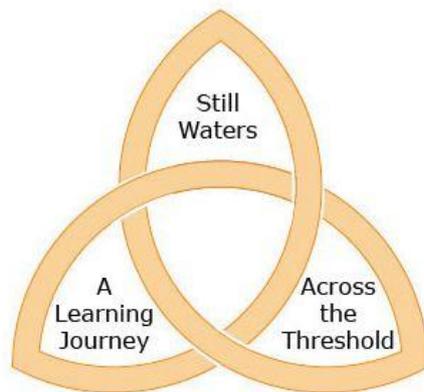


AN
introduction
to
PRAYER



Introduction



In its simplest definition prayer is a conversation between the one who is praying and the one to whom those prayers is directed.

Prayer can take many forms, and encompass the whole range of poetic and literary styles. It can be a cry for help or a cry of joy. It can be a single word or a symphony of prose.

Pope John Paul II is quoted as follows on the difficulty of praying. "How to pray? This is a simple matter. I would say: Pray any way you like, so long as you do pray."

Prayers can be individual or corporate, liturgical or extemporary. They can be short or long, simple or complex in language. In fact words are not always necessary, for we have the promise that when words fail us the Spirit will intercede for us with the most intimate prayers of our heart.

Living for some years in Wales and being aware of the interest and influence of the early Celtic Church within this land, it is difficult not to be influenced by the vision and prayer life of the early Christian saints. To the Celtic Church their God was a personal and loving God totally involved in the whole of the Created world, which He had breathed into existence.

The Celts knew that their God was involved totally in all of His Creation. They held firm to a belief in the incarnation and the knowledge that Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again from death to show the great Love of God for His Creation, and indeed for all of us, His creatures

Michael Mitton in his excellent book 'Restoring the Woven Cord' talks of the Celts' love of wholeness, and how they wove together the various strands of their faith into a most effective cord for ministry and mission. Mitton suggests that over the centuries the Church has picked and chosen from these strands, ignoring, losing and then re-discovering lost strands as if they were the most important strand of all.

As a result, the original Cord and the effectiveness of the Church in its mission has become weaker. The strands of the Celtic cord which Mitton emphasises are holiness, a love of the Bible, the importance of children, community, creation, creativity, death, evangelism, healing and miracles, the Ministry of Women, prayer, prophesy, spiritual warfare and the Wild Goose (the Holy Spirit)

It is my opinion that the early Church in this land was in some ways much closer to the heart of God than our current denominational jumble sale. We can pick and choose as we would sweets in a market stall - there's something for everyone.

But the strength of the Church is surely in a weaving together of all the strands of our Christian faith - One Church, One Faith, One Lord.

I started this introduction by stating that at its simplest prayer is a conversation, and conversations are rarely one-sided. Within our time of prayer needs to be the silence that enables God to contribute.

David Adam says of silence 'It is not an empty time but a God-filled time.' 'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer'

The Components of our Prayer

'The Lord said:

I heard your prayer and what you asked me to do'

(1 Kings 9:3)

If we are going to be creative in our prayer time then I do not feel that there should be too many hard and fast rules about the format and content. We are all individuals with our own thoughts about style and content, and this 'individuality ' can bring a freshness and vitality into a time spent talking and listening to God.

A structured prayer time is a more familiar in some denominations than others, who perhaps prefer extemporaneous prayer or an element of congregational participation by way of a time of 'open prayer'. Both are equally valid.

However, within the context of our collective worship there are certain elements that it would seem right to include, in order that our prayers are not seen to be too narrow in their aspirations.

These can be represented by the acronym A.C.T.S.

(i) ADORATION: Our prayer of adoration is one that is centred entirely on God. It is our expression of praise for all that God is - His holiness, majesty, love and greatness.

It's that mountaintop experience of being in the presence of the Creator of all that you see around you, or sitting through a truly wonderful performance of a sacred work which has transported your soul to another plain. Perhaps you see what I'm trying to explain?

Adoration comes from the heart, from our emotions; it's an expression of

our inmost feelings.

(ii) **CONFESSION:** An awareness of God's presence within our worship naturally leads on to a feeling of our own unworthiness. In confession we acknowledge what we are and ask for forgiveness.

If these prayers are part of an act of public worship then it is appropriate to express the Christian conviction that we all share in the sin of humankind.

