

Thought 14th March 2021

I realise that in talking about how to pray I may be trying to teach my grandmother to suck eggs. By this I mean I may be trying to teach somebody something they already know and perhaps know better than I do. So, to all you prayer warriors please forgive my presumption. For the rest of us struggling with prayer let see what God has to say about prayer.

As I said last week prayer is a source of guilt and angst for many Christians. It seems everybody is telling us we should pray more often or pray for longer or pray with faith or pray enthusiastically or pray persistently. What we don't hear amongst all this exhortation, good advice and guilt creating commands is any explanation of what prayer is and what God's part in prayer is.

Many people view prayer as something that it is not; they view prayer as a religious activity carried out because it's what expected of them or they pray because they are told they must pray to be a proper Christian or they pray from a fear that if they don't God will give them a blackmark against their name. This not prayer.

So, what is prayer? The essential truth is that pray is about relationship. Jesus, when asked by His disciples about prayer starts His example of how to pray with these words **Matthew 6: 9** *"Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven,"* Prayer is about relationship, prayer is talking with someone who cares for you, your father in heaven, God Almighty.

Prayer is really about spending time with God, your Father in heaven who loves you, who is intensely interested in you and all that is going on in your life. It helps to think of prayer more like going on a walk and chatting with your best friend and less like giving a speech to your boss. The first thing we need to understand about prayer is that prayer is simply the way we spend time with God. God has gone to great lengths to enable us to spend time with Him as we will see.

You may well say, Okay I believe that God wants me to spend time with Him, but I just don't feel that I can. I am not good enough and I feel guilty and I haven't done what I should and oh boy I have too much of what I shouldn't. How can I possibly

spend time with my heavenly father? My response would be, don't worry your heavenly father has this sorted. The author of Hebrews puts it like this **Hebrews 10: 19 - 22** *"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."*

God has made a way for us to spend time with Him not based on our goodness but based on what Jesus has done for us. Because of Jesus sacrifice on the cross at Golgotha we have been made fit, despite all that we have done or left undone to spend time with our heavenly Father. Or as the author of Hebrews writes in **Hebrews 10: 14** *"For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."* God has made you perfectly fit to spend time with Him.

You may well say, Okay I believe that God wants me to spend time with Him and He has made a way for me to come into His presence without all the guilt and feelings of inadequacy. But and it is a big but I don't really know how to talk to Him or what to talk to God about. My initial reply to your big but is this, remember what I said earlier, prayer is like going on a walk and chatting with your best friend. Prayer, talking to God, spending time with God can be as natural and as easy as talking to your best friend. Yes, the temptation and the pressure is to be formal and stiff but I would ask you is that the way you speak to your best friend? It helps to remember that God, your heavenly father is interested in spending time with you and talking with you. I have always found it easy to talk to someone who is interested in what I have to say, don't you? And with every relationship the more time you spend together the easier is to talk openly and honestly.

It also bares remembering that prayer is a conversation and, in a conversation, both parties talk, not just one. Lucas like many children loves his X-Box and playing Fortnite. He loves to tell me at length and in great detail all about the latest skins, his achievements or the next update. Lucas speaks passionately and at length but he isn't really interested in what I have to say, in fact I struggle to get a word in edge ways.

I enjoy these times together sharing in Lucas's life but this is not a conversation. Yet often we can treat our time with God in the same manner, we are so busy talking we take no time to listen or even give a space for God to talk to us. Remember prayer is a conversation not a speech.

Praying is both sharing honestly with God our lives and listening to what God has to say to us.

You may well say, Okay I believe that praying is both sharing honestly with God our lives and listening to what God has to say to us. But and it's another even bigger but I don't know what to pray about. My response to your even bigger but would be, don't worry your heavenly father has this sorted as well. God knows our struggles with prayer and has sent us a helper the Holy Spirit. Pauls writes in his letter to the Romans about prayer and their struggle to know what to pray in **Romans 8: 26 – 27** *"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."*

When we do struggle to know what to pray, that is talk to God we can rely on God's Holy spirit to guide us in what we should pray about. Even more that just guiding us, sometime the Holy Spirit will actually even intercede, that is pray for us. What a remarkable provision God has made for us in our weakness.

You see, you don't need to always know what to talk to God about, what we need is to simply trust that the Holy Spirit will meet us in our weakness and lead us in our conversation with God.

Are you starting to see a bit of a pattern here? God wants to spend time with you, He made a way through Jesus for you to come to Him and be with Him? God knows that sometimes it is hard to pray because of our weaknesses so He sent His Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness to be able to pray. We need to realise that prayer is not about our efforts, no prayer is about God and what He has done to make it possible.

You may well say, Okay I believe that the Holy Spirit will show me what to pray. But and it's an even bigger but, how can I be sure that God will respond when I am honest with Him and tell Him I need His help. Or how can I be sure that God will respond when I tell Him of my desires to see Him move in someone's life or the world around me? My response would be this, John in his Gospel records these words of Jesus **John 16: 23 – 24** *"In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."*

Before you take this as a blank cheque and start treating God like a genie in a lamp please consider James words in his letter **James 4: 3** *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* When we ask God to move, we should consider our motives and ask ourselves if Jesus would really have prayed such a prayer.

God promise is to answer our prayers, even if sometimes the answer is wait or no. **Matthew 7:11** *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"* Sometimes, maybe all the time we believe we know what is best for us and the world around us. We present to God a long list of our wants and demands presuming we know best. Yet often we are so wrong. For example almost everybody has prayed that they would win the lottery. Having a vast sum of money is seen as an answer to all life problems and happiness. However, surprisingly, when researchers looked at those who had won various lotteries, they made an amazing discovery around 98% of "winners" said they were unhappier after winning the lottery than they were before winning the lottery. Even more surprisingly around half said they wished they had never won the lottery in the first place.

Our father in heaven wants to give us good answers to our requests and sometimes that means He says wait and sometimes He says no because He truly only ever wants to give good gifts to those who ask Him!

So what is prayer, prayer is spending time talking with our Father in heaven. We can spend time with our Father in heaven because he has made a way through the life,

death and resurrection of Jesus for us to come confidently into His presence. God has given us helper who helps to spend time with our Father in heaven and even helps us to know what to pray. We can be sure that God will answer our prayers in the best way possible for us because we ask in the name of His son the Lord Jesus Christ.

I leave you with the final line of Pauls pray for the Ephesians, **Ephesians 3: 20** *“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”*