

BE Still

An Explanation

As Baptists we generally practice extemporaneous prayer. Off the cuff. Of course for Sunday Worship we may write a prayer - just to help our nerves. But it is written in our own words, which is our model of prayer. For a traditional Baptist, prayer should rise up out of our hearts, like a conversation with God. We would not script a conversation with anyone else, why would we with God? But other traditions have a long history of praying prayers written by others. These traditions use scripture (many consider the Psalms prayers), creeds, and prayers from faithful Christians as their spoken words to God.

I believe we need both kinds of prayer. We need the words of our heart to rise up to God. To offer our own thoughts, feelings, and needs in our own words. But there are times, especially as I get older, when my heart is too confused or too broken. In these moments I need discipline. But my mind is too frantic to stop for silence. My words too jumbled to make sense. It is then I use the words of others. We stand not as the first generation, but in a long line of believers. A beautiful tradition. So I let their words speak for me.

Here are notes on a few of today's prayers:

"A Nun's Prayer" — During a prayer retreat, the leaders shared this prayer from a Nun at Conception Abbey (north MO). Unfortunately she did not have the Nun's name, but the words have proved powerful in my busy and anxious life.



Book of Common Prayer — Henry VIII wanted a divorce, which was not permitted in the Catholic Church. So England became Anglican (church splits always happen for a good reason). One of the reasons for a new wife was Henry's desire for a male heir (erroneously thinking his wives were the problem). He did get a son, Edward IV. Unfortunately the son reigned only 6 years and passed away at the age of 15. So Henry's daughter, Mary, became Queen. She returned England to the Catholic Church and earned a nice nickname — and drink — through executing her people. Including burning at least 280 religious dissenters at the stake for refusing allegiance to the Pope.

One of those martyrs was Thomas Cranmer. Before Mary's reign, he was a key leader in the formation of the Anglican Church. When the Church of England separated from Catholicism, there was a need to create new worship structures. One of those creations was the Common Book of Prayer, which Cranmer was central in both writing and editing. The book has written prayers for many religious occasions (like Baptism and Advent). It also includes set prayers for each Sunday called Collects. The prayer we read was last Sunday's prayer and was prayed in Anglican churches (and other traditions) throughout the world.

"Jesus Prayer" — This prayer is a tradition in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Long before the Protestant Reformation the church split West - Rome/Catholic - from East (roots of this split are in the Roman Empire split).

The prayer goes back to 5th or 6th century, with the origin believed to be among the Desert Fathers, who separated from the evil of society (early monastics). The prayer was to be always on their lips - a constant reminder of Jesus.

The earliest form of the the prayer does not include the ending "a sinner". I included it today because that is how I learned the prayer. Also, as I outlined the prayer service, it felt appropriate to speak of my own sin (my need for confession).