Any prayer of confession should properly express our belief that God offers the promise of forgiveness.

(iii) **THANKSGIVING:** Often lost within the package of prayer offered within worship is thanksgiving. It gets confused with adoration or simply ignored as prayers focus on intercession.

It is only right and proper that we should thank God for all that he has done. For the beauty of this world which he created, for the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the promise of the Holy Spirit, his continuing creativity in the world today and for the Church - his body here on earth.

(iv) **SILENCE:** Silence is important, in that it allows us time to digest all that has been said through prayer. It gives us precious time within worship to let our hearts talk and our mouths stay silent.

As David Adam says 'It is not an empty time but a God-filled time when we open ourselves up to him.

A time of silence enables those worshipping to 'own' the prayers and make them their own. It also allows for active participation for those who would not feel able to contribute vocally.

Within the context of an act of worship there is often time set aside for intercessory prayer, and this naturally arises as a response to the hearing of God's word.

When we pray for others, we are adding our pleas to Christ's perfect prayer for the whole world.

'Christ Jesus...is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us'

The Pattern of Prayer in the Early Church



It might be assumed that worship in the early Christian Church was fairly spontaneous, used as we are to seeing perhaps the occasional poetic prayer attributed to St Patrick or his contemporaries. We might also think that set orders of service are a relatively modern introduction. Actually, this is not the case, certainly for congregational acts of worship.

We have to remember that the earliest Christians were Jews who were already familiar with a long tradition of worship which was liturgical in style (following a set order of service appropriate to the season). As time passed, and Christianity extended throughout the Roman Empire, approved liturgies were

refined, albeit with a little local flavour added when used at a distance from Rome.

The influence of Rome is apparent throughout the early worship of the Church. This makes sense if you consider that the first Christians in Britain were probably to be found among the soldiers garrisoned in the country after it was conquered by the Romans in the first century, or among the traders from the lands about the Mediterranean who came here at that time.

So we find that Christians in the early centuries after the birth of the Church generally followed patterns of worship developed from those which they found within their Jewish heritage, although it was the Eucharist, or Holy Communion that was at the centre of Christian worship, following the pattern of Jesus himself at the Last Supper.

The earliest references that we have to a pattern of Christian daily prayer is that of praying three times a day, and it comes from the Didache , written toward the end of the first century. It states that the Lord's Prayer should be said three times a day, but does not say at which times. Later, the pattern of praying at the third, sixth and ninth hour of the day became established (with arguments from Scripture). Origen, in the third century recommended another session or prayer in the evening.

It is likely that some rural communities followed the natural rhythm of the day, praying morning, noon and evening (their lives determined by the movements of the sun), whilst others in the towns kept more strictly to

the third, sixth and ninth hours. Psalms and hymns if used were associated with communal meals.

By the fourth century the Church was praying together more often than individually and along with the prayers are found psalms and hymns. Psalms 148-150 are associated with morning prayers each day in the week and Psalm 141 in the evening.

A division of sorts is suggested between what is often called the 'cathedral' style of daily office upon which Catholic and Protestant churches still use today and that of the 'monastic' pattern of worship developed in the fourth century, as there are differences not only in the external form of worship but also on the spiritual emphasis of both.

The Lord bless you and keep you.
May He show His face to you and have mercy.
May He turn His countenance to you and give you peace.
The Lord bless you!
(*A prayer of St. Francis*)

Prayer in the Desert



We have considered the Christians who made their home in desert places and led an austere and monastic life. At the heart of monasticism was separation - surrendering of earthly riches and temptation and entering into a community of meditation and prayer.

Those who had committed their lives to one of monastic solitude in desert or wilderness places tended to favour a pattern of prayer which followed the Apostolic call in 1 Thess. 5:17 to 'Pray without ceasing.' And they took this literally, stopping only for the briefest time to sleep and eat. They prayed while they worked and worked while they prayed, from dawn until

nighttimes, whether involved in daily chores such as milking cows, preparing meals, or tending crops. Columba had the reputation he would not spend one hour without including study, prayer or writing.

There is an apocryphal tale of Saint Cuthbert and some of his companions shipwrecked on an uninhabited beach. Beginning to fade of hunger, Cuthbert encouraged his companions to pray, saying "Let us storm heaven with prayers!" Soon after this they came across 3 cuts of dolphin meat, looking like they had been prepared by human hands, which they ate.

