



Vol. 2 Issue 1 • February 2025

Newsletter

The discipleship newsletter
for St Mary's Church
Princes Risborough



discō = Latin, 'to learn'



Prayer

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I have decided to focus this issue on the theme of prayer. Hopefully, following our week of prayer this will be something still on your minds. I've included articles written by R. A. Torrey, as well as an introduction to Contemplative prayer written by myself. I have also included a short article considering some of the Myths of stewardship.

God bless

Rev. Andrew Walmsley



Week of Prayer: Reflection

The idea of the week of prayer was to give St Mary's as a church an opportunity to come together to pray. By setting this up with a wide range of prayer sessions throughout the day, the aim was to give us all the opportunity to come and find space with God. From a personal point, Sue and I are very thankful for all the help from those who led the different sessions during the week or helped supervise the church in between the sessions.

Personally I found the week to be a very valuable time. I know that I had the opportunity, because of my job as a church minister, to be around for much of the week. But what I found was quite surprising. Even though I had kept the diary as clear as possible that week, I found the rhythm of prayer valuable in creating a different balance during the day. There was something quite powerful about starting with prayer, stopping work, and taking an hour to pray during the middle of the day, and then finishing the day in prayer in the evening. I know that others felt this too.

It was also quite clear that the Holy Spirit was present through the week, giving us words and pictures to help understand what He was saying.

As we live through this interregnum it is important for us to come together to pray, and so we will be organising the next week around the beginning of June. We hope many more of you will be able to take time out to join us in prayer.

The importance of Prayer

Prayer should be one of the key parts of our lives each day. R. A. Torrey, the 19th Century American Evangelist wrote a book all about 'How to Pray' to help people understand how to do this better. Even though this was written over a hundred years ago, what Torrey writes is as relevant now as it was then. The following is an extract with some of his key points from Chapter 1 of the book.

R.A. Torrey : Chapter 1 : How to Pray

In the Ephesians 6.18 we read words which put the tremendous importance of prayer with startling and overwhelming force:

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all 'saints.' "

When we stop to weigh the meaning of these words, then note the connection in which they are found, the intelligent child of God is driven to say, *"I must pray, pray, pray. I must put all my energy and all my heart into prayer. Whatever else I do, I must pray."*

The Revised Version is, if possible, stronger than the Authorised:



"With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."

Note the alls: *"with all prayer," "at all seasons," "in all perseverance," "for all the saints."* Note the piling up of strong words, *"prayer," "supplication," "perseverance."* Note once more the strong expression, *"watching thereunto,"* more literally, *"being sleepless thereunto."* Paul realised the natural slothfulness of man [people], and especially his natural slothfulness in prayer. How seldom we pray things through! How often the church and the individual get right up to the verge of a great blessing in prayer and just then let go, get drowsy, quit. I wish that these words "being sleepless unto prayer" might burn into our hearts. I wish the whole verse might burn into our hearts.

But why is this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer so needful?

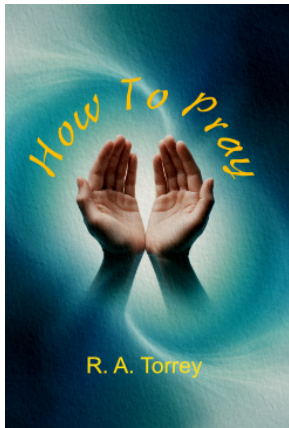
To answer this question Torrey goes through in detail 11 key points as to why prayer is needed, the main points of which are as follows:

1. First of all, because there is a devil.
2. A second reason for this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is that prayer is God's appointed way for obtaining things, and the great secret of all lack in our experience, in our life and in our work is neglect of prayer.
3. The third reason for this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is that those men whom God set forth as a pattern of what He expected Christians to be - the apostles - regarded prayer as the most important business of their lives.
4. But there is a still weightier reason for this constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer. It is, prayer occupied a very prominent place and played a very important part in the earthly life of our Lord.
5. There is another reason for constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer that seems if possible even more forcible than this, namely, praying is the most important part of the present ministry of our risen Lord.
6. The sixth reason for constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is that prayer is the means that God has appointed for our receiving mercy, and obtaining grace to help in time of need.
7. The next reason for constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is that prayer in the name of Jesus Christ is the way Jesus Christ Himself has appointed for His disciples to obtain fullness of joy.
8. The eighth reason for constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is that prayer, in every care and anxiety and need of life, with thanksgivings is the means that God has appointed for our obtaining freedom from all anxieties and the peace of God which passeth all understanding.
9. The ninth reason for constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is that prayer is the method that God Himself has appointed for our obtaining the Holy Spirit.
10. The tenth reason for constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is that prayer is the means that Christ has appointed whereby our hearts



shall not become overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and so the day of Christ's return come upon us suddenly as a snare.

