



Malya Prather

A Student's Journey

Early one semester, one Friday night at AY¹ (Adventist Youth vespers), instead of my usual participation in the execution of the service, I decided to sit in the congregation. Sitting in the pew was something I had not done in a while, considering the previous semester, I was on the AY team leading the weekly service. That evening, I was surprised by how switching from leader to worshiper would significantly change my perspective. No longer was I the one who moved to move the congregation, but as the service began and picked up speed in the delivery of its theme and message, I was moved by the moving. So much so that I was unprepared for what I was about to witness and had to write down my experience.

As the Holy Spirit danced around me, I wrote the following words in my prayer journal: "As the music plays on, as the service opens in song, as the testimonials are cried out, all I can see is God's hand reaching down, and touching all the ears that could hear and all the eyes that could see. Just as the wind moves unseen, so does He. But what is undeniable is the reaction of the things that are moved. Like leaves rustling in the wind, caressed by its touch, so are His people. One by one, they stood, all of them, until this 'tree' was swaying, dancing, wrapped up in the love of God, that wonderful thing unseen yet undeniably felt. It is made real in recognition and manifested in song and prayer."

That night at AY was the first time I had witnessed and recognized prayer as more than just a person speaking eloquently in the direction of heaven. I saw it as an awareness of the self and an awareness of what moves the self. At the time, I believed this realization to be all I needed to produce my theory on prayer and practice. Still, time revealed that the AY experience was only the beginning of my journey because as time passed and as I continued to study throughout the semester, questions that I didn't even know were necessary to be asked started to rise to the surface of my mind. During AY, I stated that



With the Prayer Project

prayer is simply recognition, but what does it mean to recognize? PsychologyDictionary.org defines *recognition* as "a sense of familiarity when encountering people, events, or objects that have been previously encountered."² It also stated that recognition pertains to material learned in the past. The next question that came to mind concerning prayer was if it is, in fact, recognition, then who is it that is being recognized?

In its simplest form, prayer is a conversation between the person praying and the person to whom he or she is praying. In this case, that would be any individual and God. So, naturally, one would conclude that in prayer, the individual recognizes God and himself or herself. To have a conversation with someone, an individual must recognize the other person and acknowledge who they are as an individual and who they are to that other person.

John Koethe defends this idea in his poem, “Theories of Prayer,” where he says:

*The stance is one of supplication, but to whom?
Time pours into the present, while a greater,
Vaguer presence menaces the borders of that country
Whose geography lies entirely within.
Half-hidden trees, half-articulated sounds
And the sympathetic murmur of the heightened mind—
These are the symptoms of an inwardness made visible
In deferential gestures and repeated words.
Come seek me, let the expiation start
The genie said, and for a while the air was
Sweeter with the promise of another life,
An afterlife, all eager to begin.³*

He is bringing to light the push and pull of the spiritual realm with that of the self, how the movement of one’s soul, and “the sympathetic murmur of the heightened mind”⁴ are all reactions to oneself. They are “the symptoms of an inwardness made visible.”⁵ This was the next stage in defining my prayer theory and practice. At this point in my prayer journey, I had concluded that prayer was self-awareness in congruence with spiritual awareness.

However, the next part of Koethe’s poem left me with more questions:

*Yet things are temporary, and the beautiful design
That seemed to lurk behind a fragrant veil
Dissolved, leaving the houses, streets,
The trees, the canyons, even the distant hills,
As they were before.⁶*

Does this mean that the murmur of God is temporary? After being touched by the Creator, can one completely reverse the effects of His power? Can an individual’s recognition of Him be erased? Before this, I thought I reached a conclusion. After, I realized that I was only halfway there.

Philippians 4:6 and 7 states, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (NKJV),⁷ Psalm 138:3 states, “In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul.” Psalm 118:5 states, “I called on the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me and set

me in a broad place.” Based on these three scriptures, it can be stated that prayer expresses our inner spiritual needs to God. Through prayer, we can find everything we need to get through this life we’re living here on earth. But, in order to know what to ask for, in alignment with God, we have to know what we need. And in order to know what we need, we have to know who we are. This leads us back to the notion that self-awareness is necessary for prayer. So, how does one become self-aware? More specifically, how does one not only become self-aware but also tie self-awareness to spiritual awareness? These questions led me to the third and final stage of my journey in search of a definition of my theory on prayer.

