

# PRAYER



*Joyce Rupp*



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## Entering into a Relationship

When did you first  
weave your way into my life,  
Beloved?

When did you first  
entice me  
with your contagious  
colors of love?

When did the mystery  
of your kindness stir  
so strongly  
I could no longer deny your grace?

I do not know the precise moment.  
Perhaps there never was one.

More, it seems to me,  
are the countless times,  
endless ways, you enter,  
thread by thread,  
the pattern of my days,

your presence inaudibly  
interlacing my every moment,  
  
your whispers and sighs,  
your breathy voice  
in the ear of my heart,  
  
persuading me into your embrace.  
  
Please, Beloved,  
never stop encouraging me.  
  
Draw me daily  
into the sanctuary  
of your enduring love.

—Joyce Rupp

*Prayer fastens the soul to God.*

— Julian of Norwich

**I**N EVERY AWAKENED ENCOUNTER with the Holy One, we enter the inner path where God's heart and ours meet. Among the numerous books I have read on the subject of prayer, the best description I have ever found for this spiritual practice is the one Kenneth Leech gives in *True Prayer*: "To pray is to enter into a relationship with God and to have that relationship make a difference in my life."

Establishing and developing a *relationship* is the nucleus of all Christian prayer. This bond is created with *someone*, and that *someone* is God. Our Source of Life continually bids each of us into a loving union. The process of prayer unfolds in a way similar to Jesus inviting his disciples to follow him into deeper friendship, a closeness that did not develop instantly. Prayer is a kind of companionship that develops step by step, as we are drawn into an ever expanding oneness of love.

Many years may pass before we really believe our connectedness to the Holy One is enduring and true. Even when we do believe this, cloudy times of questioning the worth and effectiveness of our relationship with God are not unusual. On the other hand, sometimes our prayer life offers us a profound consolation in which we become convinced that this relationship is solid and enduring. In these times of consolation, graced moments arise in which we are swept away with the profoundness of our communion with the divine.

“Prayer” is not only about entering into a relationship with God; it is also about *being changed*. Healthy prayer strengthens our bond with the Creator and it also transforms us. Every encounter with God provides the opportunity for us to grow spiritually. Prayer makes a difference in our life because it nudges and persuades us to develop Christlike qualities in our attitude and actions. Through prayer we become more loving, gracious, compassionate, and justice-oriented human beings. When this happens, we are altered in a positive way and the world we touch is also changed for the better.

### Come and See

As in all true friendships, something stirred within the hearts of the disciples when they were with Jesus. They wanted to know him better and sought ways of doing so. John’s Gospel describes how the disciples asked Jesus where he was staying. This was their indirect way of saying: “Tell us more about who you are.” Jesus took them up on their inquisitive desire and invited them to spend time with him: “Come and you will see” (John 1:35–42). In our own way, when we enter into prayer, we are like the disciples, saying, “Tell us who you are. And tell us who we are in relation to you.”

When we choose to pray we accept the invitation to *come and see* who this God of goodness is, and to *come and see* who we are as God’s cherished one. Prayer is an essential way of kindling and developing this relationship. If we are going to have quality prayer, we will need to take time to *stay* with the Holy One in prayer, to become familiar with the depth of

Love in the center of our being. As we increasingly commit ourselves to keeping this relationship alive and thriving, not only is more of God's essence revealed; we also come to know more of our own true self.

Trusting anyone with our shadow side is difficult to do. In prayer we risk allowing our whole self to be revealed and known. As we do so, we grow in our ability to be our bare-bones-self with God. This does not happen automatically. Growth in trust requires deliberate choices to spend time with the Other, humbly opening up, believing that all of who we are will be received with merciful kindness. This relationship will not grow without intentional, quality time in which we give ourselves to God with confidence, yielding to the love of this hospitable presence.

False justifications for not praying fall away when we perceive the priceless value of our union with God. If we have time to shop, we have time to pray. If we have enough minutes to read the daily newspaper or work a crossword puzzle, we have enough minutes to pray. If we have space in our schedule to watch television or browse the Internet, we have space to pray. All the rationalizations and excuses for being unable to pray are left behind once we allow God to claim our heart.

