

world that we each have available to us.

Through our different eyes of experience, culture and wisdom, we share our understandings of God's love which add to the composite volume of our faith. However, this beauty and this danger has been cauterised from many churches by a variety of factors which, although they seem benign, have had the insidious effect of trapping prayer inside our heads and so hiding the beauty of our revelations from everyone else which has impoverished our grand understanding of God's beauty and power as well as stopping us from hearing the command of God which he divinely places into the words of our prayers.

The church's prayers have been quietly offered in neutral and inoffensive shades of ordinary whilst the health and safety signs which keep us quiet have all but removed the danger from hearing God speak. The challenge is clear: if we want to grow in our understanding of God and in our witness to what he is doing in the world through Jesus, then we need to speak our prayers. Out loud.

Prayer has come to be seen as private and is often done away from other eyes. This is partly due to the relationship we have with God being personal and is rightly, to some extent, nothing to do with anyone else as he deals with our trivia and our dirty laundry; it is in much the same spirit that our close friends don't regularly read our journal or are desperately interested in our supermarket shopping list, some of it is too personal for public consumption and some of it is, frankly, too dull!

There are more serious concerns surrounding the reasons why people are reluctant to pray aloud. Sadly, sometimes prayer has been pushed out of the public arena by a misapplication of Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:

⁵ "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (NIV)

Here, we see a picture of people who are not really praying, they are playing a role, putting on a performance so that passers-by may comment on and be impressed by their devout holiness. They are seeking for the approval of people who want to be impressed by such show. Jesus is calling them out on this by saying that this isn't even prayer. It is fancy-sounding words and has the outward look of prayer, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with building relationship with God, seeking his heart and will or worshipping him. The opposite of the hypocrite's play-acting for an audience is to bring our own personal prayers about the state of our hearts and lives to the God who loves us in the privacy of our closed home. It is a simple casting of opposites to make the point that, for God, the potency of prayer is not in its performance. Jesus himself prays for the edification of others as he demonstrates how to pray to God, or to care for the needs of a loved one or to bring God's blessing to the food.

Unfortunately, this passage in Matthew 6 can be given to the common misapplication: 'Don't pray out loud or in public, it makes a show of yourself and is simply embarrassing in its wrongness.'

This discomfort around prayer has stopped the prayers of so many saints from being offered in a public meeting for prayer, in church services or even among friends.

There has grown up a myth that Jesus has commanded us; “Thou shalt not pray out loud”. This myth is not helped by overly verbose believers who would appear to believe that getting a good quantity of prayer out of their mouths and into the silence is the most helpful way to behave in any prayer meeting. This has resulted in irritated and disenfranchised believers giving up and losing heart in praying aloud, especially in group or public settings: Claire is a Learning Disabilities Nurse and has been a Christian since her mid-teens. She says of group-prayer time;

*I always feel insignificant or inferior because I'll always say one, or two, or three line sentences ... but they're going into this full stream of prayer and that really spoke to me: 'why babble like the pagans?'*¹⁸

Chance, a Worship Pastor, describes his frustrations with group prayer from the position of having been forced into the role of spectator in the group:

*It's routine. And then there's different types of pray-ers in group prayer. There's the guys that start to pray and everyone goes, 'Ohhh! Bob is praying again!' because you know he is going to pray for at LEAST ten minutes and he's going to say things that are sort of unnecessary in prayer and he's missing the whole purpose of it. But he does it that way EVERY time because that's what his prayer suit looks like... It will be different topics, but it will be the SAME prayer, the same formula.*¹⁹

If praying out loud makes lovely, faithful and prayerful people wince and wish that they weren't present to be part of these prayer groups, why should we persist in asking people to pray aloud? It is because praying together, seeking agreement as God's people who are genuinely hoping to discover the mind and will of God, requires words and to speak those words of prayer requires faith. I love to hear the people of God truly pray. They take their faith and they galvanise themselves for the big push out of the safety of silence and through their prayer they become the one through whom God is addressed, encouraged to be fully present and through their openness, others are given the opportunity to see their Saviour through the love and understanding of another.

The terms of love and adoration used by anyone else have a different order and emphasis to the ones we would usually use. Addressing God as *Master, Healer, Creator, Deliverer, King, Holy One* ... can open up our hearts to a whole facet of God's character or personality that we had not recently considered.

