Prayer Life. How your personality affects the way you pray
Pablo Martinez
Paternoster Press 2001
£7.99 Pb 156pp
ISBN 1 85788 436 1

‘I would like my readers to think of prayer without guilt…prayer should not be just one more burden in life, but a pleasure to enjoy’ writes Pablo Martinez in his introduction. His book goes a long way towards meeting this aim.

Combining his psychiatric training and experience as a pastor, Martinez explores why people with different personalities pray in different ways. Personality types are categorised using two axes to represent four psychological functions: thinking-feeling and sensation-intuition. A primary and auxiliary function can be identified (one from each axis), giving eight types, which are then divided by the extrovert/introvert classification. As Martinez describes the different types, it is easy to identify with them and consider the various pitfalls and strengths of your temperament.

This approach helps alleviate the guilt that many feel about the way they pray (or fail to pray), a feeling that is often augmented by comparisons with others’ prayer lives. Martinez urges us to be more accepting of others and ourselves: ‘We are not required to like our temperament, but to work through it for God’s glory in our lives’, and allow others to do likewise. However, Martinez also offers guidance to help us develop in prayer; having identified our areas of weakness, we are better equipped to overcome them.

He moves on to explore the therapeutic value of prayer. In the last section of the book he provides a defence of Christian prayer against the charge that it is mere auto-suggestion, or no different from Eastern meditation.

John Stott has written in the foreword to this book, ‘Here is a psychiatrist who is committed to Christ, knows his Bible, rejoices in Christ’s cross, has a lively sympathy for struggling Christians and has much wisdom born of rich pastoral experience…I cannot imagine any reader failing to be helped by it, as I have been myself.’ This book is warmly recommended for personal reading, practice library and passing on to Christian patients or church members.

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Prayers for healing: A Burrswood companion
Michael Fulljames and Michael Harper
Canterbury Press, Norwich 2003
£9.99 Pb 141 pp
ISBN 1 85311 503 7

After many years of experience at the Burrswood Christian Centre for Health Care and Ministry, the authors of this little book offer a series of morning meditations with relevant evening prayers to cover 31 days. As chaplain and doctor, their collaboration typifies the Burrswood aim for spiritual and medical care to go together when facing the mystery of healing and suffering. Situated near Tunbridge Wells, Burrswood is an independent hospital and outpatients’ department that offers a variety of services including rehabilitation, counselling and palliative care, as well as Christian worship and healing.

We are taken through the sometimes raw emotions experienced by many sufferers at the onset of a disorder, or when awaiting diagnosis and prognosis, both favourable and fatal. A doctor’s helpful or hurtful attitude is also made a matter for praise or prayer. Whatever the expected outcome, the sufferer is encouraged to move towards total trust in the God who, through the cross, has identified with human suffering and is able to use it to bring about wholeness of spirit.

There is no unrealistic insistence that healing and cure must go together, so different prayers express fear and acceptance of death as well as gratitude for recovery. Illness can produce many mood swings, yet not everyone experiences them all. If read by a sick person, this book would therefore be most helpful used selectively rather than sequentially. Alternatively hospital chaplains (or others) could mix and match to suit particular needs.

The many relevant marginal annotations and references said more to me than some of the prayers and meditations themselves, yet these are for use by the sick, not the healthy. The authors’ intention is to speak ‘the common language of suffering’, used here to express their own reactions to personal affliction and to convey how others have felt in theirs. It is, therefore, a helpful exercise for any health worker to listen to such messages, realising afresh that in times of trouble God is there, ready to be a very present help and healer.

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Curing the heart - a model for biblical counseling
Howard Eyrich and William Hines
Christian Focus Publications 2002
US$15.99 Pb 204pp
ISBN 1 85792 722 2

‘Biblical Counseling’ (sic) is greatly influenced by Jay Adams, founder of ‘nouthetic’ counseling, which has core principles of ‘confrontation, concern and change’.

The ‘cure’ in this model is not necessarily to reach a stage of ‘feeling better’ (p58), as ‘the chief problem to be dealt with is a severed relationship with God’. The primary goal is therefore ‘for people to become more Christ-like’ (p157), not to ‘rebuild a… wounded personality’ nor to ‘help [clients] perceive themselves as a person having worth’ (p162).

Eyrich and Hines outline two premises. Firstly, the root of the ‘counselee’s’ problems is sin. Secondly, Scripture is sufficient to deal with all problems. The only reference to persecution relates to the counselor rejected by a client. One of the flaws of this approach is the risk of our shortfalls becoming red herrings in the counseling process. Proverbs 30:6 is used to warn against adding to God’s Word ‘with other traditions or modern theories’. I would suggest, however, that common
What Could I Do? A handbook for making hard choices

Peter Hicks
IVP 2003
£9.99 Pb 352pp
ISBN 0 85111 299 4

This book follows on from ‘What Could I Say?’ by the same author (Triple Helix 2003; Spring:19). While there is some overlap between the two books, ‘What Could I Do?’ shifts the emphasis to the hard choices we all face by seeking to offer biblical guidance on a variety of difficult areas. The diverse range of topics covered includes environmental issues, sexuality, money and the use of time. The initial section deals generally with decision-making and is probably the only part of the book that would be read as a whole; the remainder is more likely to be dipped into rather than be read in one sitting.