### **The Mutuality of the Relationship**

Long ago, during my novice year in religious community, I first experienced what it is like "to fall in love with God," to want to be united with this incredible, attractive mystery. The focus of my novitiate year was to pay close attention to

the interior life, to allow silence and solitude to be the fundamental part of the year's experience. Until this significant time of my spiritual journey, I prayed regularly, but I thought of this relationship as mostly a one-way encounter. I believed everything depended on my efforts to get God's attention. I thought it was up to me to entice God to draw near. What I did not know is that God longed to gain a fuller entrance into my life.

As the days and months passed, I not only understood, I also *felt* that my longing was not one-way. Eventually, it dawned on me that God was seeking me, in fact, had already sought and persuaded me to enter into a relationship firmly founded on love. For the first time, I truly believed this to be so. My awareness of God's nearness brought me surprising consolation and comfort. The developing sense of mutuality in this love filled me with quiet joy.

This awakening helped me to finally understand the ancient words of the psalmist: "O God, you have probed me and you know me; you know when I sit and when I stand . . . with all my ways you are familiar" (Ps. 139:1-3). As prayer unfolds, we become *familiar* with God and allow God to become familiar with us. When this movement occurs, there is cause for abundant gratitude because the relationship is based on a firm foundation of trust and acceptance.

My "falling in love" with God was not a lovey-dovey feeling. Growth toward dedication and devotion more aptly describe what took place in my heart. The emotional tone of my prayer contained the strong yearning and desire expressed

in Psalm 63:2, in which the psalmist parallels life without divine communion to that of a dry, parched land seeking the moisture needed for survival: “O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.”

The German mystic Mechtild of Magdeburg depicted this acute longing for communion with God as that of a magnet being drawn to the divine. While this inner movement is dynamic and powerful, it may be marked by a quiet persistence rather than unrestrained or obvious passion. This yearning for God is sometimes indicated by an unnamable restlessness or a perpetual searching.

My developing closeness with God did not become clear until after months of struggle with daily meditation and communal prayer. I never would have considered this time in my life as a kind of *falling in love with God* until I noticed a gradual conviction settling in my soul. This confidence was due to my desire and decision to choose God above all else. Living with this conviction meant I would need to be deliberate about being in this relationship every day of my life in order to keep that choice utmost in my heart.

Similar experiences of spiritual growth are confided to me periodically by those who come for spiritual direction. I recall the time a middle-aged woman came from a week-long retreat and hesitantly described her experience with these words, “I feel embarrassed to tell you this, but I fell in love with God during these past days.” Along with joy for her experience, I also felt a certain sadness about her discomfort when she

spoke of her graced encounter with God. I remembered my own past reluctance to do so.

For many years I never told others about my developing relationship with the Holy One. This closeness seemed too personal and delicate to place in the open space between myself and anyone else, even a spiritual director. Once I began to reveal my deep desire for greater union with the Holy One, I was surprised that others also found courage to speak more freely about their journey of developing intimacy. I've noticed how this sharing strengthens our faith and commitment to prayer.

Many people, like this woman and myself, tend to shy away from speaking about our encounters with God, particularly the falling-in-love aspect. Yet the foundation of true prayer is a friendship based on affection, a relationship honed and developed with genuine appreciation for God. As in human relationships with an intense longing for the other, the affective piece usually begins to wane and slip into the background while the quality of enduring, faithful love moves to the foreground.

My experience of prayer has eventually become not so much a seeking for spiritual benefits as a rejoicing for the way God reveals love in my life and encourages me to grow. After my early years of emotional bonding with the Holy One, my love remains steady and strong, but my experience of the relationship is more that of Bernadette Farrell's song "Everyday God." I lost the feeling aspect of being *in love*, but I now experience more fully what it is like to have an ever developing

relationship founded on a commitment that does not waver very often amid the ups and downs of life.

Perhaps you are reading this and thinking, “But I have never fallen in love with God. Something must be wrong with me. I’ve tried to be faithful to God through prayer, but I haven’t had this kind of emotional connection.” Not everyone who has a well-developed prayer life “falls in love” with God. Sometimes there is a pronounced drawing toward the Other, but not all prayerful relationships have this emotional dimension binding them together. Nor do they require this affective experience. What people do need is a conviction that relationship with God is an essential part of their existence. How this commitment comes about is a matter of individual experience and personality.

Sometimes the emotive piece can be present in our God-relationship, but we mistake it for something else. Some years ago, an older priest came each month for spiritual guidance. On more than one occasion he voiced his disappointment that he had not had “a big God moment” in his life. He emphasized how he tried to stay faithful to daily meditation, but he didn’t think this spiritual practice was much of anything except a dry and empty effort, day after day, always struggling to stay awake and remain focused.

