



Rhythms of prayer

1. Introduction:

Our aim is to **give God the glory that is due His name!**

In Habakkuk 2.14 we read that *the earth will be **filled** with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord*, in the same way that waters fill the sea. This is the scope of our praying! Each and every tribe and people group has a distinct and unique sound of worship to bring to God.

We are *all* life long learners in prayer! God loves to hear our prayers, whether we are praying for **five minutes, twenty-five minutes or five hours!** When we pray we enter into the presence and purposes of Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and yet it can be as natural to us as breathing.

When we pray, we interact with the conversations of heaven - sometimes listening, sometimes speaking. We don't need to worry about what to say or how to say it, Romans 8.26-7 tells us *And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.*

Prayer is always on God's agenda - it's the best way of getting to know Him! Scripture makes it clear that prayer is our responsibility - and also gives us some weighty challenges! If we look at Jesus' words only, it sounds so easy — but I expect most of us have grappled with the feeling that our prayers seem not to be getting anywhere. It's when we consider Jesus' *lifestyle* we begin to see the keys to unlocking the power and authority He has given us in prayer.

Jesus lived a life of prayer. He would seek out quiet places to pray - often overnight, or getting up before dawn to spend time with his heavenly Father. It was this that fuelled his long sessions of healing and deliverance ministry when whole communities would bring all their friends and families to him.

And the garden of Gethsemane we read of him wrestling in deep, agonising prayer - Hebrews 5.7 says that *Jesus learned obedience through the things that He suffered.* It is beyond our grasp to understand that Jesus needed to learn obedience.....If He did so, *how much more* do I?

Today I want to ask two questions about following Jesus' example in prayer:

- **How can we establish a sustainable rhythm of prayer in our own lives and as a church family together in All Nations?**
- **How can we be sure that our prayers are effective?**

2. How do we establish a rhythm of prayer?

- Rhythm and order are intrinsic to creation: Gen 8.22 *As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.'*
- Right from the womb, our lives have been lived within a framework of gentle but persistent rhythms: heartbeat, breathing, walking - we are so used to them that we rarely focus on them.
- I love to observe the rhythms of the tide - always moving, ebbing and flowing, drawn by the moon's gravity.
- We can see purpose behind the different seasons: eg plants and seeds need a period of cold and dormancy before they are able to flourish and multiply. Cold and dark periods in our own lives can seem bewildering - yet both darkness and cold have their place in the cycles of the natural world. Could it be that God has given us the ebb and flow of these natural rhythms to help us understand that we will have seasons of sorrows and difficulty in this earthly life? For centuries people have watched for the dawn and

Scripture uses this powerful image prophetically about Jesus first and second coming - Zechariah, *The dawn from on high will break upon us.....* Psalms 57 and 108 talk about awakening the dawn..... hope rises when Light comes. We can learn so much about God's ways through observing the natural world.

- Our daily, weekly, yearly **routines** can also be an echo of God's rhythm in creation - the writer of Ecclesiastes tells us, *"There is a time for everything under the sun."*
- 18 months ago when Prayer Hub was in the planning stage, I was feeling very challenged about night prayer. As always when faced with a challenge, we need to ask God for the grace to push through. It's no use trying to push through in our own strength and determination - we just get worn out.
- But In order to live this way for the long haul, each of us needs to find a rhythm that is sustainable - it's essential we ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom in this - and let's be aware that there is always an agenda to stop us from praying.
- Throughout the centuries the people of God have developed rhythms of prayer - and in today's hectic, digital age, many disciple of Jesus are turning back to the order and beauty of some of these ancient practices. In addition to long established faith communities (monasteries, convents, abbeys, priories) some contemporary communities and houses of prayer are now following this pattern. At Ffald y Brenin, eg, there are four daily prayer times - morning, midday, evening and night - described on their website as 'the **pulse** of life that shapes our day and our life.' Or Northumbria Community. Each community's rhythm of prayer/worship/work/silence/eating/creativity is known as a **rule** - not in the sense of "You must keep the rules" but rather in seeing the pattern as a **ruler** which keeps us on a straight path.
- Let's consider our own rhythms. Even more than how we spend our money, how we spend our time is a strong indicator of what we prioritise in our

lives. It is entirely up to each one of us *how* we will use the 24 hours a day, seven days and nights a week that we all have at our disposal. What's the pace like in our own lives? Are we always fighting the clock?