Our spoken prayers then bless others in their understanding of who God is. Our spoken prayers also allow a deepening of knowledge of who people in our group are, as God's children, and what potential there can be to hear God and to be moved by him into a new level of relationship, a fresh challenge or an area of ministry which had been previously unconsidered.

When we pray aloud, we truly share our faith, bringing the desires of our hearts or asking God's redemption in areas or aspects of our life for the people around us to add the weight of their 'Amen' and join in faith with us. Involving ourselves in each other's prayers during a fellowship group or corporate worship can be greatly beneficial in moving us out of a stasis wherein we find our prayers following the same patterns of words or imagery and so take us on a faith adventure.

Considerable time and effort had been spent in organising a national conference for Christians to gather in the Houses of Parliament in London to hear speakers on significant

¹⁸ Claire Jackson: Relationship and Faith

¹⁹ Chance Riehl: The Prayer Suit

topics of social and ethical importance. Invitations had been issued and rooms had been secured both in Westminster and in Portcullis House. We were excited about the opportunity for God's people from many traditions to come together to pray and worship in the Undercroft beneath the Houses. It was to be a momentous occasion for us. However, with not much notice, it was brought to the organisers' attention that the Moses Room was to be required for a select committee on the day of our booking and our conference was in jeopardy. We gathered to pray. The prayer meeting was to last all night and as I arrived for my part, we were gathered around a road atlas of London, with a cross placed over the Houses of Parliament. We sang songs of worship which declared Jesus' Lordship over the city, and over the nation. We walked around the map, declaring Jesus' authority over the place we would meet. We prayed in silence. We prayed aloud. And then, I heard my voice speaking a prophetic prayer in which I saw the select committee booking being unwritten. The following day, I received a phone call from the organiser to say that our booking had been reinstated, just as I had seen, "Praise Jesus!" Praying aloud is an adventure, and is filled with the hope of faith.

Jesus wants our heart of prayer to be rooted in him and routed through him. Even as we pray 'Father God' or 'Come Holy Spirit', we are aware of the person of Jesus who makes the way for us to speak at such an intimate level with God our Father. Where he is our focus, whatever those around us may be thinking about our technique or our personal wonderfulness is irrelevant. Our public prayers should direct those listening to the one to whom the prayer is addressed and lend a dynamic for their own praying, even if it is to simply add their own, 'Yes, Lord!' or 'Amen'.

At church there are the 'people who pray' - wonderful people who may be relied on to speak out in church service or populate the prayer meeting. They are not all arrogant or even threatening when they are not praying. But they do openly display a confidence in their own ability to pray properly and have often found their own routine for spoken prayer, which many perfectly competent praying Christians do not possess. Unfortunately, it is often this confidence that leaves the rest of the gathered people to quietly and patiently listen, once again to the well-worn prayer paths of their confident peers. It is my prayer that these, the silent, competent, praying Christians will actively and faithfully realise that their unique, spoken contribution to the group prayer is a valuable and necessary expression of faith and hope in God and let their words flow as God gives them.

In a public prayer meeting, it is possible to spend the whole time worrying about whether or not to speak. Fearing, like Claire that our offering may be substandard or irrelevant to the group. Or when you are about to launch into prayer to have one of Chance's guys start in just before you've finished your deep breath. By the time they've finished, your heart simply isn't in it any longer. Being left tongue-tied or fearful, or with the moment to pray having passed both limits and inhibits our faith's development. The result too often is that prayer never happens.

It is easy to not pray aloud. If we never try, we never fail, and never experience that heart-stopping moment when we run out of words mid thought! It is a tempting thought, but if we never take this risk, then neither do we grow; losing self in God never happens. If we don't take the risk and pray aloud our part-formed thoughts, nothing changes and this can be very frustrating!

At the root of all this fear is often the insidious thought that we might be revealed as the fraud we probably are ... and this lie can stop our faith developing as we begin to believe it. We may then have silent, unspoken, internal arguments that tie us up in knots and incapacitate any ability to draw close to God, and this certainly squashes any hope we may

have had in revealing our prayer to the group. We may decide that we are simply lacking match-fitness through not doing it regularly and are afraid that we won't perform to a high enough standard, and so instead of a beautiful moment of revealed insight and obedience, faith unexercised becomes smaller and less exciting. . The first step to praying aloud is to ignore the internal struggle and to pray anyway, even if you have a piece of paper in your hand with a few words to help you out of your silence.

