



Copyright Ian McColl

TALKING WITH GOD

THE PRAYER JOURNAL OF
ST. PETER'S WOOLTON
(03 JAN 2021, ISS. 4)

What is at the heart of prayer?

In 1976 an English teenager was one of the crowd in the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam. He was feeling rather lonely in the middle of weeks of rail travel around Europe. So he mouthed a silent prayer, "Dear Lord, please show me if there is anyone here that I should be speaking with". Just a few minutes later he spotted someone he knew. This was a teacher from the school that he had left 6 months before. A pleasant conversation took place.

That teenage lad is the writer of this article. I was amazed that Almighty God bothered to hear and answer even my brief prayer on such a trivial matter. He does not change. About a year ago, I was getting a bit anxious about the dangerous way other people were driving at speed on the motorway towards Jerusalem. So I asked, "Dear Lord, please help me to drive through all this". Just a few minutes later, a van driver in the centre lane realised he was about to miss his exit. He suddenly right cut across my lane to

leave the motorway, only just missing me and another car. God had prompted me to pray at the right time!

These incidents demonstrate the simple point that the heart of prayer is a conversation between a loving God and us. It is amazing that the God who created this universe watches all that we do and hears all that we say. Prayer is communicating with this God of love. If you are a believer in Jesus, your conversations are with a God who loves you perfectly, who showed that immense love in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross of Calvary. Because it is a relationship based on love, it will be expressed in communication.

Whenever you speak with God, your words are perfectly understood. Someone who has perfect love hears you. But when you speak to a fellow human, there are imperfections in the person who is listening. They may not care for you as much as you think they do. They may not really be interested in what you say. But God's

understanding is perfect. And His attitude to all His children is a wholly undeserved but very strong love. He sees us as clothed in the righteousness of Christ, He does not treat us with the angry judgment due to us as natural sinners. The Lord loves to hear your voice (Song of Songs 2:14, 4:9, 8:13). Not just the voice of other people in church, who seem to mess up less than you, and have fine words and know what to say. He loves to hear your voice.

Our private prayer times are an expression of love. The core of your life as a believer is in your relationship with the God of love - "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3, c.f. 14:23). Knowing God personally is the key distinguishing element of Christianity, the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:34 c.f. Jeremiah 9:24, Ephesians 2:12). We approach our Father knowing that He knows all our needs even before we voice them in His presence (Matthew 6:8-13). Being in God's presence changes us and enables His light to shine out through us (Exodus 34:29-34). We gain true insight in His presence (Psalm 73:17).

Private prayer gives no benefit to the old nature, our sinful side. Therefore we can easily neglect it; we can assume there is nothing in it for us. But prayer carries a guarantee from God of a reward (Matthew 6:6). So it is good to give time each day allow the Spirit God has placed in our heart to mingle with our own spirit and communicate with our loving heavenly Father.

We love, because He first loved us. We show our desire for fellowship with God when we pray, because it is natural for us to want to spend time with those we love.

(Ian Macaulay)

Doing Prayer

It is true that, for many of us, our prayers can be limited, as they consist of a litany of requests. But if we spend some of our prayer time praising God for who he is and what he has done, this gives God the gratitude and worship he deserves, but also reminds us of the great God to whom we pray, reminds us of what he can do, and helps us to pray with more confidence. Ordained ministers of the Church of England are encouraged to pray Morning Prayer each day, which includes at least one psalm. Amongst the psalms crying out to God for help are some wonderful psalms of pure worship (e.g. Psalms 146-150). Reading such psalms rarely fail to move me to praise and renewed trust in the Lord even on the difficult days.

(J. Pratt)

Sharing Prayer

In many Methodist churches, the first Sunday of a new year is marked by a Covenant Service, in which the following covenant prayer is prayed:

*I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all
things to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.*

(The Methodist Covenant Prayer)