

Catherine
Hutton



StudyNotes

INTRODUCTION to the series...

Prayer

When we pray, we ‘remember the Lord’. We remember that we are not alone and that we are people, belonging to a family in which God is our Father and we are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, through adoption into God’s Family, Romans 8:15-17. God is a Father on whom the earthly dad is modelled - good and strong and kind. Father God teaches and trains us so that we can reach maturity in our faith and share that goodness with the world.

As we grow up in our faith, we learn to understand the prayers that are in keeping with the heart of God. This series will explore prayer and hopefully help us to become better at it! The guiding texts for the series are below:

Prayer for All: Learning Always

Pray from the Depths

Prayer & Worship

Prayer & Expectation

Pray Continually

Prayer & Passion

Matthew 6:9-15

Jonah 2:1-10

Ephesians 5:15-20

Matthew 7:7-12

1 Thessalonians 5:9-24

Luke 22:39-46

For some of you, prayer will be the most natural thing in the world - a lovely two-way dialogue that is constant and reliable. Others will have a more intermittent and patchy dialogue with God where one party seems to be speaking more frequently or clearly than the other. Still others have a particular pattern for prayer, with a day punctuated with points for talking with God. Others may find that the carefully formed prayers of scripture and the tradition - be they the ancient or recently found traditions - these prayers are the ones that best communicate with God. None of these are wrong - but as has been said in school reports for centuries, we “could do better”.

We long to do better in our praying - and the best way to learn is through having a go. I hope you enjoy this series. I have considered it a privilege to write for you. With love,

Catherine

Study 1 **Prayer for All**

Opening Thoughts

When do you pray?

morning - night - all the time - when I'm scared - when I want something to change - when I need something - when I see injustice - when I'm helpless - when I am worshipping - when I'm at church - when I'm happy - when I'm thankful - when I read the Bible - when I think about who God is - when I'm weak - when I'm sick - when I'm overwhelmed

Underline all applicable & add your own

Prayer

God, our Father, you are beyond our understanding, rich in love and generous in grace and mercy. Forgive my halting prayers - my missing moments of being in your presence... Restore to me the joy of salvation as I lay my whole self before you... All I am and all I need for my well-being and the good of my family, community, city, nation and world. I ask for you to teach me your perfect ways, that I might be more like you each day, through Jesus Christ and for your glory, Amen.

Now Read Matthew 6:9-15

Please read it from your own Bible.

For Your Consideration

This prayer is one we may know well in one of its forms.

Read it through again, or pray it now in a form you know.

This prayer may form one of your earliest memories of prayer. I remember praying it with 'hands together & eyes closed' before the Sunday school left the main congregation during Sunday Service. **Note your favourite phrases from the Lord's prayer - either in Matthew's Gospel or in a version your prefer to pray.**

Archbishop Anthony Bloom suggests that *“The Lord’s prayer is not only a prayer but a whole way of life expressed in the form of a prayer: it is the image of the gradual ascent of the soul from bondage to freedom.”* P.20

We proclaim God our Lord and spend our day trusting and referring to God for our needs - both physical and internal. God takes care of our salvation through forgiveness and helps us to come to the decision of responding to the world with God’s love through also forgiving - and this maybe in a costly way in order to ensure that we are no longer held captive by grudge or anger against another person. Bloom goes on to say that The Lord’s Prayer is an image of the Hebrew people walking out of slavery in Egypt towards the promised land of Canaan - which they will only get to if they do not succumb to temptation and wholly trust in God, their deliverer.

Consider The Lord’s Prayer as being a prayer that proclaims our salvation:

What does it mean to confess God as your heavenly Father?

How does this change your perspective on life?

It was only when the Jews, guided and enlightened by Moses, realised that their state of enslavement had something to do with God, and was not simply a man-made situation, it was only when they turned to God, when they re-established a relationship which is that of the kingdom, that something could happen... Bloom, P.25

What role does God have in establishing you as a person, fully alive on earth?

What Godly attributes do we need to live the ‘new life’?

The main temptation we guard against is falling into self-sufficiency; to guard against trusting in things we choose, and instead to trust God for our direction and satisfaction.

Look at the parallels with the Hebrew people as they showed their anger to Moses.

