

Sunshine Cathedral

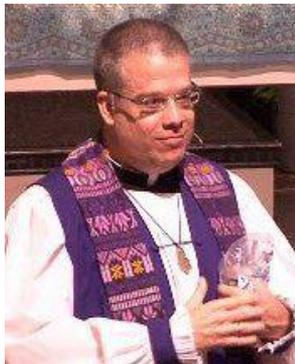
A Multi-faith Community Church

**Affiliated with Metropolitan Community Churches
& the International New Thought Alliance**

www.sunshinecathedral.org

Six Lenten Prayer Lessons

Spending Lent Deeping Our Experience of Prayer



Rev. Dr. Durrell Watkins

LESSONS

1. On Prayer
2. The Past is Past and the Future has Infinite Possibilities
3. Constant Prayer
4. Attitude Adjustment
5. Six Simple Steps of Prayer
6. One With God

1. On Prayer

During this Lenten season of prayer and reflection we may find ourselves being tempted to doubt the sincerity or the efficacy of our spirituality (Luke 4.1-13), or we may feel that as dedicated as we are to sharing hope and healing in the world, some oppose our work because they would rather protect the status quo, especially if the status quo privileges them (Luke 13.30-32, 34-35). But whether the distractions come from outside of us or from the negative voices we have internalized over time, the solution is the same - keep praying.

Prayer isn't about having wishes granted or pleasing a cosmic dictator or removing some stain from our character. Prayer is what we do to remember our unity with our Source, our oneness with God. God is All Good, so when we realize that we are expressions of this one All then we will certainly experience more Good in our lives. But our primary objective is to know the joy and peace of realizing that the eternally Sacred is within and all around us and is the "ground" of our very being.

When we know our Truth, then the distractions in life become less distracting and we find ourselves "going to peace instead of to pieces."

I'm not trying to minimize anyone's experience of heartbreak, grief, struggle or injustice. What I am trying to do is remind us that those things don't get to define us and those things don't make the bulk of our story and they don't get to have the last word in our lives. None of those things can harm our True Selves which are made in the divine Image and which have been pronounced very good! (Genesis 1.26, 31).

So, dear friends, keep praying, not to change God but to open our consciousness to the presence and goodness that God is. And as we remember our unity with our divine Source, then the outward things will probably improve as well (Matthew 6.33).

***Spirit of goodness and love,
We choose to focus on your presence in our lives and we know that
what we continually focus on we experience more of. So, today,
may our focus be on you and may we experience more of the
goodness, joy, peace and love that you are. Amen.***

2. The Past is Past and the Future has Infinite Possibilities

"Use the affirmation: 'I am perfect, whole, and complete, just as I am.' The more you repeat this statement of truth about yourself, the quicker you will release the past." Louise Hay

At Sunshine Cathedral we say every week, "Sunshine Cathedral is different kind of church where the past is past and the future has infinite possibilities."

Of course we are referring to our shared life as a church. We can't rest on the successes of the past nor must we be limited by the mistakes or difficulties of the past. The past is past. The good that is behind us is not as good as what lies before us, and the more painful experiences of the past can be healed and replaced with a much better future. Either way, the past is past and the future has infinite possibilities!

But we are also talking about our individual lives. Sunshine Cathedral is a church that teaches its members, friends, and guests that *the past is past and the future has infinite possibilities*.

The relationship that ended badly - it's OK to grieve the loss and regret the mistakes, but eventually, one has to release it and move on. Give thanks that you survived the ordeal. Look for a positive lesson or gift to retrieve from the experience. Forgive yourself for getting in the situation. Even try to be willing to forgive the person who hurt you. Know that the experience doesn't define you, it isn't the end of your story, and it can be put far behind you. *The past is past and the future has infinite possibilities*.

The family that rejected you - of course that isn't how families ought to behave. Of course it was a hurtful experience for you. They may even have regrets about it too. But you survived the experience. You've made friends and a life for yourself. Hopefully you've even created a family of choice that is supportive and loving. *The past is past and the future has infinite possibilities*.

Fell off the wagon? There are 12 Step meetings taking place every day. There are people who will help you get back on track. *The past is past and the future has infinite possibilities*.

Having financial worries? You are stronger than you may have previously believed, and there are still prospering ideas to be had, prospering opportunities to be seized, and you can navigate the financial difficulties. It's always too soon to give up hope because *the past is past and the future has infinite possibilities.*

Dropped out of school? You can go back.

Treated someone badly? You can make amends.

Last 10 diets failed? There is a sensible plan of healthy eating and exercise that can help you take control of your body. You can find it. The previous failures do not eliminate the possibility of future success, because *the past is past and the future has infinite possibilities.*

Whatever the situation, there is great hope to be generated by the idea that the past is past and the future has infinite possibilities.

