

**“Practicing the Presence: Prayer in daily life” – 7th March 2010**

**St George’s Anglican Church**

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Last week Liz reminded us how praying a vital for growing a relationship with God is. It needs to be simple and real and I loved her way of comparing it to how we communicate with our friends, asking for help, thanking them, sometimes peppering them with questions, but at times just being content to be silent and enjoy each others company.

Today I want to share about how practically we can incorporate prayer more into our lives. I’m going to give you some ideas so you can think about which ones you may like to use in the coming week.

**Let’s look at 1Thess. 5 v 16,-18**

Paul, Silas and Timothy wrote these instructions to the first Christians in Thessalonica probably only about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. They like us were struggling to live differently from the people around them.

1Thess. 5 v 16,-18

“Be joyful always,

Pray continually,

Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Here we are challenged to have an attitude of gratitude and to pray all the time! Why are these simple commands so important?

Prayer helps us to live God ward, with God at the centre of our lives.

It is one way where we can deliberately pay more attention to God rather than getting pushed around by all the other voices in our lives which clamour for attention.

Prayer helps us to centre on God alone, to leave our self-centred world of worries and concerns and choose to enter God’s world and see it from his perspective.

## Eagles and Chickens

The Nepali Christians have a wonderful picture to describe how we can live God ward. Around their villages they have chickens which peck in the mud and dirt to find their food. Their heads are down their eyes on the ground and they have no idea of what is happening above and around them. All they can focus on is the grubs in the mud.

On the mountains around live eagles- these are huge birds with a massive wingspan. They perch on the crags and cliff tops in the mornings and watch and wait. Then when the thermal winds rise up, they lift off and let the warm air currents take them thousands of feet up into the skies where they can see huge distances and soar freely to places that the currents take them.

as believers we need to live not like chickens head down and stuck in the mud living our self centred lives and only rushing to find grubs in the mud.

but to live God ward each day: to soar like eagles, to be people of prayer and faith and to let God's spirit lift us up to rise above the ground where we can now see our lives and God's world though his perspective.

How can we do this? How does this relate to praying continually?

For the French monk, Brother Lawrence

it meant carrying on an ongoing conversation with God no matter what he was doing. Sometimes the joy this brought to his soul meant he had to modify his outward behaviour so others weren't surprised or shocked!

this is called practising the presence of God.

Praying continually can simply be one way in which we seek to stay connected to God throughout the day.

This attitude of constant prayer is something we learn by doing, it must not be a duty or just another method but it needs to develop out of a desire to grow closer to God and to connect with Him. It shouldn't be complicated. It should happen with joy springing from our hearts with an attitude of gratitude.

I'm still very much a learner in this area but here are some practical suggestions which may be helpful to encourage us to pray continually, to live more like eagles.

- Wake up- morning

It starts from the moment we wake up. How can we live God ward from the first moment of the day until the last? Our habits and what we do each day in turn affects how we spend our weeks and lives.

How do you and I begin our day?

I was challenged by some new Nepali believers who came and asked how they should begin their day now they were no longer Hindus [they could no longer wake up and worship their idols.]

Remembering "This is the day that the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it" and the examples of biblical characters like David and Jesus who got up early to pray they decided to now wake up with thankfulness and begin their day with prayer, and they also often get up in the dark to walk with a torch for half an hour to meet together in the church to begin the day together with prayer and worship.

How do we begin our day? Perhaps this week we could choose to wake up differently with a grateful heart, a prayer on our lips and a listening ear choosing to look God ward right from the start.

- Stop and have set times to refocus.

Some other ways of reminding ourselves to pray continually through the day is by having set times when we stop and focus again on God.

The Bible tells us about people who every day deliberately set aside regular times to pray- like Daniel, [Daniel 6 v 10] and the disciples [Acts 3 v 1].

CAR

Some people have a prayer time while in the car, a time when they can offer their day to God worship along with a CD or just pray for the day ahead.

COMPUTER

Others have a time as they wait for their computer to boot up.

## TEA BREAKS

Others take time to pray in their tea breaks. Again the Nepali women who used to come to my home would make tea and once all seated on the floor I would be really challenged as they took the opportunity of this tea break in their working day to pour out their hearts to God in thanksgiving, often all together in unison and this was followed by fervent prayer for others, their families and for the growth of God's kingdom in their country. It flowed naturally out of their gratitude to God and their love for Him.

I am ashamed to say that at first I used to sit with my eyes open swatting the flies away from the cups but God really challenged me to learn to use this practice as a reminder to live God ward.

Perhaps this week we can stop for a few minutes, slow down when we have a cuppa and look and take a moment to pray and listen. Saying grace in a real and fresh way before meals can also become another opportunity to help us pray continually.

- Listening to God nudges and asking God for help

Praying continually is also having the ears of our hearts and spirits open to hearing God's nudges, to having a tongue ready to praise and thank the creator and lips ready to ask God for a blessing on others we meet or ask God for His help to live in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This may often be expressed as arrow prayers

The busy young mum who prays-Lord, help I need extra grace for this situation,

The surgeon who prays for wisdom in the middle of an operation.

