

## Acts 7:55-60 and John 14:1-14. Why do we pray, what do we pray and how do we pray?

14 May 2017. Sarah Thomas

What is prayer? It's about developing a relationship with God. And it's something, like the effort we make with any worthwhile relationship, that we have to be intentional and committed about. It is both simple and yet makes demands on us. It is something we do corporately when we meet together to worship, when we are in small groups and, probably most often, on our own.

If we want to develop a relationship with God, prayer will be one of the major bits of glue that will be part of the bonding process, together with exploring God's Word in the Bible and applying what we learn there, to our daily lives.

Why do we pray? It's something that is built into the DNA of those who follow Jesus. Almost exactly 36 years ago, on 12 May 1981, I was confirmed. I have to admit that I only know that because the date is inscribed (along with my name mis-spelled) inside a Manual for Communicants produced by the Church in Wales and presented to those being confirmed.

It has advice on how I should apply myself to this relationship with God. It says that 'Loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ means that my life's work is to get to know God's will for me here and now and every day and that means [among other things] I must speak to him every day in my prayers'. The index covers: Morning Prayers, Evening Prayers, Forms of prayer, Prayers of Dedication, Arrow prayers, Prayers of Praise, Prayers of Intercession, Prayers in times of anxiety, sin and forgiveness, personal prayers (that bit is left blank for you to fill in yourself) and then prayers before, during and after communion – for it sees communion as being interactive, that we don't just listen but pray alongside it. The reason it focusses so much on prayer is because it recognises that prayer is formative, it moulds us.

What do we pray?

If you remember, the first disciples didn't ask Jesus why he kept going off on his own to pray with God, no, they asked him, how shall we pray? And he taught them the prayer we know as the Lord's Prayer. Our Horizon service is looking at it, phrase by phrase this term. Most of the things that we want or need to pray about are covered in the scope of this prayer, for it says: 'I want to be part of God's kingdom movement. I want to be part of his heaven-on-earth way of living, part of his bread-for-the-world agenda. I need forgiveness for myself (from sin, from debt and from every weight around my neck) and I intend to live that way in my own dealings with others. Interesting that we commit ourselves to live in a way we will find difficult to achieve. Stephen's example of loving those are killing him might be a step beyond anything we are asked to do, but we are asked to love our enemies And then, because I live in the real world where evil is still powerful, I pray for protection and rescuing. And in, and through it all, I acknowledge and celebrate the Father's kingdom, power and glory.' We can pray it through all in one go. We can split it up, praying though it slowly, pausing to bring before God the things that that are on our hearts that fit into each category.

Tom Wright in his book *Simply Christian* suggests that we modern people are so anxious to do everything our own way, that we think that if we use other people's prayers they won't be authentic or come from our hearts. Yet the prayers offered by this little confirmation manual I have and in the various liturgies that are available to us, use many different forms of prayer that have been used over centuries, and carry in them all of human experience, starting with the psalms. These prayers are tried and tested and offer us the suffering and the courage, the sacrifice and the holiness, and all the pain and the love that have attended their use. We can tend to resist this method of prayer (I know I do) preferring to use our own words, yet they are valuable, in the same way that using liturgies can be helpful, so long as we also try to understand what the language and phrases used really mean. Don't forget that if you have questions about why we do certain things you can write them down and pop them in the box at the back of the church, to be answered during the autumn. Or you can ask one of us at any time.

And of course, we can use our own words or no words at all. Stillness and silence, which takes practice, can be as meaningful as a whole dictionary or prayer book.

As part of our corporate prayer, we include laying on of hands for healing once a month. It will be next Sunday. Think about what is burdening you and if there is something, why not come and receive prayer. The experience of a couple of people I spoke to this week is that they felt refreshed, lighter, better able to cope as a result of the prayer ministry they had received.

And if our prayers help us to build our relationship with God, what about those people who do not yet know about God's love for them? Jesus was clear in our gospel reading, He is the way to knowing the Father. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. We can see him and through him see God. But knowing Jesus isn't something we keep to ourselves after all someone will have prayed for us to find Jesus.

Do we pray for others in that way? It might be implicit in the words we use in the Lord's Prayer – 'thy kingdom come' but can we be more intentional about it? Iain will be covering this in more detail next week, this is the advert. All Christians in the UK are being asked to join in an international wave of prayer using the resources from 'Thy Kingdom Come', that more people will come to know Jesus Christ. You can see the resources at this link

[https://www.thykingdomcome.global/downloads/TKC%20Take%20Part%20PDFs%20\(Ind\)%20V5.pdf](https://www.thykingdomcome.global/downloads/TKC%20Take%20Part%20PDFs%20(Ind)%20V5.pdf)

And if you are thinking about finding a resource like my little book of prayers, then there are plenty also available on the link.

But you don't have to wait until 25 May, you can start now.

Because the question after why and how do we pray is when do we pray? It is good if we are intentional about it, making a regular place and time, but we can make our lives into a prayer. Some of you will do it by keeping meticulous lists of people and situations to pray about. If you want to be more spontaneous you might like to think about this:

When we are cleaning vegetables we can pray for those who will eat the food we are preparing, those who sold it to us, the people who transported and grew it, those who live in the places it came from and passed through on the journey to us, we can give thanks for the water we are using, our concerns about climate change and so on. And if you are thinking, well I grow my own, then pray for your neighbours on the allotment or garden.

On the way to work or into town, pray for the children on their way to school, those sharing the bus ride on their way to work or appointments, those seeking work, those without homes or families, the bus drivers, cyclists, those who service our workplaces, keep them clean and so on.

Instead or (or as well as) being nosy on rightmove, pray for those who live or have lived in the house up for sale or rent, for those who will be moving in.

If you are creative you might like this example which I read in the Church Time a few weeks ago about a child who made paper flowers, adding petals every time she prayed about things.

Pray for open eyes, ears and hearts so that you can respond to people in need, listening to their problems.

If you want to come for a walk around parts of the parish with me during 25 May to 2 June, when we will pray for the people living in the streets we will walk through, then I'd love to have your company.

But above all, however you do it and whenever you do it, PRAY! GK Chesterton said that the difference between talking about prayer and praying is the same as the difference between blowing a kiss and kissing. And you know what that feels like! So get praying.....

Amen