We may have learnt and become good at various techniques for praying, but to demonstrate these in public is another issue altogether. We cower away from the spotlight because in some twisty way, it has made sense to us that to hear our own voice speak out loud makes this about me rather than about God.

There are a lot of good reasons that we might give, both to ourselves and our group leaders or church ministers, about why it's not a good idea for us to hold forth in prayer, but most of these are red herrings which are designed to distract us from the potential of greater intimacy with our heavenly father in whom is our hope and our life.

Praying aloud is definitely worth pushing ourselves beyond our known limits to properly discover the joy and hope that is found in speaking, actually talking out loud to God.

Even if praying out loud in public is not your thing, it can be so important to the life of your fellowship group, prayer group or church congregation that you give it a go.

Jesus calls us together to be a body. Different parts of the body have different concerns and issues on their heart. I love to give my 'Amen' to the prayers of another for people whom they love, and also to the world or political issues that are burdening them. In my Youth Group, Gill would always pray for the hostages, (Terry Waite in particular) and we would sigh every time she did. She didn't pray for much if anything else, her shyness about speaking publically making her speech impediment worse. For years, Gill prayed for Terry Waite's release, as the rest of us prayed for a whole raft of unremembered things. Then one day, Terry Waite was released, and Gill's prayers of dogged faithfulness were answered. I was glad that she had forced me to be part of them by claiming my 'Amen' to go with hers, week after week. She saw something that I had missed, and she brought her love and understanding to a situation I had not properly cared about.

When we pray to Jesus, it is so good to hear the many titles of Jesus spoken aloud in adoration of his Name by the gathered body of worshippers. In my heart he may be 'Jesus is Lord' but after participating in the prayer of adoration formed by the titles ascribed to him by the people in fellowship with me, I know him as so much more. He grows in my heart and mind as I allow him to become bigger through the prayers of the people.

"Jesus, you are Lord. Jesus, you are Healer. Jesus, you are Peace. Jesus, you are the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus you are Saviour. Jesus you are the Good Shepherd. Jesus, you are the only way to the Father..."

And so it goes on. And so our understanding of who he is grows and develops.

It can be useful to have a good number of Jesus' titles in your prayer-vocabulary. As prayers of adoration, they can be a heart-beat, pumping life-blood of understanding and love into the prayer-meeting or time of worship, as Jesus is given the praise he deserves.

Praying aloud has a value in itself. There is something powerful about the halting, heartfelt commitment to speak of Jesus that gives life and vigour to our faith. I have seen how prayer can often unlock streams of faith and wisdom that are dammed up inside us. A friend of mine does not like to speak about her faith, shy reluctance stemming her wealth of insight and wisdom. She is often found hiding behind 'I don't know ...' and sometimes

can't even say this, resorting to a response of shrugged shoulders. However, I have discovered that when asked to pray within the group and persisting beyond the 'I don't know what to pray about ...' she offers beautiful prayers which allow God to speak to her own heart and confidence. The reluctance falls away and her wisdom and understandings about faith issues and the Bible begin to flow in uninhibited debate with the rest of the group.

She is a living picture of how spoken prayer claims the truths which we know and gives them added faith. Silent prayers can be argued with by a silent enemy. Out in the room, among other believers, the opposite happens: to the words of her prayer are added the agreement and faith of her friends, her fellow believers, and the word of Truth rings in her ears, allowing its impact to penetrate spirit and soul.

When you speak out your prayer, hearing it from outside your head will allow you to add your own 'Amen!' The spoken prayer has a power to transform our mind within.

Refusing to pray often masks a fear or reluctance in our faith that needs to be dealt with. The devil renders us mute with all manner of accusations about the quality of our prayer-offering and our right to speak out the love we have for our Lord Jesus.

On more than one occasion, I have seen that the inability to pray aloud has been hiding an unhelpful spiritual stronghold.

I remember how this powerlessness to speak my prayers came a few years ago. It brought withholding of forgiveness in a time of ministry that had been particularly painful and draining. My friend suggested that, as a preliminary step to recovery, I should name and declare forgiveness in Jesus' Name all those who had caused me anger, pain and frustration. The faces came readily enough to mind, along with flashes of hurt, anger or shame as I recalled physically how their words and actions had affected me. But I could not speak. I waited and waited for words to arrive on my lips, but none would rise up and do what I needed. Forgiveness was blocked. Linda did what I have since done for others and brought her own prayers as a bridge between my need and my mouth, so allowing God's grace to flow into the hardness of my heart.

