

**Evagrius Ponticus (345-399), *Chapters on Prayer***

3. Prayer is a communion of the mind with God. What sort of state does the mind need so that it can reach out to its Lord without turning back and commune with him without intermediary?

4. If Moses, when he tried to approach the earthly burning bush, was held back until he removed the sandals from his feet (Exod. 3: 5), how can you, who wish to see and commune with the one who is beyond all representation and sense perception, not free yourself from every mental representation tied to the passions?

5. Pray first to receive tears, so that through compunction you may be able to mollify the wildness that is in your soul, and, having confessed against yourself your transgression to the Lord (Ps. 31:5), you may obtain forgiveness from him. 7. Even if you pour forth fountains of tears in your prayer, entertain absolutely no exaltation within yourself for being superior to most people. For your prayer has received help so that you can confess your sins zealously and make peace with the Lord through tears. Therefore, do not turn the remedy for passions into a passion, lest you provoke to greater anger the one who gave you this grace.

12. Whenever temptation comes upon you or contrariness provokes you either to rouse your wrath for revenge in kind or to utter some inappropriate word, remember your prayer and the judgement that will be rendered against it, and immediately the disorderly movement will quiet down.-13. Everything you do to avenge yourself against a brother who has wronged you will become a stumbling block for you at the time of prayer. 14. Prayer is the offshoot of gentleness and freedom from anger. 15. Prayer is the issue of joy and thanksgiving. 16. Prayer is a defense against sadness and discouragement. 21. 'Leave your gift before the altar,' scripture says, 'and go; first be reconciled with your brother, then come' (Matt. 5: 24) and pray without disturbance. For resentment darkens the ruling faculty of the one who prays and leaves his prayers in obscurity. 22. Those who store up hurts and resentments in themselves and think they can pray are like people who draw water and put it into a jar full of holes.

28. Do not adopt only the outward forms of prayer, but turn your mind towards conscious perception of spiritual prayer with great fear. 33. What good is there besides God? Therefore, let us give back to him all that is ours and it will go well for us. For the one who is good is certainly also the provider of good gifts. 34. Do not be distressed, if you do not immediately get from God the request that you are making, for he wants to do you more good through your perseverance with him in prayer. For what is more sublime than conversing with God and being drawn into communion with him?

34a. Undistracted prayer is the mind's highest act of intellection. 35. Prayer is the ascent of the mind towards God. 36. If you long to practice prayer, renounce absolutely all things, so that you may inherit the whole. 37. Pray first to be purified from the passions, second to be delivered from ignorance and forgetfulness, and third from all temptation and abandonment. 38. In your prayer 'seek only justice and the kingdom,' that is, virtue and knowledge, 'and all the rest will be added unto you' (Matt. 6: 3 3).

46. The demon is very jealous of the person at prayer and uses every trick to frustrate his purpose. Thus he does not cease setting in motion mental representations of objects through the

memory and prising loose all the passions through the flesh, so that he can impede his excellent course and his setting out towards God (cf. 2 Cor. 5: 8–9).

50. Why do the demons want to produce in us gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, and resentment, and the other passions? So that the mind becomes thickened by them and unable to pray as it ought; for when the passions of the irrational part have arisen, they do not allow it to be moved in a rational manner and to seek the Word of God.

52. The state of prayer is an impassible habit, which by means of a supreme love carries off to the intelligible height the spiritual mind beloved of wisdom. 53. One who wishes to pray in truth must not only govern the irascible and concupiscible parts but also be beyond mental representation tied to the passions. 54. One who loves God is ever communing with him as with a father, while turning away any mental representation tied to the passions.

58. If you want to pray, you have need of God ‘who bestows prayer on the one who prays’ (1 Kgs. 2: 9). Therefore, call upon him saying; ‘Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come’ (Matt. 6: 9–10), that is, the Holy Spirit and your only-begotten Son. For so he taught us, saying that the Father is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth (John 4: 2 3–4). 59. One who prays ‘in spirit and in truth’ (John 4: 23–4) honours the Creator no longer on the basis of creatures, but praises him for himself.

60. If you are a theologian, you will pray truly; and if you pray truly, you will be a theologian.

61. When your mind out of a great longing for God gradually withdraws, as it were, from the flesh and turns aside all mental representations deriving from the senses or from memory or from temperament, being filled with both reverence and joy, then consider yourself to be near the frontiers of prayer. 62. The Holy Spirit, out of compassion for our weakness (cf. Rom. 8: 26), visits us even in our impurity; and if only he should find the mind praying to him in love for the truth, he enters it and annihilates the entire phalanx of thoughts or mental representations that surround it, while urging it on to love for spiritual prayer.

66. When you pray do not form images of the divine within yourself, nor allow your mind to be impressed with any form, but approach the Immaterial immaterially and you will come to understanding. 69. Stand on your guard (cf. Hab. 2: 1), keeping your mind free of mental representations during the time of prayer so that it may stand firm in its proper tranquility; as a result, the one who has compassion on the ignorant may visit you and you may then receive the most glorious gift of prayer. 70. You cannot practice pure prayer while entangled in material things (cf. 2 Tim. 2: 4) and agitated by continuous concerns, for prayer is the laying aside of mental representations.

83. Psalmody puts the passions to sleep and works to calm the incontinence of the body; prayer prepares the mind to exercise the activity that is proper to it. 84. Prayer is an activity befitting the dignity of the mind, or, indeed, the superior and pure activity and use of the mind. 85. Psalmody belongs to multiform wisdom (cf. Eph. 3: 10); prayer is the prelude to immaterial and non-multiform knowledge. 86. Knowledge is excellent, for it cooperates with prayer to awaken the intellectual power of the mind to contemplation of divine knowledge.