One day when this pastor came to share about his spiritual life, he again bemoaned the supposed meagerness of his prayer. Shortly after this, he related how things were going with other aspects of his life. How brightly his eyes lit up as he described a recent moment at Mass. He said that when he held the chalice up at the time of the consecration of bread

and wine, his eyes looked beyond the chalice to the people in the pews. His voice wavered as he recalled the experience, “In that moment I felt the greatest love for the parishioners. I realized how dear they are to me and the beautiful bond we share.”

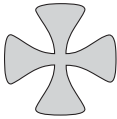
I looked at the priest with a smile and inquired, “And you have never had an intimate spiritual encounter with God?” Immediately this pastor-of-the-dry-prayer realized the connection. He had looked diligently for an emotional experience within his personal prayer life but almost missed how God drew him into love through the people with whom he celebrated the Eucharist. While he had judged his prayer to be of little benefit, his inner vision was being sharpened so he could see how God was moving between the parishioners and himself.

### Who Is This One with Whom I Relate?

If prayer is about entering into a relationship with God, then the question arises: how to name and relate to this One with whom we communicate? What names or metaphors do we use in our prayer to address a God of mystery, one who is accessible and touches our hearts in both formal prayer and in unexpected moments? Does it make any difference what words we use?

One thing that can hold us back in prayer is a false or a confining view of who God is. After my novice year, I related to God as a dearly loved presence, but this relationship contained an unperceived drawback. This shortcoming of mine

was directly reflective of my relationship with my dad — although I was oblivious to this reality. A simple comment when I was in my early thirties woke me up and changed my outlook.



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Several of us adults were planning to facilitate a senior high school retreat. We tossed around ideas and discussed what we might do. One team member suggested we use the surrender prayer of Charles de Foucauld as the central theme. In this prayer Foucauld abandons himself into God’s hands and expresses gratitude for whatever might happen to him. He says he is ready to accept everything that comes his way and asks only that God’s will be done. Then Foucauld offers his love to God and surrenders himself “without reserve and with boundless confidence” into God’s hands.

I was alarmed at the thought of using this prayer and immediately protested, “We can’t ask these young people to pray that prayer. I can’t even pray it myself!” The team member looked at me with wide eyes. With what seemed like feigned surprise at my outcry, he asked in a light, joking voice a

question I will never forget: “That doesn’t say much about who your God is, does it?” He made his point and it pierced through an inner wall I did not know I had, a wall that kept my relationship with God from being all it could be.

I gulped at the comment and could say little in response except, “Well, I just can’t do it; that’s all there is to it.” I thought about his remark for weeks. Question after question arose. Why did I fear surrendering to the One who was central to my life? Why was I unable to place myself in the care of the God whom I believed truly did love me, the God with whom I met in prayer each day and felt a mutuality of relationship? What did I think would happen to me if I gave my all to this divine being?

As I searched my spirit and rummaged around in my personal history, I looked for memorable events and experiences that might be keeping me afraid of yielding to God. Finally I got it. The truth became clear. I realized I was afraid of two things: I wanted to do all I could to please God, to match up to the Holy One’s expectations, and I feared what giving myself totally might cost me. I had to admit I was scared of the demands and difficult tests I thought God would ask of me.

Not only did I identify my fear of surrendering to God, I also discovered the source of that fear. I still did not trust God with my life because of an old message coming from the voice of my dad. My father was a man of integrity, with high ideals. He expected a lot from each of his children. Early on in life I knew he expected the best of me. When I did not come through and meet those hopes and ideals, I met with his displeasure and disappointment. The first time I recall this

happening was when I was three or four years old. I had done some silly, inconsequential thing at dinner, like shoving my detested lettuce under the table. My father looked sternly as he reprimanded me, “So, is that the kind of girl you’re turning out to be?”

His penetrating question crushed my heart. I loved my father. I sorely wanted to win his approval and receive his love. His words implied I had failed him, that he did not care about me nearly the way he would if I behaved better. While my current view of God has expanded to include more than that of seeing God as a male, fatherly image, at the time of this family incident the concept of *father* was central to my notion of the divine. Thus, I easily transposed my dad’s comment onto what God’s expectation would be. It seemed natural that God would ask me to shape up, to earn love and approval by how I behaved.

