

Prayer of Mutual Presence

Tilden Edwards is a spiritual teacher and co-founder of The Shalem Institute, a contemplative organization. In this passage, he describes the purpose of prayer:

Authentic prayer is opening to God's gracious presence with all that we are, with what Scripture summarizes as our whole heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). Therefore prayer is more a way of *being* than an isolated act of doing.

Prayer is aimed at our deepest problem: our tendency to forget our liberating connectedness with God. When this happens we become lost in a sense of ultimate separateness. From this narrow outside-of-God place rise our worst fears, cravings, restlessness, and personal and social sinfulness. . . .

Prayer also arises from our deepest hope: for the abundance of life that comes when we abide in our deepest home, our widest consciousness. Prayer is our bridge to Home.

Edwards goes on to distinguish between two types of prayer:

Active prayer is present where our wills normally shape our opening to God, with faint or strong promptings from deep within. Intercession, petition, confession, thanksgiving, and praise are forms of active prayer. These are forms of prayer that most of us learn as children and find reinforced in corporate worship and Scripture. Their content and shape rise naturally out of our daily lives and evolving spiritual life.

Quiet, contemplative prayer happens when we are still and open ourselves to Christ's Spirit working secretly in us, when we heed the psalmist's plea: "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalms 46:10). These are times when we trustingly sink into God's formless hands for cleansing, illumination, and communion. . . . We are in a state of quiet appreciation, simply hollowed out for God. At the gifted [that is, graced] depth of this kind of prayer we pass beyond any image of God and beyond any image of self. We are left in a mutual raw presence. Here we realize that God and ourselves quite literally are more than we can imagine. . . .

Such contemplative prayer finds us in what Scripture calls our "hearts": our deepest, truest self in God, the self that is deeper than our normal sense of mind and feelings, yet includes these in a transfigured way. Here is the "home" of God in us, where we are most together, "I pray that Christ will *dwell* in your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17). It is the core dimension of our being where we most realize our divinely gifted nature, indeed, where we sense ourselves being intimately breathed in and out by God continually. In the placeless place of the spiritual heart we are in touch before thoughts,

beyond thoughts. We can bring into that inner sanctuary only our naked trust and longing. . . .

If the fundamental spiritual discipline is prayer, opening to God, then the fundamental discipline of prayer is turning to our heart and inviting a sustained mutual presence.

Tilden Edwards, *Living in the Presence: Spiritual Exercises to Open Your Life to the Awareness of God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987, 1995), 11–13.