- Let's not forget that one of God's gifts to us is **Sabbath rest!** Psalm 95 and Hebrew 4. Time to be refreshed and recreated in God's presence - time to be alone with Him in the secret place; special times with friends and family; time for hobbies, exercise, fun and enjoyment - Pete Grieg, *Dirty Glory*:
"Jesus had just three years to save the planet, yet he still made time for parties, picnics and fishing trips."

Sabbath is an essential part of our rhythm - a time of joy, creativity, glorying in God and all he has given us. I like the phrase **Pray and Play**.

- So I would encourage us all to take some time out to review our lives and ask ourselves
 - **Is time my servant or my master?**
 - **Am I constantly rushing around....?** *Ruthlessly eliminate hurry.*
 - **Is Sabbath a regular part of my rhythm?** If not, we will discover that our rhythm is not sustainable for the long haul. The OT penalty for breaking Sabbath was death..... if we ignore God's rhythms for our lives, perhaps we are unconsciously inviting illness, stress and even premature death? Let's make the **choice** to accept Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11.28-30, *"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."*

A formative time in All Nations: what we build now into our own lives and into the AN movement will take root and grow.

- God is calling us to develop rhythms of prayer - in several contexts: praying at home, here in our Prayer Hub, prayer walking the streets and city wide prayer! When with us last year, Dr Sharon Stone said "God is looking for dark places on the earth from where He can blaze out His glory!" He looks for people who will stand in the gap on behalf of our neighbourhoods, cities

and nations. (Ezekiel 22. 30 *And I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one.*) God is calling His people right across the globe to pray. There are an estimated 20,000 places of 24/7 prayer across the globe! It is only in prayer that we win spiritual battles and take territory for His Kingdom! Jesus said we are the salt of the earth - salt was used to prolong the life of food and make it acceptable for eating; we are here to make the earth acceptable to God - to cry holy holy holy, to live lives that express worship and adoration for Him in every waking moment.

- We were encouraged by Pastor Lawrence Neisent in August who said this is a sharp spiritual atmosphere! A place where God's people have two edged swords in their mouths. Psalm 144 says that the high praises of God will be in our mouths and two edged swords in our hands. By embracing the AN rhythm of 21 days of prayer and fasting in September and in January, we invite the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. Fasting increases our appetite for the work of God in our lives. I don't know anyone who loves the actual going hungry - but I do know plenty of people who love the grace and spiritual strength that comes into our lives when we seek God like this. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us plan wisely - and let's live intentionally, seeking first God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

3. How do we ensure that our prayer is effective?

So, how did Jesus pray? How does He pray for us now? In the gospels we find many helpful keys to effective prayer:

Matt 21.22 Jesus, *"and all things whatever you ask in prayer **believing**, you will receive.* **We need to have faith.**

John 15.7 Jesus, ***if you abide in me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you.*** **We need to live close to Jesus and to know His Word.**

1 John 5.14-5 *And this is the confidence we have in him, that if we ask anything **according to his will**, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears*

us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. So we need to know God's will - and to have faith in His goodness.....
List them again: faith; staying connected to Jesus; knowing God's Word and His will and we need to trust that He is a good God.

Faith: In Matt 17 Jesus gives us really good news - our faith only has to be the size of a grain of mustard!

While Peter, James and John were witnessing the glorious revelation of Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration, some of the disciples were experiencing a tussle with a demon. As soon as they descend the mountain, they are met by the other disciples who are perplexed - and probably also feeling desperate because they couldn't bring healing and deliverance to this boy.

Matt 17.14-20 At the foot of the mountain, a large crowd was waiting for them. A man came and knelt before Jesus and said, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son. He has seizures and suffers terribly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. 16 So I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't heal him." 17 Jesus said, "You faithless and corrupt people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." 18 Then Jesus rebuked the demon in the boy, and it left him. From that moment the boy was well.

19 Afterward the disciples asked Jesus privately, "Why couldn't we cast out that demon?"

20 "You don't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible."

Strong talk from Jesus was not good for the disciples' self esteem! Perhaps their faith was based on past successes, or a miracle rather than in Jesus - Jesus makes it clear that nothing is impossible IF our faith is in Him! Our faith is in an infinitely large God! **It's Him doing the work, not our faith.**

Faith is a gift from God - we ask for it.

