

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Prayer:

Finding the Heart's True Home

by

Richard J. Foster

1. According to Richard J. Foster, we need to laugh and play and walk and talk and have other ordinary, positive life experiences in order to have a healthy prayer life (p. xii). Why would such experiences make a difference in our prayer practice? How has this observation proved true or not for you?
2. How would you define prayer? Do you agree with Foster that prayer is the language of our love relationship with God? If not, how might his perspective change the way you think about prayer? How has prayer changed you?

3. What kinds of prayer do you find yourself practicing most frequently? What other kinds would you most like to try?
4. What keeps you from praying? Are you held back by a sense that everything must be “just right”? How do you react to Foster’s statement, “We will never have pure enough motives, or be good enough, or know enough in order to pray rightly. We simply must set all these things aside and begin praying” (p. 8)?
5. What does Foster mean by saying that just as a child cannot draw a bad picture, so a child of God cannot offer a bad prayer (pp. 8–9)? What does such an image say about God?
6. Foster tells us that we all must begin with, and indeed return to, simple, or self-centered, prayer (pp. 10–11). How have you practiced simple prayer? Does it change your ideas about simple prayer to read that it is the kind of prayer most often practiced by the people of the Bible? Why or why not?
7. How does self-knowing assist us in prayer? How does turning inward bring us to God, what Madame Guyon calls the “law of central tendency” (p. 32)?
8. When have you most struggled with God? How, if ever, were you able to relinquish your will to God? Why is it necessary for us to undergo a “crucifixion of the will” (p. 53)?

9. Why is regularity in prayer so important? When have you best succeeded in praying regularly? What did you learn from that experience?
10. How do you tend to err—making too much conscious effort to exert control over entering God’s presence, or remaining too passive in prayer? How have you tried, or how can you in the future try, to find the middle, where you both act and are acted upon?
11. Do you tend to pray in a more improvised way, or through rites and rituals such as are found in the liturgy or a prayer book? Why? What are some advantages of both types of prayer? How can you be more balanced in your prayer life?
12. Why is it so important to understand Scripture emotionally as well as intellectually? What role has Scripture played in your prayer life?
13. Foster cautions us that contemplative prayer is not for the spiritual novice; he then lists several attitudes that might reflect the necessary spiritual maturity to engage in contemplative prayer, including “a continuing hunger for intimacy with God, an ability to forgive others at great personal cost, a living sense that God alone can satisfy the longings of the human heart, a deep satisfaction in prayer, a realistic assessment of personal abilities and shortcomings, a freedom from boasting about spiritual accomplishments, and a demonstrated ability to live out the demands of life patiently and wisely” (p. 156). How would you assess yourself according to these criteria?

14. How have you been able to experience prayer within the daily context of your work or family life? Why does Foster suggest we can find God most in the work that we abhor?
15. When you were growing up, if your family gathered for study, prayer, and/or blessing, how did that look? What is the practice of your family now? What new ideas might you try to adopt—for example, blessing your children each night or creating a “hermitage” in your home?
16. In giving us the Our Father, or *Paternoster*, Jesus taught us to ask God for a variety of things large and small, everything from our daily bread to God’s will being done on earth. What is harder for you to bring to God: things that are seemingly trivial or those that are seemingly too large? Why?
17. Describe your normal intercessory practice of praying for others. Why do you think Foster suggests each of the four steps of prayer for healing: listening, asking, believing, and giving thanks (pp. 210–215)?
18. How does praying alone or praying in a group or community affect your prayers? What are some ways you can pray more frequently and more effectively within your church community?
19. How has *Prayer* expanded your ideas about prayer? What new experiences of prayer have you had? What, if any, changes have you made or do you hope to make to your prayer life?