



# Thoughts on Prayer

Jerome has talked a lot in recent weeks about the use of 'pictures' in the bible to communicate with us (e.g. the parables). In response to some of the comments I received in the last edition of Twinspire about prayer, I feel it would be useful to look again at some of the comments in terms of the 'pictures' the bible uses.

## By yourself or together?

Re prayer, Roddy highlighted the verse from Matthew 6:6 where we are told to go to our room, close the door and pray to our Father who is unseen. Prayer on our own is certainly important, as Jesus himself demonstrated – particularly in Gethsemane. But look at the wider picture – this verse is one from the 'Sermon on the Mount', plus it is also within the wider context of the whole bible. The first point to note is the language Jesus used when he gave us the Lord's Prayer as a model (in the verses immediately following Matthew 6:6). Think about it in terms of being on your own. "Our Father ... Give us today ... Forgive us the wrongs ... as we forgive ... Do not bring us to hard testing, but keep us safe." The repeated use of the plural forms suggests that prayer was expected to be done by groups of people, not by yourself.

## Charity

Look also at the bible passages from the Sermon before and after the teaching on prayer. If we took the teaching on charity 100% literally there would be very little fundraising in the Church. Matthew 6:3 says "But when you help a needy person, do it in such a way that not even your closest friend will know about it." Tickets for coffee mornings for Bangladesh, or ceilidhs with raffle tickets – these are fund raising for charities with the prices clearly displayed and advertised – everybody knows the price paid. Besides, much work for charity could not be done if it was not spread amongst many hands. Jerome talked a few weeks ago about these verses and highlighted the attitude of some of the religious folk of the day.

## Blowing your own trumpet

Do you remember him talking about 'blowing your own trumpet'? When you look at the Sermon in a wider context (the Beatitudes, the teachings on charity, prayer, anger, fasting, revenge etc), I would suggest that we are being given a picture where the focus of much of what is being said is the message that God says "I require an attitude of absolute humility in everything" – pride has no place before God. Remember that among Jesus listeners would be those who were the religious elite – those who liked to have a trumpet blown to highlight their acts of charity, and to be very public in other religious duties.

## House of Prayer

Consider also the words of Jesus when he went to the Temple (see Matthew 21:12-13 and John 2:13-22). This is the well known passage where Jesus used a whip to drive out those who were buying and selling, where he turned over the tables of the money-changers. There are a number of important things to notice here. Firstly, what was the attitude of Jesus? Well, I think it would be true to say that he was furious! Absolutely livid! This was a matter that was obviously very important for Jesus – so much so that he took a whip and drove the people out, creating mayhem in God's house! It would seem that even the Temple Guard were powerless before him. What words does Jesus use? He says "*It is written in the scriptures that God said 'My house will be called a house of prayer.'*" God says that his house will be called a house of prayer. Think about that picture for a moment – a house of prayer. A house is where a family lives together (7 days a week), where parents (God) can talk (through prayer / scripture) with his children (church members), where people can share, laugh together, even fall out with one another. The people in the Temple were not necessarily doing anything wrong, as there were all sorts of rules about what could and could not be done in the Temple. But it would appear that nobody was doing what Jesus primarily wanted them to do within the Temple – that is, they were not a people of prayer. They were perhaps just going through the rituals of 'Sunday worship' without doing that which was very important to Jesus. Can you picture Polmont Old Parish Church as a 'house of prayer'?

## Fellowship

This 'family life' concept of the Church is further illustrated in the early Church. In Acts 2:42 we read that, talking of the early Church, "They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and prayers." i.e. the believers were meeting together for prayer (and a lot more!). What ever else may have been different about the early Church, one thing is for sure – it was a growing Church. Perhaps you feel that things are different today – we live in a different age when such things just can't happen. If that is your opinion I would invite you to read a book like "The Heavenly Man" (available in the Church library). Here we see the Church in China today with many accounts of God acting in response to the prayers of the Church, overcoming tremendous persecution to see real growth. If you haven't read this book, it is an excellent read.

**Family Prayer**

I would suggest that it's not a case of having 'a prayer meeting'. It's more like that we should have prayer and times of fellowship seven days a week, with the whole family involved (a house of prayer). I like the way Eugene Peterson puts it in his translation of the bible (The Message) when talking about prayer – "Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace."

*Murray Mathers*

PS. What would the attitude of Jesus be if he turned up at Polmont Old one day? Would he come with a whip and turn over much of what happens? I wouldn't say there's anything wrong in what happens at Polmont Old, but are we just going through the rituals of Sunday worship without doing what Jesus really requires of us?

**THE WILL OF GOD**

The will of God will never take you .....  
Where the grace of God cannot keep you,  
Where the arms of God cannot support you,  
Where the riches of God cannot supply your needs.  
Where the power of God cannot endow you.

The will of God will never take you .....  
Where the spirit of God cannot work through you.  
Where the wisdom of God cannot teach you,  
Where the army of God cannot protect you,  
Where the hands of God cannot mould you.

The will of God will never take you .....  
Where the love of God cannot enfold you,  
Where the mercy of God cannot sustain you,  
Where the peace of God cannot calm your fears,  
Where the authority of God cannot overrule for you.

The will of God will never take you .....  
Where the comfort of God cannot dry your tears,  
Where the Word of God cannot feed you,  
Where the miracles of God cannot be done for you,  
Where the omnipresence of God cannot find you.

*Author unknown*

*Contributed by Margaret Clark*

**TIME FOR GOD**

*This is an email which is currently going the rounds:*

God, when I received this e-mail, I thought:  
... I don't have time for this  
... and, this is really inappropriate during work.  
Then, I realised that this kind of thinking is **exactly** what has caused lot of the problems in our world today.

We try to keep God in church on Sunday morning.....maybe, Sunday night. We do like to have Him around during sickness.... and, of course, at funerals.  
However, we don't have time, or room, for Him during work or play, because that's the part of our lives we think we can, and should, handle on our own.

May God forgive me for ever thinking that there is a time or place where HE is not to be **FIRST** in my life. We should always have time to remember all HE has done for us.

HE is my source of existence and Saviour. He keeps me functioning each and every day... Without Him, I will be nothing. But, with Christ, HE strengthens me. (Phil 4:13)

Of all the free gifts we may receive,  
Prayer is the very best one ...  
There are no costs, but wonderful rewards

When Christ is the centre of your focus,  
All else will come into proper perspective

WHY?	WHY?	WHY?
Why is it so hard to tell the truth, yet so easy to tell a lie?		
Why are we so sleepy in church, but right when the sermon is over we suddenly wake up?		
Why am I more worried about what other people think of me, than what God thinks of me?		



**Plant kindness,  
reap love**

