

PRAYER

Prayer is a key feature of the Christian life. It has been said that prayer is 'the air which Christians breathe'. It is communication with God, and it has many aspects: listening, confession, thanksgiving and asking (intercession) for your needs and the needs of others. It can be spoken or silent, solitary or corporate. Even when praying on your own, in prayer you are not really alone because the persons of the Holy Trinity are involved (see below). You may well discover that you are engaged in a kind of spiritual warfare as you pray that God's will be done on earth.

Prayer implies a relationship with the living God, and it requires trust, love, and openness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament there is a rich heritage of prayer especially based around God's covenantal faithfulness. See, for example, texts such as Genesis 18:23–32, 32:9–11; Exodus 32:11–13, 33:12–21; 1 Samuel 1:10–11; 1 Kings 8:23ff; Nehemiah 1:5ff; Psalm 57; Jonah 2:2, 4:2.

In the New Testament a new intimacy in prayer was modelled by Jesus, as he spoke and listened to his heavenly Father. His disciples were able to see his deep prayer life, and to learn from his teaching, as when he instructed them to pray personally to their Father, who knows their needs. (See Matthew 6:5–15, 7:7–12.) Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (recorded in Acts chapter 2), Christians are able to pray with the help of the Holy Spirit at work within them (see Romans 8:26–28). This type of prayer becomes the bedrock for Christian life and mission (Romans 10:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 13:18–19; Jude v. 20). Faithful believers are living *in* Christ and that makes Christian prayer distinctive, giving it the particular intimacy to which we have referred. Prayer is the cry of the church. (See Revelation 22:20b).

The Bible teaches us to pray to God as our Father, in the name of Jesus (this points to the truth that in prayer, as in all things, the Christian is to rely on who Jesus is and what he has accomplished), and in the power of the Holy Spirit. This also points to the Trinitarian understanding of God. The true, living God hears the cries of His people (Exodus 2:23f) and He acts powerfully.