



THE SPIRITUALITY OF LAY PASTORS

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Introduction

The spirituality of lay pastors is that of a Christian who seeks to know God more and more so to show God more and more. The experience of a relationship with our Heavenly God through the person of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is a lifelong journey packed with spiritual lessons.

Love and Prayer

Such life-time learning is motivated by and founded on love: God's great love for us which in turn promotes our gradual development of loving actions and attitudes towards others and ourselves. We come to discover that God created us with love, for love and to love.

Imagine a world totally devoid of love. The total absence of tender care, kind words and a gentle touch, of compassion and empathy, of grace and mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation, is more than the human spirit can bear. The work of the lay pastor is to soften the harshness of what seems like cruel fate, to encourage trust in God and to pray with a strong faith in a future of hope and promise, in this world and in the next. In order to maintain a disciplined approach to spiritual growth, lay pastors are to be reminded to make personal time in communion with the Lord the highest priority each day. Since their identity is to be found in God's love for them, and their purpose is to worship God and love others as they love themselves, time spent 'practicing the presence of God' is essential for effective meaningful ministry.

Approaches to Prayer

There are a variety of approaches to personal intimacy with God and any combination on a daily basis will root and ground lay pastors and prepare for Spirit-filled service:

1. Scripture: To feast on the word of God is the daily bread of the human soul.
2. Prayer: To listen to the Spirit and share our heart with God
3. Silence: To be still in the presence
4. Music: To allow the 'lullabies of love' to wrap us in 'rhythms of righteousness'
5. Worship: To give due God praise and thanks
6. Sacraments: To receive the Eucharist after Baptism (and Confirmation)
7. Work: To labour for the Lord
8. Witness: To share the truth about God's unfailing love

9. Confession: To admit our sins to God and feel forgiven
10. Journaling: To write our thoughts, feelings, experiences and revelations

These are but some of the myriad of Christian methods used to be present with the Lord.

Locations for Prayer

Locations for such communing are a matter of personal preference, and many have found that a change makes for a fresh anointing, or that the familiar may permit the soothing of the senses to occur in a shorter space of time enabling the focus to be directed toward God with less effort:

1. Nature: To walk in a garden, in the mountains or by the sea
2. A Prayer Chair: Suitably placed with ample lighting far from distractions
3. A Family Altar: Adorned with candles, a bible and crucifix
4. An empty Sanctuary: replete with stained glass windows, or simpler furnishings
5. The Car or Train: Long commutes make for lengthy worship, study and prayer

Whatever the preference, God will be found by all who seek sincerely. Anywhere becomes a place of prayer if the desire is to meet God there.

Positions for Prayer

Prayer positions are mentioned several times in the Bible. To stand and pray out loud was the most common. Hannah's silent prayer was so unusual that the priest accused her of being inebriated. Lying prostrate was, and still is, way to lower oneself in the presence of God as a sign of humility or heaviness of heart. Kneeling to pray enables God to exalt us, literally raising us up to stand on our own two feet again, and face the challenges. A comfortable chair enables us to truly feel as if we can sit like a weaned child (Psalm 131), and allows us to rest in the arms of Jesus for long periods of time. Prayers while lying in bed especially during a time of illness, brings to mind the man let down through the roof by his friends.

Private Prayer Experiences

Different Christian traditions offer their own patterns and positions for prayer and praise, confession, intercession, petition and thanksgiving. Persons speak of moments when they feel compelled to dance before the Lord in private, or as a part of a group of liturgical dancers. They shout before the Lord with hallelujahs, laugh uncontrollably, weep and wail, speak in tongues or anything else that the Holy Spirit moves them to do.

Prayer Partners and Support Groups

Lay Pastors need persons as confidantes for moral support. This may be one person or the pastoral group organized by the church to prevent burnout. Confidentiality is the key to successful sharing. Names should not be called unless permission has been granted by the individual. The handling of the need to refer to the priest or pastor, or the decision to contact the police or a professional to do crisis intervention is something that ought to be determined ahead of time during training sessions.

The Power of Prayer

Since lay pastors are called to pray before the visit, during visits, and after the visits, they are expected to have a personal prayer life. The church community is intended to be a people of prayer and the church building is declared by Our Lord, Jesus Christ, as a house of prayer.

The power of prayer is the shot in the arm that keeps us energized for action, anchored in faith, and trusting in God. It is the recalled presence of God that never lets us go. Prayer is our source, our outlet, stronghold, sanctuary, fortress, our cleft in the rock, our place in the palm of God's hand.

Conclusion

The spirituality of the lay pastor is the foundation of the ministry. The connection with God is the umbilical cord of grace that nourishes the spirit with life-giving sustenance. It is the breath of life breathed into our dust at creation, and the Pentecost power of the Holy Spirit for ministry. The privilege of being a Christian is the joy of salvation, celebration of forgiveness, freedom of faith, hope for the future and the very present love of God. We want this for everyone, for all of God's children, and as Christ's disciples, it is for us to share the Good News by our words and deeds.