



Depending on God

Poynton
Baptist
Church

Lent 2010

Prayer is the application of the heart to God.

To pray is to sit open-handed before God.

Prayer and the hearing of prayer are the marks of our friendship with God and God's friendship with us.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.
Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

Philippians 4:5

Introduction

Do you ever find prayer tedious and boring? Do you sometimes feel guilty you're not praying enough? Occasionally feel God as gone on holiday? Or perhaps your life with God has stagnated?

For some prayer is a joy, for others it can seem hard work. This booklet summarises our preaching series aiming to get us diving deeper into prayer and draw us closer to God in everyday life. Our quest is to know Jesus better, to follow him more closely and to consciously live in his presence. It takes some discipline and effort to create space in which God can act, to search for ways to connect with God and to relate prayer to every part of life. Although we can't say what will work for you we hope this booklet encourages you and gives you a few ideas which can help you grow.

Depending on God – resisting temptation: Luke 4:1-13

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness comes at an interesting moment following his baptism and the Spirit descending on him. Being full of the Spirit didn't mean freedom from temptation but Jesus resisted and continued to live in dependence on his Father in heaven.

Temptation works because it is attractive. Jesus was hungry and so the choice between meeting his own needs or seeking the word of God was a real dilemma. Likewise the temptation to take a route focused on results rather than on holiness or to be bold and show people that he was a person of faith had genuine appeal.

We might not face the same temptations that Jesus did but we do face the same challenge of deciding whether to embrace uncertainty and trust God or to seek to make our lives more comfortable and straightforward.

Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of God, have
mercy on me a
sinner....

Spiritual growth requires us to live in dependence on God; being willing live a life which revolves around God rather than our own desires, with a hunger and thirst for God and a longing to walk in God's ways.

Depending on God can be scary, it can be unpredictable but to follow with open hands is the essence of trust and dependence.

To ponder: What are the main temptations you face and what makes them attractive to you? What does it mean for you to live, not on bread alone but on every word from the mouth of the Lord?

Types of prayer – Luke 10:25-41

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.”

This passage draws a fascinating contrast between the rich young ruler who is encouraged to go and do and Mary who is commended for taking time to sit at Jesus' feet. Jesus responds to them in different ways; perhaps recognising the way their different characters, backgrounds and temperaments make them unique. Likewise it can be helpful to us to recognise that we approach prayer in different ways and our own character, temperament and background affect what works best for us.

Contemplation

Silence is more than the absence of speech it is the act of living to God, solitude is to find peace with God in contrast to a life filled with noise.

Reading the Bible not for a lesson but with the faith that God will speak through it. Carving out space to read slowly, deliberately and gradually so that you have time to get into the emotions and feelings of the passage.

Take time to dwell on holy things.

Spirituality and character can be analysed in many different ways but here are four possible categories and some ideas of what might help or hinder spiritual growth:

Head Spirituality: preferring education and order we appreciate study groups and sermons. We like worship which is ordered with songs that are crafted to reflect what we believe. There is a danger we can become dogmatic, dry and excessively rational but we can be encouraged to grow through journaling, reading and prayer which intentionally seek connection with God.

Heart Spirituality: we want to be moved emotionally, we long for moving experiences of worship but we also want to connect with life stuff. Rather than sermons we prefer testimony because we need to feel that God is real. The danger is we focus on warm feelings and energy, becoming more concerned with God's presence than holiness. We can be encouraged to grow by giving ourselves permission to be human and recognise that sometimes we feel sad, angry and doubt and to learn we don't need to be constantly on the lookout for the next spiritual fix.

Soul Spirituality: we want to be contemplative, to focus on the inner journey and move towards union with God. We long for simplicity and space in order to appreciate the enormity and beauty of God. The danger is we can become detracted from reality and retreat from the world. We can be encouraged to grow by deliberately balancing times of retreat and solitude with times of interaction and service.

Campaigning Spirituality: we want to be focused on action in the kingdom to obey God and witness to God's reign. We want to be single minded and get on with transforming society and can get angry and frustrated with church and institutions which get in the way of our implementing the vision. The danger is our unrelenting tunnel vision creates casualties on the way, can make others around us feel guilty and that we burn out. We can be encouraged to grow by learning that being driven is not the same as being faithful, because God is in control.

To ponder: which types of activity give you spiritual energy and which ones sap it? What new things could you try to help you grow?

Active spirituality

Art: using drawing or movement to express your feelings to God.

Pilgrimage: an intentional journey which you prepare as an outward expression of an inward journey.

Fasting: an expression of reliance on God, a discipline of self control and sacrifice.

Serving: an opportunity to do something for God and to focus on the needs of others is a reminder that the spiritual journey is not simply inward but is outward as well.

Loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength suggests that whatever our own natural balance we need to integrate all aspects into our walk with God. So what does it mean for you to love God with all your heart and soul, strength and mind; and what about loving your neighbour as yourself?

Types of prayer – The Lord's Prayer: Luke 11:1-13

Prayer is more than a shopping list of requests to God, the Lord's Prayer is a framework given by Jesus in response to the disciples asking him to teach them to pray. In 2008 we did a sermon series specifically looking at the Lord's prayer, CD's and booklets are still available but here are some pointers.

Jesus starts off addressing God as Father; prayer comes as a living and developing relationship with God, sharing in Jesus' own relationship with his Father in heaven.

To recognise this is to recognise that God is truly sovereign, prayer is not a spiritual extra that we tap into to meet our needs but an opening of our lives to the one who is holy. It is also to look to the day when God's rule will once again be established over the whole world, a reign of justice and peace; goodness, mercy and compassion.

While the first part of the prayer is God focused, starting with who God is, seeking to reverence God, seeking God's kingdom to come in the second part the community of disciples express both dependence of God and need.

We pray to bring our needs to God and look to him to provide our legitimate needs. We acknowledge our own frailty, say sorry for where we go wrong and ask God to restore and make us whole again. We don't duck the difficulties of life but seek God's protection over us so that the trials of life don't overwhelm us.

Prayer is more than a shopping list, it should include opportunity to recognise God with praise and gratitude, it should be real about our fragility and fallenness as well as bringing the needs we and others have to God.

To ponder: what are the main themes of your prayer life? How could you develop a pattern that includes all the elements of the Lord's prayer and more? Would using a set pattern of prayers or liturgy help?

Thirsting for God

The psalms contain both emotional highs and lows as the writers are brutally honest about how they feel. Sometimes we can be reluctant to acknowledge how we feel but God knows and can handle it!

Nevertheless we will find it easier to navigate these ups and downs if we have built foundations in our relationship with God, roots that come from consistent practice of spiritual disciplines including prayer and Scripture reading over months and years.

He took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying "This is my body, which is given for you".

However, whatever our emotional state, whatever history we have with God, the future will require some grit and determination on our part; stickability in the face of upset and resolve in the midst of distractions. There are times when we sense the Spirit prompting us, there are times of joy when we are stirred to new depths but there are also times when prayer seems dry and God seems distant.

There are times when our relationship with God just seems stuck. Maybe because of things we have done and choices we have made but sometimes there is no obvious reason. There are times when we need to rely on God, to remember that Jesus is on our case and is praying for us. Even when we feel too weak to carry on or feel we have lost our faith God still believes in us.

To ponder: What is the Spirit prompting and stirring in your heart that needs nurture and development? What practices of prayer and bible reading are most helpful to you? What has been the biggest hindrance to your spiritual growth in recent months?

Spiritual discipline

We all need to develop a pattern of spiritual discipline which provides structure and direction to help us grow in holiness and to conform to the image of Christ.

The gospels paint a picture of Jesus as having a regular rhythm of prayer, of being someone with a good grasp of Scripture and as someone who regularly withdrew to pray. Perhaps it was these habits that helped him remain grounded when the crowds were wowed by the miracles, to face dark moments like the garden of Gethsemane and take risks like walking on water.

In past centuries monastic orders developed which aimed to balance work and prayer, they valued stability faithfulness and obedience as well as recognising the importance of other Christians to shape and mould us. Encouraging people to live simply, demonstrate humility and serve others they wanted to call people to follow God and surrender their lives to him.

But what about you – what steps might you take to develop a disciplined spiritual life? Here are some areas you might want to consider:

- Study: not just the Bible but other things which might help you grow in knowledge, wisdom and maturity.
- Prayer and worship: seeking to be centred on God.
- Rhythm: a pattern of life with space for prayer, work, family, church and relaxation.
- Simplicity of lifestyle: giving a percentage of your income to God, using fair-trade products and caring for creation.
- Action: commitment to pray and work for good, for justice and compassion.
- Mission: an involvement in God's mission to reconcile the world.
- Sharing with others: inviting their discernment and giving opportunity to reflect on what God is doing in your life and how the Spirit is prompting you.

Sermon CD's available

These notes go with the sermon series preached at PBC. Currently available for download from www.pbc.org.uk. if you would like copies of the CD's please ask the church office.

Sources used:

Corrine Ware **Discover Your Spiritual Type** Alban Institute 1995

Ray Simpson **A Pilgrim Way: new Celtic monasticism for everyday people** Kevin Mayhew 2005

Tony Jones **The Sacred Way** Zondervan 2005

David Runcorn **Spirituality Workbook** SPCK 2006

Poynton Baptist Church
Park Lane
Poynton
SK12 1RE

01625 859036
www.pbc.org.uk