

Prayer, a gift for everyone

These few pages looking at prayer are offered for anyone who might be seeking to pray for the first time and wanting to find out little more. Firstly, prayer is for you and for all people, it is not about fancy words but speaking truthfully from our hearts and listening faithfully with openness to God. Secondly, we can pray anywhere, at any time, in any language, speaking out loud or from the quiet of inner being and if we do not know what to pray God the Holy Spirit will help us. You might want to finish reading here and go pray, if not I hope this will be of some help and encouragement.

What is prayer?

Put simply, prayer is communication between people and God, yet what amazing Gift from God to all people. Sometimes we might feel overwhelmed at spending time with God in prayer, but never forget how much God loves you and welcomes all.

Prayer is much more than a 'friendly chat', it is spending time with God who knows you better than we know ourselves. I mean, do you know how many hairs you have on your head? God does.

How do I pray?

When we think about communications, we soon find this can take many forms. At the heart of prayer is relationship with God. For the Christian this is about knowing Jesus Christ as Lord, Saviour, and friend. It is about knowing God Holy Spirit living within and seeing God Holy Spirit active in people's lives. It is about knowing God the Father, and we recall how Jesus taught his disciples to pray 'Our Father who art in heaven...'

Prayer life is an intimate relationship, built on love and involves receiving from God, recognising that God speaks today. This might be an audible voice we can hear, or that still small voice within us. It might be through reading the Bible or even through what someone else speaks. God with us means God will help us and journey with us to better understand what God is showing us in our lives.

Sometimes it might not be about words, sometimes God speaks to us through providing a sense of peace or comfort. That we have a tangible experience of the presence of God with us.

There are lots of ways we can spend time with God in prayer, we can speak, read, or write prayers. We can draw, paint or even model prayers from clay or play dough. We can use other prayer aids too like candles, a holding cross, or stones, things which act as a focus point and symbolise something of God. Really private individual prayer as well as shared prayer times can be as creative as the resources we have, recognising that we are made in the image of God, our creator.

Sometimes people like to journal or jot down somewhere their prayers. I think this helps us to remember what we have talked about with God and what God has spoken into our lives.

A comment from someone who regularly jotted down their prayers, 'I like to make a note in the back of my Bible, it means I don't forget to say thank you to God for answered prayers. One prayer got answered twenty years after I'd first begun praying for it and some prayers have been answered in different ways than I expected.' I found this person's faithfulness in prayer remarkable, and what a faithful God wow! It is a good reminder too, that God is beyond time and we pray God's will be done. Prayer is not a shopping list, but our hearts being met by the love of God, it is a relationship.

Coming to God in prayer

The ways in which we approach God in prayer are as many as there are people on the earth. Some people find acronyms help for shaping prayer time, such as ACTS – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or CATS if you prefer. In approaching with adoration, we recognise who we are meeting with, God of all grace, love, mercy, and goodness. In confession we sort stuff out with God, saying sorry our sins and turning away from all that is not of God.

Saying sorry means, we repent and turn towards God. We can know forgiveness because of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus who is and was without sin, died upon the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. That is how much God loves you, to give His life for you. You are worth the Son of God, precious child of God.

Thanksgiving follows because when we consider what it means to know God in our lives and all that God has done for us, our natural response is thanksgiving. And supplication, praying for others, seeing all the needs of our global family, and praying for people in need.

It does not take long before we see how many people in the world need our prayers. The hungry, the homeless and refugees, the devastated and broken, the sick and imprisoned, the oppressed and the abused, the victims of injustice and prejudices, the lonely and the poor. All people who are loved by God, just like you and those we are called to love through words and actions, as we love God and love each other in our lives.

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Everyone can find a pattern or an approach which best helps shape their prayer life. I would encourage bringing life to your prayers. That we can pray from our hearts and souls being open and honest as we place trust in the steadfast love of Our faithful God.

I pray that this will have offered some encouragement, even if just a little. If you would like to talk with someone from the church about prayer or anything else, please do not hesitate to be in touch. You can use the contact link on the Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit Website, and we would be happy to talk.

Some of what Jesus taught about love and prayer

⁴³ *'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy."* ⁴⁴ *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* ⁴⁵ *that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. [Matthew 5:43-45]*

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. [Matthew 6:5-8]*