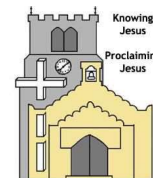


Prayer:

Carol Hunter:

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Prayer. We like the sound of it, we know it's good for us, God encourages us to do it and the Bible tells us it's a powerful, superior weapon. We know it is a privilege and it's the way we communicate with our Creator ~ so why do we find it so difficult?

I think this is something worth looking at and wrestling with

What are the obstacles that stand in our way?

- **Prayer is hard work.** Let's start with the fact that it's a discipline and let's face it ~ we don't like discipline! It takes commitment and practice ~ like most of the excellent things in life like fitness, knowledge, skill in art or music ~ they all come from discipline (and like the benefits of getting fit/learning a new skill etc the benefits are splendid)
- **Prayer is too hard.** If we are feeling that prayer is too hard, are we putting pressure on ourselves to pray in a certain way or feel we have to pray for a certain length of time? The things that make prayer feel hard are usually self-imposed. Do we need to learn how to push these aside and embrace a more simple life of prayer?
- **I'm not very good at praying.** This obstacle can be hard to overcome because it's so feelings based. But the reality is that there is no such thing as a bad prayer. And it can be learnt ~ Jesus' disciples make this clear when they ask Him to teach them how to pray. And let's not fall into the trap of measuring yourself against others and feeling inferior. Theodore Roosevelt once said "*Comparison is the thief of Joy.*" We are all individual, God made us unique ~ this will be reflected in the way that we pray, the language we will use etc.
- **I don't know what to say.** Prayer usually involves speaking. Sometimes it is out loud, sometimes in the quietness of our hearts. Either way prayer says something. But prayer doesn't need to be full of words. Remember prayer isn't a monologue but a dialogue and also involves listening and allowing God to speak to us.
Sometimes we can't find the adjectives we need to describe what we want to say or know what to ask for. In these times I have found it helpful to 'pray God into the situation' resting on the words of Paul who said "*I know who I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day*" [2 Tim 1:12]
- **I don't know how to say what I want.** I wonder, do we have a preconceived idea of how prayer should sound? Let's not get caught up in the notion that prayer has to have a certain form or shape. Perhaps some of this comes from set prayers. Set prayers can have enormous value in our lives. They bring richness and unity to our prayers. But when I'm praying, their language is not what I would use. If we think that prayer has to sound a certain way then we are going to struggle. Let's look for a moment at prayer in the Bible. There's poetry, angry demands, set prayers, individual pleas and words spoken to Jesus. They each sound different. Form is not important to God ~ coming to Him is. Jesus invites us to call God 'Father' ~ as a parent, I don't demand my children use specific ways to speak to me ~ I just want to be part of their lives.

- **It's difficult to pay attention.** Is it hard for you to pay attention when praying? I hope I'm not the only one! Some find it helpful to have a special place they like to go to pray. I often find I lose concentration when I'm praying on my own ~ this is one of the reasons I like praying with others ~ I find it easier to remain present.
- **There are more enjoyable things to do.** Sometimes other occupations cry louder for our attention. Sometimes we're in too big a hurry to get something done because it's more fun to take out the 'to do' list than it is to spend time in prayer. And if I'm perfectly honest, sometimes I would rather watch Coronation Street than turn out for a prayer meeting!
- **I don't feel God's presence.** I once saw an amusing poster outside a church which said "*If you don't feel close to God, guess who moved!*" Remember, in the birth narratives Jesus was called '*Emmanuel*' which means God is with us. When you sense God nearby, God is with you. When you don't feel His presence, He is still with you!

These are just some of the obstacles that can stand in the way of a fruitful prayer-life, but they can be overcome or God wouldn't have said that when we truly seek Him, He will make sure He is found [Jeremiah 29:13].

I hope that reading this encourages us all to reflect on the phenomenon of prayer. I could go on to speak about the privileges and benefits of personal (on our own) and corporate (with others) prayer, but that's for another time. Below is a list of helpful hints that I hope may inspire you to pray, and please do remember that we have our monthly Monday evening prayer meeting **on the first Monday of each month** (via zoom at the moment) at 8:00 p.m. - 8.30 p.m.

Creative prayer ideas:

- Pray through the notice sheet.
- Download a pray app or get yourself some Bible notes that inspire prayer.
- As you iron, pray for the people whose items of clothing you are ironing.
- Pray for the people you meet at the bus stop/in the shops/bank etc
- Bake 'prayer buns' (spend the time baking them, praying for a person/family, then take them around to them and tell them what you've done)
- Pray through a photo-album.
- Pray through the newspaper.
- Write a prayer list and set out a regular time to pray through it.
- Put the names/situations of the people on your prayer list, cut them out and put them in a little basket. Every time you pass, pluck out a name or situation and pray.
- ABC prayers. Find words to describe God through the alphabet and praise Him: Alpha & Omega/Beautiful/Creator/Dependable.....
- Wash your eyes out on creation ~ look at the beauty/colours/textures and marvel at our wonderful Creator God. Tell Him what you see and how it makes you feel.
- Go on a prayer walk and pray for the people/businesses/schools etc in your community
- Join the Diocese Prayer Community (see Carol for details)
- Form a prayer couple/triplet and meet (or telephone) for coffee once a week to pray together
- Count your blessings ~ literally!

Yours in Jesus
Carol