Thus it was that I entered my early thirties with this old impression hanging onto my relationship with God. No wonder I could not pray the prayer of surrender. Discovering the source of my flawed view did not change things instantly. I had miles to go before I could truly accept the reality of God’s totally generous, unconditional love. After about ten more years and another challenging experience, I could say with the full voice of my inner conviction that God is always for me and never against me. I could finally believe what Paul wrote long ago: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any creatures

will be able to separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39).

How did I eventually come to this freeing trust in God? When I turned forty, I chose to make a thirty-day retreat. With the help of a skilled spiritual guide, I prayed the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. These four weeks take the retreatant through a journey of meditation on the life and teachings of Jesus. During that month I repeatedly noticed the compassion and mercy Jesus extended to men and women. I saw how the messages and events of his life mirrored divine goodness. Through daily reflection on the Gospel texts, I slowly let go of the old message of having to earn God’s love by matching up to some impossible divine expectation.

Praying the cycle of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection convinced me that no matter what happens in my life, God will always hold me in a welcoming embrace. I finally accepted that my human journey will have its hills and valleys because that is how life is. I no longer fear God as out to reward or punish me for my human failings, or sending me “tests” of suffering to prove my fidelity. Those four weeks of retreat freed me to enter into a relationship centered on unreserved love.

This view has not caused me to care less about living a moral and just life. On the contrary. More than ever, I desire that I be transformed through prayer — not because God will be disappointed with me, or love me less if I do not continue to grow spiritually. I now believe I have a lifelong divine companion who will never leave my side, who will cheer me on in my good times and grieve with me in harsh ones, who wants

me to give of my best self, and who helps me daily by offering what I need to fulfill my desire to live a life modeled on the goodness and teachings of Jesus. More than ever, I want to be a woman of great love.

### The Richness of Divine Mystery

Each of us travels our own journey with God. Sometimes that journey requires us to traverse back to the past to see how we have come to know the God we pray to now. We may discover our view of God is not expansive enough, that we have boxed God in, placing tight parameters around how we name and find the Sacred in our life.

During a group response time at a Lenten retreat, an older woman asked me, “Aren’t you going to speak about the Holy Spirit?” At first I felt a bit chagrined by the question. Had I not spent an hour speaking about the qualities of the Holy Spirit by indicating ways the divine presence moves within the currents of our life? Had I not shown clearly enough that God’s grace and guidance are continually providing us with wisdom for the journey? As these questions zoomed through my mind, I quickly sensed that the inquirer wanted and needed to hear *her* name for God used, the metaphor that gave her the greatest comfort and support. Because I had not directly used the name “Holy Spirit,” she did not make the connection that the qualities of the Spirit were contained in the descriptions I used to refer to the divine.

Rather than boxing God in with a one-name-only approach, the consistent transitions of our life urge us to find

alternative ways to name and relate with the Holy One. Many religious traditions carry hundreds, even thousands, of ways to name this mystery whom we label “God.” Sufis have the ninety-nine most beautiful names of Allah. The Jewish and Christian scriptures provide a myriad of names and descriptions for the divine. Roman Catholic litanies, such as the one to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, contain numerous metaphors for Christ. Think of the various descriptions Jesus gave himself: servant, friend, teacher, door, truth, shepherd, healer, motherly hen, pathway of life, etc.

Humans have always sought meaningful ways to describe and relate to the vast, divine mystery known as God. Elizabeth A. Johnson describes it this way in her book *She Who Is*:

No language about God will ever be fully adequate to the burning mystery which it signifies. . . . Great symbols of the divine always come into being not simply as a projection of the imagination, but as an awakening from the deep abyss of human existence in real encounter with divine being.

As we experience “the deep abyss” of our faith-journey, our naming of the Holy will be expanded and altered. Obviously, as Johnson notes, no name will ever fully embrace the totality of God. All names for the divine are inadequate and never fully sufficient, even “Abba” or “Daddy,” the name Jesus used. All are human attempts to describe and connect with the One who dwells within us and among us. It is good

for us to remember, as Jan Richardson puts it, “the naming of God is a journey not a destination.”

