

Prayer: command or gift of grace?

'To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing,' so says Martin Luther King. I am sure that we all agree with that statement and yet, for all kinds of reasons, we often struggle with prayer and consequently feel like someone struggling to breathe in a spiritual kind of way.

So what can we say about prayer to clarify our thinking? Well, if we take time to build it into our daily routine it becomes a way of life; it becomes as natural as breathing, something we do on a regular basis without having to make special plans. It doesn't need to have any particular structure; pray out loud or quietly; pray with others or alone; use formal prayers to direct and inform your thinking or just say what is in your heart, surely it is what is in our hearts and on our minds that God wants to hear?

Jesus has some useful advice for us when we consider how to pray. When his disciples asked for guidance he gave us an example which we generally call the 'Lord's prayer' and we can use this as a basic guide. **Say Father;** you are speaking to a Father God who loves you, who loves to hear and answer. **Ask for God's will to be done;** not just in our own lives but throughout God's community that we call the world. **Ask for forgiveness;** and also for help and direction in forgiving others and bringing his kingdom into our society through what we do. **Pray with faith;** believing wholeheartedly that your Heavenly Father desires to answer and bless not just 'us' but you.

In thinking of what to pray, one useful structure is **Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Intercession;** but there are no rules as such. Praise God for who He is to you. Confess your sins and ask for forgiveness. Give thanks to God for all the ways He has revealed His grace to you and provided for you. Bring the needs of others to God; bring also your concerns for the world and ask for his help in your own life.

Many people find speaking to God a lot simpler than listening, but for our prayer to be complete

it needs to be a two way dialogue; so how do we listen to God?

Reading the Bible gives God the opportunity to speak to us inwardly through His Spirit.

Meditation; spending time dwelling on a passage of the Bible will illuminate our thinking and deepen our understanding of what God is saying to us. **Silence;** God speaks to us in all kinds of ways and there are times when we need

to be still and wait for Him to speak to us personally. Remember to examine what you hear to ensure you have heard correctly. Check with scripture or talk with someone you can trust.

So what about answers to prayer? Well, there are a few common reasons why our prayers don't 'deliver the goods'. **We need to confess our sin** first or God may 'put us on hold' until we get around to it. **We need to be willing to forgive others;** yes, it

may be a struggle to forgive but we need to start the process at least. **Unbelief** is another big issue, if we don't believe God can or will answer then we are starting from the wrong place. **We need to seek God's will** for our future rather than the progression of our (often limited) plans. **Acceptance of God's will;** sometimes the answer passes us by because it isn't what we want, or maybe it is just that God is saying 'wait' or 'no'. **Persistence is sometimes required;** there are many testimonies of people praying for a long time before the answer comes. Once again, this is part of our acceptance of God's will and our trust in Him come what may.

Going further. Why not pray with others? Pray with a close friend or maybe form a 'prayer triplet', a small group works really well for most people. Husbands and wives are powerful prayer partners. Pray with someone at the end of a church service. Join in prayer at small group meetings.

Yes God commands prayer, He wants to talk; and yes, it is a wonderful gift of grace.

Adapted from the church booklet on prayer – see the welcome desk for this and other titles.

A note from Bethan

I can by no means believe that it is approaching a year since I joined the congregation and the team at Thornbury Baptist Church, but what a great year I have had. I have been involved in so much, both with the children and young people in particular, and it has just been a real privilege for me to be a part of a church who values so highly their commitment to sharing the Gospel, to whoever, regardless of age, gender and background.

I have been heavily involved with the children's work this year, in running and coordinating both Xstreme and Adventurers, and it is just such an encouragement when these young children have such a real and mature faith in the Lord, and I get to teach them more of his word.

Through being involved in the youth work though, particularly the outreach work that happens on Thursday and Friday evenings at the cafes, I have seen kids grow in new wholeness, both spiritually, socially, physically and emotionally. One girl for example comes faithfully to Attic Café, however she does have physical disabilities. When I first joined to church, she could not say very many words at all, perhaps even just "yes" and "no", but throughout the year, and through being a part of the group at Attic, she is able to have rather intelligible conversations that were once never possible. The other week she was sharing with me some of what she was going through, and as she got upset, and quite tearful, God gave me the opportunity to cry with her, just as He is doing. He is the God of the broken, and I pray that both you and I will never forget that.