I had not chosen to harden my heart against these people. I'm sure that I had unwittingly built that wall around my heart to protect it from further damage from external attack. To help me, Linda played a recording of the Maranatha Community's Shalom Prayer, and I allowed the words of healing and of God's understanding of me to break down the spiritual wall between my heart and my willingness to forgive. This prayer stood as a bridge between my pain and the means of healing. Between myself and my Saviour. It took a good fifteen minutes of this external prayer, but then my tongue was released. I named and declared forgiveness for all who had wounded my spirit, and in the privacy of Linda's home pleaded for their forgiveness through Jesus my intercessor, for the pain I had inflicted on their hearts.

For me to grow in love for Christ's Church would have proved impossible for me without this breaking down of a spiritual barrier. Speaking out our words of prayer, praise, blessing and release are important spiritual tools; they are weapons that can save our lives in an unfriendly or openly hostile spiritual environment.

To pray out loud may involve overcoming hurdles in personality, which may be shy, preferring to await an invitation before speaking. Your spoken prayers can also be a great blessing to those around you who recognise your struggle. James, who fits this personality type really well, describes a breakthrough in understanding how God sees him:

I was at City Church and we were doing a bit about prophecy and seeing what God was telling us to say. We were just going round and asking God for a 'word' and to start off, mine was 'Love'. Then we were told to pray into our word a bit more deeply and then we were just asked what was on my heart to say out loud. And I started and felt God tell me to say that "He IS love. Just about how much he loves us. That he sent his Son to die for us and that his love never fails." The way it happened when I was speaking, it was just 'not me'. The language used was far too poetic, in a way, far too striking for it to ever have been me.²⁰

Praying aloud can bring you healing, as the fear in praying audibly is broken down to liberate you. The words which have been trapped in your head take on new authority as, in faith, they are declared verbally. You have taken control and in your courage, you have allowed God to shine his grace through you. This can often be a massive blockage to remove, as years of non-verbal praying, perceived disapproval from those in charge and a general fear of making an idiot of yourself through talking rubbish are mountains too big to blithely dismiss. We may need to train ourselves to deal with the things that inhibit our prayers.

Perhaps a way to begin this journey of is to get used to hearing your voice speaking in an otherwise silent place. Reading your daily Bible reading out loud can really help here. In the quietness of your moment, listen to the words of scripture fill the space around you. Read and hear the words of God and you will soon come to realise that these are not about 'you' but about the living Word giving life to you.

The prayers we pray are no longer ours once we speak them. They belong to the heart of God and are reflections of our understandings of him. We bring our words of love and he receives them. We bring our cries of hurt for ourselves or for others and he receives them also. As we open ourselves in prayer, we receive affirmation from God that we are his and that he loves us.

Some people describe this as a sense of peace, or a physical quickening of our spirit as we feel the love of God come alive again within us. As James found, the words that he spoke were no longer his own halting, searching words; they were words which God had placed in his mouth, reminding him of God's power at work within him. Learning to speak out what God is saying in our hearts can be a great way of learning how God sees us. Once the words are spoken and affirmed, they can be less easily dismissed as God may well bring them to be remembered by the people with whom we were praying as the need arises in the future. Our prayers, spoken in public, are borne witness to by the believers present. We can not deny that God was speaking, when others heard it too!

Your voice is not a vehicle by which the prayer is made 'dirty' or loses its power through your vocal expression. Our minds are full of many things and it can be tricky business trying to keep one clear thought-line purely open for God. Our mouth, on the other hand best serves us when we stick to a single topic! Trying to verbally manage several conversations is too much effort for us to keep an accurate track of what's going on. Praying out loud, in the privacy of our own home or private space can usefully help us to develop our prayers. Phil, who is a church leader and minister, has been a Christian for many years and he advocates the 'praying aloud wherever possible' approach to prayer:

Speaking out praying and talking out loud just helps me concentrate. If I'm on my own, I'll pray out loud nearly always now. It took a while to get used to doing

²⁰ James Hollins : Connecting with God

these things, but I actually find it better and easier. Obviously, it's a bit more tricky when you're in company or leading a service and watching all sorts of other things going on. I actually find it quite helpful for concentration.²¹

True prayer brings attention to God rather than the bringer of the prayer. Your spoken prayer is a means of blessing God and of stating your faith in him. It is a powerful blessing to others. It is part of the worship of the body of Christ as you involve yourself within it.