In their prayers Christians reflected on the mighty works of God and prayed for spiritual growth and personal salvation. They prayed using the Psalms, particularly when praying together. Listen to the words of St Patrick, whose background was in the monastic movement.

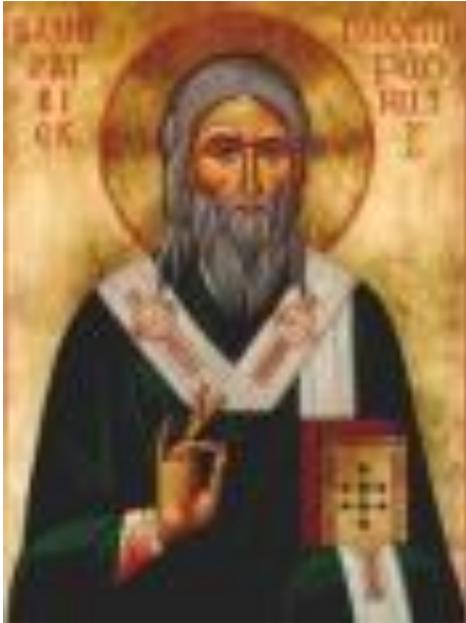
"I prayed frequently during the day. The love of God and the fear of Him increased more and more and faith became stronger and the Spirit was stirred, the Spirit was then fervent within me." Within the monastic communities rules of life were developed, such as that of the fifth century St. Benedict and our own, rule of St Columba.

Traditionally, the daily life of the Benedictine revolved around the eight canonical hours. The monastic timetable or Horarium would begin at midnight with the service, or "office", of Matins (today also called the Office of Readings), followed by the morning office of Lauds at 3am. Before the advent of wax candles in the 14th century, this office was said in the dark or with minimal lighting; and monks were expected to memorise everything.

These services could be very long, sometimes lasting till dawn, but usually consisted of a chant, three antiphons, three psalms, and three lessons, along with celebrations of any local saints' days. Afterwards the monks would retire for a few hours of sleep and then rise at 6am to wash and attend the office of Prime. They then gathered in Chapter to receive instructions for the day and to attend to any judicial business.

Then came private Mass or spiritual reading or work until 9am when the office of Terce was said, and then High Mass. At noon came the office of Sext and the midday meal. After a brief period of communal recreation, the monk could retire to rest until the office of None at 3pm. This was followed by farming and housekeeping work until after twilight, the evening prayer of Vespers at 6pm, then the night prayer of Compline at 9pm, and off to blessed bed before beginning the cycle again.

A Celtic Liturgical Style?



Those who belong to mainstream denominations may be used to following a weekly pattern of liturgy comprising at the very least of morning and evening prayer and the celebration of Holy Communion, and be familiar with the repetition of prayers, some of which we know have their roots in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. But as has been mentioned above, forms of Christian liturgy have been around since the early days of the church.

At Iona in the time of St Columba, Mass was said on Sundays and feast days, but by the 7th century we hear of priests celebrating twice on the same day.

The Bangor Antiphonary, a seventh century manuscript which is now preserved in the Ambrosian Library, Milan contains, among others three Canticles from the Bible; the Te Deum, Benedictie, Gloria in Excelsis; ten metrical hymn ; sixty-nine collects; seventeen special collects; seventy ' anthems' or versicles, an unusual form of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer.

The Book of Mulling is an Irish pocket Gospel Book from the late 8th century. The text collection includes the four Gospels, a liturgical service which includes the Apostles' Creed.

There are others, including the Stowe Missal from the eighth or early ninth century containing variations of liturgy for the Mass, Baptism and Visitation of the Sick, and which contains non-Roman elements.

The Book of Cerne is a large early ninth-century manuscript collection of prayers, etc. made for Æthelwold, Bishop of Lichfield (820-40). It once belonged to the Abbey of Cerne in Dorset, but is Mercian in origin and shows Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, Carolingian, Roman, and Byzantine influences.

These were not liturgies that could be undertaken within the space of an hour, in medieval Christianity it took up much of the day!

As you might have noticed, there seems to be the influence of Rome on the liturgy of the Church at this time, albeit with a local flavour. This is because the Church in the West generally had at its core an adherence to Rome and the Pope.

