

From illusion to prayer

Quotes are from *Reaching Out* by Henri Nouwen



Solitude and hospitality can only bear lasting fruits when they are embedded in a broader, deeper and higher reality from which they receive their vitality. ...The movement from illusion to prayer undergirds and makes possible the movements from loneliness to solitude and from hostility to hospitality and leads us to the core of the spiritual life.

How do we know that we are not deluding ourselves, that we are not selecting those words that best fit our passions, that we are not just listening to the voice of our own imagination?...Who can determine if [our] feelings and insights are leading [us] in the right direction?

Our God is greater than our own heart and mind, and too easily we are tempted to make our heart's desires and our mind's speculations into the will of God. Therefore, we need a guide, a director, a counselor who helps us to distinguish between the voice of God and all other voices coming from our own confusion or from dark powers far beyond our control.

We need someone who encourages us when we are tempted to give it all up, to forget it all, to just walk away in despair. We need someone who discourages us when we move too rashly in unclear directions or hurry proudly to a nebulous goal. We need someone who can suggest to us when to read and when to be silent, which words to reflect upon and what to do when silence creates much fear and little peace.

The paradox of prayer is that we have to learn how to pray while we can only receive it as a gift.

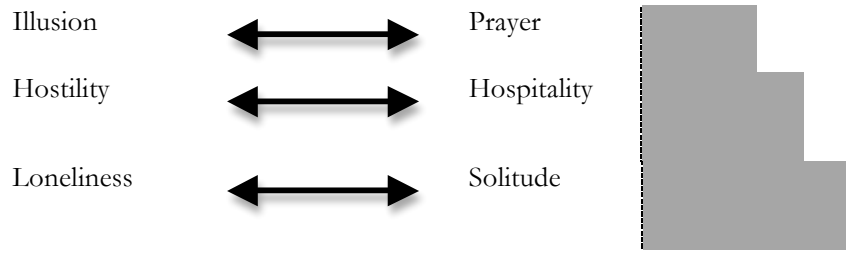
We will probably never be fully free from illusions, just as we will never be fully free from loneliness and hostility. But when we recognize our illusion, we will also recognize the first outlines of prayer.

To the degree that our prayer has become the prayer of our heart we will love more and suffer more, we will see more light and more darkness, more grace and more sin, more of God and more of humanity.



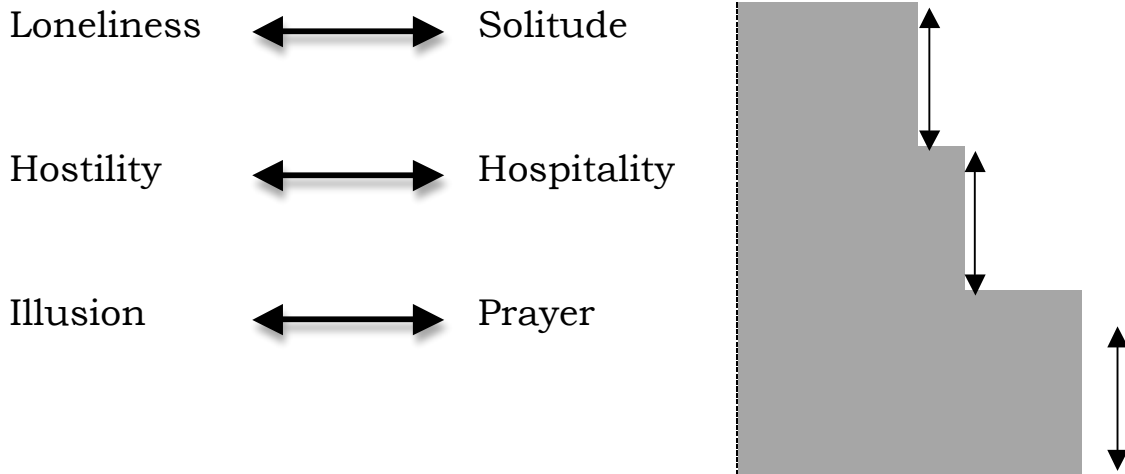
Based on *Reaching Out* by Henri Nouwen

There is a sense in which we arrive at Nouwen’s understanding of “prayer,” by having a base of solitude and hospitality. That foundation allows for our encounter with “Reality.” It is the path to our deepest self and our most profound connection with God in community, Trinity and Body of Christ.



In Nouwen’s discussion on prayer he brings forward another image.

The movement from illusion to prayer undergirds and makes possible the movements from loneliness to solitude and from hostility to hospitality and leads us to the core of the spiritual life. ... When we do not enter into that inner field of tension where the movement from illusion to prayer takes place, our solitude and our hospitality easily lose their depth. - H. Nouwen



The struggle of the movement from Illusion to Prayer, and the foundation of a deeper prayer, provides for hearing in our solitude and pilgrimage in our hospitality. There is movement up and down the map as well as between the poles.

The paradox of prayer is that we have to learn how to pray while we can only receive it as a gift.

If we are to grow we need to develop a spiritual discipline, a Rule of Prayer. And at the same time we will experience that relationship with God (Prayer) comes as God’s gift to us, on God’s initiative. What a parish can do is provide the first and help people remember the second. The parish is to offer a “school of prayer” and also be a community that waits on God’s action. The parish can be a place of reflection so we might better navigate our movement from loneliness to solitude, hostility to hospitality and illusion to prayer. Nouwen notes that communal and individual prayer belong together, they are interdependent and influence each other. For Anglicans communal, or “common prayer” is the Eucharist and the Daily Office (the daily prayer of the church) and individual prayer may be best understood as a stance of reflectiveness supported by the practices of piety and meditation that each person finds suited to their temperament and unique relationship with God.