

Finding your prayer practice

One raises his hands, palms open, as he sways rhythmically whispering, "Come Lord Jesus." One reaches for her prayer book, turning familiarly to dog-eared pages and sliding her finger down the margin to rest on words of comfort. One sheds his shoes at the entrance to the labyrinth and glides sock-footed and effortlessly along the marked path. And one picks up hammer and nails to secure the drywall in a Habitat for Humanity house.

For each and for all, this is prayer. "The desired result of prayer," says Nosson Scherman in *Prayer, A Timeless Need*, "is the increase of God's presence."

In the West, especially in the Episcopal Church, says Corinne Ware, assistant professor at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, we are accustomed to thinking of prayer as reaching God through the spoken word. And the gift of that, particularly as expressed in *The Book of Common Prayer*, "is that those prayers are so well crafted and so timeless that they give us words we could not have put together."

But through her research, Ware has discovered that different people experience Scherman's "increase of God's presence" through differing means. Both the hands that clasp the book and the hands that drive the hammer are expressions of the holy.

Our choices are influenced by the traditions we grew up with, our cultural heritage, our personality and personal history, our career and family situations, our stage of life, and the challenges we are facing at this time in our lives.

Ware, who is director of the seminary's Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry Program and Assistant Professor of Ascetical Theology, has identified four specific patterns of prayer (she expands this into four spiritual typologies in her book *Discover Your Spiritual Type*.)

"Head" spirituality " Perhaps most common among Episcopalians are people who feel close to God through their minds. "God speaks to them through the written word," explains Ware. They depend on inspiration from Scripture and study of Scripture. They enjoy written prayers and books about prayer.

Those who have an affinity for "words" find high spiritual moments in hearing something said that stirs them or in reading a passage that seems to say exactly what they feel to be true. For people who love words and ideas, reading is the avenue of God's speech.

Heart" spirituality

A second group finds God through the heart; for them, connection to the holy is through feeling. They respond to art, music, and fellowship, and they express their joy in such ways as raising their hands. Although prayer is made up of words for this group, the words are less formal than with type one, and praying is often extemporaneous. The aim

of this type of spirituality is to achieve holiness of life through personal renewal, which is often done by experiencing God in the moment.

The mystics

The third group Ware identifies as the "mystics." "For them," says Ware, "prayer is not addressing God but is listening to God." The desert mothers and fathers are an example, as are the medieval mystics. "People attracted to this type of spirituality love walking the labyrinth," says Ware, and often are, by nature, contemplative, introspective, intuitive, and focused on an inner world as real to them as is the exterior one. "Being" is more important than "doing."

The visionaries

The fourth group, which Ware points out are a smaller portion of the general population, are the "visionaries."

"Ask them how they pray," says Ware, "and they will say 'My work is my prayer.' As they work at Habitat for Humanity, as they feed and clothe others, they are at prayer. For them, work and prayer is the same thing." Mother Theresa of Calcutta comes to mind. Visionaries want nothing less than the transformation of society, a rectifying of the wrongs of the world, and they may even become martyrs for their cause.

The question to ask the Church, maintains Ware, is does it appreciate all of its members' ways of receiving the presence of God? "There is a thirst for the affective in our lives," she says, "for an emotionally moving experience more in touch with feeling." Indeed, national demographic figures indicate that the Christian population formerly concentrated in type one, head spirituality, is now moving entirely away from church membership or into congregations that represent the type two "heart" experience. Life in a technological and impersonal environment can leave us with a yearning for relationship and meaning.

Finding your own

In *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth*, Corinne Ware explores in depth the four spiritual types from which the prayer types, given here, are taken. Along with individual spirituality types, Ware postulates that congregations also possess particular spirituality types, often displayed in the way they worship (which explains why a person may or may not "fit in" with the worship style of a particular congregation). Ware's book is available through special order from Viva Bookstore in San Antonio or directly from the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest bookstore. Call the seminary at (512) 472-4133.