

3: Praying as you *can*, not praying as you *can't*!



Staying with the story of the Prodigal Son, our attention now turns to the older brother. Note the words that he uses to his father on his brother's return: "All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders." (Lk.15v29). What a strange way to describe and to define his relationship with his father! He was obviously a dutiful son but hardly a joyful one and he didn't seem to get much pleasure, enjoyment or benefit from being a child of such a generous and loving father, where "everything I have is yours" Lk.15v31

Do we have the same feelings about prayer? We know that we *ought* to do it but we don't especially enjoy it and it can often feel more like a duty than a delight. We don't get a lot from keeping company with God.

And added to that we bring into our praying liberal doses of *guilt*!

- Other people prayer better than we do (although never mistake mere fluency with true spirituality).
- We don't have the "right words".
- We don't pray "long enough".
- God doesn't think much of us and of our prayers because...(add your own ending)!
- And how many of us have fallen asleep praying only to wake up with a start and feeling so guilty!?

So let's start again.

Something about God keeping Us company.

God loves you more than you can possibly imagine (e.g. Jer.31v3; Eph.3v16-19).

God really does look forward to meeting with you in prayer and enjoys your company - "Come near to God and He *will* come near to you.."(e.g. Jas.4v8).

God is much more interested in your heart and in you than in the words you may or may not have and certainly in your having to have the "right" words (e.g. Jer.17v10; Mt.6v7-8).

Something about Us keeping God company.

Personality: We all have preferences for the ways in which we pray. Some prefer set prayers and others the informality of impromptu words: some prefer "Thee" and "Thou" and others "You": some prefer stillness and silence and others words or music: some prefer older songs and others more modern choruses. Neither is right or wrong or better than the other but we just need to recognise our own personality preferences (and of course extend tolerance and respect to others who have different preferences).

Habit: We learned a particular way of praying and we are used to and more comfortable with a particular style of praying. Once again not better or worse, just recognising that custom will affect how we pray and what we are comfortable with.

Opportunity: Although we need to be serious about prayer, God knows and understands the difficulties we sometimes face in finding time and opportunity to pray. How much "quality time with God" did Mary manage when Jesus was a young baby and toddler, plus all her other offspring?

A Way Forward

1. Begin your prayer time with the certain knowledge that you are acceptable to God and therefore what you offer to Him in prayer He will hear and will receive.
2. Value what you have to offer to God, because He values it (remember the principle of the "widow's mite"?). It is not better or worse than anyone else, it is just you keeping company with God.
3. Don't allow yourself to feel guilty by what you think are your weaknesses in prayer. So you fell asleep praying – well what could be better than falling asleep in God's presence and waking up in that same presence (Ps.3v5; 139v18)? So you feel dry at times when you pray and feel nothing – what honours God more, praying when you are getting a lot from it, or the honour you do God by praying even when it's hard? For at those times you bring Him glory because you are there not for what you are getting out of it but you are there simply for His sake alone.

PRAYER:

Father I thank You that I am accepted and acceptable to you and therefore so is my praying. Amen.

Study 3: BIBLE READING: Luke 18v1-14

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- 1:** Who taught you to pray and how did you learn to pray?
What did you learn or pick up that has been helpful and what has been less helpful?

- 2:** What do you find the most rewarding things about prayer and what do you find the least rewarding?

- 3:** Why is it that we so often seem to come into God's presence feeling unacceptable and guilty, or not as spiritual as others? How can we create a more helpful and healthy way of viewing our relationship with God and therefore our prayer times?

- 4:** What difference do you think it might make to your praying (or to anyone's praying) if we started with the following faith assumptions?
 - that God loves you more than you can imagine.
 - that God likes and enjoys being with you.
 - that God is more interested in you being there than in you having the right words, or indeed any words at all.