What 'Huge Obstacle' have you trusted God to help you overcome -like the escape from slavery and the crossing of the Red Sea?

Where have you doubted God's power to overcome the Obstacle - like the refusal to move into Canaan when they saw its inhabitants?

During the time we have been subject to quarantine and restrictions due to COVID-19, we may have been seduced into thinking that either the virus or our national government are 'master' over us and that we are slaves to their power. Maybe there have been other times too, when you have felt slave to events or circumstances. How might the Lord's Prayer give you a fresh perspective as you pray it in troubling or restricted times?

How could you describe the Lord's Prayer's importance to someone - other than to say: *'It's something I pray a lot'*?

This beautiful piece of Scripture begins with an address to God that is only possible when we enter into a daughter/sonship with God. God becomes Father as we both male and female join the body of Christ, and become one with Christ: Romans 8; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:5. The Lord's prayers opening address "Our Father" not only shows the relationship that we have with God, but invites us into the very trinity itself. We have all the rights of sonship (privilege and inheritance).

God is 'Our Father' - not just among one another, but we share the address with Jesus The Son.

When we 'join together in saying The Lord's Prayer' it is a declaration of faith, of our belonging to God as his adopted child, and our intention to live the kingdom life, wholly focussed on God.

Study 2 **Prayer from the Depths**

Opening Thoughts

Talk about your favourite stories of prayer... ones from the Bible or from biographies, your own experiences or from people at church. Why do they stand out?

Prayer

Loving Father God, I throw myself on your mercy, admitting that I have no hope but you and no Salvation but you. I die to sin and all that keeps me from you and ask for your redeeming love to break through the hard shell of my soul. I completely and wholeheartedly yield myself to your pleasure and disposal.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Now Read Jonah 2:1-10

Please read it from your own Bible.

For Your Consideration

Jonah was running from God and he was making a terrible hash of everything as a result. He nearly got his shipmates drowned and finally, he put himself into their hands as he begged them to throw him in! This isn't like a child asking to be thrown into a pool - it is a desperate man, giving up his own, sin-soaked life so that others may live. As he is thrown into the huge waves, the Lord has mercy. Gordon Keddie suggests that;

The miracle is that God appointed that the animal was in place, ready to swallow Jonah and that he was kept alive for three days and three nights inside it before being spewed up on dry land. P.74

It is indeed a surprising manner of bringing salvation. The animal then became a cell from which Jonah could reflect and respond properly to God. Having shaken off everything else, there is only God.

As you read through the 'psalm' of prayer look at how low Jonah is brought before he 'remembers the Lord' in verse 7.

Note the words and phrases that Jonah describes.

What sort of head-space was Jonah in? Can you relate to how Jonah was feeling from the descriptions? Where is the hope coming from?

Keller makes the point;

If Jonah was to begin finally to ascend, both in the water and in faith, he had to be brought to the very end of himself. The way up was, first of all, down. The usual place to learn the greatest secrets of God's grace is at the bottom.

But it is not simply being at the bottom that begins to change Jonah, but prayer at the bottom. P.73

Acknowledging God's rule & reign over our lives is a key part of the covenant relationship he has made with his people. As Jonah is cast into the depths, God is still with him.

How does this encourage you to pray when you aren't in a great place with either God or yourself?

What does 'prayer at the bottom' do?

Jonah's example of prayer is one which teaches us about the nature of Salvation. When we are far from God - God is near to us. When we are without hope, God makes a way with his gracious provision. When we are facing destruction and have sunk beyond the bottom, "to the roots of the mountains", a glimpse of God is sufficient light to turn things around.

In your own time, look up similar pieces to Jonah's own 'psalm'. Knight directs us to Psalms 40, 124, 130, 30, 31, 42, 69 & 120. Pp68-69.

Knight goes on to point out that here, in Chapter 2;

Our Psalmist has taken the Jonah story and expressed it in a hymn to be used in the cult in Jerusalem. By this means he helped ordinary worshippers to existentialize the meaning of the return from exile in their own experience and so to make patent in their own lives the forgiving love of Israel's God. P.68

Jonah crucially acknowledges his impotence to save himself from anything. His only route out of the mess is through turning to God, verse 6. It is hard to acknowledge when we can't 'fix' things and especially when we can't fix ourselves. **The sooner we recognise this truth, the quicker we seek the right place for restitution - in God.**

Jonah's stance changes in verse 6 moves from being downward-facing and introverted, to being open to God and upward-looking. The spiral of disappearing into the water depths with his head wrapped round with seaweed gives way to pictures of prayer and salvation; Jonah's eyes are turned upward rather than cast down.

