**Lesson 1: Prayer is a Personal Response to God’s Loving Presence**

The single, most important conviction I want to share with you is that prayer is a personal response to God's loving presence. I would like to explain.

Either you and I are more important than God or God is more important than we are. The answer is obvious, isn't it? He is more important than we are. Further, if what God wants and does is more important than what we want or do, then more of our attention should be focused on what God is and does. Again, what God wants to say to us is more important for us than anything we may have to say to Him. And God does want to speak and communicate Himself to us. Therefore, when prayer becomes too self-centered, even if it is centered upon noble and holy desires, we are going to be in difficulty.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Prayer is a personal response to God's presence. This means that God first makes Himself present to us and prayer is our awareness and acknowledgement of this presence and what God is doing to us, rather than anything we are doing. God has first loved us. His love for us is more important than our love for Him. He wants and appreciates and is grateful for our love, but His love deserves more of our attention.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The beginning of prayer, then, is to be aware of that presence, simply to acknowledge it, to be able to admit: "Yes, God my Father, You do love life into me. Yes, You love life and being into the things around me and into all that comes into my senses. You love the talents you have given to me into me" etc. The focus is on God and what God does.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Prayer is not thinking about God. When I am thinking about you, you are the focal point of my thoughts, but that is not communication with you. Prayer is a person-to-person communication with God. It is good to think about God or the life of Christ in meditation, but this is not essentially prayer.

Prayer is when "He" becomes "You" in the second person, when I say, "Yes, God my Father, You love life into me" etc. So, the first step in prayer is to face the reality that He is present to me, that He loves breath and being and a share of His own divine life and all my capacities into me, and to be able to say, "Yes, God my Father, You do love all this into me. Yes, Jesus my Brother, You do. Yes, God my Spirit, you do." -- That is to pray. If in the few minutes that we have during the times of private prayer, we do nothing else but merely make ourselves aware of God’s loving presence, this experience is profound and fruitful prayer. This is a genuine opening up to God who communicates Himself to us if we only give him the opportunity.[[4]](#endnote-4)

1. Armand M. Nigro, S. J., “Prayer: A Personal Response to God’s Presence” paras. 2-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., para. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. para. 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., paras. 7-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)