The same semester I took a class called Fundamentals of Christian Education. For this class, we studied the book *Education* by Ellen G. White. In the book’s first chapter, she explains the source and aim of true education. In the beginning, she states:

“True education means more than the pursual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”⁸

Later in the book, she states that Colossians 2:3 brings the source of such an education into view. It says in Him, “are hid all the treasures of wisdom.”⁹ God, being the Creator that He is, knows all that there is to know about everything. He is omniscient. He made everything and placed Himself in all the things that He made. The world that He molded us out of is filled with things that represent Him and who He is as the Creator. At creation, one of the things that He established for us to do for eternity was to learn about Him. Since the beginning of time, our duty has been to use the resources He created for us to gain a better understanding of who He is. These resources can be

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found in nature, a gift many of us take for granted. And this is unfortunate because often what we are looking for can be found in incandescent sun rays and dandelion wishes. Often what we need can be heard in the whistling of the birds and the gentle touch of the wind. What we need is not artificial or made by human beings. That is why God did not leave it up to us to invent nature. He birthed us from nature into nature. And even after the fall of human beings, God implemented the practice of education to promote the development of the body, the mind, and the soul so that the divine purpose might be realized. This divine purpose is the work of redemption. "This is the object of education, the great object of life."¹⁰ Also, because we are a part of His creation, we can learn about who God is by diving into the complexities of self. In learning about Him, God allows us to learn about ourselves and how we, as the creation, tie into Him as the Creator.

In finding this, I realized that I needed to go deeper in developing my theory of prayer and practice. Prayer is not just recognition; it is recognition through self-awareness in tandem with spiritual awareness. And prayer is not just awareness; it is awareness through the practice of education, a process of continual seeking after God and learning more about Him with each encounter. Education allows us to recognize the needs of self and the power of the only One who can ever fill those needs in the most beneficial way. Education allows us to communicate with our Creator as effectively and intimately as possible. We are all different; therefore, we all have different ways of communicating. It is a beautiful, never-ending cycle. This realization was the third point of awareness in my search for the definition of my theory of prayer and practice, and I highly doubt it will be my last. ✍️

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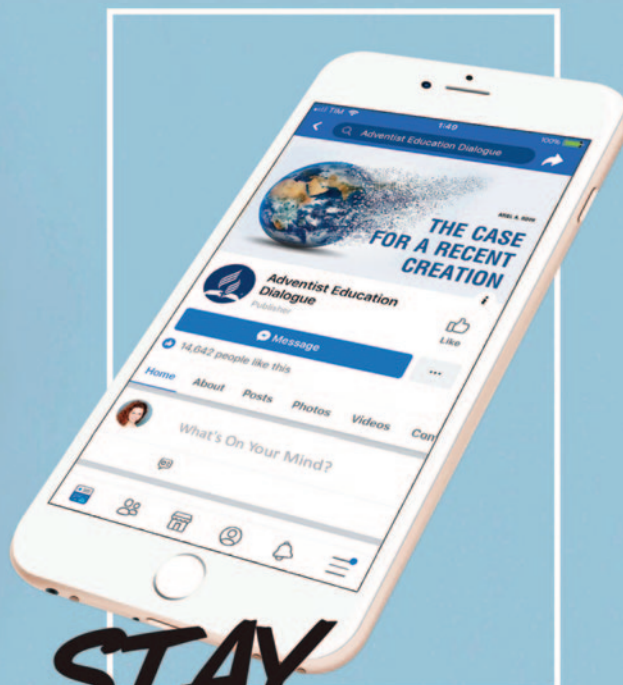
Recommended citation:

Malya Prather, "A Student's Journey With the Prayer Project," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 85:2 (2023): 36-38. <https://doi.org/10.55668/jae0037>.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. "AY" is an abbreviation for Adventist Youth. These meetings are held on Friday evenings and, in some parts of the world, on Sabbath afternoons or as an evening vesper service.
2. N. Sam, "What Is RECOGNITION? Definition of RECOGNITION," *PsychologyDictionary.org* (April 28, 2013): <https://psychologydictionary.org/recognition/>.
3. John Koethe, "Theories of Prayer," *The Paris Review* 154 (Spring 2000): <https://www.theparisreview.org/poetry/816/theories-of-prayer-john-koethe>. Used with permission from the author.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from the *New King James Version* of the Bible. Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
8. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903): 13.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 15.

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