Look at verse 6.

The picture is of God's holy temple, the place where Jonah believed held God's presence.

Consider how the sentiments shift from self to God.

This passage in Jonah - the prayer from the innards of a large sea-mammal moves from despair to hope. From deepest self-absorption and failure to looking up and finding the light of Salvation that is God. There is an emphasis on God's works of grace throughout the passage. He moves towards us with his rescue before we are able to acknowledge and move towards him.

How does the confession of faith in God - even from the 'ocean depths' of despair change everything?

Recall times when you've called on God and found light seeping into the edges of your life.

Keller's parting shot about this passage is that "*the merciful God patiently works with us, flawed and clueless though we are*" P.82.

The prayer releases Jonah to begin to change, to reclaim his part in the covenant relationship with God.

Pray that God will make a start with you, by looking towards him and acknowledging that, right now, your life needs a Saviour.

Study 3 **Prayer & Worship**

Opening Thoughts

Is it possible to draw a line between things that are prayer and those which are worship. Note your thoughts...

Prayer

Lord, our God, we worship you.

We praise your Holy Name. We sing and celebrate all that you have done. May your Spirit fill us again on this day, in this very moment so that our thoughts and all our activity might bring honour to you, and your kingdom will be extended on earth, through Jesus Christ.

Amen

Now Read Ephesians 5:15-20

Please read it from your own Bible.

For Your Consideration

In our previous series, “Step into your Gifts”, we looked at how God gives his Holy Spirit to his church to continue the work of Jesus. We look to God for satisfaction and completeness.

Look at verse 15 - wisdom is an attribute of the ‘saved life’ in Jesus. How do you make ‘wise’ life choices?

What makes our life choices distinctly ‘Christian’ - even though they include work, shopping, travel, eating, socialising - which are really ordinary things that everybody has to do?

The pull of the world draws us away from the holiness of God. It is through a deliberate focus on the things that fill our senses on that which is Godly, that we are able to make our choices from ‘in Christ’. This is the role of prayer: to fix on God and allow his character to overlay ours.

Look at verse 17. Consider how you usually “understand what the Lord’s will is.”

Maybe it is easier to turn to a ‘quick fix’ to calm our feelings in incidences or periods of trouble or stress... Or even to return to old patterns of behaviour because this feels easier. Being ‘filled with the Spirit’ has a deliberate intentionality to it. It puts the focus on God’s salvation rather than a personally done patch-up job.

Talk about how ‘inviting God to fill you with his Spirit is a prayer that can lead you to Godly thinking’.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit (verse 18) is a result of wise living and maintaining a proper focus in the face of ‘difficult days’. In response to losing your senses through blotting them out with alcohol and losing control so that your behaviour becomes profoundly ‘ungodly’ (18), Paul exhorts that people of Ephesus to instead ‘be filled with the Spirit’, which will result in the focus being one which results in the praise of God through Scripture, and ‘hymns & songs’, as the Spirit enables (19).

Look at the passage from Risbridger;

I may come to a gathering of the church full of struggle and doubt, finding it very difficult to lift my heart in praise to the Lord, but as I stand alongside you in the solidarity of congregational worship, my faith is encouraged by your faith, my praise stirred up by your praise even as my struggle and lament may lead you to prayer and to a deeper authenticity of relationship with God: we speak to one another as we sing. P.249

Think about how and why worship & prayer are not a lone activity, but are part of the common life of faith.

Why is this important, especially with regard to Paul’s emphasis on ‘wise living’ in verse 15, from which this passage extends?

Paul seems to be suggesting that there are two kinds of worship: one which is for the encouragement of the Body - and one which is ‘from your heart to the Lord’ (5:19b). Worship and prayer are a means of aligning ourselves with the kingdom of God, and desiring the

breaking in of God to transform our godless state.

This is not about us - it is about getting our focus on God and allowing him to shape us for his glory.