The shopkeeper -Lord help me to be a channel of blessing to each customer.

There is no right way to "pray continually" and no right time. Our lives change.

Sometimes we have lots of time alone or we can't sleep Let God use those night time hours as a special opportunity to pray continually.

## TIRED, STRESSED--- GETTING REFRESHED

What happens when we seem to be stuck in the mud like a chicken stressed, upset and empty inside?

How can we follow the challenge to rejoice always and pray continually?

Again I am still learning in this whole area but I have found it crucial to set aside time for God

First after getting alone in God's presence I follow 3 simple steps .

Let go

Look up and receive

Look out

Let go

Letting go simply means getting rid of everything that clutters up our souls and spirits-

a bit like seeing my hands full of stuff, there is no room to receive what God has for me

I need to get rid of worries, sense of failure, sins, and burdens and then give them to Jesus.

Look up into His face and sit in His presence,

Just enjoy His presence and stillness.

Listen and Let Him speak

Let come and look out

Receive His grace, His source of life and forgiveness.

A bit like holding my hands our palm up and waiting to receive from Him

Just sit quietly in His new strength, with His spirit, His fresh power so that I can go out and serve Him again.

I don't worry or fret if I feel that nothing has happened. Spending time in the presence of God always changes one even when seeds planted are hidden and take time to grow.

Sometimes it takes a while and several times of set aside prayer times [when I'm really dry several days] but it is a bit like a sponge which needs to soak for a while when it is really dry before it can absorb the water again.

It's a bit like the eagles which wait on the crags for the winds to lift them far above the valleys.

So we wait in his presence, pray and let His spirit lift us God ward.

Paul tells us to be joyful always, to rejoice in the Lord and to pray continually.

how long is it since we have just enjoyed our Lord.

Let's use prayer to spend some time this week just enjoying our relationship with Jesus, just sit in His presence, listen to him or talk to him

.

#### INTENTIONAL PRAYER

As well as learning to pray continually the Bible also teaches us about also having definite times for prayer.

We do need to have the balance of intentional times where we deliberately set aside time to pray and seek God. Often our lives get so rushed and busy we need to take these times out and we need the encouragement and discipline of meeting with others

There is no right way to do this and it covers many different aspects of prayer like praying for others, intercession, praying for healing, seeking God for guidance.

There are many examples of this in the Bible.

Let's look at Philippians 1 v 3-11 where Paul gives us an example of intentional prayer.

Here he uses every time he remembers his fellow believers to spring into prayer for them.

Philippians 1 v 3-11

I thank my God every time I remember you.

In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now,

being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.....

And this is my prayer:

1. that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight
2. So that you may be able to discern what is best
3. And may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ
4. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ
5. To the glory and praise of God.

Doesn't it strike you how his attitude is one of thanks and joy?

When we pray for others and our church do we do so with thankfulness? is it a privilege to pray for them or a burden?,

Do we see them as partners with us in the work of sharing the Gospel?

Do we also have confidence that God will continue to do His work in their lives.

As Christians we are in a battle, but often we forget we are in a war,

we forget to listen to God for His instructions

and to intentionally take time to pray for his protection for ourselves and our fellow fighters.

story of us in Nepal it was a tough time, we were sick, under pressure and we got a letter in the post treat. It was from an old lady in Nelson, we had never met her but somehow she had heard about us and she wrote to tell us that she took time everyday to pray for us. We read this and both of us sat down and cried.

We were humbled grateful that God prompted someone to pray and humbled that someone had the discipline and love to set aside time to do this

What should we pray for others during these times of intentional prayer?

Well this is a wonderful guide.

It's easy to remember if you use your hands

the thumb- more love

pointing finger- discernment to know truth and what is best

middle finger- lives that are pure and blameless

ring finger- lives filled with the fruit of righteousness

little finger- lives that give glory to God

Practically what helps us incorporate times of intentional prayer into our lives?

Here are some suggestions you may want to choose one to put into practice this coming week as we learn to pray by doing it.

Prayer walking-Some people pray best when they are moving, prayer walking can be a wonderful way to build definite times of prayer into your life. Meet a friend in the park walk and pray together. Pray in each room of your flat or home, pray as you walk the streets of your neighbourhood.

Having a prayer spot-Others find having a special place, a prayer chair or a prayer room encourages them as they go there deliberately to meet with God. Set up a spot in your flat or home for prayer.

Having a special time- set aside a regular time to pray each day or each week. Slot it into your schedule.

Praying with others-Some find blocking in prayer meetings and times with others helps them set aside regular times of prayer, prayer partners can be a real encouragement, or a set prayer meeting in your area or flat.

Let's look again at Paul's words to

be joyful always

to pray continually

in an attitude of thanksgiving out of a heart response to an awesome God and Father who wants a relationship with us.

this week let's seek to enjoy God, to rejoice in His presence, to live God ward like eagles and to pray whenever and wherever we get the chance.

and to set aside times of intentional prayer so that we can learn to pray continually with thanksgiving.

Is there something that we can do this week? Is there one thing that we can do to help us to live more God ward.

Let's pray.