I have been so fervently reminded this past year in Thornbury of what such an awesome responsibility we have in teaching the very word of God, and it's a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. However, what I have seen demonstrated here at TBC is an urge to do it right, to teach those within the congregation particularly, the Bible as it is, and I have been greatly encouraged to take heed of it. I hope you are too.

Like all things this year has had its highs and lows, and has brought many challenges to me that I honestly never thought I would face, but through it all God has still been God, and well, I am here to baring witness of that.

Thank you for your extreme generosity in welcoming me to your fellowship here, it has

been a year that I know will greatly influence many years to come.

Bethan Perry

The Community Week.

The first week of the school holiday was packed full of fun activities for children ranging from ever excitable toddlers to the rather more collected, although nonetheless excitable teenagers. What better way to start the school holiday than with the Thornbury Together Community Week! Every morning, from Tuesday to Friday, the *Fun Factory* took place in the Church building for children aged 2 to 7. With a wide range of exciting activities; dramas worthy of an Oscar (well almost!) and a catchy theme tune that stubbornly refused to leave your head every single day! The Fun Factory proved to be a remarkable hit amongst children and parents alike.

Similarly, the daily *Kidz Roadshows* were a huge success. Thankfully, the weather held out-just! It was great to see children and parents returning day after day. Face painting and painting finger nails, balloon modelling and games such as rounders and football were amongst the activities held on the Green at Streamleaze, not forgetting of course, the daily Bible story that ended each morning, giving both the children and the parents something to think about.



Each evening, as part of the Community Week, 'Basement Café' was held for years 7 to 9 from 7.00 to 8.30 pm and then immediately afterwards 'Attic Café' catered for years 10 upwards. As the week progressed the numbers at the 'Cafés' steadily increased; a great time was had with each evening consisting of games, tuck, laughter and chill! Indeed

one of the highlights of Attic Café was a particularly memorable game of Signs and later Charades.

The final event of this year's Community Week was the very popular Friday night barbeque. A fantastic turnout from both the children and adults who'd been at the events of the Community Week who enjoyed some more superb entertainment and crafts and of course the all important barbeque itself. It all made Friday night an evening that helped cement the relationship of Thornbury Baptist Church with the wider community in Thornbury.

Throughout the week, the Thornbury Together Team members, clad in their timeless (and highly visible!) canary yellow T-shirts were able to start

and build up relationships with the children and parents in Thornbury who are not familiar with the Church or with who we are. These relationships are very important; for it is through them and the continuing commitment and hard work of everyone involved with events like Thornbury Together, that we can show God's love to every member of the Community in Thornbury.



Sarah and Will James.

Missionary retreats in the French Alps

JillMary Thomas, a massage therapist, recently attended a missionary retreat in the French Alps. The retreat was a ten day holiday for missionaries organised by a small company called 'Heart Stream'. The programme, called 'Refresh' is quite varied comprising talks on conflict resolution, stress management, communication skills, maintaining spiritual vitality and much more. There is also fun in art, music and days out. Children are welcome and very well catered for. You may know missionaries who would benefit from such a retreat. For more details visit the Heart Stream web site at www.heartstreamresources.org.

Here is her account of her time there

One day at the beginning of May, I had a phone call from Terry, the leader of my former house group in Bristol. He had met the director of 'Heartstream' who runs healing retreats for missionaries and they needed a masseur for 'Refresh' in the French Alps. Terry suggested me and was now asking me to pray about going! I would be the only person from the UK and wouldn't know anyone! I prayed and felt God was saying 'yes go' So I rang the director in the US and after our conversation I said, 'Yes I'll be there.' Now I had a problem, pain in both arms and right shoulder (repetitive strain from too much gardening!). Everywhere I went I asked people to pray, then my pelvis went out of alignment. Terry's wife prayed I would definitely be ok when I laid hands on the first person so I ignored the pain and trusted God because I knew he wanted me to go. The miracle was that I did 21 sessions in eight days (far beyond anything I've ever done). The

Christians and their churches in Thornbury have shown that they contribute voluntary hours valued at up to £1,850,000 each year

Father mightily sustained me. I was free from pain and any restrictions. I also had the privilege of praying with each one before the massage. Now I'm back I feel I want to give free massages to those in need. So do contact me please!

