

20.02.11

Prayer Part 2 How to pray: Types & Ways

Daniel 9:1-19

Intro/recap

Hopefully you know that as a church we're making prayer and evangelism our particular focus for the year ahead. We've been discussing at Elders meetings and at church meeting how we can re-invigorate our personal prayer- lives and that of the church. As part of that we spent last Sunday morning looking at prayer – what it is, and why we should pray. Today we have the second instalment –how to pray, that is types of prayer and ways to pray.

As I said last week, this is just scratching the surface and so I encourage you to discuss prayer in your house groups, as well as having a go at praying, and to read some more. In addition to the two books I recommended last week (Philip Yancy & Richard Foster) here's another one that really doesn't take long to read – 'How not to pray' by Jeff Lucas.

As we begin to look at how to pray – the sorts of prayer there are and the different approaches, it's worth bearing in mind all along the advice of the early 20th century Benedictine Abbott of Downside Abbey Dom Chapman '*Pray as you can, not as you can't.*'

And remember - Prayer is relationship between God and you.

Types of prayer

So, types of prayer.

At some point in the past you might well have heard or been taught to pray using the acronym ACTS – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication

That's a good starting point for us. It provides a 'balanced diet' of prayer if you like. Different aspects of prayer that make for a balanced nutrition. All these things- Adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication - are present in the prayer Daniel prayed that we heard a few moments ago.

Before we look at each of these think for a minute about your Sunday dinner. I'm not doing this to make you feel hungry, or for those of you who have left it cooking – anxious. It might be when you sit down to your roast dinner later that you eat all the meat first (or nut cutlet), then the potatoes, and finally the vegetables. Or maybe you always eat the veg first, potato next and save the meat til last. It's possible to eat that way, but highly unlikely and probably pretty boring! Much more regular to eat a bit of this, then a bit of that, then back to the potato again. Maybe you're even more daring and you'll have veg and potato in the same mouthful. All the different types of food that give you the balance of a healthy diet are present, but you eat them in a mixed up kind of way. Well, so it is often with prayer. We do

separate the different aspects out at times. But at others they get jumbled up. Daniel's prayer is a mixture. He flips backwards and forwards between them.

We might even end up praying confession and adoration together. Don't worry too much about that. I think if you eat everything that's on the plate that's fine. So it is with prayer. Aim to cover it all to keep healthy and balanced, but don't get too hung up about what you're on when!

Balanced prayer

Is there a pecking order? Some types of prayer more important than others. Some 'higher' than others? Some more 'spiritual' than others? Reticent to ask. Seen as least mature aspect of prayer. Should we reach a point where we don't ask? NO because we are forever dependent on God. Asking is not the lowest form of prayer.

I'm going to go in the order of ACTS because it is easy to remember:

Adoration – in the prayer of adoration we love God for himself, for his very being, for his radiant joy. We praise him. We're not seeking anything for ourselves.

It can slip easily into thanksgiving – who God is leads us on to what he's done for us.

Dan 9:4 first part is adoration, second part slips into thanks 'who keeps his covenant of love...'

That's one of the reasons we shouldn't get too prescriptive about what sort of prayer we praying in what order. Daniel mixes them up. So can we.

But it is good to simply wonder at, revel in, who God is, and tell him about that, pouring out words of love.

Confession/repentance

Daniel quickly comes to this aspect of prayer.(v5) We can easily go one of two ways – neglect this aspect or wallow in it. Neither is very helpful.

(V9) the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving , even though we have rebelled against him.

I'm sure God doesn't need to be told that, but as part of his prayer Daniel is reminding himself of God's mercy and forgiveness.

A phrase we sometimes incorporate into prayer at the evening service which tends to use more liturgy and written prayer than the mornings: 'Listen, here is good news, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'

Thanksgiving – what he's done

(V15) who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name

Even in pleading there is time to thank. So much of Judaism is about remembering what God has done. We have so much to thank God for – because of Jesus.

It's easy to forget the words 'thank you'. We ask for something, get it, move on to the next thing without pausing. We do good imitations of spoiled children!