It is a little bit hazy as to the date when Christianity first made it to Roman Britain. The earliest support for the idea that Christianity arrived in Britain early is Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus also known simply as Tertullian (AD 155-222) who wrote in "Adversus Judaeos" that Britain had already received and accepted the Gospel in his lifetime.

We know that in the year 314 three bishops from Britain were present at a council held at Arles in the south of France. During the rest of this century bishops from Britain were present at other ecclesiastical councils, showing that the British Church was in no way isolated but was in active communion with the rest of the Church in the Empire.

As Anglo-Saxon raids were increasing in England, Ireland was being evangelized by Bishop Palladius, sent by Pope Celestine I in AD431-2 and a Romano-British Christian called Patrick.

Augustine was the prior of a monastery in Rome when Pope Gregory the Great chose him in 595 to lead a mission, usually known as the Gregorian mission, to Britain to convert the pagan King Æthelberht of the Kingdom of Kent to Christianity.

Æthelberht converted and allowed the missionaries to preach freely, giving them land to found a monastery outside Canterbury city walls. Roman bishops were established at London and Rochester in 604, and a school was founded to train Anglo-Saxon priests and missionaries.

As a result of this contact with the rule of Rome and the missionary zeal of the Roman Church, worship in Britain and Ireland was always going to be influenced in style, organisation and pattern of prayer by that tradition.

The Gallican rite

is an early form of liturgy used in the West, originating in Jerusalem, established in Gaul in the 5th Century and known in Ireland, mixed with Celtic customs. The known elements are listed below – compare it with the liturgy that you are familiar with today:

- Introit

- The Agnus (agnus) sung in Greek and Latin. Following this, three boys sing Kyrie Eleison three times. Followed by the Benedictus.

- Collect Old Testament reading

- Epistle or Life of the Saint of the Day

- The Benedicite and Agnus (agnus) in Latin
- Gospel reading
- Sermon
- Dismissal of catechumens (baptismal candidates)
- Intercessions
- Great Entrance and the Offertory chant
- Kiss of Peace
- Sursum Corda, Preface, Sanctus, and Post-Sanctus Prayer
- Eucharistic
- The Fraction (the host is divided into nine pieces, seven of which are then arranged into the shape of a cross)
- Our Father
- Blessing of the People
- Communion of the People
- Post-Communion Prayer

The Celts were great collectors of books and knowledge. Their love of poetry and liturgy led them to add their own touches to the pattern which originated in Rome, but it is more in the area of private prayer and poetry that we see the real originality of Celtic thought.

Using the Psalms

Throughout the Scriptures we find the Psalms quoted, so it is quite understandable that the early Church should use them as part of their worship, perhaps a lot more so than we do today. Ephesians 5:19 talks about believers 'addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...'

One of the earliest records of the Psalms being used as part of Christian worship comes from a fourth-century pilgrim Egeria who reports that on Good Friday in Jerusalem the readings 'were all about the things that Jesus suffered: first the psalms on this subject, then the Apostles which

concern it, then passages from the Gospels. Then they read the prophecies about what the Lord would suffer, and the Gospels about what he did suffer.'

It was with the Desert Fathers and the early monastic communities that psalms began to be used regularly within daily worship. They encouraged their followers to memorise the entire contents of the book and recite it during their waking hours. Some would spend the whole night simply reciting the psalms from memory.

The practice was to use the psalms as an inspiration for silent prayer and meditation. A psalm would be read, followed by a time of silence, and this pattern repeated. Why such an emphasis on the psalms? Possibly because the Scriptures see prophecies relating to the Messiah within them. The fact that the psalms were written in a way that made the singing of them possible was seen as God's way of making learning more fun!

The fact that some psalms are more cries of desperation or anger than songs of praise did not deter them – it was the act of saying or singing them that was pleasing to God!

Over many generations the periods of silence between the singing of psalms grew shorter and shorter. An early monastic Rule of the Master says that this is to avoid the risk of anyone falling asleep or being tempted by evil thoughts!

Within the more formal 'cathedral' services the psalms were used as 'hymns' with a verse sung by a member of the clergy and the congregation repeating a refrain. Psalms such as 51 ('Have mercy on me, O God...') start appearing at the start of services as a act of penance. Psalm 116 was used at funeral services as the body was prepared for burial.

