Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Sage Friedman)



by Colleen Gibson

Columnist

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

November 5, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Calm your body. For a moment, take a deep breath. Go ahead. I can wait.

Sink deep. Deeper than one breath can take you. Deeper still to the place where your shoulders release and your muscles unfurl. Keep breathing with no other intention than to breathe.

Ease down to the bedrock of your being. You'll know when you get there. Close your eyes, if need be, stare into space or reread the above. Maybe some more slow breaths might help before you come to the still space of beginning. When you get there (or even if you can't quite make it) ask yourself: What is the grace I need?

Here. In this moment. As everything else swirls around, what is the grace I would pray for myself? For the world? For this moment?

Hold that grace for the moment, so that it can take hold. Give it space to take up residence, to set up shop and prop open the door. This grace, if given the space, might never leave. Maybe it'll even invite its friends in. How about that?

Sitting in prayer a few weeks ago, my mind raced as I sorted through a conflict the day before. Had I said the right thing? Had I been firm enough? Should I apologize? What was there to apologize about?

Rerunning the situation in my head, my heart raced, revisiting the adrenaline-filled moment. In the end, the voice of one of my first spiritual directors echoed in my ear. *Name the grace*, I could hear her whispering. *Name the grace you need, you want, you're afraid of*.

Breathing for a moment, I came to that ground floor of my being, clearing the space of the adrenaline haze and the many voices of fight and flight. What I needed and wanted was peace.

> The grace of prayer is unwrapping the gift God is offering us through ongoing dialogue.
>
> Tweet this

Naming the grace we most desire is at the heart of a fruitful prayer life. Sometimes what we name is perfectly aligned with God's desire; other times what we name might come out sideways or take on a different meaning in the movement of the Spirit. In some moments, we don't exactly know what we want or need and at other times, what we name is not exactly what God knows would serve us better. Yet to intentionally name a grace is to introduce into prayerful dialogue a desire for deeper understanding and resolution in our lives and relationship with God.

The process of naming such an intention in prayer — a desired outcome, if you will — draws us into direct conversation with God. We are planting the seed we hope to cultivate with God and what grows in our time together is a fruit of that intention. Like any good conversation, prayer takes that intention and forms it through mutual engagement. I may want peace, but I need to listen to what God wants for me and how God thinks might be the best way to come to that end.

Here we come to realize that the naming of a grace is not just wishful thinking or projected wish fulfillment. God is not a genie. It is not as if we name a grace and then, it just so happens that when our prayer is complete, the grace has magically come to be. Likewise, in praying for a specific grace, we are not subliminally determining where our prayer will end up.

Prayer of this sort, wrapped up in pretty little packages, should raise suspicions. If anything, the grace of prayer is unwrapping the gift God is offering us through ongoing dialogue. We are sharing with God and, as such, we also need to be prepared to receive whatever grace/gift God offers us in return. What is revealed may be far more complex or gratifying than we ever could have imagined. Thus, prayer becomes a process of growth, discovery and surrender.

We also need to recognize that maybe the grace we want is deeper than what we are willing or able to name. In that case, part of the invitation of prayer is to listen to what God is trying to illuminate within our lives. The invitation then is to ask God what we need and to discover together what the answer might be.

Advertisement

For some, not knowing what you want or need in a specific moment can be a scary prospect. If I can't tell God what I need, how can we proceed? Or, better yet, how will

I know when I get it? The answer to both these questions is essential and essentially the same: trust.

Like sinking into the silence, we know when we have arrived. We trust the moment and know it when we feel it. The only way to get there though is to trust the One with whom we journey.

What scares some in this prospect, enlivens others. Not knowing exactly what grace is needed frees us to imagine God's grace in new and different ways. Perhaps a broken relationship or betrayed trust is what I bring to prayer. Unable to clear the cloudiness of anger and hurt, I could settle for cheap grace, or I could ask God what might be best in this moment. The answer — maybe to pray for the peace and success of the other — might surprise me and call me to examine my own motivations and prompt deeper trust in God's will and reliance on God's ways.

The grace that we name, then, may or may not be the grace we receive. We trust, though, that by entering into prayer with our full being, God will guide us to what we need. If we don't find ourselves where we intended or where we thought we would be, it would be best to talk about that with God, too.

Ultimately, as with any relationship, what matters is our showing up. If we can enter into the place of prayer willing and open to the work of the Spirit, we will discover the grace that longs to come alive in us. Here our work is to pause and let the stillness take hold. This is where we begin, where grace can come rushing in. Let our prayer simply be for the grace to pray for the grace we need.