

# My Best Prayers

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My prayers start in different ways.

There is the “help!” prayer: desperate for a hand when I am suddenly faced with life problems that overwhelm. Generally, to be honest, I am not concerned with what is going on around me apart from this strong need for help, now, please, and thank you.

Then there is the “worn out” prayer: “God, you know what’s been on my mind? Of course you do. It’s the one thing I keep talking about. I have mentioned it numerous times, even just today. I pretty much always talk about it whenever I think of it. I know it’s important. You know it’s important to me. I keep asking and you seem to keep not hearing, or at least not answering, or answering it in ways that don’t remove my concerns.”

I am sure you have your own other types of prayers. I pray those too, in all the moments that make up life. Perhaps these are the kind of “I need to get things done, and then I need them done quickly. I don’t have much time at the moment, and God, I am sure you are busy too” prayers. These prayers are not my best prayers.

My best prayers probably start with ... silence. Maybe no words, but just a sense, sometimes a *heavy* overwhelming sense of who I am speaking to. For me this doesn’t make it formal. Some, I know, are reminded in these moments that God is in heaven and we are on Earth, so perhaps our words should be few - a reminder of God’s response to Job. This thinking colours my prayer and makes me hesitant to share my whole heart.

In my best prayers, rather, there is a sense that God *is*. Just *is*. God has been, *is* and will be. God. More than *who* God is, the fact that God *is* forms a better basis for all that God and I might talk about. For me, I suppose I think of it not in theological terms, but more as a facial expression. Perhaps not even a full face, just the eyes might be enough of a glimpse. It’s the way I am seen, how fully I am seen, how deeply I am known, right now, today; and then most importantly how well I am loved. I know this can be hard for many of us. We struggle to know who we are, much less accept the kind of person we are, so then how can we allow all of ourselves to be loved?

And so, my best prayers, I suppose, start with God loving me. All of me. Me being honest with who I am. I sometimes talk a lot, in prayer (and otherwise), but my best prayers start with knowing and not talking. I look at God, and God looks at me. As others have said, I listen to God and God listens to me. We just look ... and see each other as we are. In a sense, we *undress* ourselves, right in front of each other, like an established couple might do, respectfully, knowingly, gently and consciously removing boundaries, being ready to be vulnerable. The undressing is not done shyly, or with averted eyes. It is not done seductively or with pretence. It is done with knowing looks into open and revealing eyes.

I am seen.

I see you.

I am known.

I am getting to know you.

I am loved.

I am growing in my love of you.

I begin to sense *communion*. The two of us... becoming a little bit more *one*.

So, what now, now that I am reminded, that we are *one of heart*? Well, there is less to *say* and more that is just *known* between us. God is close, I am understood and my heart cries have not fallen on deaf ears. In fact, the very opposite is true, every tear has been seen, been considered. None have fallen unnoticed. No prayer has fallen on deaf ears. I realise that God is not like that.

God listens.

God cares.

God knows.

God loves.

God understands.

God did not come to this earth, at this time, to judge. I judge myself. I condemn myself. I hide myself, just like Adam did in the Garden of Eden. When I am hiding myself and try to hide who I am I make it hard for me to receive love. I let others love the "nice" parts of me, but as I deny the "not nice" parts of me and pretend they aren't there, in that moment I don't let those parts be loved. But in my best prayer these shadows are not here. The sting of judgement is not present. I feel free to bring all of myself; the good, the bad and the ugly.

I am liked.

I am safe.

I am seen.

I am known.

I am loved.

For me, it is helpful to think in terms of coming to my heavenly *father* when I pray. You may find that you need to think of God differently to allow you two to be close. Others may find it more helpful to relate more to God's "mother-ness", rather than his "father-ness". God is bigger than our male-female (and every rainbow colour in between) definitions. God is ... God. One day, perhaps we will learn to relate to more of who God is, but it's good to start where you can. For me, that's *father*. I can identify with Jesus' prayer "Our father..." I feel privileged to do so; it makes it easier for me to come close.

So, once I stop hiding bits of myself, once I stop pretending, once I let down my guard, as I see and am seen, then what?

Slow down ...

Settle...

Breathe...

Wait...

Wait ...

Wait...

Breathe...

Be...

You might just have a sense of how big the Universe is, or how small you are, or a sense that you just wanted to be noticed. That's what sometimes happens for me. I am seen and understood. God knows, and sometimes that's enough. Sometimes I have a sense that I need to attend to some things. Sometimes I face my churning emotions. Sometimes a *shadow of shame* begins to cover my face. I move to hide, I am drawn out by God's great and everlasting love. In my best prayers as this tug-of-war erodes my foundation, I let myself be drawn out into acceptance, into the open, into freedom, into a fuller and more open life.

I find, in my best prayers, that my heart has been changed. Or perhaps I should say, "Now that I have seen more of what is in my heart and now that I have seen *me* in the light of *you*, God... Well, I have changed my mind in terms of what I want to talk about." Now, in a sense, the rest of the time of prayer is much less important.

I know that *you* know.

My burdens are shared.

My heart is heard.

You are near.

I am loved.

I love you too.

I am not alone.

I will never be alone.

You are God.

You are my friend.