

4: Discovering new and fresh ways of praying



As before we are staying with the story of the Prodigal Son but this time thinking about the words of the father to his eldest child: “*My son..you are always with me, and everything I have is yours...*” (Lk.15v31). What a tragedy that for all those years the elder son had put a limit on the quality of his relationship with his father. There was so much more to be discovered and enjoyed but he had never found that out.

Thinking about prayer, we’ve identified the fact that we are creatures of habit and that certain internal and external factors (e.g. personality, habit) influence our preferred or usual style of praying. But it would be as tragic as the elder son’s mistake if we assumed that this was the only way of enjoying and being with God!

Below are just some ideas of other ways of praying. As prayer is simply about the Father and his child being in each other’s company and enjoying each other’s company, we can allow ourselves to explore and to experiment in the security that God approves of what we are doing. We can’t “fail”, or “get it wrong.”

Prayer is:-

1. Consciously coming into the presence of God.
2. Becoming attentive to God.
3. Engaging with God.
4. Becoming transformed by our meeting with God.

If we can see prayer as containing those four elements it can free us up to experience new and stimulating ways of engaging with Him. It can also help us to use them as a kind of check list against these new approaches. Are the first three things happening as we try out these new ways? (God is responsible for the fourth). If they are, then prayer is happening.

All of us have preferred communication styles which broadly divide into the following four categories.

- Oral: we are moved by words.
- Aural: we are moved by sounds.
- Kinesthetic: we are moved by actions.
- Visual: we are moved by sights.

Oral

The Bible: Bible notes can be very helpful but the danger is that you just read the passage and the notes without much real thought. What about using the passage to become the springboard for prayer i.e. the things that come to your attention as you read become the things that you pray about. This can be very exciting because you begin to get a real sense that this is what is on God’s heart at that moment. And don’t forget to let your imagination enable you to inhabit any passage and to pray out of what you are shown.

Poetry: might also help us into the conscious presence of God as we use those words and the thoughts and images they produce to become the focus of our conversation with the Lord.

Silence: the Bible says “be still and know that I am God” (Ps.46v10), and so it can be very helpful to learn to become still and to “hear” the silence (even as Elijah did in 1 Kng 19v12), or to become aware of the sounds around you and to reflect on what God is saying to you through them.

Praying in Tongues: using this gift often and regularly (1 Cor.14v4 – you spiritually build yourself up).

Aural

Music: do you listen to music as part of your prayer time or to accompany your praying?

Elisha did, to great effect (2 Kngs 3v15).

Singing: do you sing (it doesn’t have to be tuneful!) as part of your praying?

Kinesthetic are you perhaps someone who likes to have their hands busy and to be doing something?

A Cross: holding and handling a cross may be helpful, or another approach can be to sew, knit, embroider, paint etc. something that speaks of you and God and then to use that in and as your prayers. Why not “knit your own psalm”!?

A Walk: when was the last time that you went for a walk with God?

Visual

Picture: a picture, a photograph, a figurine, looking out of your window etc. can also be ways in which we can enter into the presence of God. Worshipping through an icon (and there are books to guide us into their use) may also be helpful.

Why not begin by exploring and developing your prayer life along your preferred styles? Then perhaps begin to branch out still further by trying ways with which you aren’t so familiar?

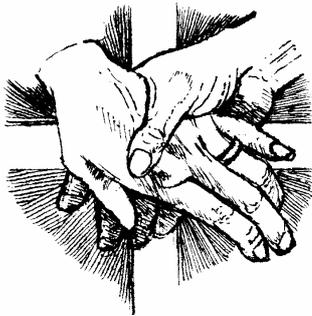
Study 4: BIBLE READING: Genesis 13v14-18

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- 1: What sort of communication – learning style(s) do you prefer, and how much do you think that influences what moves you in worship and in prayer and how it affects how you pray?
- 2: God encouraged Abraham to look up and to see the full length and breadth of all that was his inheritance from God. He then told him to walk through it and to make himself at home in it, and obediently Abraham took the first few steps.

Where do you think you might take the next few steps in the development of your prayer life and in feeling at home in any sort of different pattern?

- 3: Can you share with others the ways in which you pray and the different approaches that you use? What could you recommend for someone else to try?
- 4: If someone came to you this week and said to you (as they said to Jesus), “Teach me to pray,” what would you want to say to them?



TO BE IN YOUR PRESENCE,
To sit at Your feet,
Where Your love surrounds me,
And makes me complete.

*This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.
This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.*

To rest in Your presence,
Not rushing away;
To cherish each moment,
Here I would stay.

Noel Richards
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