In your prayer work this week, use the affirmation, "I am perfect, whole, and complete just as I am." Say it over and over again until you realize you are a person of sacred value, innate dignity, and enormous potential. And keeping saying it until you fully realize, *the past is past and the future has infinite possibilities!*

3. Constant Prayer

"Pray without ceasing." Apostle Paul (1st Thessalonians 5.17)

Remember to make prayer part of your day, every day!

No matter how busy you are...make shower time prayer time, make driving time prayer time, wake up five minutes earlier and make that prayer time, make the last few minutes of the day in bed before drifting off to sleep prayer time. The effects of exercise are cumulative, and so are the effects of prayer. Steal prayer time throughout the day and you'll notice *something* wonderful happening within you before too long.

If you aren't wordy, then don't bother with words. Just sit in the Silence and feel the calm peacefulness that comes as you focus on your breath. Just sit very still and know that you are in the presence of divine Life.

Also, prayer doesn't have to be beautiful words or mystical silence (though, I can't recommend intentional quiet time enough! It really is important); it can be action. Whatever we do, if we do it as prayer, then it is prayer. When we attend worship, we are saying with our presence, "I wish to grow spiritually. I wish to be a compassionate presence to

someone who needs it. I wish for my spiritual community to be healthy and vibrant. I wish to commune with the God of my understanding." And the spirit of Life receives and blesses those beautiful wishes.

When we financially support our church, worthy charities, and causes in which we believe, we are saying with our giving, "I believe in this work. I want this work to prosper. I am thankful for all the ways people are helped because this work takes place. I'm glad to participate in it." And the spirit of unlimited Abundance receives and blesses those noble desires.

When we do our work as if it is an important service (and isn't it? Teachers' Aides help teachers have more time to actually teach children, nurses help us recover and maintain our health, janitors help us have pleasant, comfortable, and more sanitary conditions, police keep us safe, shelf stockers at the supermarket are making sure food is accessible to us, singers bring beauty and joy to our souls as do gardeners and decorators and landscapers, exterminators keep us from being plagued by pestilence, taxi drivers get us places, car salespersons help us have a way to get ourselves around, etc. Whatever we do is a service that matters!), if we think of our action as being divine, as being a Sacred act that will bless our world, then everything we do can be a prayer.

Every act of kindness, every expression of hope or love, every honest effort to make a positive difference can be prayer.

To have a consciousness of prayer is to "pray without ceasing," and that's what we are learning to do at Sunshine Cathedral.

Whether you pray quickly in the shower, silently in a comfortable chair, in an embodied way by thinking of your work as prayer, or with your generosity using your time, talent, and treasure as prayers of blessing, or even if you simply pray using the words below, however you choose to pray, know, as Norman Vincent Peale said, "prayer is an emanation of power."

"Dear God, I used to be afraid that somehow, in some unimaginable way, some of us might wind up separated from you. Where did I ever get such a silly idea? Well, if there remains any false concept of separation in my thinking, please heal it today. Let me remember that I am one with you, now and forever. Amen."

Durrell Watkins, *Optimism & Gratitude: Prayers for Every Day of the Year*
(Lulu Press, 2010)

4. Attitude Adjustment

"When we are willing to change our thinking we can change our lives."
Louise Hay

It is impossible to be happy while criticizing. Of course, we all criticize now and then, and we usually feel we are justified in doing so, but when criticizing becomes our modus operandi, we are rarely happy, and when we are constantly unhappy, happy people don't spend a lot of time around us.

How can we break the patterns of criticizing that actually make us miserable?

First, we can choose to express gratitude. What we focus on brings to our awareness more of the same. If we switch our focus from being unhappy to being grateful, the energy shift will impact every area of our lives. No wonder the Apostle Paul told the Philippians to focus on what is good (**Phil. 4**).

Secondly, we can be intentional about our affirmations. Complaining is an affirmation that things are bad, and if we affirm that often enough we will believe it deeply, and if we believe deeply that things are bad, then of course we'll be unhappy! **But we can affirm the good instead of the bad.** Just as we can express gratitude for what is good, we can affirm that there is more good to experience, that happiness is available to us, that we don't have to get stuck in old habits or thought patterns, that we can release the past to the past and enjoy the present and move forward into a new experience of life. Affirming the possibilities immediately feels better than wallowing in discontent.

Finally, rather than naming all the things we dislike, we can express love for ourselves. If we love ourselves, forgive ourselves for previous mistakes, and believe in our own potential, we will have fewer insecurities and regrets to project onto others. If we love ourselves, there will be very little "out there" to hate.

Basically, to be happier more often, we should criticize less, give thanks for every blessing, affirm that life is meant to be joyous, and be willing to love ourselves. That won't make every situation go our way or make every person conform to our desires, but it will mean that no matter what is happening around us, we can be content and find reasons to experience and express joy. We'll move through sadness more quickly and find ourselves being a more positive influence, and then we'll notice

we are attracting more positive people and even more beautiful experiences into our lives.