There are times when the prayer we give voice to is not for ourselves, but is offered on the behalf of a group of people in spiritual support of another. This is not a time to stay silent or to resist being heard. The prayer we pray may be our words, but it gathers the hopes and love of the group as you speak the prayer which brings the person to God. I believe that here, as the praying person, we have a responsibility for it being audible. The rest of the group need to be able to add their 'Amen', their agreement to the prayer, and to do this, you need to be heard. If this were a prayer of confession, or some personal time of prayer within a group, it would not be necessary for others to hear you, but when you carry the prayer of the gathering, it is not a private moment.

It can be frustrating for the group which is left in awkward and unproductive silence whilst this inaudible prayer is taking place- they have not been led to do anything other than pray and are, even subconsciously, waiting to participate in what's going on at the front. I know this can be hard, as some of our best and most earnest intercessors have a dread of the public gaze resting on them. It is not necessary for the person praying to be in an elevated place and facing the group, but for them to allow their words the weight to carry beyond them and into the room is really useful. Even to allow a microphone to pick up the prayer so that the other people can lift that prayer too, for God to shine his glory upon it and to be one with the prayer that is taking place.

There are people who may react at this point by saying that God knows what that prayer is and it isn't for the people, it is to him. This is a fair point, but we need to come back to our context. If you are in a room with a lot of people present and are in a seat under the balcony when the prayer for the speaker is announced and it is just below your audible abilities, it is simply annoying. You are straining to catch the words and relaxing into the presence of God with the prayers that are being offered, allegedly on your behalf, becomes impossible for you.

Or if you are in a gathering of around 50 people and the speaker is being prayed for and the intercessor's back is turned from you whilst they offer a quiet prayer for a good 5 minutes, there can develop a sense of alienation or of having been deliberately excluded from the act of worship. In a group of 12 or less, it is simple bad manners to have a private conversation, even of prayer, and expect the rest of the people to wait patiently and silently until you have finished.

Praying as though it is a secret to be withheld from the small group draws a ring around the prayer and inhibits potential engagement by the rest of the people present. When you pray for something or somebody on behalf of a gathering, it is important to make an effort to include the whole body present in your prayer for the one. If you are shy and don't like the public attention, face away from the gathering as you look at the person, but keep your voice at a good level of audibility. If you are offered a microphone, allow someone to hold it for you if its presence makes you uncomfortable.

Close your eyes, take a deep breath, raise your hand to heaven and pray a silent - or even audible- 'Come Holy Spirit' and trust that God will give you the words that will bring all

²¹ Phil Snelson: Praying Aloud

present closer to him and allow them to receive the blessings which he loves to bestow on his people.

There is a level at which every prayer we pray in a public gathering is on behalf of the people present. At every prayer meeting, church service, or other time of worship where there is more than you present, if you have the compulsion to pray aloud, then it is for the edification of the others present or to lead them further into worship. Don't necessarily believe that the person at the front is finding this any easier than you would find it. To pray for God's people is a privilege and a responsibility which shouldn't be taken lightly. Mark, who is a preacher and worship leader says:

A lot of times, I pray out loud because I have to, not because I'm desperately keen to. I think I'd rather listen than talk. I think I find that easier. I get really frustrated by people who pray with lots and lots and LOTS of words. I think, 'For goodness sake! You've already said it! Why don't you just stop and let God say something?'

*When I'm praying in a prayer meeting, I'll say what I want to say and then shut up. And then, I hear other people's prayers and I'm like, 'How come my prayers aren't long and good like that?'*²²

We can be so very easily distracted from the adoration and worship of God in our prayers. We take every critical nuance in the atmosphere and apply them as condemnation to ourselves, our ability and our worth as Christians, as people. Prayer is the flashpoint in our faith where we are deeply vulnerable. Unscripted, we respond the Holy Spirit of God at work within us and we offer our attention, our badly-formed sentences, our half-mortified thoughts to God.

These may die on our tongues as we become aware of ourselves and lose our focus on God. But God is gracious and eager to be with us in our prayers and so often he comes to our aid. The Holy Spirit lends strength to our words, clarity to our thoughts, resolve to our wills.

