

**Father John Catoir**

# The Way to Pray

Writer James Thurber was a master of the brief but telling comment. Once he and a friend attended a play that was a bore from the opening curtain through the final scene.

On leaving the theater, the friend began to criticize the production. He concluded by saying, "That was the dullest, dreariest and shoddiest play I ever saw. What did you think of it?"



"Well," said Thurber, "I didn't think it was that good."

Thurber often used understatement to make a point. He knew that it's not the number of words you string together that makes a comment memorable, it's more a matter of how effectively you get your idea across.

Understatement, without a doubt, is an effective literary tool that can be used in spiritual writing as well. In the realm of supernatural mystery, overstatement tends to obscure rather than clarify meaning. The following points on prayer have been adapted from the works of one of my favorite masters, Abbot John Chapman (1862-1932). He was one of the most sought-after retreat masters of his day, and here are just a few of his ideas.

"Prayer is giving yourself to God."

"The less you pray the worse things get."

"There is really no best way to pray."

"The only way to pray well is to pray often."

"You may not be able to get rid of the worries which trouble you at any given moment, but you can learn to laugh at them."

"Progress will be made when you become less concerned about success at prayer."

"Sometimes God will allow you to remain in confusion when you pray. Learn to accept confusion. Acceptance will help you attain peace of mind."

"In order to pray you first have to stop doing everything else. The best way to begin is to take yourself as you find yourself."

"Never force feelings of any kind. Pure prayer is in the will, not the emotions."

"It doesn't matter if your prayer is not as good as you'd like it to be. God knows you're trying, and He is pleased with your humble efforts."

Abbot John Chapman's books are out of print now, but it doesn't matter because he repeats the same basic ideas over and over. His wisdom has guided my prayer life for many years. I hope you find his words as comforting as I have.

All prayer is a personal communication with God, and each prayer is a unique experience. If you learn to accept yourself as God does, you will be free from needless worry about the success of your prayer life. God doesn't look for success. He only wants you to give Him your heart.

*[For a free copy of the Christopher News Note, Let's Talk About Prayer, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to The Christophers, 12 E. 48th St., New York, N.Y., 10017.]*