

Coming Up at St Mark's

Next Couple of Weeks:

11th April: Soup and Pud Lunch after the Thursday Communion Service. For more details please contact Jose Rhodes.
j.a.rhodes@talktalk.net

14th April: Full Immersion Baptism at 9.15 – contact office if interested (Please note – no LOL that week)

15th April: The Alpha Course kicks off with a Welcome Meal in the Narthex at 7.30pm. Please contact Andy or the office if interested.

27th April: New Wine Leadership Network Day at St Mark's, 10-4

Men's Weekend, 10th-12th May, 2013. Jonas Centre, with James Barnett. If you can book by Easter that will be really helpful...thank you. (Pick up a leaflet in church)

A big thank you to all who sang in the Gospel Choir on Easter Sunday evening (with extra special thanks to Paul and Jonathan)! It sounded wonderful!



Please pray together for...

Please pray for **Nicola Harasym** as she goes into hospital on 10th April for surgery.

Continue to pray for **Susie Appleby, Andrea O'Neill and the Lee family**, asking that the Lord would bring His Kingdom presence to them this week.

Please pray for the upcoming **Alpha Course** - for the leaders, helpers and guests.

Pray for those who attended our **Easter celebrations**, particularly those who visited us.

Give thanks for our **Lighthouse group**, for the great team who run it, and all its lovely members.

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

Pray for **Pippa Carter at Wetherby Young Offenders' Institute**. Thank God for the team that visited on **Easter Sunday**, and the ongoing impact on the young people there.

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!

**Alleluia!
Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!
Alleluia!**

The Easter Season

THIS WEEK'S READINGS:

Matthew 6:5-15

Philippians 4:6-7

Romans 8:26-27

PRAYING EVERY DAY – GETTING PRACTICAL

Briefly reflect on the main way God spoke to you through this Sunday's teaching: Matthew 6:5-15

I'm so often aware as I'm doing my sermon prep, and considering the subject or theme for the given week, that the person I need to preach to most of all is myself. And I can confirm that with this week's theme 'Praying every day - getting practical' this is very much the case! Especially as in the last week as 1) I've been struck down with the dreaded yet much misunderstood man-cold, and 2) I've had a few days of holiday. Generally, I must confess, during the aforementioned phenomenon my pattern of prayer looks somewhat irregular and erratic, and so I offer the following reflections as someone who knows a) he's not very good at praying and b) wants to be better at it. I'm sure a lot of us might say the same thing. So let's set out on this journey together. As we begin to think about our everyday praying I'd like to offer three encouragements or challenges. The first of which is...

Start where you are

So often we imagine if only our situation or circumstance was different then it would somehow be so much easier, or we'd be better equipped, to be a good friend, or get fit, or to finally learn the piano or Italian, or indeed pray. Rowan Williams observes:

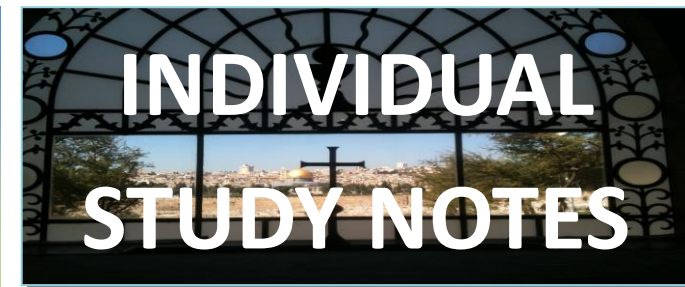
The fact is that we don't want to start where we are.

I wonder, what are the factors in your life that are preventing you from praying? Is it circumstance? Are you waiting for things to be different? For your relationship with God to be deeper, or your questions answered before you make a habit of praying?

The reality is that we need to start where we are – to make best use of the situation that we find ourselves in. But sometimes it's the getting starting that we need a little help with.

When Jesus taught his disciples and would-be disciples how to pray he gave us both a basis for praying and a framework or structure of how to pray – the Lord's Prayer.

First, the basis: If we are to have a conversation with someone we need to have a basis for our dialogue (unless we are particularly extroverted!). The basis may be fairly simple such as if we meet someone on a country walk, in which case it's likely to only be a passing exchange -



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“Hello, isn’t it a lovely day to get out and about” (the basis being the common bond that we are both out walking/enjoying favourable weather); or it may be a more complex or profound basis – “I hope you don’t mind me ringing but I’ve been researching my family tree and discovered that we share a great-great Grandmother”. Generally if there is no basis for the conversation then there is no dialogue – just try greeting a stranger on the street on familiar terms... they’ll probably not stick around.

It’s the same with prayer – we need a basis to pray and Jesus reveals the very basis of our dialogue with God when he says:

‘Pray then in this way: **Our Father** in heaven...

This is the starting point, the basis, of our dialogue with God – we are children of our heavenly Father. That is our relationship.

