

# Personal Prayer



*"...whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:6).*

From time to time, a few of my hens go alone behind the shade-cloth curtain on our veranda, not to lay eggs, but just to sit in its folds. Later they emerge and resume their usual activities. I have no idea why they do this!

There are times when we, too, feel an urge to go alone into our inner room, wherever that may be, and pray to God. This is not just a selfish desire to sulk or lick our wounds when others hurt us, but rather a compulsion to turn to God, like the needle of a compass seeking magnetic north.

Praying may be something we do regularly each day. Or we pray because a person we know is troubled or desperately ill. Perhaps we need to articulate a painful event in a torrent of angry words and tears, blaming God and everyone, until we are empty, silent and still. At times a feeling of great thankfulness can drive us to prayer.

Praying, as we often experience it, is not always attractive. It may feel boring, or our thoughts are rushing in every direction requiring a picture, words, deep breathing or physical walking to focus our minds and bodies.

For whatever reason and in whatever state we enter our inner room to pray,

we can be certain that God is there, ready to hold us, listen to us, speak to us, forgive us and heal us, and those for whom we pray.

In Luke 3:21-22, after his baptism, we are told that “Jesus was praying and the heaven was opened”. . The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, and God spoke. Jesus, open to God in prayer, received the Spirit’s power and direction for carrying out God’s mission on earth.

When we are baptised and become members of the body of Christ, we are called to participate with Christ in that same mission of God; to reveal God’s love in actions and words where we are. Like Jesus, we are strengthened by God’s Spirit for this work - which includes prayer.

Sometimes we may not know how to pray or what to pray. In these situations Paul directs us to open ourselves to God and allow the Spirit to pray through us. Then, as it says in Romans 8:26-27, the Spirit “intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

When we lay ourselves open to God in prayer, we also open ourselves to God’s love for all creation and its needs. We start to see our world through God’s loving eyes, even the parts we want to reject or pretend do not exist.

As followers of Christ, we can no longer limit ourselves to caring just about the needs of our biological family or our church family. While praying, we find God’s whole created family, human and non-human, edging into our room with us and we begin to share in its joys, pain and suffering.

Through prayer, the Spirit unites us with Christ who enters our inner being and we are gradually changed. This change will often be a struggle as we are not always keen to give up self, die to what we want, for the sake of our neighbour. Strangely, and usually unknown to us, through our failures and successes, the unique person God created us to be develops as we give and receive God’s love with others.

Our room where we choose to pray may not be in a house. A friend of mine was told by the doctor that he had cancer and only a short time to live. He responded by returning home and going alone into his garden to pray.

On the night before he died, after the Last Supper, Jesus and his friends crossed the Kidron valley and entered the Garden of Gethsemane. Mark 14:35 tells us that Jesus left his disciples, even his three closest friends, and walked on a little further where he threw himself on the ground and prayed. It was not Jesus' friends, but the earth that physically held his body and supported him at this time.

For us, too, nature, perhaps a garden, a mountain top where Jesus sometimes went, or a beach looking out to sea may be where our relationships with God and God's creation merge.

Wherever and whenever we enter our inner room and shut the door for personal prayer, we find it is not a solitary affair. In that room we struggle with vying forces, and needy hands continually tug at us demanding attention. Such work could be too much for us except that God's Spirit is in us and around us, continually loving, supporting and strengthening us, bringing new life through death. Amazingly, when we leave our room, even if exhausted, we can experience peace.

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