



# THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

**P**rayer must be the heartbeat of our Christian lives. Yet a lack of uninterrupted time coupled with secular work environments conspires to limit opportunity. Guilt felt at not being able to pray can be insidious and heavy. I hope the following Scriptures and reflections are of use to those struggling.

When I read the Psalms or the book of Job, I'm reminded of a lesson we must re-learn throughout our Christian lives. This is that God can 'take' whatever we throw at him – whether anger, doubt, grief, apathy or despair. Our starting point in prayer must be echoing St Paul's confidence to go boldly before the throne of grace.<sup>1</sup> Of course, as with any interpersonal relationship, details of how, when and where we communicate will vary according to character.

To come before God, ideally we need a mindset of both joy and surrender. I find it helpful to write down on a plain page everything that I am thankful for. This can and should include anything that comes to mind – from making it to a meeting on time, the taste of tea, the smell of cut grass or a correct management decision. Our daily readings, in reminding us of God's works, should be a point of joy. Likewise a prayer journal can be a source of joy as we realise previous prayers have been answered. Joy is described by Lewis as 'the serious business of Heaven'.<sup>2</sup> Joy is second only after love in St Paul's fruit of the Spirit characteristics,<sup>3</sup> yet joy is often underrated. Our joy in Christ is great, and we must draw on it. Psalm 1 describes the situation of the righteous – as 'trees planted near a stream, which always have leaves, produce fruit in season and succeed in everything that they do'. There are so many ways of encountering the joyous nature of God across different art-forms. I've been grateful recently for a photo of a favourite stained-glass window, and an ipod full of ancient and modern hymns! Small reminders we set for ourselves can be surprisingly helpful. I know a friend who keeps his debit card behind a Bible quotation card; every time he pays for anything by card he has to read the verse. Another uses scriptural phrases as computer passwords (He1srisen!).

To reach a mindset of surrender is as important. 'Blessed are the poor in Spirit' – only through acknowledging our spiritual poverty can we be blessed by communion with God. Just as writing a quick list of things we are thankful for can be useful for realising joy, so writing a list worries can be of benefit; again, including a whole spectrum – whether large issues or ones seemingly trivial. I believe

strongly that if an issue matters to us, it matters to God, even if it is a distraction that should be recognised as such. Reading through our list of worries/distractions, we can then surrender each one to God. In my experience, high on the list is neglect of prayer itself(!); as with any issue we can submit it to God, trusting in his strength to help us.

## To come before God, ideally we need a mindset of both joy and surrender

There is no escaping the reality that finding time for prayer is difficult. Of course, we may pray at any time in our thoughts, but it is important to grow an alertness as to who/what needs to be prayed for. One train of thought is as follows: each person on earth is in need of prayer; therefore, for each person we come across, our question to ourselves should be, 'What is it that I should pray for them?' Salvation for non-believers, and development of believers' love should be a high priority, but we must not neglect physical needs; clinical safety, multidisciplinary team workings and colleagues' health are worthy matters to pray about.

There was a story written where an old explorer found a great and powerful treasure of an ancient age, though none knew what became of it. The explorer went on to instruct his daughter to take care of a rescued orphan. The treasure eluded many who searched. Ultimately, the 'treasure' was in fact the orphan himself, a survivor of a powerful race. Likewise, the person of Christ is the aim, substance and outcome of prayer. Augustine of Hippo wrote: 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.' Christ is our joy, our strength and our song; we must be determined to meet him regularly.

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### references

1. Hebrews 4:16
2. CS Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*
3. Galatians 5:22
4. Matthew 5:3