11. There is one more reason for constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer, and it is a mighty one because of what prayer accomplishes.



If you have never read what Torrey has to say about Prayer, then it is well worth reading, and is indeed just as relevant today as many of our modern 21st Century writers. Copies of the book are available in church by the Discipleship noticeboard. All proceeds go to St Mary's church!

Contemplative Prayer

A year ago I sat down to work out how to explain prayer to others, and to explain how we could pray in different ways, especially what we would term 'contemplative prayer'. I know that many people would say they pray, but would not necessarily use the variety of methods of prayer in their prayer times, daily reflections or when meeting in groups for prayer. I could not find any short guides so I decided to write something - it's the teacher in me! As I was near finishing this guide the 'Practicing the Way' course was released and we decided as a church to run that course. This course has proved fruitful for many who have attended. But the question still holds as to how effective our prayer lives are. The booklet that I have written covers the following types of prayer:

- What is Contemplative Prayer?
- What is Centering Prayer?
- What is Lectio Divina?
- What is Welcome Prayer?
- What is Ignatian Prayer?

- What is Taizé Prayer?
- What is the Daily Examen?
- What is the Jesus Prayer?
- How else can we pray?
- What is the Lord's Prayer?
- What is Daily Prayer?
- A simple way to think of praying

If you are not used to praying in different ways, and you don't really understand what contemplative prayer is, I've included the introduction from the booklet below. As we go through this interregnum, it would be a blessing if we all learnt how to improve our prayer life, and vary the ways in which we pray, as this will allow us more opportunities to come closer to God, and discern his will for our lives and His Church.

Introduction to Contemplative prayer

'God has made us for himself and our heart is indeed restless till it rests in him'.¹

Contemplative prayer is a general term for a way of praying that allows Christians to be more meditative in their prayer, or to build times of silence, reflection, and contemplation into their prayer. This differs in style from how many people will normally pray, which tends towards using petitionary prayer, where they ask God for specific things. Instead, contemplative prayer focuses on cultivating a different attitude when praying so that each person can develop being still with God, being open to the presence of God, and being attentive to hearing what God is saying. As Augustine comments (see above quote), we need to rest in Him, because we were made for Him, and until we get to that point we will indeed be restless. Because of this, contemplative prayer often gives the perception of being a form of prayer that is receptive rather than active. Not that either form of prayer should replace the other, but rather that they should complement each other. As petitionary prayer allows the person to bring specific concerns to God, contemplative prayer allows the individual to sit back and listen to what God might be saying, and to be still in His presence. Together, they build a way of praying that allows both the active and receptive forms to be used.

From a practical point of view, contemplative prayer involves letting go of distractions that can stop us from being more receptive when praying. The various forms, as introduced on the following pages, tend to follow distinct steps depending on which form is being used. But they all need you to take certain steps before beginning to pray so that you can focus more effectively.

For example:

1. Look for a quiet space to sit where distractions will not easily bother you.

2. To begin, you need to sit comfortably with your hands and body in a position you can maintain during your prayer time. This type of prayer can often last for up to 20-30 minutes, so being comfortable is a necessary thing.

3. Once comfortable, pause and sit quietly before beginning.

4. Depending on the type of prayer you are using, you may pray by:

- Choosing specific words or a piece of scripture that will be the focus.
- Use a simple phrase or mantra which you will keep coming back to throughout the time of prayer, e.g. 'come Holy Spirit, come'.
- Instead of a word, it might be a symbol or image that you use.
- You might use music that will gently play in the background.

A word of warning



Some forms of prayer outlined are not ones that everybody will be familiar with and so will take some time and practice for them to become second nature. The time spent also depends on how easy it can be to sit in silence. It may be better to start small and focus on just praying for ten minutes rather than try for thirty minutes from the start. The more experienced you become, the easier it will be and the time praying can then increase.

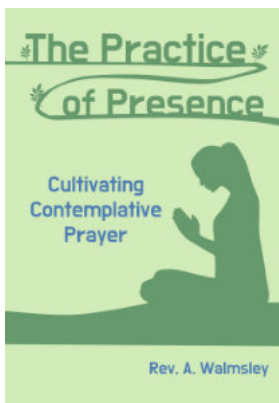
Contemplative prayer is about giving the initiative to God and allowing Him to speak. There may be times when nothing happens at all, or there may be times when we feel inner peace. Alternatively, there may be times when feelings, emotions, or specific pictures surface that make us uncomfortable. If that happens, then it may be worthwhile to speak with a friend, mentor or spiritual director.

