

## *Relational Prayer*

There are different forms of Christian prayer and all have their value and place. Nothing, however, can replace or substitute the heart-to-heart intimacy God desires with us. Here are a few thoughts on *Relational Prayer* that have been forming throughout the years. Hope you find them helpful as we actively surrender to God who pursues us.

Fr Francis Valerio © 2016

www.desertheartcry.com

frfrancisvalerio@gmail.com

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**Relational Prayer:** The Scriptures, every Catechism and every worth while spiritual book reveal the spiritual life is always about growing in our relationship with God – the One through Whom all things were made (John 17:3; Colossians 1:16). True intimacy is more fully knowing the Person of God and allowing ourselves to be fully known by Him. *Prayer is Relationship*. Therefore prayer is a dialogue, a conversation, a giving God permission to know me, love me, encourage me, convict me, heal me, forgive me, form me, restore me; a giving myself permission to be, feel and share with God; a giving myself permission to receive from God's heart. Jesus says, "My sheep know my voice" (John 10), and He is interested in knowing mine. If this mutual listening, sharing, receiving is taking place between God and myself, there is prayer. It's no different than any other relationship I have with a loving family member, a good friend, a spouse.

**The Heart of Prayer** is not just about learning new things about God, or the historical context of scripture, or profound revelations, or what concordances say, or what new insight I can gain so people will think I'm spiritually smart. God isn't something to be figured out, but a Person to know and fall in love with. God desires we be reconciled and at peace with Him (2 Corinthians 5: 16-21). God desires we be at peace with one another (Colossians 1:19-20; Ephesians 4:3). God desires I be at peace with myself (Mark 12:31). To freely receive love and freely give love away, to God and others, is why Jesus paid the price He did for us (Matthew 10:8; Luke 6:27-38). It is God's presence and freedom in relationships that lead to union, communion and unity (John 17:21). The freedom to be in True Love Relationships is what Holy Spirit desires for us and helps us with (1 John 4:7-14; 2 Corinthians 3:17).

**Listening** is one of the most intimate actions we can offer to another person. Listening is loving. Listening says: "You are valuable, your voice, thoughts, feelings matter... you're worth my time and sacrifice, worth receiving all that's in your heart and on your mind." God honors my entire self and desires to see and listen to me (Song of Songs/Solomon 2:14). We are created for relationship and the only way relationships grow is if there is mutual honoring and reverence. In relational prayer, after I have shared my voice/ thoughts, it's time to listen to God's heart/voice for me. To only talk/share my thoughts with God, without then listening to His (or others) is not honoring. It's dumping. One of the greatest causes of loneliness today is the absence of mutual, honored listening. Listening is loving... and where there is love, Holy Spirit moves.

## **Where there is safety - our hearts open to Love**

We desire to be known, but sometimes our shame and/or pride tempt us to fear Love...to fear Love's gaze...to fear vulnerability. What will Love do? How will Love respond if all of me is really known/seen? Jesus is not ashamed of the messiness of my humanity. On the Cross, Jesus has chosen to be vulnerable to me first. There He has already embraced all of my wounds, hurts, pains and sin. God gets me. He understands. Jesus continues to invite us out of our fear-based shame/pride into greater vulnerability. In this *vulnerability of being known* we will know God's presence, peace and hope (Matthew 11:28; Psalm 139; John 4:29; 1 Peter 5:7). Without this vulnerability our fears will always have some control over us. Most of us have to learn to be loved by God's kind of love...this is where we grow in trusting Jesus.

**Where my heart feels safe, it will open to Love.**

Where my heart does not feel safe, it will close and wall off to others.  
When God becomes my safety – I am free.

*A good question to ask myself:*

Who makes me feel safest today? Abba Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit or Mary?

In Relational Prayer, if I stay with whom I feel safest, my heart will open more to God’s Love (1 John 4:18). In that openness I will receive more Truth from God, which will encourage me into greater intimacy with the entire Trinity and Mary... step by step. In *this* Relationship we find our hope, belonging, value, freedom, peace, purpose.

\*We understand Mary is not God, but she is our spiritual Mother. For many, regardless of the theological truth that “God is love,” the idea/thought of letting God, as a masculine figure, embrace us or be close to us, may not feel safe. This often is so because of life’s hurts and traumas that have warped the true Father image of God. Thankfully God has given us Mary, as a spiritual Mother (John 19:26-27) and an image of Love that many need to feel safe and receive God’s Love residing in Her heart (Isaiah 66: 10-14). Often, Mary will help restore the true image of God’s Love to us...helping us feel safe and leading to a full Love Relationship/ Intimacy with Abba Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit.