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Christian Basics - Finding God

Finding God seems an odd title, in that it suggests that maybe God is somehow lost (which is not what I intended!) but it does cover a multitude of possible alternatives which would have been a lot more wordy or 'theological' in nature.

Early Christians sought out remote and sometimes fierce locations in order to establish their monastic communities - even, with the Desert Fathers, resorting to living atop a pillar or suchlike. The aim was, among other things to draw close to God. It is difficult for Christians today to emulate such dedication even if they wanted to, but is it necessary, this isolation? Do we have to be alone, in some remote desert place in order to find God?

What started this train of thought was the reading of a Philip Yancey book '*Finding God in unexpected places*' which, although an excellent read got me to thinking 'Is it we that find God, or God that finds us?'

I could turn to a host of different Biblical references, but I want to begin at [Genesis 28:10-17](#) and the story of Jacob's Ladder, for reasons that hopefully will become obvious later!

10-12 Jacob left Beersheba and went to Haran. He came to a certain place and camped for the night since the sun had set. He took one of the stones there, set it under his head and lay down to sleep. And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground and it reached all the way to the sky; angels of God were going up and going down on it.

13-15 Then God was right before him, saying, "I am God, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. I'm giving the ground on which you are sleeping to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will be as the dust of the Earth; they'll stretch from west to east and from north to south. All the families of the Earth will bless themselves in you and your descendants. Yes. I'll stay with you, I'll protect you wherever you go, and I'll bring you back to this very ground. I'll stick with you until I've done everything I promised you."

16-17 Jacob woke up from his sleep. He said, "God is in this place—truly. And I didn't even know it!" He was terrified. He whispered in awe, "Incredible. Wonderful. Holy. This is God's House. This is the Gate of Heaven." (The Message)

I'd also like to point us to the Psalms and these wonderful words from [Psalm 139:1-10](#)

1 O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.

2 You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.

3 You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do.

4 You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.
5 You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!
7 I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!
8 If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.
9 If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
10 even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. (NIV)

The Bigger Picture

If I go on my computer I can go onto Google Earth and look at the small town in Wales where I live. I can zoom in to see my house and the roads nearby, and if I zoom out again the view expands to show the whole town, its castle, the meandering river, the nearby forest, beach and out to the sea. As I continue to zoom out the detail gets smaller as a larger land area fills my screen. Eventually I am left with an image of the United Kingdom on the screen. I can still see Wales, and I know more or less where I live, but there's no detail, I can't actually see the town.

Let's expand the picture a little more. Imagine a dark but clear night sky, full of stars. Obviously we can't see all the stars up there; some are way too faint, and positioned out of our viewpoint. It is estimated that there are around 500 million stars in the Milky Way, which is the band of stars that we look into. If I were to hold up a small coin at arms length toward that night sky, it would block something like 15 million stars from my view.

There's only one other galaxy close or big enough to be seen by the naked eye and that's Andromeda, about twice the size of the Milky Way and home to half a trillion stars. Put together, these two galaxies are two of 100 billion galaxies swarming with stars.

How big do you feel now?

This is the scale of the universe that God created. That was some 'big bang!' But it also emphasises how small our world is, and by implication how tiny we are. So, does God have some high tech version of Google Earth that he can use to home in on earth, and then zoom in to get a view of Wales, then Carmarthenshire, and eventually to my house? Can he then see through the roof to check who's at home today?

With You Always

The Psalmist was in no doubt. There was no problem with the size of the universe because God is not like us, he does not exist in one place at any one time, he is everywhere. Those old religious paintings hanging in galleries around the world have a lot to answer for in putting that picture

in our minds of a kindly (or sometimes stern) old man with flowing beard peeping out from behind a large cloud.

*7 I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!
8 If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.
9 If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
10 even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.*

The Psalmist was echoing the words that God said to Jacob in our first reading from Genesis, '15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go'

That of course could be either a cause for celebration or worry, depending on your point of view. What do we feel like about the idea of God being aware of what we're doing or thinking at any moment of the day? Are you quite comfortable or maybe a little worried about that possibility?

In fact, is that your understanding of God, that he is not that old gent in the sky as depicted by the master painters of the past, but a presence around us wherever we are and wherever we go? In some ways it can be more difficult to imagine him like that than it is as a physical person.

