



## 1: If God knows everything anyway, why do we pray?

From the moment that we were born we entered life asking for something. It might have been sleep, or food, or a change of nappy, or simply attention but we quickly discovered why lungs and breath were given to us – to demand something from the person who could give us what we needed and to do it now!!!

In adulthood we somewhat suppress that impulse, although consumerism is a continuous attempt to keep us in childishness, and when we become Christians that impulse is subdued still further. In fact it is sometimes pushed down so far that now we find it hard to ask for anything for ourselves at all! But basically in those early days of life a thought pattern was established that we ask the one who has the power (parent, teacher, boss etc.) to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. So no surprises that we carry over that way of thinking into our relationship with the Great Parent, Teacher and Boss – God Himself. And of course the prime way in which we communicate with this God is through prayer and therefore prayer then becomes the prime place and means of asking for things from God, usually for others and sometimes for ourselves. But the bottom line is that we think of prayer as being about asking God to do things and to give things (with the occasional bit of praise thrown in)!

Now there are some positives to that. The Psalmist cries out: “how can I repay the Lord for all that He has given to me?” (Ps.116v12). In other words he is immensely aware of and grateful for, all that God has done for him and for all that he has been given by God.

But there are some huge negatives in regarding prayer in this way. We may be in danger of treating God simply as an errand boy, there to fulfil our wishes: we may become very angry when God doesn't do what He has been asked to do: prayer may be quite a disappointing exercise because we keep on asking but nothing much seems to happen: we pray in a sort of hope but without much expectation that it will do any good: and it is so boring!! Prayer becomes a wearisome and ever increasing shopping list of needs, where we feel guilty if we omit anyone or anything. In a perverse way, prayer which is meant to be about God's will being done on earth as in heaven, becomes an attempt (as per babyhood with our human parents), of us seeking to impose our will upon our heavenly Parent, even if we think that we are doing this for all the best and right reasons.

And what's the point if God knows it all anyway? “Before they call I will answer...” (Isa. 65v24); “For your Father in heaven knows that you need these things...” (Mt.6v32). Or to put it another way: What is the point of prayer, in fact, **What is Prayer?**

Well of course it is not just one thing. Just think of the number of English words that we use to describe what actually goes on in prayer: *praise, intercession, confession, petition, adoration, silence, listening, binding and loosing* etc. Prayer is not monochrome it is a whole rainbow of things!

But if Prayer is not actually primarily about Asking / Intercession, then what would be a better way of describing it? How about **PRAYER IS KEEPING COMPANY WITH GOD?**

Think about being with someone close to you. Of course you talk and you share information, including needs. But much more than that you share yourself with that other person and they share themselves with you. And the terms that we would use to describe such an encounter would be words such as *intimacy, companionship, enjoyment* and *refreshment*. No wonder that the most common New Testament word for “to worship” is *proskuneo*, which literally means **to move towards to kiss** – hence the story of the Prodigal Son and the meeting of the father and the son in Luke 15v20.

**IF** we can truly grasp the truth that Prayer is less about *asking God for things* and more about simply *enjoying being with God*, then can that free us up to look at prayer differently and therefore to approach prayer differently? Can we begin to see it as a joy and not as a burden and even to look forward to it?!

### **THIS WEEK:**

Leave your prayer list to one side – the Lord knows anyway! – and just chat to God about whatever is on your heart and mind. Talk things out with Him; invite Him into all of your hopes, dreams and fears. Don't be afraid of companionable silence and don't forget to listen as well!

**PRAYER:** Lord, here am I; here are You; and here is this quiet time and space. Open my heart; open my mind; open my eyes and ears and let us talk together and let us keep company together. Amen.

## Study 1: BIBLE READING: Luke 15v11-32

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- 1: Make a list of words that describe Prayer e.g. praise, petition etc.  
What do they tell us about the many and varied faces of Prayer?
- 2: What are your reactions to the fact that the Greek word for worship literally means “to move towards to kiss” and that this is the commonest word for worship used in the New Testament?  
What does that tell us about Prayer and about what goes on in Prayer?
- 3: Imagine the scene between the Father and the Prodigal Son and their meeting in Luke 15v20.  
What might have been going through the Prodigal’s mind as he approached his home and the Father whom he had so grievously insulted and hurt?  
What might he have expected to receive from his Father and what, in fact, did he receive?

Does this help us to give an insight into the difference between how we so often feel and fear is our relationship with God our Father (i.e. that God doesn’t want us; doesn’t much like us; is disappointed in us etc.) and how that relationship actually *is* and how God *really* feels about us?

Think about it...

Who took the initiative in coming out?  
Who threw his arms around whom?  
Who did all the kissing?  
What filled the Father’s heart?  
What did he then do for the son?

“So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him [lit. *fervently, or again and again*]” (Lk.15v20). So in the context of thinking about prayer, when the Father and the Prodigal Son met together, **worship happened**.. Quite a thought!!

Love says “Come”, guilt says “Stay Away”.

- 4: Did you notice that the son thought that he needed prepared, special words to (re)establish a relationship with his father (v.18,20) but that his father wasn’t interested in the words at all (and in fact interrupted them)? He only cared that he and the son were back together. What might that tell us about any tendency we may have to think that we need the “right words” to pray, or that we don’t have the “right words” properly to pray? What was more important to the father – the words of his child or the presence of his child?