I wonder if the worship that we experience in our regular (Methodist) Sunday services is often lacking in the power and weight of the presence of God, because we have become passengers in the process... The worship of the people has become the sole provenance of the locally appointed preacher or minister, lacking any expectation of involvement in prayer expressing a hunger and desire for the Holy Spirit's filling. Risbridger poses several questions, which bear careful consideration;

Careful preparation, good organisation and high quality training all have their place and should not be denigrated, but if our experience of corporate worship has become stale, the key question to ask is whether the church is truly praying.

Nonetheless, alongside this, we need to ask whether our structures and leadership of corporate worship nurture the expectation of a powerful encounter with God, by the work of his Spirit?

Do we acknowledge and welcome God's presence by the attitude of our hearts and words we use to call people to worship?

Do we provide accessible opportunities for prayer and counsel because we expect God to be at work?

Do we leave any room for the unexpected? P.248

Prayer & worship have a trinitarian completeness ... the songs may come from the Spirit (verse 19), the singing and music are 'to the Lord' (19b), the wise person is 'always giving thanks to God the Father for everything' (20a) and this is done from our position of being in Christ as we pray 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (20b).

Worship and prayer are linked together as the means by which we understand and celebrate God's character and person, and through its expression we become wise with the wisdom and purpose of God.

A Deeper Look at Prayer & Worship

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.

Neither 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 out our revenge scenarios against those who have hurt us also is not praying.

It therefore makes no sense for a Christian to say to their friend who

is in a situation of pain or difficulty; 'I'll be thinking of you'. Thought alone has no power. Song alone may feed our emotion or lift our mood, but it does not, of itself, connect us with God.

Prayer is an actual process, and one which is more than our human inclination to merely *think*! There is a time of waiting involved as we continue in the awareness of God's presence to discern or hear his response to us.

Worship too is beyond the ordinary, it involves expectations in a way that humming along to a favourite tune or mindlessly joining in with the crowd can't offer. We worship in response to God and to his love and grace.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 4, Paul talks about Christian maturity and our need to pursue this as being vital to our safety as Christians. Until we reach a level of maturity which equips us to resist false teachings or false revelations, or pseudo-spiritual experiences.

True worship requires the assent and intention of our will and our heart in order for us to be with God in that intimate expression of love and adoration of him. The place of worship is within our hearts and minds as God takes our offering and responds to us through the movement of his Spirit within our lives. We do need to be careful with our bodies and how we use them, as they are part of our worship-offering to God. Paul writes to the Romans (12:1 & 2) NIV TM

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship.

If our bodies are used in ways which are dishonouring of ourselves or other people, then our worship of God is corrupted through our activity. If we see ourselves responding to a situation that makes us uncomfortable in our spirit, then we should pay attention to that feeling and examine it before persisting in things that could lead to serious damage of our spirit.

This may begin with the raising of our hands in response to the music at a festival, or our use of food, alcohol or drugs to make ourselves feel better. It may be in our seeking of sexual gratification to fill a void in our lives or through dangerous friendships which place us in moral or physical danger. The whole of our being belongs to God and our fulfilment, of a true and lasting nature, comes when we discover how to engage with God on 'speed dial' and keep him in constant connection with us at a conscious level.

Prayer begins when we choose to open up a connection with God and allow his responses to refashion the shape and content of your life. Worship is a stream of prayer which ascribes position to God, placing him over our lives in surrender to his majesty and power.

Worship blesses the Living God and also moves us beyond the understanding of our relationship with God being simply one whereby we

open a conversation by asking him for things and he responds, in his own time, by giving them to us! Worship should transform us because we spend time in the presence of Holy God, who makes us holy. We cannot be in God's presence and remain sinful, and so the closer we come to him in worship, the purer our lives become.

Knowing our Bible, hearing the stories and adventures of faith from other Christians and, of course, our own praying are all part of our path towards the Christian maturity that Paul points out to the Ephesian Church.