But how else could God be God of the universe? How else could God be in all places at all times. We have to personalise God, as have all generations, in order to begin to understand his love, his majesty and his power, and because we already have an understanding of what he is like through the person of Jesus – we have first hand documentary evidence through the Gospels and Biblical writings; people who saw, heard and touched him, felt his power, authority and love whilst he was alive on earth!

'I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go'

That was the great hope of the Psalmist. If you flip quickly through the book of Psalms you will find the writers one minute praising God for his majesty and power and the next complaining that they are being hemmed in on all sides by their enemies. But whether the mood was positive or negative, the glass half empty or half full, they remembered that their God was with them and that was more important to them than the fear of the moment. In their despair they cried out to God to save them, and in their joy they celebrated his salvation and the blessings that God brought to their daily lives.

Do we find God or does God find us? The evidence of those who were close to God in the Bible is that God doesn't need to find us because he already knows where we are! It's more of a problem for God in making himself known to us, because so often we're looking in the wrong

direction or we are spiritually asleep. Like Jacob in our first reading from Genesis there has to be a wake-up call.

What did Jacob say when he woke up?

'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it!'

That's a phrase that I think is worthy of highlighting! How many times could that be said of our lives? How many times have we wandered through beautiful countryside without a thought for the creator? How many times have we been in the presence of a truly wonderful person who is the very essence of the word 'loving' and not thought about the very nature of love and its source? How many times have we taken part in a time of worship and failed to connect with either the singing or the message? Is it that God wasn't there, or simply that we failed to recognise his presence?

Let's put those two highlighted verses together and if you can, memorise them. The one is always true and the other you may need to bring to mind sometimes...

'I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go'

'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it!'

Jacob got a bit of a wakeup call from God, and it wasn't until his mind cleared that he realised the significance of the occasion. There are many other passages that we could look at where God surprised people by being with them in unlikely moments, but I want to just highlight one because it was to an unlikely person on a journey that had nothing to do with Christian qualities of love and tolerance, but rather to do with violence and oppression. This is the story of Saul's encounter with God, as retold in the book of Acts. [Acts 9:1-15](#)

And the rest, as they say, is history – literally, because the spread of the church and indeed our understanding of the Christian faith is so much in debt to this one man, the most unlikely person for Jesus to connect with.

But it doesn't stop there, because in order for Saul to become the person he was intended to be, it needed Jesus to find and connect with someone else, a Christian called Ananias, who was possibly asleep at the time.

Ananias was a bit like Jacob in our very first reading, surprised by a vision from God – but more importantly his ears were open to listen, and realising that it was actually God speaking he was able to put aside his fears because he know, like the Psalmist that :

'I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go!'

There was no hint of 'God was in this place and I didn't realise it' with Ananias!

So what can we say about finding God based upon the readings we've heard? I think it's not so much a case of us going out on a walk or seeking out the desert places trying to find God, but being aware, as the Psalmist was, that God is everywhere and at all times, a constant presence with us despite our often indifferent response to this fact - and that sometimes he wakes us up out of our daydreaming and prompts us into action.

To some people it might be that they suddenly feel a call to ministry or mission, to others it might simply be the feeling that they ought to do something- visit someone, make a phone call to ask how a friend is, volunteer to help out at a drop-in centre, offer to pray for a stranger, give money to an urgent appeal, make some form of sacrifice for the sake of someone's wellbeing, be a shoulder for someone to lean on. If God needs us, he will find us and call us!

God breaks through into our everyday lives, maybe not in the spectacular way that he did with Paul, but think of the work that Ananias did after God's prompting, and the lasting effect that action had on the future of this world.

Listen... listen to your conscience, it is a God-given gift to jog us out of our complacency, to spur us into action.

Listen... as you read your Bible, because the words that seem to spring out of the page might be God's prompting for this day.

Listen... as you walk around this world, listen to the still small voice that whispers into your ear 'Though times might be tough at the moment, remember that I am with you always'

Listen... as you work or go about your daily life. Needs are revealed through conversations, moments created to pray for others.

God might be speaking to you, and it might not be now, it might not be at a convenient time for you, but listen - God is never more than a whisper away.

'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it!'

Early Christian Prayers



These are examples of my favourite prayers handed down to us from the first centuries of the Christian Church.

