

**Synod of the Diocese of Yukon  
October 12 -14, 2012**

**Prayer by The Rev. Rob Langmaid**

Prayer is a key element of the Christian life. Some have said that it is the fuel that allows a Christian to keep moving forward. The question is, “What is prayer?” At its base level, prayer is conversation with God. Sometimes this conversation is formal, sometimes it is informal. Sometimes the conversation is just between you and God, and sometimes an entire congregation prays together, having a communal conversation with God. Prayer is a key mark of being a follower of Jesus.

When Jesus was teaching during his sermon on the mount, he mentioned prayer. Looking at Matthew 6:5-15, we learn about some of Jesus' thoughts on prayer. He said, “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Of key importance here is that Jesus, speaking to His followers, says *when* you pray. Not *if* you pray, but *when* you pray. Jesus assumed that his followers would pray. Thus, there is an expectation that, as followers of Jesus, we will pray. So what are some principles of prayer that would be helpful for us to practice?

The first principle is to pray regularly. The more often you pray, the more familiar you will become with prayer, and ultimately, with God to whom you are praying.<sup>1</sup> The second principle is that we need to take time to pray privately. That is, we need to pray when it is just us and God with no distractions around. It is helpful if you can pray in the same place every day. When you are comfortable with your prayer environment, there are less distractions.<sup>2</sup>

Another key principle is that you don't need to keep repeating the same thing over and over again. Prayer is conversation with God, it is not a magic formula. We don't pray to impress God or others. Instead, we pray so that we can express our needs to God and so that we can hear from him. We pray so that we grow close to God.

Let's take a look some different ways we can pray as we grow closer to God. The first way we might pray is through formal prayers. As Anglicans, we are likely very familiar with formal prayer. When we attend Church, much of the service consists of formal prayer. Our collects, our confessions, the prayers of the people and our Eucharistic prayers are all very good prayers, and they can be used to connect with God. They help us remind ourselves of God's truth, and they help us to have a conversation with God. Formal prayers can also be used as part of your personal prayer time. Both the BAS and the BCP have what are called the daily offices. These include prayers for Morning, Mid-day and Night. In the BAS these are found starting at page 45, while in the BCP they start on page 4. I find the daily office prayers helpful. They allow me to pray when I can't think of what to pray. I also find them helpful when my mind is racing to and fro and I cannot seem to focus on anything, yet I still desire to pray and focus on God. Praying the offices, I can focus on God and use the words of the

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Chesterton, *Starting at the Beginning*, (Toronto, Canada: Anglican Book Centre, 2004), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Chesterton, p. 80.

prayers to block out distractions. I encourage you, if you are not familiar with prayer but would like to start praying on a regular basis, to consider praying at least one, if not more of the daily offices, to draw closer to God.

Now, there is more to prayer than just formal prayer. Let's look at a few different types of informal prayer. To start, we'll look at simple, conversational prayer. In this type of prayer, you talk to God as you would talk to a friend who is right beside you. In conversational prayer, you can talk to God about what is going on in your life, what you feel you need, what you feel others in your life need, tell him about your thoughts and emotions. In this type of prayer, it can be like talking to your best friend. You can talk to God in the midst of your daily activities. You don't need to close your eyes or fold your hands or kneel, though you can if these things help you to pray. However, if you are driving while you pray, then **please keep your eyes open**. I encourage you try conversational prayer as you go about your day.

Another type of prayer we'll discuss is contemplative prayer. As I said at the start, prayer, at its heart, is having a conversation with God. Sometimes, when we have a conversation, we spend more time listening than talking. Contemplative prayer is the art of listening to God, and there are many ways to do this listening. I have found two methods to be especially effective. One way I listen to God is by journaling. With this form of prayer I usually start by asking God to guard my thoughts and to speak to me. Then I spend some time in silence, and start to write down everything that comes into my head. After a few minutes, I stop, read over what was written, and ask God to show me what he was trying to say. I also ask him to help me ignore what just came out of my own head. Normally, I will then ask the Lord to bring parts of the Bible to mind that agree with what I felt him speaking to me as I wrote. This has been a very helpful discipline in my prayer life. I invite you to try this method of prayer, perhaps just one page at a time, to see if God speaks to you through it.

A second type of contemplative prayer that I have found very effective is to sit in a comfortable position in a quiet space, with closed eyes, and focus on Jesus, inviting his presence to fill me. Anytime I feel my mind wander, I say this simple phrase, "Jesus, I love you", to refocus my mind on Him. After some time with Jesus I thank Him for his presence, and I feel ready to continue with the rest of my day. I encourage you to attempt this type of prayer, even if you can only do it for a minute at first. As you grow used to this type of silent prayer, you can extend your time to 5, 10, 15 minutes or however long the Lord leads you.

I hope you will be able to take some things away from this to apply to your own prayer life. First, prayer can be formal, such as in the daily offices, or informal such as in conversational prayer. Second, prayer is key to our lives as Christians. Third, I encourage you to make prayer part of your daily life, trying out different methods of prayer to help you connect with God, whether they be the daily offices, conversational prayer, journaling, or prayer of silence. For further reading about prayer, I strongly suggest a book by Richard Forster entitled *Prayer*.

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