This narrative is also found in Mark 9 and interestingly, he records another answer given by Jesus - this one tells us more about abiding in Him.

In v29 of Mark 9 we read Jesus' words: *"This kind can be cast out only by prayer."* (OR prayer and fasting). Jesus cast the demon out straight away - he didn't need three days of prayer and fasting right there and then, because he lived in a rhythm of prayer and fasting. When we live like this, we get to know our Father and His will - our prayers are effective because we abide in His Word - in Jesus the Living Word.

The letter of James teaches us about a lifestyle of effective prayer:

James 5. 13-18

Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. 14 Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.

16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. 17 Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! 18 Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

Elijah was just like us - so we can pray the same.

James gives some guidelines for lives of prayer:

- we pray in whatever circumstances we find ourselves - all the time!
- we ask each other for prayer when we are sick
- we confess our sins to each other - in 'authentic community' we trust each other enough to share our weaknesses and to ask for help in overcoming them, to be accountable to each other.

Deep friendships with just a few people who know the worst there is to know about us, and love us, will provide a priceless foundation of **security** in our lives - and if we choose to live in humility and vulnerability like this, we can even hasten the day of his coming, see 2 Peter 3.12.

For inspiration regarding the potential effectiveness of our prayers, I recommend reading Daniel and Acts 12.

Derek Prince: *“The most influential people on earth today are those who know how to get their prayers answered - because they can release the omnipotence of God into situations.”* I want to be one of those!

Pastor Steve took us to the dramatic events of Acts 12 last week. King Herod has a high profile church leader murdered, then imprisons another one - who escapes miraculously because of the prayers the church; then Herod himself is killed by an angel because he fails to acknowledge God. Acts 12:24 *“But the word of God continued to advance and multiply.”*

Herod was on the throne - but who was really ruling in Palestine ?

- Let's ask ourselves:
 - are my prayers self centred?
 - are we willing to let God expand our horizons and pray together as history makers?
- Part of our calling is to pray for governments and all in authority: *1 Tim 2.1-4*
I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.

What about us today:

- do we have good government? (we are not taking sides in politics!)
- do I complain about the government?
- do I pray for the government - not just of the UK but of other nations
- is it possible that as God's people in this land we have failed to fulfil our calling to pray?

Let's pray like Paul, Timothy and the Early Church so that Christians may live godly lives and the gospel may flourish.

God has a global vision: for **all** people to make their peace with Him!

- Genesis 12.3, God to Abraham, “.....in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” - Isaiah 11.9, MSG, *The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide*
- Matt 28, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.....*

Let's think big and pray big!

Our calling is not just to pray of course - but to put prayer into action. In Proverbs 31 we read: *Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.*

To quote Pete Grieg again, ***Our calling....is certainly to seek God's presence in prayer and it is to proclaim God's presence in mission but it is also to recognise His presence in the poor....***

Daniel Cronshaw, in *Dangerous Prayer*: *'around the world and in our own neighbourhoods we do not have to look too far to see the suffering of things messed up and in need of restoration. It is estimated that 200 million Christians face the persecution of prison, torture and death for professing their faith. Upwards of 34 million people are enslaved in one form or another, including more than a million children each year trafficked for sex or labour. Wars are started and fought on religious grounds (or ethnic grounds presented in religious guise). About 21,000 children die of starvation daily. 805 million people struggle with hunger and 1.2 billion live in extreme poverty. Over 80% of modern war casualties are civilians.Of the world's 7 billion people, 3 billion are in unreached people groups with minimal opportunity to hear the gospel. What is going on in the world that Jesus came to restore? Do you feel that pain?'*

Evangelist Carlos Anacondia, when he was here in Wolverhampton in June, told us that his life changed when, as a new Christian at the age of 35, he saw a vision of our earth, the globe, shaped as a beating heart - but heaving with sobs. He spoke to us as leaders and intercessors and said **“God needs your tears.”**

Yes, we pray from the position of hope and victory - but as we pray about the needs of the world around us, we begin to grieve with Him, to touch some of the pain and anguish in God's heart. When we pray like this in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are praying the prayers of heaven.

- If we seek God like this, we will see Him move in our communities and nations.