**Be not ashamed: our greatest struggles can lead us to freedom**

It’s helpful to ask Holy Spirit for greater awareness in where I struggle the most, am tempted the most, react instead of respond to others, where I tend to control/manipulate to feel safe or get my way, etc. The Desert Fathers encourage us: If you follow the demon’s temptations - they will take you to the places where God desires to help, heal and restore you. Where I struggle the most - is where God wants to help the most. Where I struggle the most is where I need the most Love and Truth. Jesus came for those who admit they need a doctor, not for those who trust in themselves, their own intellects, their own goodness (Luke 5:31-32 / Rom:21-16/ Titus 3:5/ John 15:5). God is not ashamed of me or mad at me because of my weakness, sin or past. God is already present in the messiest places within me...waiting for me there. Will I meet Him there and let the Lord/Mary help, embrace, heal, forgive, restore me by His Grace? (Romans 5:6-11/ Colossians 2:13-15).

**Through Relational Prayer:**

- \*We grow in listening to God’s voice/heart
- \*We grow in sharing our own voice/heart
- \*God desires I listen to Him, know His voice, receive from Him...God’s love, truth, dreams, desires, hopes, purposes are invaluable to me and for me
- \*God desires to listen to me...my voice, heart, hurts, joys, weaknesses, desires matter and are important to Him...He desires to receive me, embrace me in it all (1 Peter 5:7)  
-I am valued and valuable to God (Isaiah 43:1-5)
- \*The core of why Jesus lived, died and rose for us is revealed: the truth of Who God is/is for us, and the truth of who we are in Him (Identity)

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## **Breakdown for 35 minutes of Relational Prayer Time**

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and everything else will be given to you” (Mt 6:33)

### ***1st 5 minutes***

- Be in a place/ space where there will be the least amount of distractions
- Take a few minutes to quiet down... about the time of an Our Father or Hail Mary
- I remind myself that the Holy Trinity God dwells/lives within me... I am never alone
- Spend a few minutes in Gratitude/Thanksgiving/Praise to Holy Spirit for His presence, love, goodness, truth, revelation and wisdom
- Maybe picture yourself with the Lord/Mary in a safe prayer scene together

### ***next 10 minutes***

Possible questions from whom I feel safest with: Abba Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit or Mary:

(Pick a few that stand out to you)

- My child, what are you feeling/ thinking today?*
- What are your troubles/struggles/burdens?
- What are your desires?
- What are your fears?
- What are your joys?
- What do you need from Me? What do you need Me to be for you?*
- Will you let Me help you?

I'm invited here to give my heart a voice...I may have to give my heart permission to feel, express itself to God and receive His love. Honesty is most helpful in any relationship... it's the same with God. God prefers my honest feelings over what I think "I should sound/feel like." The Psalms are filled with honesty from man to God. Religiosity is not helpful if I desire to really encounter Jesus. God already knows what's in our hearts... so be honest with whatever is there. Children are honest. Jesus encourages the childlike (God's kids, that's you and I) to be with Him and know Love's embrace (Luke 18:16). It may be helpful to keep a prayer journal and write down your thoughts to the Lord/Mary. For some, simply speaking our heart/thoughts out loud is helpful. For others, picturing ourselves with the Lord/Mary conversing in a safe scene is good (this is a prayer form St Ignatius encouraged using the God given gift of imagination). Maybe I see/sense the Lord/Mary close to me, holding me, holding my hand, going for a walk, etc. In this safety, I respond to the Lord's/Mary's questions to me.

### ***next 10 minutes***

*After I have shared my heart thoughts, I give the Lord/Mary some time to respond to me:*

I may ask one or more of these questions in return:

- Lord/Mary, what are you saying/speaking to me?
- What do you think about what I've shared?
- How do you want to help me?
- What's Your Love and Truth for me?
- What's your heart feeling, thinking, desiring for me?

Here I write down, speak out loud, what I believe the Lord/Mary are saying. Or with the gift of imagination, picture the Lord/Mary with me...responding to me in that safe prayer scene. I may need to give God/Mary permission to speak and give God's heart a voice.