A critical spirit may try to rob us of the joy of prayer, with a sinking feeling and pervasive hollowness that accompanies our best efforts. Give voice to these thoughts and remember the preacher's prayer, '*may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable to you, O God.*' (Psalm 19:14)

Your spoken prayers are better than you may imagine when they are honest, unrehearsed and an expression of your spirit. If you are generally comfortable in your ability to pray aloud, maybe it is your task to encourage and allow the release of the untapped prayers of others in your fellowship. To take a moment to discern who else is taking a deep breath to pray aloud. It may be time to shake off your old habit of praying with your head bowed and your eyes closed so that you can make eye contact and smile encouragement at quieter members of the group, or to hang back and see who else is going to bless you today. There should be space for everyone to offer their prayer. All we desire is that we are, and our prayers are acceptable in God's sight.

Although other people may have claimed the spot as the group pray-er, there is nothing in Scripture that says; 'to some, is given the ability to pray'. Prayer is a gift which is universal and for the benefit and building up of you and the church. You add value to any prayer-gathering when you pray aloud with the Holy Spirit.

²² Mark McKnight: Praying Aloud

We are constantly aware that God deserves the best. Our best today will not be as 'good' as tomorrow's best. Each day we practise giving to God what he deserves, we become better at knowing what is required and how we move towards achieving it in our speaking as well as in the whole of our daily life. The words of Scripture which we have learnt, phrases from worship songs and hymns, patterns from liturgies that we have followed all offer themselves as starting points from which the prayer grows. We are never alone when we pray. Jesus is with us. The love of God wells up within us to excite, challenge and bless us.

It is risky to speak your prayers out loud and these prayers are both dangerous and very beautiful. They are the point from which your faith takes flight in your surrender to the new things of God, to which you hear yourself giving your voice.

Chapter 7 Prayer and Worship

It is when we stop trying to draw lines of distinction between seemingly different parts of our relationship with God, that we are best able to experience the depth of his love and power.

We are used to a culture of delegation, where roles and tasks are neatly placed into boxes and assigned to people to deal with them, often without overlap. As church leader, I am usually at the front during worship, helping the people to experience God's love and sharing His Word. Over the years, I have developed a habit of being there early, to prepare the room for worship, tidying up if it needs it, to unlock the gates and switch the lights on if the church elder is running late. I want all things to work well so that there are as few distractions for everyone else. I want the Church body to be able to experience God in all aspects of the worship, from the simplicity of sitting expectantly among their fellow worshippers to being able to pray, sing and share their love for God with the people who join them. It can all be worship. Unless singing is specifically referred to as an element of worship during this chapter, please don't assume that worship specifically means singing.

On the whole, we need to broaden our focus when we gather for worship. Just because the rota says that I am the preacher doesn't mean that I don't have a responsibility to wipe the floor if I notice a spillage, or straighten the chairs after a meeting. Just because you are the sound engineer, doesn't mean that you haven't a responsibility to engage with God in the worship. Just because you are on the coffee rota, it doesn't mean that you shouldn't be praying or sharing your testimony of how God has worked in your life this week. Or because you teach Sunday School or run the Crèche, that you are separate from the rest of the body of worshippers. If you arrive with an attitude that says that you aren't going to experience God, you will effectively keep him at arm's length no matter how accomplished the worship leader, fervent the prayer or challenging the preacher may be. God separates us from sin, but he is concerned that we live integrated lives, that fully hold together under his scrutiny and he knows when we have drawn a line within our hearts which is intended to remove us from fully engaging with Him.

Nor should there be any lines of distinction between the character we demonstrate at work and at home, between college and church, or speaking to God and to your friends. You should show the same love for all. We create false distinctions and then try to apply them to our relationship with God, trying to separate out the strands of our love and worship for him into distinct compartments.

We are created by God for his glory (Isaiah 43:7) and so, as a whole person, we must exhibit our praise to and worship of God. If prayer is, at its most basic level, communication between God and people, then it follows that all our communication with him is a prayer, whether it is sung or chanted, thought or spoken.

When we attempt to persuade ourselves that we have streamlined our prayer processes into a neat package, we miss the point of the wonder of a full and complex relationship with our Heavenly Father.

At a very simple level: we know that not all singing is worship. Some songs which we join in with during the course of our day are lyrics containing sexual intention, getting drunk or high, entertaining thoughts of death or anger and frustration that life isn't going as planned. To sing these is not to offer worship to God.

Similarly, not all thoughts that we have are prayer. Daydreaming about a new car or item of clothing is not praying. Thinking bad thoughts about people is not praying. Mentally playing our revenge scenarios against those who have hurt us also is not praying.