Don't beat yourself up for old habits of complaining (that's just criticizing yourself, which is still criticism, which will only keep you trapped in unhappiness). Just decide you want something better from now on.

Make a better choice in this moment. You may fall off the wagon again and again, but now you will notice the old habits resurfacing and you can adjust your thinking more easily and quickly. Forgive yourself, switch gears, and start expressing gratitude, affirming the good, and offering yourself loving-kindness. Of course, as we learn to love ourselves more, we will also find ourselves loving our neighbors as we love ourselves, which is a biblical mandate. But we can't give what we don't have, so it all starts with forgiving, affirming, and loving ourselves.

In **Psalm 36**, the psalmist models the prayer that expresses hope instead of despair, affirmation rather than criticism, gratitude rather than bitterness, and a belief in our right and ability to give and receive love:

"Your unfailing kindness, O Love, is [omnipresent]. Your [goodness] is like the strong mountains and your justice as the great deep; you, O Love, [care for all living beings]. How precious, *divine Love*, is your enduring kindness, [all people will ultimately] take refuge under the shadow of your wings. They shall be satisfied with the good things of your house and you will give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the well of life and in your light shall we see light. *You will* continue your merciful kindness toward those who know you and your *generous* dealing to those who are true of heart." Amen.

5. Six Simple Steps of Prayer

God within us, you are our life and in you there is no weakness, frailty, lack, discord, or reason to fear; and so it is that we focus on your omnipresent goodness and we affirm that the blessings we need most are now at hand. Thank you, God! Amen.

Notice the elements of our prayer:

1. Recognize the divine Presence, "God"
2. Acknowledge our unity with that presence, "within us, you are our life"
3. Deny that there is anything to oppose this divine presence, "and in you there is no weakness, frailty, lack, discord, or reason to fear"
4. Declare that blessings already exist for you and are yours by right of consciousness, "and we affirm that the blessings we need most are now at hand."
5. Give thanks, "Thank you, God!"
6. Release (let go and let God), "Amen."

Recognize God, Acknowledge unity with God, Deny that anything can oppose God's goodness, Affirm your acceptance of God's goodness, Give thanks, and Release the prayer to the perfection of divine Right Action.

And so, let us pray:

God within us, you are our life and in you there is no weakness, frailty, lack, discord, or reason to fear; and so it is that we focus on your omnipresent goodness and we affirm that the blessings we need most are now at hand. Thank you, God! Amen.

6. Lenten Lesson #6: One With God

Positive thinking is important. Being positive brings more hope and joy than being negative (in fact, negative attitudes offer no hope and no joy). But the affirmative prayer method that we teach is actually more than positive thinking.

- Optimism is important.
- Believing that good things are possible is important.
- Trusting our resilience is important.
- Self talk that is uplifting and encouraging is important.

But affirmative prayer is more than these important things.

Affirmative prayer is KNOWING our unity with the Substance of all life. *Affirmative prayer* is recognizing the divine Omnipresence which includes us and expresses as us.

Affirmative prayer is the feeling and the trust that there is ONE Power, it is All Good, and we are each expressions of that Power.

Once we know we are one with the One, then of course we believe in possibilities and affirm that Good is the natural state for us to experience, but the power lies in our understanding that there is really ONE Power and It is the very source and substance of our lives, of all life.

Psychologist and spiritual teacher Wayne Dyer says, "God never fails and you are a piece of That which never fails."

Religion scholar Alan Watts said, "You yourself are the eternal energy which appears as this Universe."

Early Divine Scientist Fannie James wrote, "Everything is made of Spirit-Substance."

Medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart taught, "The seed of God is in us."

And Ernest Holmes wrote, "We should think of our spirit as being some part of the Universal Spirit."

These great teachers are reminding us of the divine Omnipresence, the divine Reality which is the pattern and material of our lives. So, as we embrace our unity with the eternal, unconditional Love we call "God" we will naturally become more positive, hopeful, and we will expect blessings. But the initial step is to become aware, as James Dillet Freeman expressed, that "wherever we are, God is!"

During this Holy Week, spend time everyday acknowledging the one Power and one Presence that fills us, flows through us, and expresses as us.

From the point of knowing we are one with the eternal, omnipresent spirit of Life we will of course find our thoughts being positive and our statements being affirmative and we will feel more joyous and more grateful and we will expect more good; but all of that flows from the awareness that the All Good is the "ground of being" - the Substance of our lives. We are one with All Good.

Dear God, you are omnipresent which means you are right where I am; "there is not a spot where God is not." This thought blesses me with that peace that passes understanding, with joy unspeakable, and with indomitable hope. My thoughts and attitudes are bound to be positive as I remind myself that you are All Good and you are omnipresent; and so it is that I am part of you, in you, filled with your grace, and I now expect more and more Good to be made manifest in my life. Thank you, God! Amen.

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