

The Practice of Prayer: Part III. Wow

If we are not dead to wonder, we have a chance. If we can still be stopped by beauty, by miracle, by love, by grace, by power beyond ourselves, there can come a prayer welling up that has no word but “Wow.” To say more is impossible. It is that moment when we stand perfectly clear that God is God and we are not. And yet there is a deeper Wow, that even though we aren’t God, we are of God and some deep imprint in us resonates with the holiness before us. And we say, “Wow.”

I never worry that Alaskans have missed this opportunity for prayer. Each of us could rattle off a time in this Great Land when something took our breath away. The view at the top of the mountain. Watching a glacier calve. Seeing a whale breach beside the kayak. Pulling up a really big fish. Marveling at the running grace of a grizzly. Waking up to the deep silence of the wilderness in winter. Seeing a full moon on fresh powder. The Northern Lights. You can add your own.

The Wow prayer comes unbidden from the deepest part of our soul, connecting us to God in an effortless way, so natural that for an instant we are reformed into that image of God, suspended in time. I try to imagine what it was like to be a disciple with Jesus and to see water turned into wine. Wow. A blind man healed. Wow. Lazarus raised from the dead. Wow. I wonder how often the disciples prayed in this way, incredulous at the possibility Jesus opened to them.

As we end this section on prayer as a spiritual practice, I’m aware of the many many ways that every prayer holds a potential for ‘Wow’, even if it is a prayer of Help or a prayer of Thanks. As a spiritual practice, it can’t be shoe-horned into a certain time of day or a predetermined ritual. It simply comes. The spiritual practice then of this prayer is to be so grounded in God, that the response is automatic.

After starting to write about prayer, I hardly know where to stop. This intimate way of being with God, baring our souls, trusting beyond reason, is the fabric of faith. As Martin Luther is quoted as saying, “I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.” The spiritual practice is to come to this attitude—that spending time talking to God, in whatever form that takes, is our first inclination. Prayer becomes not so much a habit we do at meals or in church but as a constant part of daily life. It leaves our control at some point, where we don’t so much pray to God, as God prays to and through us. That kind of intimacy.

As you consider your own practice of prayer, here are some questions that broke me out of complacency about my own prayer. Add your own.

- When do I speak to God from deep within my soul? How long since I’ve done that?
- Do I pray to get God to agree with me or do I let go of all my agendas, trusting in what unfolds?
- Has my prayer changed over time? Why? What is meaningful now?

If you would like to share your practice of prayer, your questions about prayer or how your prayer has changed, transformed or sustained you, please write me at mwakeland@gmail.com. Sharing our stories of prayer is another practice of a Christian community!