My main criticism of the author’s approach in this book is that he appears reluctant to offer any definitive guidance. The introduction states, ‘there’s only one person who has the right to tell you what to do and that’s God’. There is no mention of the authority delegated to others such as consultants, teachers, police and pastors. Therefore, in a messy and complex world, it all appears to come down to the individual Christian’s personal view on the right course to take. To illustrate this, I was somewhat startled to see the following advice given to a woman facing an unwanted pregnancy: ‘In the last analysis it is you who have the right and responsibility to choose to have an abortion or to have your baby.’ Yet this appears to run contrary to the author’s stated view that abortion conflicts with ‘Christian morality and principles’ (p191) and his use of the example of the misuse of abortion legislation when he argues against legalising euthanasia (p114). It is clear that he does not advocate abortion; it is just a pity that he hasn’t stated this more clearly.

It would be unfair to write this book off on the basis of a CMF live issue – parts of it are excellent and in general the issues surrounding a broad range of topics are covered well. It is certainly useful to have a selection of compiled Scripture passages for each of the issues covered. Some readers will find that the range of options presented is a helpful approach; others, however, may be frustrated by this attempt to provide non-directional advice.

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The R Option

Michael Schluter and David John Lee
The Relationships Foundation 2003
£7.99 Pb 224pp
ISBN 0 9543879 0 2

‘This book reminds us that it is the quality of our relationships that, more than anything else, determines our happiness, fulfilment and the sense of a life well lived.’ (Jonathan Sacks, Chief rabbi).

Jonathan Sacks statement is powerful but counter-cultural one. As Schluter and Lee outline, our highly individualistic age assumes that we function first and foremost as individuals – our everyday encounters serving mostly in a contractual, and ‘rights based’ fashion. Thankfully as Christians and doctors, we are aware of the faulty philosophy of such a view. As doctors, we see the value in nurturing relationships as we struggle to maintain the doctor and patient relationship in an increasingly pressured working environment. As Christians, we realise our true nature – relational beings made in God’s relational image. However, the reality of nurturing our relationships can be challenging.

Schluter and Lee outline a way of looking at life ‘relationally’ – that is analysing the impact of our lifestyle choices on our relationships, motivated by Christian thinking on the importance of relationship. For example, on lunch: if the time spent with our children over a meal is more significant than any committee meeting, we might do well to spend some time thinking about what we will discuss, how the discussion went and what was going on in the individuals’ responses – as we would do for any meeting with colleagues. On money – consider spending money to develop relationships, perhaps a night out with friends, rather than buying a new gadget. On coffee breaks – see sociability at work as crucial to effectiveness and productivity. In this respect, I have particularly valued the daily midmorning break of 10-15 minutes in my current practice. Day to day events as well as clinical questions are shared and I believe the teamwork is more effective as a result. All nineteen chapters are short and readable covering areas as diverse as lunch, leisure, sex, forgiveness and schooling.

The beauty of the book is that the aim of developing relationships is not for personal satisfaction. The wonderful truth this book subtlety reveals is that fulfilment comes from putting other people’s interests first. While this holds true for this life, it hints at an even deeper reality. As Jesus declared, ‘many who are first will be last, and the last first.’ (Matthew 19:30) I will try even harder not to miss the coffee break.
Whether you are just starting to pray regularly or you want to start over, this guide is designed for people like you. He has a personality and qualities you can understand and relate to, but you cannot expect to relate to God in exactly the way you might to a close friend or family member. He’s so much bigger and more incredible than that. He is beyond what you can understand in the natural everyday world. What Will Happen When You Pray? Ways to Develop Your Prayer Life. We hope that after reading this guide, you’ll feel equipped for your journey with prayer. Well, think about how you began your prayer by addressing God directly, by name. This is important because it acknowledges that God is more than a force, more than an unnamed higher power or an idea. Your Prayer Personality. Are you a Prayer Prodigal or a Part-Time Pray-er? Do you pray without ceasing, or forget to begin? Take our prayer quiz and assess your prayer life. Beliefnet. 1. I pray: Several times a day. Only when I am desperate, if at all. You pray more than part-time, and your prayer life may be quite active. But your prayers are goal-oriented. This is the proper way to pray as taught in Holy scriptures and Jesus Christ: Do not long and repetitive prayer or very loud that you may attract the prays of men. For your reward will be from men and not God. Prepare to pray: Kneel or sit in a chair, cross your arms, close your eyes and bow your head. Focus all of your thoughts to God. Four elements to prayer: If you pray with real intent, God will answer you. The point of prayer is not laundry list of what you want God to do, but ask Him what He is willing to allow for your growth and development. Consider He knows and see all things past, present and future. Trust that, He wants best for you. Why do so many struggle to pray? Dr Pablo Martinez, a medical doctor and psychotherapist, suggests that our basic personality type strongly affects how we pray, and what we pray about. Extroverts may struggle to develop a regular prayer life; introverts will be more likely to set time apart. Thinking types find prayer more satisfactory if accompanied by pen and paper; feeling types may long for intimacy with God; intuitive types tend to be innovators and visionaries, and may have a more mystical bent; sensation types often have a particular capacity for spontaneous prayer; and so on.