

We participated in an Ash Wednesday service last week unlike any other I've attended. There were no ashes, but the church's choir sang parts with volume, clapping and swaying to the beat. The whole-person-worship worked me out of my comfortable rut. Then the preacher took the microphone and stood before his congregation.

"Fasting without prayer is nothing more than a diet," he pronounced.

I laughed but am still thinking about his statement. He's right. A Lenten fast or any act of worship needs the partner of prayer to direct it to God. Talking to God doesn't require fancy words or form. Prayer is simply talking to Him. The important thing is to begin. The Spirit helps us when we pray.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because [g] the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Romans 8: 26-27

That promise encourages me to know the Spirit enhances my prayers. Scripture is one of many tools to help us pray. We can talk to God about promises like the one just quoted. If something stands out to us when reading the Bible, this may be the Holy Spirit speaking and is something we ought discuss with God. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3: 16-17

Scripture can spark worshipful prayer. Here's a beautiful declaration written by Paul in Romans 11. Dwelling on one word or phrase at a time can lead us to praising God in our own words launching from scripture.

Oh,

The depth

Of the riches

And wisdom

And knowledge

Of God!

How unsearchable are His judgments

And inscrutable His ways!

For who has known the mind of the Lord,

Or who has been His counselor?

Or who has given a gift to Him that he might be repaid?

For from Him

And through Him

And to Him

Are all things.

To Him

Be glory

forever,

Amen.

Here are some other Scriptures to use in praying. Spread them out over this second week of Lent to meditate and make your own.

Worship

Ephesians 1:1-10; 1:11-14; 3:20-21 Philippians 2:5-11 Colossians 1:15-20

Intercession

Philippians 1:2-6, 9-11 Colossians 1:9-12

Petition

Ephesians 1:15-23 3:14-19

Confession

Ephesians 5:14-21 Philippians 2:1-5

Anytime

Psalms 8, 19, 40, 103, 131, 145

Another tool I use for prayer is a devotional. These help, but after many weeks of using the same one, I may rush through and merely brush the surface of God with small-talk and a list of requests. When this happens, I know I need to change my approach. Deeper prayer, that soul to soul contact with God, requires a deeper dive into Him. Isn't that why we enter into Lent, to dig deeper and draw nearer to Jesus? Prayer can be hard work. "Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6)

Writing prayers, which no one besides God and I will see, keeps my mind from drifting. Writing reveals thoughts I didn't realize were rolling around my head. At times, I'll begin a sentence, then see that I am deceiving myself about what I am penning. God already knows my crud, so I must be honest with Him and myself. This confession encourages me to ask for help in changing, and it's freeing to know He loves me despite the ugliness in my life. Very often, writing to God clears my thoughts when I'm confused. The time it takes to choose and write words allows the Holy Spirit to speak to me.

Sometimes I forget to pray! I want to abide in Christ, but I get wrapped up in the tasks at hand and unconsciously leave God out. Whatever fast you've chosen for Lent, whether to give up something or take up something, use it as a tool to remind you to pray.

Stand, sit, lay on your face, or take a knee. However you position your body, pray, pray, pray.
“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”
(Matthew 7:7) Remember, fasting without prayer is just a diet.

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