John 15:4.

Can you imagine a branch disconnected from the vine and trying to survive on its own? It is impossible. But when a branch is connected to the vine, it easily receives its much needed nourishment. The branch will not only remain alive but

will grow. How can we be connected to the vine? Prayer is one of the most important ways of connecting and staying connected to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer is the pipeline of communication between God and God's people.

As I drove home from our meeting, I found myself admiring my friend's strength! Then I thought about my current prayer life. I pray on and off all the time, but I must confess to you that my prayers often become routine and sometimes are rushed through.

Let me share a personal story.

As most of you know I was away on a renewal leave for 6 weeks. When I returned, a few surprises waited for me! I couldn't find my keys. These included my house key, church key, and car key.

I went through the entire house searching every possible corner where I may have left the keys before I left for the renewal leave. I could not find them. After repeating my search of the house several times, I came over to the church and ransacked my church office. They were not there either. I did everything to remember, thinking hard of all the places where I may have left my keys to make sure they would be secure.

Did I pray? Yes, I did. As I searched, I kept calling out to God to help me locate them.

The second day came and still I had not found my keys. Now I began worrying about replacing locks and reporting to the Church that I had lost my key, which is one of the master keys.

That night as I was going to bed, I could not sleep as my brain kept focusing on the quest for my keys. Soon, I found myself crying out loud to God as I lay there and finally fell asleep. Morning came. I awoke to find my brain still crying out to the Lord. Then, I thought of a place where I had never put anything before. I got up

and walked straight to that place, doubting myself and thinking that I probably did not put my keys there. Sure enough, there were my keys....

Now that same day, I realized that I misplaced a very important document. I had not made a copy of it, and I now needed it. I found myself again searching the entire house trying to find that document. Yes, I once again searched through my church office and even my car, recycling bins etc. I could not find my document. I truly thought I was losing it. Did I pray? Yes, I did just as I had for my keys, as I searched through the entire house, I shouted out some prayers. Once again as night came, I went to bed and found myself crying out loud to the Lord. The next morning I woke up to find my brain still crying out loud to God "Please help me to find my document." As I got out from bed I remembered shoving a paper into my knitting basket. Could it be? How could I leave such an important document in there? I got out of bed and went straight to my knitting basket to check, and sure enough it was there. Two days in a row...

A couple of days later when I was looking for another misplaced item, Gary simply looked at me and said, "Go to bed".

Well, these have been strange experiences for me but I have learned my lesson. As I prayed to God asking for His help, I was more focused on the lost items than the Lord. I was not in any mood to listen to what the Lord was saying, but instead kept trying to find my own way out. Then when I went to bed, all my physical actions stopped, and I was not going from one place to another. Everything stopped except my crying out to God.

What if I had just stopped my frantic searching, calmed down, and simply spent my time praying and listening to the Lord? I believe I would have been able to find those items much easier and faster.

Many of us talk about prayer, but not many of us truly practice praying.

For those that claim you are praying all the time, what is the quality of prayer time?

“Renovaré.” I would like to make my prayer life new.
This book will definitely help us!

There are two people in the Bible that impress me whenever I read the following passages:

The first is Elijah. The Bible says that the whole nation was suffering from a severe drought, and there was Elijah praying for rain.

Picture this passage with me.

1 King 18: 42-44. Elijah climbed to the top of Mt. Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees and prayed. Then he asked his servant to go and look toward the sea. So the servant went up and looked. But he did not see anything. So Elijah went back to pray again and asked the same thing. “Go back and look toward the sea”. For seven times, the Bible says. The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.” Then Elijah got up and said to his servant, “Go and tell Ahab to hitch up his chariot and go down before the rain stops him.”

In this passage I learned three important aspects of prayer.

I see the attitude of prayer – he was sincere and serious. He bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. I see the total surrender to the Lord.

I witness the faith of Elijah – he was not wishy-washy, but he knew what he wanted and never doubted that it was coming.

And. I am impressed by his persistence- he prayed again and again until he received a sign of God's answer. He did not give up but continued to pray waiting for a sign of God's answer.

The second person is King David as he prays in Psalm 86, which we read today. In his prayer we hear the same aspects of prayer as we did from Elijah: sincere attitude, trust that God will listen, and persistence as he called out to God all day long.

His prayer also expresses what kind of relationship he had with the Lord. It was very intimate.

David called God, "You, Lord". Definitely he had a "You and I" relationship with God. Whenever I hear David saying "You" to God, I find it really refreshing.

I would like to read this passage (just the first 7 verses) again with you. Whenever David says, "You" I would like you to read that part out loud with me:

Hear me, Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.
Guard my life, for I am faithful to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord,
for I call to you all day long.
Bring joy to your servant, Lord,
for I put my trust in you.
You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
abounding in love to all who call to you.
Hear my prayer, Lord;
listen to my cry for mercy.
When I am in distress, I call to you,
because you answer me.

When was the last time you sat in front of the Lord and centered yourself away from all the distractions of life, and called upon his name?

Close your eyes, and picture yourself sitting in front of the Lord. Now repeat slowly with me:

“You, Lord, here I am.”

 “You, Lord, here I am.”

 “You, Lord, here I am.”

 “You, Lord, here I am.”

 “You, Lord, here I am.”

May the Lord refresh your spirit and let your face glow with peace and strength!

Amen!