Worship takes the whole of our practises and understandings, our descriptions of what Christianity means to us and our desire to be better at faith and offers them to God. Fanny Crosby rolled it all together in the final verse of her hymn, To God be the Glory (1875)

*Great things he hath taught us, great things he hath done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer and higher and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.*

Seeing Jesus is part of the deal when we come to worship. In this verse, Crosby is describing the extent of the relationship that God has entered into with us through Jesus. There is an excitement born of closeness as we begin to see how this intimacy with God brings about a life-changing response within our own lives. The lines from Crosby end with phrases which point at the eternal perspective of worship. We begin to worship God on earth and it is wonderful, but we are moved so much further into the reality of worship and our place in God's presence once we are with him in Glory. It is good to know that the very best of our human experiences of worship are never the final understanding of how we will relate to God. There is always more intimacy to be found through prayer and worship, as we constantly, imperfectly seek God.

We approach God through our worship and adoration given to him in expressions of love, gratitude, surrender and commitment. This again opens that opportunity to listen and respond to God's will and hope for you, as well as to notice and pray blessing over or release for the ones to whom God directs your notice.

We often draw a line of distinction between times to pray and times to worship God. This can be marked by music and that vague feeling that worship is the singing of our love for God whereas prayer is when we ask God for things.

This is a distinction which makes me uncomfortable. We stand to worship God and in worship, we offer the whole of our selves to God as a 'living sacrifice'. It is in the giving of ourselves to God with our full intention of focussing entirely on him and his love for us that the business of God coming and taking his place in our midst occurs.

Worship is the honouring of God with the full focus of our life. In true worship, we invite him to fill the space within and around us with more of his holiness in order that we might examine our hearts under this spotlight of God's purity and find ourselves giving greater portions of our hidden self to him as he scrapes us clean of long-forgotten sin.

The old hymn-writers would have described this long-forgotten sin as a 'stain', and indeed through worship, the image of being washed whiter than snow is often used as we understand more about the radiance of God's holiness that comes from being in his presence. We are assured that it is the blood of Jesus that removes these stains from our soul and spirit.

The chemical industry is forever finding the perfect stain remover, colour restorer, spill-soaking product but Psalm 51 contains them all! King David begins with adoration of the God who loves him and reconciles himself to the unalterable fact that God's holiness shows up more obviously the sin and murkiness of his own imperfections.

David is known for his response to God as a worshipper. Today, some Christian traditions chant the psalms of David using a simple melody. Some Christians will read the words from the page without any attempt to add music to them. Others have reworked the psalms to new tunes which are then sung, often with instrumental accompaniment. If these are worship, then they are also prayer: In Psalm 51, verses 1-4 forming a recognisable prayer of confession.

It is often when Christians are together in prayer and worship over a sustained period of time that they begin to make the progress in dealing with dormant sins and issues in their lives which are normally glossed over and covered up in the short space of Sunday Service or even during fellowship meetings. Acts 2:42-27(NIV) is where this is truly lived by the early Christians in Jerusalem. Here, we see the early church fully immersed in the life of faith. The people are constantly in God's presence and they are intentionally seeking together to grow in faith and in discipleship. This is a concentrated time of living as God instructs, with each day punctuated by worship and fellowship as the people learn that knowing more of God's love for them has its benefits. They become holy.

Their worldliness is eroded by the constancy of allowing God's intense light to burn away that which is not of Him through persisting in being in His presence. We may approximate this by spending time at the various Christian Conferences which are on offer throughout the year, or by going to retreat houses and spending time living in community with people whose lives are devoted to God in this way.

The Acts 2:42 picture does not remove the Christians from contact with the rest of the world and neither should a long period of devoted worship remove anyone from their responsibility to service within a local community. Every day, new people came to faith and joined them. The

holiness and devotion of their whole person was such that their impact was to reveal Christ to the local community and not become separated away from it.

Worship and prayer need to occupy the same place in our intentions, if we are to truly know the will and heart of God.

It can be tough to see ourselves as a people of worship when, in our everyday, we do not have a worship leader who can provide the music and the sensitive choice of worship song to fit our individual needs, or when we are unable to get together with other like-minded Christians for their help and support. Should worship only take place where the people of God are gathered in greater number or is there more that we can do?

Many Christian traditions would talk about worship as a form of Liturgy during which they would use scripture and poetic styles of written prayer which have been specially designed and authorised by the church for people to use, often daily in order to come into God's presence and seek his blessing. In these times, especially the Catholic and Eastern traditions would describe 'The Liturgy' as a 'time when Christ offers himself to you'. This is daily worship - focussing on and honouring God. Some see these patterns of liturgy as a vehicle, others see them as a discipline through which we place ourselves in a position whereby God can meet us and work in us. Once the decision is made to enter into the Liturgy for the day, even only partially engaged, there is a strong argument in Eastern and Catholic traditions that this is a time of worship and connections are made with God.