The use of varying metaphors for the divine not only enhances our relationship with God; these names help us sense God touching the heart of what we are experiencing. When we are hurt or dealing with illness, comforting metaphors for the divine can ease our pain. When I was grieving, someone sent a card with the hands of Jesus holding a young lamb. This tender image led me to address God as “Gentle Shepherd” during my time of sadness. Although I do not often use that metaphor now, it helped immensely at the time when I sought comfort and assurance.

Metaphors such as “Loving Mother,” “Compassionate One,” “Sheltering Wings of Love,” “Eternal Mystery,” can sustain us in times of distress. When work issues are the focus of our prayer we can address God as “Just One,” “Peace Bringer,” “Eternal Truth,” or “Heart of Forgiveness.” Struggling parents might pray to God as “Holy Wisdom,” “Loving Parent,” “Patient One,” or “Unconditional Love.”

As we grow, our connection with God grows. When this happens, fresh qualities of the divine arise for us. Theologian Sandra Schneider tried to draw her readers beyond a staid way of addressing God as “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” and drolly commented, “God is more than two men and a bird.” Schneider was not attempting to disparage the Trinity. Rather, she was hoping to expand the reader’s view of God, to reinforce the belief that we can stretch beyond this basic concept. We can pray with many meaningful names and

descriptions, while continuing to keep our Trinitarian foundation. Always we relate to a sacred mystery which will not be contained by only one name from our human voice.

### The Gift of Grace

We are mistaken if we think we can grow spiritually by our own efforts. This is actually the opposite of how prayer “works.” In prayer, we bring ourselves to the entryway of our relationship with the Holy One, but it is God “who is able to accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine.” Divine power at work in us gives us what we need in order for our prayer to be a catalyst for union and transformation (Eph. 3:20).

The divine vigor stirring within us is *grace*, the loving energy of God’s movement. This gift enables us to grow into the person we are meant to be. The marvelous thing about grace is that it is freely contributed by God. We cannot force it to be given to us. We struggle fruitlessly if we try to grasp this gift in our clutches. What grace necessitates from us is our receptivity.

In her book on spiritual discernment, *I’d Say “Yes” God, If I Knew What You Wanted*, Nancy Reeves comments on the abundance of grace at our disposal and our inadequacy in being able to acquire it through our spiritual labors:

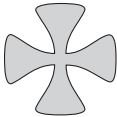
As we walk our spiritual path, evidence of God’s lavish love for us becomes more and more evident. This awareness often results in the realization of our unworthiness

to receive such a gift. This is true, and if God's love depended on our worthiness, no one would receive it. We are cherished for who we are, with all our shortcomings. This is grace. We are not used to free gifts, with no strings attached. It can produce anxiety to know that we can't control God's grace. Even though we are repeatedly told that divine grace and love will never be taken away from us, we would feel more comfortable if we could ensure its continuation.

Always divine grace draws us into relationship and encourages us into fuller life. Grace leads us into prayer and moves us out again, as the Acts of the Apostles clearly notes: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout all Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus experienced this himself when he was being prepared for his public ministry. Luke's Gospel tells us that Jesus was "filled with the Holy Spirit . . . and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days" (Luke 4:1). Mark's Gospel gives a stronger emphasis by saying "the Spirit *drove* him out into the desert" (Mark 1:12). Whether led or driven by the Spirit, we know that the loving movement of the Holy One was with Jesus, leading him into a place where he discovered more of his deepest self. He became increasingly sure of how God was active and alive in his being. One can imagine the intense stirring that occurred within Jesus when he lived and worked in Nazareth. He paid attention to the stirring and

eventually allowed this powerful and persistent inner movement to motivate his departure from his home place and guide him into the unknown territory of the desert. In this graced wilderness, Jesus encountered the depth of his inner strength and realized where his true power lay. Jesus learned he could trust the Abba with his life.




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*Prayer is not a competition, not an experience of winning or of accumulating good feelings and great insights. Prayer is about “showing up” with an open mind and heart, being willing and ready to grow and change.*

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We, too, are led (and sometimes driven) to union with the Holy One. We cannot control, force, or manipulate our relationship with God in prayer. Like Jesus, this encounter takes place when our spirit is ripe for it. If we are ready and willing to be graced, God enters in to reach and teach us in surprising ways. Through prayer we discover how God is present to us, guiding and encouraging us along the way.