Remember that contemplative prayer aims to help us be more receptive to God and to build a stronger relationship with Him. This will not happen overnight but will take time. Investing effort in this will result in greater rewards, as our love for God will grow as we work with Him. Hopefully, as you try some of these different types of prayer, you will find ones which you can add to your own pattern of prayer.

The quality of prayer rather than its quantity is what matters. A single moment of divine union is more valuable than a long period of prayer during which you are constantly in and out of interior silence. It only takes a moment for God to enrich you.²

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1, 1. Anthony Meredith, *Christian Philosophy in the Early Church* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 137.

² Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart*, (1986, 1992 by St. Benedict's Monastery) p. 57



To purchase copies of 'The Practice of Presence' then please see the Discipleship noticeboard. As with the Torrey book on prayer, all proceeds will go to St Mary's Church.

Stewardship : Eight Common Myths

Young children always seem to have a reason why they cannot wash their faces, or go to bed on time, or an excuse to get out of drying the dishes, or tidying their rooms. But us adults are not much better - we all have reasons why we never got around to things! The issue of giving is no different so here's a quick look at ... Eight common tithing myths.....

Myth	Response
1. People on low incomes simply cannot afford to tithe.	But we are asked to give what we can, not what we can't, so no one should feel guilty on a low income. But tithing is also about priorities: our first fruits or second thoughts or last minute scrabbling for something to put in the plate.
2. I can't tithe; I'm a farmer /self employed/ seasonal worker and my money comes in irregularly.	But I can put a sum aside after last year's harvest/profits or stock sale, invest it and release a tithe monthly?
3. Tithing is for other churches; it's just not C of E!	Well the Bishops, the General Synod and many Anglicans would be surprised to hear that!
4. 10% is beyond me, so should I give nothing at all?	No, we start where we can, maybe a half tithe and work towards a full one over time.
5. Tithing means 10% for God, 90% for me to enjoy.	The 10% reminds us that God allows us to use, or steward, 90 %!
6. 10% is all that's asked of me.	10% is an initial target, not a limit.
7. Tithing is barely mentioned in the New Testament	Yes, but surely our standard of giving cannot be less than the Old Testament.
8. Tithing is hard for the wealthy who will end up giving so much	No, it's harder for people with less disposable income – i.e. The Widow and her Mite.

Final things...



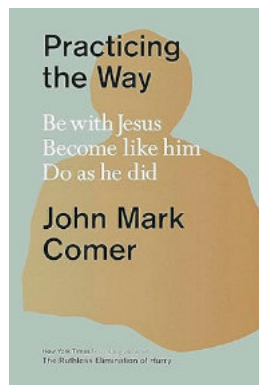
If you are new to St Mary's then you may not have thought about Life Groups. These are groups that meet weekly or fortnightly so that people can come together as community and be with each other for prayer, bible study and social times. We have a variety of different groups at St Mary's church and are always looking for more people to join our groups. So if you have not yet joined why not think about joining a group. If you would like to know more about this then speak to one of the Clergy, or Claire Barbary or Liz Stoddard.



The Bible in a Year Over the last year a number of people have joined in reading the bible in a year. From the conversations that I have had this has been a productive experience. I have had many comments from people about the new things they have learnt from reading through some of the books; especially Old Testament books that they have not read before. They have also realised what a rollercoaster of a ride the Israelites had with God as their leaders wavered in acknowledgment of who God was to them.

If you have never read through the Bible then I would encourage you to have a go. It is amazing what you can learn as you read through each book. Many of us followed the Alpha Bible in a Year with Nicky and Pippa, but there are many different bible schemes that you can use. So why not give it a go this year and see what God has for you.

Practicing the Way



Earlier in the year we ran the course Practicing the Way. This course on developing yourself through the spiritual disciplines is an important way of understanding how we can change and understand the tools that we can use to do it. The course was very successful and many of those who joined the course have experienced a new way of understanding themselves and their discipleship.

Coming up this year we would like to run the course again. This time, rather than run the course on an evening we have provisionally booked to start the course in May this year on a Saturday morning from 10am to 12pm. Please do pray and think if you would like to join this course and then watch out for more details after Easter.

The writers of Practicing the Way have also written some smaller four week courses on different aspects of the Spiritual Disciplines. We decided to run one of these starting on Tuesday March 11th in the Chapter House from 7.30pm. The course we have chosen is Sabbath. This mini course will cover four aspects: Stop, Rest, Delight, Worship

Sabbath Course



Sabbath is a twenty-four hour time period set aside to stop, rest, delight, and worship. It is the best day of the week. In our era of chronic exhaustion, emotional unhealth, and spiritual stagnation, few things are more necessary than the recovery of this ancient practice.

Watch out in Church for details of how to sign up. This course is open to everyone, even if you have not done the main Practicing the Way course, and will prove a valuable tool in helping you to slow down and spend time with God.