

Half-baked prayer

Rev Dan Balsdon | May 2021 | read online at www.revdanbalsdon.com

My prayer life is Rubbish.

There isn't enough of it.

I never know what to say, or how to say it.

my prayer list is always so long, and I never feel like I ever get to the end of it.

I don't know what to pray, or if I'm praying right.

I don't know if God is doing anything anyway.

Ok – so that may not be how you expect me to start, but I wonder, can you relate? Do you have similar self-deprecating thoughts that make you feel guilty about your prayer life, or lack of it.

If you have thoughts like I do, then I also want to suggest to you, that like me, there's a mistake in your understanding of prayer.

The mistake comes when we assume there is a right and wrong way to pray. But there is no definitive right and wrong way to pray – there are simply lots of ways to pray, and we each find different combinations of those ways are what works for us as individuals.

Prayer is, for us, conversation with God and seeking God's kingdom, listening to God and looking out for the signs of God's kingdom responding to God and living for God's kingdom.

When I was training as a local preacher I remember going through different types of prayer...

- intercession and petition (prayers for others and the world),
- adoration, praise and worship, words to adore God
- confession...recognising the fragility of our humanity
- thanksgiving.... giving thanks for who God is

And at times I felt as if there was this list of ingredients that, if all were included in the recipe of a service, it meant the service worked and would successfully bake a good cake for the congregation.

But actually, thinking about forms and types of prayer is not about a recipe to success at all.

I wonder if we've failed ourselves by overthinking prayer – and not grasping its joy, its flexibility, its breadth and depth, and its uniqueness for each of us as individuals.

What all those types of prayer do helpfully remind us of though, is that they, along with many others, are tools in our toolbox to resources us in our relationship with God, as worshippers and as disciples.

You see, prayer is not following a recipe to make a successful cake for others, Prayer is a tool from the disciple making toolbox that we used to help us as disciples to nurture a relationship with God. To make our relationship with God a good cake.

And for prayer, it's not actually the ingredients that matter, but the heart from which they come, and to which God speaks and responds.

I wonder, if prayer sometimes too easily becomes a list of wants and desires. Well-meant and good to be prayed, but if wants and desires for others and the world is all prayer is to us, then prayer becomes so focused on the earthly kingdom and asking God to intervene, that we miss out so much more.

Because if we are too focused on the earthly kingdom our attention is drawn away from also seeking God's kingdom - the kingdom and way of living that God calls us to seek and live out in the world...

When Jesus was asked by his disciples how to pray, he begins: *'Our Father in heaven, you are holy, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.'*

Prayer is a multi-resourced way of life with a heart focused first on seeking God, and God's kingdom, and partnering with God in bringing about that kingdom on earth.

Prayer can be conversation, it can be thoughts and feelings, prayer can come while we're shopping or talking, cycling or swimming, using a prayer book or a mobile phone app, it can be when we are alone or with others, with other disciples, or with those who have not yet met Jesus, via podcast, Youtube video, facebook or a paper book.

**May prayer be a tool for us, not to fill us with guilt and shame,
but to empower us and nurture us as worshippers and disciples.
That we will seek first God, and God's kingdom.**