Faith Action Audit

You may remember filling in a very simple questionnaire earlier this year asking about any ways that you are involved in voluntary work. The reason for this was that Thornbury Churches Together had commissioned the production of a Faith Action Audit for Thornbury. The purpose of this work was to establish the work undertaken by the Christian community for the benefit of the wider community, to celebrate successes and to identify ways of working better together both within and outside of the churches. It is also hoped that this will encourage organisations such as the local councils to consider the views of the churches when making policies, knowing that their members are so important in the life of Thornbury and beyond. And that was before David Cameron had announced his ideas of the Big Society!

The Faith Action Audit revealed much about the extent of the voluntary work of Thornbury's churches undertaken for the benefit of others. Of the total of 319 individuals who completed questionnaires, over 85% are involved in volunteering, contributing at least 936 hours of formal and informal voluntary work every week. Christians and their churches have shown that they contribute voluntary hours valued at up to £1,850,000 each year, and that the benefit of this work is felt at local, regional, national and international level. In addition, the church halls in Thornbury are used by many local organizations and groups for community activities. The Town Council is dominated by people

attached to one of the churches and without the churches and church members the provision of activities for children and young people in Thornbury would be sparse. All these are points for celebration.

Yet Thornbury's churches have the capacity to give more and the challenge is to make the best use of the gifts and talents of individuals who are prepared to give up their time for others. It is hoped that over the next few months we can begin to address this challenge and show God's love for our community and world.

If you would like to read all the findings of the Faith Action Audit you can access it on the church web site or speak to Sally Heath.

Church Calendar: September 2010 to November 2010

September

Sunday 5

11.00am Community service and meal, David Lawrence
6.30pm Sally Heath

Monday 6

7.30pm TCT Prayer Event at TBC

Friday 10 to Sunday 12

Men's walking weekend

Saturday 11

8.00am Men's breakfast

Sunday 12

9.15/11.00am Children & Youth Recognition Service
Paul Ferguson, Who do you say I am?
6.30pm Neil Mobbs

Monday 13

2.00pm Inside out, games and tea at the Mawson's

Thursday 16

8.00pm Prayer evening

Sunday 19

9.15/11.00am Mary Groves, Cross-shaped lives
6.30pm David Ling

Sunday 26

9.15/11.00am Nigel Coles
6.30pm Malaysia & Kenya feedback

October

Sunday 3

11.00am Community Service & meal, Stuart Dallison
6.30pm Bulgaria Feedback

Wednesday 6

8.00pm Family Forum

Saturday 9

7.45am Men's Breakfast

Sunday 10

9.15/11.00am Harvest Service, Paul Ferguson
6.30pm Sally Heath

Monday 11

1.00pm Inside Out - visit to Dyrham Park

Sunday 17

9.15/11.00am Terry Wicks
6.30pm Ian Taylor

Thursday 21

8.00pm Prayer Evening

Sunday 24

9.15/11.00am Ken McGreavey
6.30pm Celebration evening with Ken McGreavey

Sunday 31

9.15am All age service, Mike Levy
11.00am Mike Levy
6.30pm Mary Groves

November

Sunday 7

11.00am Community Service & meal, Philip Jinadu
6.30pm Terry Wicks

Monday 8

Inside Out - talk on Boots plc

Saturday 13

7.45am Men's Breakfast
10.00am Christian Dance Fellowship Day

Sunday 14

9.15/11.00am Remembrance Sunday, Michael Wood
6.30pm Speaker to be confirmed

Thursday 18

8.00pm Prayer evening

Sunday 21

9.15/11.00am Dave Day
6.30pm David Ling

Sunday 28

9.15/11.00am David Lawrence
6.30pm Peter Hatton