The familiarity of the prayer might blind us to its revolutionary nature – Jesus calling God Father, and inviting his followers to call God Father is extraordinary (and clearly scandalous to many people as we read on in the Gospels). Yet this is the offer – we pray on this basis.

The Lord’s prayer also offers a structure of how we can pray (this too is wonderfully useful if we are struggling to know where to start). This means that we don’t necessarily always need to use the identical words that we find in Matthew’s Gospel (for you’ll see that in Luke it is subtly different), but it is a scaffolding or framework around which we can build our prayers.

When I was younger my parents would always pray the Lord’s prayer with us before we went to bed and my sister admits that every time she prays the Lord’s Prayer it brings on a yawn! It’s like a Pavlovian response. It’s so easy for the prayer to become wallpaper, for us to simply get lost in the familiarity of the prayer. If you find this to be true, why not try to say the prayer in a fresh way, elaborate on certain words – i.e. “hallowed be your name... your name is holy and powerful”.

Another element to starting where you are is bringing your current situation, the things that are on your heart and mind before God, and acknowledging *where you are*. What is consuming your thinking – pray about it. Offer it to God.

What are you worried about – express it to your heavenly Father and prayer for his protection and care. We read in Philippians 4:6-7:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

There is no point ignoring the things that are on our hearts and minds, it’s far healthier to acknowledge them and bring them to God as you pray. It’s funny (and perhaps a little troubling!) how often I will begin to pray about something and within a minute be thinking about what I’ll be having for lunch, or how Sammy Ameobi really should have scored on Tuesday night, or whatever it might be. Why not find a way of bringing those things to God, finding a way to pray about them – thank God for food and football... pray for those who can’t enjoy them... and so on. Start where you are.

Get into the habit

Praying isn’t necessarily easy! Like all disciplines or relationships it takes time, practice, patience, endurance and dedication, and if we are to grow as people of prayer we need to work at it. Along with starting where we are, it is equally important that we get into the habit of praying regularly.

Tom Wright observes that while most people pray in some form or other, the approach or expectation of people differs enormously. He writes:

At its lowest, prayer is shouting into a void on the off-chance that there may be someone out there listening. At its highest prayer merges into love, as the presence of God becomes so real that we pass beyond words and into a sense of his reality, generosity, delight and grace. For most Christians, most of the time, it takes place somewhere in between those two extremes”.

I must say, the second experience of prayer that Wright offers appeals far more to me, but it quite often the case that we begin with and grow from the first example! Yet the truth is we won’t move on in our life and experience of prayer unless we give the time to it.

A question you might want to reflect on - how much time do you put into it? This isn’t a guilt trip because, as I mentioned, I am somebody who knows a) he’s not very good at praying, but b) wants to be better at it. Where are we giving God the time to meet with us and enter into that dialogue?

As this week’s theme is ‘Praying every day – getting practical’, I want to set you a challenge!

For the next couple of weeks I challenge you to set aside 10-15 minutes each day to pray. Try and find a quiet space (if that is possible), close the door and pray to your Father. Start where you are but keep going! After the two weeks are up why not speak to someone you trust about the experience, and review where you are.

I’ve found that an important part of nurturing a life of prayer has been keeping something of a record of what I have prayed for and being encouraged! I’m not a natural journal keeper but making a note of the things that I have been praying about or for has been really helpful in seeing where God has been at work in me and in other people, and it has encouraged me to keep going.

It’s also helpful to remember that praying isn’t just speaking at God. Henri Nouwen writes:

For many of us prayer means nothing more than speaking with God. And since it usually seems to be a quite one-sided affair, prayer simply means talking to God. This idea is enough to create great frustrations. If I present a problem, I expect a solution; if I formulate a question, I expect an answer; if I ask for guidance, I expect a response. And when it seems, increasingly, that I am talking into the dark, it is not so strange that I soon begin to suspect that my dialogue with God is in fact a monologue.

If we treat God as a vending machine, or as an academic exercise we are likely to be disappointed, for what we truly need is a relationship, an on-going dialogue. This can’t really be achieved by simply firing our prayers at God, we need to be nurtured in His love, to spend time in His presence.

We won’t always know what to pray, or have the strength or ability to articulate the words but “the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words”

Pray(ing) with others - please see attached sheet ‘Tips for Group Prayer’ and read on!

Study

- If your prayer life was a painting or piece of artwork what would it look like? What would you like it to look like?

- Where are you starting from? What are things that prevent you from getting into a habit of prayer?

- What is your experience of praying with others? How might it be different/grow?

- Read through/Pray the Lord’s Prayer. Come at it with fresh eyes – does anything strike you afresh?

- Read Phil. 4:6-7. What’s on your mind? What do you worry about? Lift them up in prayer.

Living it out (Application):

Take up the challenge set out in the notes - For the next couple of weeks set aside 10-15 minutes each day to pray. Start where you are!