**This “Letting God speak to me / respond to me” can be verbal and non-verbal by:**

words spoken, thoughts communicated by the Lord’s / Mary’s loving gaze upon me, listening to their heartbeat as they hold me close, by a particular mental image or scripture scene of being with them, for some by drawing/painting a picture scene of the Lord/Mary and myself together, for some by certain feelings/emotions I experience in their presence, by the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), by a deeper knowing that they understand me: my hopes, my hurts, my needs, my weaknesses, my struggles, my joys, my desires.

**This interactive dialogue/conversation between the Lord/Mary and myself can flow from:** simply what’s going on in my life (sharing my feelings/thoughts, etc.), *Lectio Divina* (what God’s *speaking to me personally* from the Scriptures), or as a springboard off something that stands out to me in spiritual reading, daily events, family life, by encountering the Lord in the Sacraments and Eucharistic Adoration, through worship, by revelation through God’s creation, through fellowship and interaction with other Believers, through my daily interactions with others in daily life, etc. God speaks to us in many ways. We’re asking Holy Spirit to give us greater awareness and availability to listen, receive and respond.

**\*One common concern in letting God speak to us is:** “it’s just me thinking these thoughts,” and, “I’m putting words in God’s mouth.” A few thoughts that may help with these concerns follow:

**Help 1: Take a risk.** A good encouragement here is to go ahead and write down, speak out loud, etc. what you believe they’re saying. Take the risk. Often we have not all grown up with affirming/encouraging words spoken to us all the time, and so we grow in learning to be loved by God...learning to receive affirming/loving words and gestures from the Lord. Be patient with yourself, this “learning” can take a little time and getting used to. God will always speak Love and Truth, for that’s who He is (1 John 4:16, John 14:6). God does desire I hear Him, so to know Him personally.

**Help 2: Give God permission to encourage.** We all have encouraged other people with words, gestures, a hug, etc. We know what those encouraging words /gestures look and sound like. Will I let God encourage me in the same way? God is the only source of love and truth. So if what I am “hearing” from the Lord is loving, truthful, encouraging, building me up...then it’s probably from God. God’s words to me can be convicting but they’ll never be condemning (Romans 8:1). Remember God wants me to see/know/believe the truth of who I am *in Him*, so that with Holy Spirit I can live the Truth...my true self In-Christ. A deduction from this equation= one reason there is a lack of true identity in Jesus believers today, is because often there’s little true prayer happening...food for thought. At this point in my relational prayer, if I’m not sure what God is saying, maybe write down/speak out loud, what I believe the Lord/Mary would say to me, or even what are the loving/encouraging words I wish they would say to me... these could be a good words to start with, and often, these *are* the words God is desiring to speak.

**Help 3: The Childlike heart is humble.** Our deepest identity to God will always be “son” or “daughter” (Galatians 3:26; 2 Corinthians 6:18). In my relational prayer time, picturing myself as a child can be helpful in receiving God’s love. It’s the humble heart that receives the Kingdom. A child desires to be helped and deep down, knows it can’t “do life” on its own. A little one cannot buy clothes, or food, or shelter and take care of itself. Similarly, little ones cannot produce “love” for themselves. A child needs love, help, attention and care. If I pictured/imagined myself as a child that needed love, attention and care, how old would I be? I can picture myself at this age with the Lord/Mary, etc. to share heart to heart and be cared for in a safe prayer scene. Even if we don’t have physical children of our own, we know how we would respond to a little child in need of love, help and encouragement... it is those similar words, gestures and caring God is wanting to share with me as His child (1 John 4:10).

**Help 4: Discernment.** A common question: How do I know its God speaking? In relational prayer there is a heart-to-heart conversation, and I may think I am “putting words in God’s mouth.” A few thoughts on confirming the “words I am hearing in prayer” are from God:

(a) these “words from God” will not contradict God’s Word in Scripture, Church Teaching or Tradition. Having each of these as our sources of Truth is vital, for the Word says that even the elect may be deceived in the last days (Matthew 24:24). Our current times find many parishes, Churches and peoples replacing Jesus as their center and making themselves their own “way, truth and life” while disregarding Biblical and Traditional Truths handed down throughout the centuries. Jesus paid a price so His Truth could set us free. These are the same Truths martyrs have given their lives for – both past and present (Revelation 7:14).

(b) these “word from God” will confirm the truth of who Jesus Christ is as fully God and fully man, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, was crucified and died for our sins, rose on the 3rd day and now sits at the right hand of God the Father and will one day return for His Bride. Any “words from God” that would lead one to deny the truth about Jesus as the only Son of God are not from God’s Spirit, and should always be rejected (1 John 2:21-24).