The worship songs we may sing, the spoken expressions of love and adoration of God that we might speak out, the periods of contemplation before the cross of Jesus or reflecting on passages of Scripture are all examples of worship. Some serve as vehicles on which we travel into God's presence and some are our heart's inner response to our Loving God.

Not all worship is singing and not all Liturgy is vain repetition! God blesses the intentions of our hearts and the inspiration of our will which seeks to honour him.

Is this prayer, or is this worship? Yes! But I'm not prepared to carve a distinction between them where there ought to be wholeness.

God in Christ directs our prayers from this point to be in tune with his heart. Learning to worship God in Spirit and in Truth is an important part of a fully functioning prayer life.

Prayer and worship should place us into God's presence for the blessing of his heart and the delight of ours. The focus is lifted from our own wants and needs and is now on his face. Being in God's presence transforms our perspective from earth to heaven so that we may truly live for his glory.

Study 4 **Prayer & Expectation**

Opening Thoughts

Do you enjoy anticipating what might come, or are you someone who can't bear to wait? What incidences come to mind?

Prayer

*Father God, giver of all good gifts, I praise and adore you for all that you are. I thank you that you love to give good gifts to your children. I thank you for the tenderness with which you watch over us.
May I grow in faith as I seek to know you more and serve you better,
may my prayers echo your good & perfect will -
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Now Read Matthew 7:7-12

Please read it from your own Bible.

For Your Consideration

What do you expect from God?

Your answer to this maybe colours all the prayers we pray: do we pray expecting our un-saved, un-godly prayers to be answered, in the manner of a 'discount code' we type in at the checkout, hoping for a good deal? Or are we open to expect that the goodness of God will break through our words so that we find our words are surrendered to God.

Remind yourself of prayers you prayed and saw answered with the specificity with which you prayed them.

If our expectations are such that "God doesn't answer my prayers because I didn't get the job, girlfriend, item I specifically asked for", then it might bear looking at what expectations we bring into our prayers. Michael Green reminds us to;

Keep prayerful and close to God (7:7-11) That relationship is crucial. Ask, seek, knock! God will not refuse our prayers, giving us stones for bread or snakes for fish. He will not give us what

will harm us, and for that reason he will often answer our prayers differently from what we ask. We do not know what is for our own good. He does. He is a good Father and longs to give good things to his children. P.106

Now, remind yourself of prayers you prayed about a particular situation that were not answered according to the words you prayed.

How did you feel about it at the time?

How do you feel about it now?

When we looked at worship & prayer, we recognised that this flows from our heart in response to the majesty and glory of God, there needs to be less precision - we know that if our words are muddled, then the sentiment behind them is the thrust of the prayer, the heart of the worship. However, in asking God for 'outcomes' or 'specific things' (petition), it requires our faith to have an expectation of response. Archbishop Bloom makes the point;

But it is much more difficult to have such undivided faith as to ask with one's whole heart and whole mind with complete confidence. No one should look askance at petition, because the ability to say prayers of petition is a test of the reality of our faith. P.82

Read through verse 7 again. Think about at the confidence that Jesus has in the willingness of the Father to respond.

Jesus has a well-founded expectation in God the Father to treat his children well when they (we) persist in petitioning God for the things of our heart. As we seek God, the things of our heart become, by nature, things of God's own heart.

**Do you expect God to give you things in answer to your prayers?
What has informed your thinking?**

Look at and respond to the statements below:

*Someone else is better at praying than me - someone else is holier than me
- someone else deserves God more than me - someone else has a better life
than me - God has better things to do with his time than focus on me...*

Expectation is an expression of faith (Hebrews 11:1). To approach God with a boldness and confidence that we are not unnoticed, either in the quality of our expression of worship or in the validity of our request.

Have a think about some of our favourite hymns and songs that remind us of the assurance of our place in God's attention and of the rightness of being bold in coming to God with our requests.

