

Dear Friends,

For the foreseeable future, while I am unable to speak with you from the pulpit, I look forward to sharing a midweek spiritual reflection on some of the things I am learning. I have begun to see this "down time" as a kind of spiritual retreat, since I have had plenty of time for reading and prayer during mornings of solitude here in my study. I have already shared with you that this has been a very rich time of study and growth, specifically on prayer and the joy and peace of the real presence of God which we can experience through this classic Christian discipline. My own prayer life, "practicing the presence of God", has made all the difference in facing my current medical crisis and I am so grateful to our faithful God for this practical "means of grace"!

"All prayer is in some way a response to the mystery of God's presence in our lives. [prayer] is a journey into presence." ~ Eugene McCaffrey, *Patterns of Prayer*

I have been especially enriched by an image of prayer gleaned from a book titled *Prayer* by George Buttrick, the pastor whose preaching first captivated a young Frederick Buechner and opened a new pathway for Buechner's journey toward God.

"In Willa Cather's Death Comes for the Archbishop there is an account, tender with the 'still, sad music of humanity,' of why the Acoma Indians in Colorado chose to live on mesas. The rock gave safety. The plains, with Apaches on the south and Navajo on the north, were the scene of a periodic man hunt; but the mesa was accessible only by a narrow staircase which a few men could defend against a host. Thus, 'these Indians, born in fear and dying by violence for generations, had at last taken this leap away from the earth, and on that rock had found the hope of all suffering and tormented creatures ~ safety.' The rock was more than safety; it was sustenance and beauty. When rain fell, its deep crevices were natural cisterns. Often it had secret springs by which the plain was made fertile. Sometimes the Acoma, by great labor, would carry soil to the mesa, where the coolness of the rock would keep the soil unparched. Thus barrenness broke into a splendor of flowers. The rock served a subtler but deeper need than safety or even sustenance; the sand was forever blown in new eddies, the clouds never drifted, but the rock stood. Earth and sky were in ceaseless change, but the mesa was fixed in the midst of fleeting time; 'The Acomas, who must share the universal human yearning for something permanent, enduring, without shadow of change, ~ they had their idea in substance. They actually lived upon their Rock; they were born upon it and died upon it.' Our generation, with pride shattered and body bruised, longs for sanctuary, for fruitfulness, for an abiding Home. Prayer is the true Mesa."

Whether in the form of intercessory prayer, which frees our attention from our own needs and reinforces the communal dimension of our faith; "set" prayers, as in praying the ancient daily office at dawn, day, dusk and dark; or abiding in God's quiet presence in the adoration of centering prayer, I have found safety, sustenance and enduring peace on the "True Mesa" of prayer, enjoying a constant conversation with a caring Triune God whose loving presence is so available if we but seek Him. I would encourage all of you to continue in your own current practices of prayer or to venture out and try some new ways of communing with God. Here are a few resources that might help (most available in inexpensive used editions from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)) :

Doors Into Prayer : An Invitation by Emilie Griffin, Paraclete Press

Patterns of Prayer by Eugene McCaffrey, Paulist Press

A Centre of Quiet : Hearing God When Life is Noisy by David Runcorn, InterVarsity press

May your week be filled with God's presence as you wait on Him in prayer!

Under His mercy,

Howie