(c) ultimately, these “words from God” will *build me up* and confirm me more in the Truth of who I am as God’s child, created for spiritual adoption to inherit God’s Kingdom in the present and eternal life (John 1:2; John 15:15; Romans 8:14-17).

#### ***next 10 Minutes***

Spend a few minutes *just BEING in God’s/Mary’s presence*

- I picture their love/goodness/peace pouring into my heart, mind and body.
- Simply choose to receive all they desire to be for you, pour into you, encourage you with.

#### ***last 5 minutes***

*After prayer time with the Lord/Mary I could ask myself:*

- 1) What did that time of relational prayer help me believe about myself?  
-jot down a few Words of Truth
- 2) What did that time of relational prayer help me believe about God/Mary?  
-jot down a few Words of Truth
- 3) Continue to add these Words of Truth to a “**Truth List**” (an ongoing list) and speak these Truths *out loud* daily as a “**Declaration of Freedom**”

#### *Examples of who I am to/in God*

- “In God’s eyes, I am good, a gift, lovable, wanted, I am not a burden”
- (or from Jesus/Mary to me): “You are good, a gift, lovable, wanted, I love to be with you”

#### *Examples of who God is / is for me*

- “Jesus is kind, powerful, understanding, wants to be with me, merciful, is not mad at me, here to help, rejoices over me”
- (or from Jesus/Mary to me): “I am kind, powerful, I do understand you, I love being with you, I am mercy, I’m not ashamed of you or mad at you, you’re worthy of My time and attention, you make Me smile”

## **The Truth will set me free** (John 8:32)

*Our greatest freedom comes from the restoration and truth of 2 Identities:*

- 1) The truth of who God is, and is for me
- 2) The truth of who I am in God's eyes

- It's very possible I have lived under Lies about myself, God and others for years.
- Where there are lies, there will always be fears/controls trying to persuade me
  - St Paul reminds us: "Do not conform to the standards of the this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds" (Romans 12:2)
  - God's Word, Love and Truth transform my mind and heart. In this, Jesus becomes more my personal "Way, Truth, and Life" (John 14:6), into intimacy with Abba Father and Mama Mary

## **Faith comes by hearing the Word of God** (Romans 10:17)

We were created from God's heart, for God's heart (John 1:1-5). In the beginning, God's Word, Jesus, spoke...and from that spoken Word Life began and is sustained (Genesis 1:1-31/ Colossians 1:15-20). We live out of what we believe, not what we know. Our belief system is formed by what we hear, perceive, experience through life events and the words/actions of others and ourselves. To grow in intimacy with God, I need God's Love and Truth spoken to me/ within me/over me. God's Word to/for me is a constant washing of Jesus' Blood and refreshing of Holy Spirit within. Through this washing of Love/Truth Jesus rescues us from the Kingdom of Darkness (Lies/Fears), re-establishing us with His inheritance/freedom/authority to reign with Him at the right hand of Abba Father (Colossians 1:13-16 /Ephesians 2:1-7/ Hebrews 1:1-4).

- God speaks His Word to me
- I willfully agree with it.
- greater Union with God happens.
- Jesus is more fully alive within me, ready to share/speak the same Words of Love, Truth, Mercy, Encouragement to others through me that I have received (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

Mary's willful receptivity/agreement with God's Word and the Fruit of that receptivity/agreement is a great prayer meditation (Luke 1:26-38). Mary's response to God's Word is to be our own: "Be it done unto me according to Your Word" (Luke 1:38)...the Fruit of this response in/from us will be the same: Jesus more alive in us and given to the world.

## **To receive/agree with God's Word (Love and Truth) releases:**

- a greater outpouring of Holy Spirit upon/within us
- a deeper receiving of Jesus' life/love/truth/freedom/authority within
- an increased desire, and Holy Spirit ability, to share Jesus' life with others

**One encouragement:** Daily, I'm going to receive/ agree with /declare God's Word (Truth) or Satan's Lies. The choice is mine (Hebrews 4:2; Hebrews 4:14). My life will manifest whose "word" I am agreeing with. This is not magical or about positive thinking... it's relational. Whether I feel it's true for me or not, I choose to declare God's Truth. In this I choose Life and Faith's door remains open to Intimacy with God (Deuteronomy 30:19 / Revelations 3:20-22). Faith is not about my feelings, and God's Truth doesn't change because of them. Regardless of the season of life I'm in, God is faithful and His grace sustains (Hebrews 4:14-16). Holy Spirit empowers us to remain with/in Jesus (John 15:1-11). The choice is ours. Let us encourage/ pray for/ pray with one another to remain in the Freedom of God (Ephesians 6:18/ 1 Thessalonians 5:11).