Whilst our salvation is not a process - although coming to it might be - our sanctification is a life's work. The expectations that we have of God may well fluctuate during our lifetime. There will be a number of reasons for that fluctuation, but these can be distilled into a single issue - we have taken back control of our life from God and are judging him according to the view of life we have. Of course, our view is partial and faulty, but in that moment we are unable to convince ourselves so. The main point of our praying be that "God's will be done". It is not prayer to seek to manipulate the purposes of God to our ends, but to ask God, to seek God and to keep knocking until we receive an answer, all the while becoming more determined to discover God's purpose and will. Bloom counsels us that

This means our life of prayer is at the same time a struggle against all that is not Christ's. We prepare the ground for our prayer each time we shed something which is not Christ's, which is unworthy of him, and only the prayer of one who can, like St Paul say, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' (Gal 2:20) is real Christian prayer. P.79

How much is prayer an expectation of your constancy as well as a trust that God hears and respond to you? Note your thoughts.

Afterword...

This is the last of the study booklets I will write for you as your Minister and Superintendent in Norwich Circuit.

I would like to thank the people at Sprowston for your loving acceptance of Gavin, Aidan, Joel & I, and for your warmth and enthusiasm to grow in faith and to hear, receive & share the Gospel of Christ. You have reminded me that my first love is Jesus and permitted me to be the minister that God has called me to be. My time with you has been important.

Thank you to those churches who have received my ministry during the years I have been in Norwich, either because you have been 'mine' or because you came to me because your minister was sick, absent or redeployed. To those who have allowed me to love you with the love of God, it has been a privilege to serve you. May you continue to grow in faith and the Grace of the Lord be always with you.

I will be sad to leave my most excellent colleagues: Matthew, Edmond, Mary, Steve & Sean (I'm going to take Gavin with me on our next ministry adventure...) You have been brilliant - the Norwich Circuit is hugely blessed that you remain to serve and equip the churches as disciples after Christ's own heart. I love that together, we have built a church, pushed the boundaries of bureaucracy in pursuit of extending the Gospel, celebrated Mary's Ordination and fought many good fights, shoulder to shoulder to see Jesus' Name exalted.

I have loved working with the team of Circuit Stewards, which will continue to bless and serve you as your new Superintendent comes. They are Godly and prayerful people who seek to love and serve for the growth of God's Kingdom. It has been a joy to work alongside you all in the service of Almighty God. John, John, John, Kit, Min & Sue - may God's grace sustain you and hold you in the next phase of Circuit life.

Martin, grateful thanks to you for joining the team as Circuit administrator and PA, your heart for service is huge and your passion for Jesus is greater still! Crack on and finish your LP studies!!

Liz, Joy, Eric, Marilyn, Stephen, David, Linda, Alec, Florence, Nigel & Bernard - Thank you for the blessings you are and have been within the Circuit. A special note of love to Sue in memory of Howard whose 'can do' attitude and whose grace I treasure.

Prayer is a great gift to God's people, learn it and use it well - it is only in truly knowing God that we can share the Gospel of Christ with authenticity and love.

Be blessed in the Mighty Name of Jesus. He is the Light of the World, the Hope of Nations and the Yes to all of God's promises. Seek him & find your salvation in him.

With love, Catherine.

Bibliography

Bloom, Archbishop A; *Living Prayer*; A Libra Book published by Darton, Longman & Todd; 1966
Chester, T; *The Message of Prayer*; BST; IVP; 2003
Keddie, Gordon J; *Jonah: Preacher on the Run*; Evangelical Press (Durham); 2017
Keller, Timothy; *The Prodigal Prophet*; Hodder & Stoughton; 2018
Knight, G.A.F; *Ruth & Jonah: The Gospel in the Old Testament*; Torch Bible Paperbacks; SCM; 1966
O'Sullivan, Kathleen SSL; *Light out of Darkness*; Hodder & Stoughton; 1993
Risbridger, John; *The Message of Worship*; BST; IVP; 2015
Stott, John; *The Message of Ephesians*; BST; IVP; 1989
Warrington, Keith; *The Message of the Holy Spirit*; BST; IVP; 2009



www.catherinehutton.com youtube.com/catherinehuttonUK



@catherinehutton

© Catherine Hutton 2020, All Rights Reserved.
Published by Epiphany Publishing, UK



Prayer