



Patience: a Christian reflection

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'For God alone my soul in silence waits.'

It's not a prayer, really. It's more like an instruction to yourself. Just stop, and wait. Be patient. There's nothing else you can do.

Some people seem to have a very lively relationship with God. It's all very chatty, like having a best friend with you all the time. It feels good, in the same way as it feels good to be with someone you love (or fancy). The great spiritual writers, over the centuries, have described this and the joy it can bring.

But those same writers also tell us that prayer must take us beyond these things. If we just keep chatting, then there is a danger we will only be chatting to ourselves. If we keep going after good feelings, then there is a danger that we just get hooked on them.

There is also a bit of a problem for people who don't ever find it easy to chat with God, and who find they never feel anything much, even in the most beautiful or enthusiastic church service. They could be left with the impression that God just isn't there for them.

In the end, the Bible tells us, prayer isn't something we do. We might get on our knees, put our hands together, and remember to offer adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication (praying for ourselves and for other people. This is all very good, but it isn't what makes 'praying' into actual 'prayer'.

Prayer is God's work in us. It is the Spirit of God at work in our own souls. Prayer, through the Spirit, is God calling and enfolding us into his own life. This is not, in the end, any kind of feeling, and it is far beyond anything that words can describe. It is simply God being God for us. It is just the case, just like your existence and mine isn't something we can make happen – it just is.

So what should we do? Most of us should probably do less, but I'm not talking about being lazy. We could spend more time waiting for God in silence. Let the chatter subside. Let the feelings flow in and

out of us like a slow river, and just wait, patiently. Let the Spirit do its work, to make us ever more patient with God, with others, and with ourselves.

Suggested Bible passages

- 1 For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.
- 2 He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall never be shaken.

- 5 For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
- 6 He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
- 7 On God rests my deliverance and my honour;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

- 8 Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.

Psalm 62: 1, 2, 5-8

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8: 26-27

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Galatian 5:22-25

Prayer

Almighty God, give us wisdom to perceive Thee, intellect to understand Thee, diligence to seek Thee, patience to wait for Thee, vision to behold Thee, a heart to meditate upon Thee, and life to proclaim Thee.

St. Benedict