There's a lot to be said from studying early prayers such as these as they provide a continuous link of worship between the early Christians of the first few centuries after the Crucifixion to ourselves. Their content and pattern

provide a useful template for the writing of modern prayers:

Look upon us, O Lord,
and let all the darkness of our souls
vanish before the beams of thy brightness.
Fill us with holy love,
and open to us the treasures of thy wisdom.
All our desire is known unto thee,
therefore perfect what thou hast begun,
and what thy Spirit has awakened us to ask in prayer.
We seek thy face,
turn thy face unto us and show us thy glory.
Then shall our longing be satisfied,
and our peace shall be perfect.
(Augustine, 354 - 430)

We beseech thee, Master, to be our helper and protector.
Save the afflicted among us; have mercy on the lowly;
raise up the fallen; appear to the needy; heal the ungodly;
restore the wanderers of thy people;
feed the hungry; ransom our prisoners;
raise up the sick; comfort the faint-hearted.

(Clement of Rome, 1st Century)

O Lord, who hast mercy upon all, take away from me my sins,
and mercifully kindle in me the fire of thy Holy Spirit.
Take away from me the heart of stone,
and give me a heart of flesh,
a heart to love and adore thee,
a heart to delight in thee,
to follow and to enjoy thee,
for Christ's sake.

(Ambrose of Milan, c 339-97)

Deep peace of the running wave to you,
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
Deep peace of the shining stars to you,
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you, for ever.
(Source unknown - early Scottish)

O good shepherd, seek me out, and bring me home to thy fold again.
Deal favourably with me according to thy good pleasure,
till I may dwell in thy house all the days of my life,
and praise thee for ever and ever with them that are there.
(Jerome, c 342 - 420)

Alone with none but thee, my God,
I journey on my way.
What need I fear, when thou art near O king of night and day?
More safe am I within thy hand
Than if a host did round me stand.
(Columba, c.521 - 97)

Lord, thou hast given us thy Word for a light to shine upon our path;
grant us so to meditate on that Word, and to follow its teaching,
that we may find in it the light that shines more and more until the
perfect day;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Jerome, c 342 - 420)

May God the Father bless us;
may Christ take care of us;
the Holy Ghost enlighten us all the days of our life.
The Lord be our defender and keeper of body and soul,
both now and for ever, to the ages of ages.
(Æthelwold c 908-984)

Our God, God of all men
God of heaven and earth, seas and rivers,
God of sun and moon, of all the stars,
God of high mountain and lowly valley,
God over heaven, and in heaven, and under heaven.
He has a dwelling in heaven and earth and sea
and in all things that are in them.
He inspires all things, he quickens all things.
He is over all things, he supports all things.
He makes the light of the sun to shine,
He surrounds the moon and the stars,

He has made wells in the arid earth,
Placed dry islands in the sea.
He has a Son co-eternal with himself...
And the Holy Spirit breathes in them;
Not separate are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
(Patrick c389-461)

Lord, because you have made me, I owe you the whole of my love;
because you have redeemed me, I owe you the whole of myself; because
you have promised so much, I owe you my whole being. Moreover, I owe
you as much more love than myself as you are greater than I, for whom
you gave yourself and to whom you promised yourself. I pray you, Lord,
make me taste by love what I taste by knowledge; let me know by love
what I know by understanding. I owe you more than my whole self, but I
have no more, and by myself I cannot render the whole of it to you. Draw
me to you, Lord, in the fullness of your love. I am wholly yours by
creation; make me all yours, too, in love.
(Anselm 1033-1109)

O Sovereign and almighty Lord, bless all thy people, and all thy flock. Give
thy peace, thy help, thy love unto us thy servants, the sheep of thy fold,
that we may be united in the bond of peace and love, one body and one
spirit, in one hope of our calling, in thy divine and boundless love.
(Liturgy of St Mark, 2nd century)

Lord, be with us this day,
Within us to purify us;
Above us to draw us up;
Beneath us to sustain us;
Before us to lead us;
Behind us to restrain us;
Around us to protect us.
(Patrick c389-461)

I rise today
Through the strength of heaven -
Light of sun,
Radiance of moon,
Splendour of fire,
Speed of lightning,
Swiftness of wind,
Depth of sea,
Stability of earth,
Firmness of rock.
(source unknown, early Scottish)