### **Don't Push the River**

When grace entices and encourages us into an ever deepening union with God, we can be sorely tempted to want to rush and hurry the process. This hurrying and pushing is subtle

and undetectable until someone points it out to us. Our overly concerted efforts in prayer often happen in the following way: we read books on prayer and spiritual growth; we listen to pastors and speakers; we observe and learn how wonderfully others are experiencing God. As all this presses in on us we leap ahead and try to put our journey with God on a fast-forward speed. We quickly forget that our prayer is numb without grace, that it remains at a standstill without the loving movement of the Spirit to give it vitality and life.

Because of pushing when “nothing seems to be happening” in our prayer, impatience, discouragement, or apathy set in. All sorts of illusionary thoughts and feelings bombard us: “Why bother?” “What’s the use?” “Maybe I’m praying in the wrong way.” “God has forgotten about me.” “I’ll never learn how to get rid of my distractions in meditation.” “So and so seems much closer to God than I am.” “I wish I could pray like she does.” These temptations assail us when we forget that prayer is not just about our efforts but mainly about God’s gracing.

Thinking that our spiritual growth is entirely up to us is not an uncommon temptation. Bridgit Mair, a psychotherapist and participant at a conference on “inner freedom” in north-west England, wrote an article in an Irish magazine. In it, she commented on her experience: “I came home from that weekend feeling nourished, replenished and connected in a way that surprised me. I had been liberated some more and it wasn’t hard work, as was often customary. I hadn’t been on a war footing with myself in my efforts to change or heal

or transform. All I did was to turn up there, quietly open to receiving.”

This comment elucidates the connection between prayer and grace. Mair’s term “war footing” describes well how some people approach God and self. Prayer is not a competition, not an experience of winning or of accumulating good feelings and great insights. Prayer is about “showing up” with an open mind and heart, being willing and ready to grow and change. There is no need to get discouraged with prayer that does not match our expectations of results or prayer that reveals our sense of incompleteness.

Does prayer take effort and discipline? Yes. Every friendship requires faithful attention to the relationship. And yes, sometimes we have to *work* at renewing or restoring this bond because we have a zillion things that can lead us away from this attentiveness. But underneath, in our heart of hearts, the reason we give ourselves to the effort of prayer is love, the love that drew us in the first place into the relationship, and which is destined to unite us with God. Prayer flows from a conviction that we will do all we can to benefit this relationship and enhance its quality. In the end, however, we know that when we have done our part, God will take care of the rest. Knowing this, we attend to our prayer with surrendered peacefulness. Wise woman and author Paula D’Arcy refers to this surrender in *Sacred Threshold*:

“Don’t push the river,” says my friend Richard Rohr. Don’t get ahead of your soul. The goal isn’t to get somewhere. The goal isn’t about forcing something to

happen. The goal is to be in harmony with the gifts that are already given. The goal is to fall in love with your life.

A river flows along toward its destination easily and surely, as long as big obstacles are not placed in its path. As we enter the river of our prayer and spiritual growth, we do not need to hurry this river or shove our desire for God along like a warrior fighting in combat. Our union with God will grow in its own good time. We cannot force inner change. What we *can* do is continue to enter the relationship through prayer and keep renewing the intention of our heart to be in union with God. We can focus on the wonder of this relationship and be grateful for the beauty and graciousness of grace. And always we can keep our minds and hearts receptive and ready to receive.

Each day the river of our prayer steadily carries us along on our journey with God. Andrew Harvey offers encouragement to stay on this journey when he writes in *The Way of Passion*:

The only way by which we unite ourselves to the Divine in us is by longing with every cell of our body and our mind to be one with the Beloved. It is the only way. And that longing has to be perpetual, permanent, it has to go on as a river in the heart, a cry in the heart, saying endlessly, “Take me to you, take me to you.”

When we tend our God-relationship with love and devotion, “take me to you” becomes our theme song. This cry in our heart echoes resoundingly in the Beloved’s heart as we travel the wide river of life.

## Questions

1. How would you describe your relationship with God?
2. What people, circumstances, and resources have helped you most in learning how to pray?
3. What does “grace” mean to you? How have you experienced “grace” in prayer?
4. With what do you most agree, or disagree, in this chapter?

## Prayer

Divine Companion,  
you are ever near as I travel  
on the vast river of our relationship.  
Thank you for your grace in my life.  
May I grow daily in my love for you.  
I renew my commitment  
to have you be the center of my life.  
I pledge my faithfulness  
to communicate with you every day.  
Amen.