## Tracking with God – Sharing God

“We share with you what we have seen and heard” (1 John 1:3)

- #1)** –I review my week of Relational Prayer with God and jot down, underline or highlight some key things that stood out to me.
- I write down any particular feelings/ thoughts/ reactions to God in prayer
  - I write down any specific things God has shared that moved me
  - In a few sentences, I write down a Basic Theme from my last week of prayer (this will be the heart of what my last week of prayer was about)
  - I jot down how I feel the Lord and I will grow in this particular area together

**#2)** Repeat #1 for the next 3 weeks of prayer.

**#3)** Review the past 4 week’s Basic Themes, then jot down an Overall Theme for the past month, as well as any specific interactions/experiences that stood out the most. This isn’t about super mystical revelations - it’s about Relationship. Its about the greater awareness I’m having of God’s presence; Who He is for/to me; who I am to Him; where He is inviting me to grow with Him; how He is encouraging me; where I have struggled; where there have been break-thrus, etc.

*Tracking with God* may give us greater recall of what has happened in prayer over the past month, and not just over the past few days. It may also help us see how this Relationship/Intimacy with God is not a stagnant, boring thing...but alive, personal and growing... which is always an encouraging thing.

*Tracking with God* may also foster a greater desire to share what we have received from Holy Spirit. From relational prayer we will, in some way, share with others our experience of God and in fact share God himself (Acts 1:8; Acts 4:20). The heart of all evangelization is sharing the Person of Jesus with others, that we ourselves have known.

*Tracking with God* can also be invaluable if you connect with a spiritual director. Spiritual directors shouldn’t really have to dig and ask a bunch of questions for you to share what’s going on in your prayer life...that pretty much should flow from the directee. One fruit of Relational Prayer is a greater awareness of one’s interaction with God’s heart/mind and the ability to share that with others. A spiritual director may ask some follow-up questions to probe deeper into a specific area that you mention, give you some thoughts for future prayer, enter into a discussion on a particular area Holy Spirit may be highlighting, etc. If I’m tracking with God, the person doing most of the talking/sharing during spiritual direction – would be me.

“Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in times of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Hope some of this helps  
Know you’re loved  
God bless, peace, stay amazing!

Fr Francis Valerio  
© 7-28-2016  
www.desertheartcry.com  
frfrancisvalerio@gmail.com

## **Simple Footprint: 35 minutes Relational Prayer**

### ***1st 5 minutes***

- Be in a place/ space where there will be the least amount of distractions
- Take a few minutes to quiet down...about the time of an Our Father and Hail Mary
- I remind myself that the Holy Trinity God dwells/lives within me...I am never alone
- Spend a few minutes in gratitude/thanksgiving to Holy Spirit for His presence, love, goodness, truth, revelation and wisdom
- Maybe picture myself with the Lord/Mary in a safe prayer scene together

### ***next 10 minutes***

- \*Let whom I feel safest with: Abba Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Mary ask me:
  - “My child, what are feeling, thinking, needing, etc.?”
  - I share my honest heart thoughts

### ***next 10 minutes***

- \*I give the Lord/Mary some time to respond to me:
  - I write this down, speak out loud, sit with prayer image, etc., what I believe they are speaking to me

### ***next 5 Minutes***

- \*Spend a few minutes *just BEING in God's/Mary's presence* – let them hold me, be with me, receive their love, truth, goodness, peace pouring into my heart, mind, body, etc.

### ***last 5 minutes***

- \*After prayer time with the Lord/Mary I ask myself:
  - 1) What did that time of relational prayer help me believe about myself?
    - jot down a few Words of Truth
  - 2) What did that time of relational prayer help me believe about God/Mary?
    - jot down a few Words of Truth
  - 3) Continue to add these Words of Truth to an ongoing “Truth’s List”

To encourage the Truth of Identity (mine and God's) - I speak these Truths *out loud* daily...possibly **at the end of my Relational Prayer Time** as a **Declaration of Freedom**