

PASTROW BENEFICE YEAR OF PRAYER 2017

APRIL - WHAT'S STOPPING US PRAYING?

Before sitting on a three-legged stool it's worth checking that all the legs are present and correct. In looking at our problems of praying it may help to explore them in the context of the three vital legs of our own 'stool of life' - Body, Mind and Spirit.

Body. Many struggle to pray because of illness, infirmity, chronic pain, or simply because they are exhausted by the demands of life, be they work or perhaps caring for others. Elderly people can feel worn out and unable to rise to the challenge of, 'Well you may not be able to do as much as you used to, but can always pray'. Then there's the mother trying to get her children ready for school, making sure they've had breakfast. Her prayer might only be, 'Thank you Lord that the children are well, please give me strength and patience, and please may the porridge not be lumpy'. Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, 'We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.' When we are exhausted, even groans will do.

Mind. We may think we should never have doubts, but do they seem part of the Christian experience for most people. The hymn writer Charlotte Elliot wrote, '.....though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt.' We can only refer to a few of the prayer blockages that might be in our minds:

If God has the whole universe to care for, why should he bother about me and my prayers?

Jesus uses really vivid illustrations to convince us of God's love and care for each one of us. He knows each sparrow that falls, and every hair on our head is numbered. There are still so many mysteries in life, such as aspects of bird migration and how people fall in love. We cannot comprehend the fullness of God's love - it remains a sacred mystery - but we can still accept it.

I don't know how to pray properly. Our programme of monthly teaching on prayer for the rest of the year will help you overcome this problem!

When praying I feel I'm talking to empty space. Most of us go through 'dry spells' and have mood swings, but we must not just depend on our feelings in life. God is always with us, however we feel and however silent we are. Cultivating a sense of thankfulness in our prayers, even if that's all we pray on occasions, will surely help us to be more aware of God's presence in our prayers.

God never seems to answer my prayers. Yes, wait, no - they are all answers to prayer, but do we hear the answers? Earthly parents know they have to say 'No' to their children at times, for good reasons. How much more does our heavenly Father know what is best for us. Even a 'Yes' answer may not appear clear cut at first. St Augustine's mother longed for her erring son to become a Christian and prayed that God would stop him from sailing to Italy with its tempting, licentious culture. God did not stop him, but in Italy he met St Ambrose and was converted! As Augustine noted, God granted not what Monica asked but what she had always desired. Waiting for an answer to prayer can be really difficult, but we should always remember that patience is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Our timing will never be God's timing. Waiting means patience.

Spirit. The very heart of the matter, our soul, the depth of our being, 'the real us' as the Lord sees us. Many people's lives are troubled by mental difficulties, almost permanent anxiety or depression that is not always recognised by others. Praying in these dark times can be very hard. In Psalm 139.v12 we read 'Darkness and light are the same to you'. God is with us in the darkness. If we can offer such sufferings to our Lord He may not take them away, but by grace we can be equipped to look beyond ourselves in our prayers.

Summary. Whether our prayer problems are linked to our Body, Mind or Spirit, we should never forget that God is with us and loves us. In God's hands our prayers, however weak they may seem to us, are never ever useless - particularly when they are prayed in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God our Father and allowing the Holy Spirit, our intercessor, to comfort, encourage and empower us at all times.