Supplication

petition – asking – why do we have to ask for things if God knows our needs?

Sharpens the focus of our petition, persistence means you're serious!

We will always need to ask, we are always reliant on God. He initiates the relationship, as I said last week. We respond to his love. It's an imbalanced relationship. Parent and child.

intercession (on behalf of others)

We've had a brief look at types of prayer. Now let's look at ways of praying.

Ways of praying

It's important to say here that we are all different (thank God!!). We all have different personalities, different ways of learning, different ways of communicating, and therefore we will all have different ways of praying that work for us. Here Dom Chapman's advice is strong – pray as you can, not as you can't. That's actually pretty good advice for many things in life! Don't assume that what works for you works for others.

I remember a conversation with someone at university about how we best remembered information from a lecture. I would make copious notes and then re-read them several times. She would write down very little, but then find someone to have a discussion with and, preferably a heated one. Once she'd verbalised the information, it was fixed in her mind. My way of working horrified her. Vice versa, her way of working horrified me.

You might well revel in the thought of three hours of silent prayer. But for some to be silent for even a few minutes is a form of torture.

Even things as basic as the time of day that you prefer to pray vary according to personality, body clock and routine. Be flexible. Change as circumstances change.

If you don't know what works, try different things out. Don't be afraid to get it wrong. As I said last week learning to pray is a bit like learning to walk. You have to get up give it a go and fall over a fair bit.

So here are some possibilities: prayer alone, prayer with others, speaking out loud, journal keeping/ writing it down, using others' prayers – books, biblical prayers, psalms, singing your prayers, listening to music, repetition of a phrase, The Examen – thinking over the day & bringing it before God, praying in snatches, or sessions, prayer & fasting, prayer breakfasting.

Some that are harder to categorise!

Type of prayer or way of praying. Sometimes can't be separated out so easily.

Unceasing - 'Pray without ceasing' 1 Thess 5:17. Some people it seems have this particular gift, to be in constant conversation with God.

Meditative prayer – reading a passage of scripture, entering into it, imagining yourself there.

Contemplative prayer – silence – silencing the thoughts, being with God.

Learn to walk before you run. Maybe go on a retreat to learn some of these techniques.

Discipline

Not something we generally like. There are some things in life that we do whether we feel like it or not. Maybe have to force yourself into it. I believe that we will reap the rewards of a closer relationship with God. For example, practising a musical instrument. There are days when you would do anything to get out of it. But the benefits are massive. One day you find you can pick it up and play! And then you actually want to, it comes alive!

So what are we going to do about this?

Last week I invited each of us to enjoy some time with God, to be in his presence.

This week I want to invite you to think of one thing that you could change with regard to how you pray, and commit to make that change in the next week.

Remember: *'Pray as you can, not as you can't.'*

Housegroup Notes
Prayer Part 2 How to pray: Types & Ways
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'Pray as you can, not as you can't.' Dom Chapman (Benedictine Abbott of Downside Abbey)

Types of prayer

Adoration
Confession & repentance
Thanksgiving
Supplication –asking for ourselves & on behalf of others

A Balanced diet of prayer is beneficial to our spiritual wellbeing, but the order isn't crucial.

Ways of praying

Alone, in groups, fasting, eating, speaking out loud, journaling, others written prayers, singing, listening to music, watching images, repetition, the Examen (looking back for God over the day), brief snatches, long sessions.

How we pray very much depends on personality.

Others

Unceasing prayer (*1 Thess 5:17*)

Meditative prayer

Contemplative prayer

Discipline

Unpopular but beneficial!

For Discussion

1. During prayers of adoration we offer God our praise. As humans, praise causes us to flourish. Does God *need* our praise? Why/why not?
2. Should we have a balanced prayer 'diet'? Why/why not? What happens if we don't? Are there times when only one aspect of prayer is appropriate?
3. There is an argument that work *is* prayer. How do you respond to that? Does it change anything for you?
4. What are your preferred ways of praying? What can you learn from others in the group?

Identify one way that you could pray differently in the coming week, and commit to giving it a go!