

People want to know how I spent my summer. Well, I am happy to report, parts of my body had more fun than I did! Two vertebrae lower down my spine decided to amuse themselves. *Let's pinch a nerve*, they said. *Ouch! that hurts!*, I complained. They said, *Not like this it doesn't!*, and so it went on for 10 days. They thought I would die laughing at their amusement.

Why am I telling you this? For two reasons. First, knowing the fact that laughter is the best medicine, I watched snippets of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. I have never had any interest in this, so this was the first time. I presume we all know the one-liner that won the 10th annual joke award, *I'm not a fan of the new pound coin, but then again, I hate all change*.

We live in a new world in which a Chinese scholar, studying mathematics at Cambridge University, goes to an event in Scotland, and wins a comedy award!

If I were one of the judges, I would have voted the Asian comedian who declared, he felt very much at home on stage at that moment, surrounded by **cauk-Asians!!** Gave me the belly-ache I needed to forget the pain in the leg!

The second reason I am narrating the conversation between two spinal vertebrae, is that, like almost everyone, we learn to pray when we are in pain! The pain may be physical, emotional or social, but there is nothing like pain which we cannot control, to turn our minds to prayer, to plead with God to do something, NOW(!), deal with it!

If you are thinking, knowing Kalyan as we do, he must have been praying, *Father, Forgive me my many sins...* well, you could be right, because, once again, like most of us, when we find ourselves facing difficulty, the first thought we have is, ***I must have done something terribly, horribly bad ... and this is retribution, this is payback!***

As I pondered on this, I realised, *We really don't know the person of God, if we think, God is in the business of inventing ways to punish us for every small infraction, every tiny violation of His law.*

We have this view of an angry God, who does not suffer fools; a cross between a stern judge who dishes out painful punishment, and a Divine Bouncer, who decides who in the line at the door, gets in to the eternal rave party, and who doesn't!

When I was not watch the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, I read an article which sent a chill down my spine. The article identified a group of people who said that the Bible was homophobic and **NOT** as inclusive as Christians claimed it to be. It was,

therefore, time to rewrite the Bible and change all the bits that offended people! Amidst thoughts of horror and terror that seized my mind, I found myself pleading with myself for calm, and for reason, and I heard the voice of Divine Wisdom, *They think they know Me, but they really don't; that's why they want to cast Me in a play where they make up my character to suit their fantasy of me.* This is when I felt the urge to re-discover God of The Bible, the person He really is, rather than the person we think, or perhaps want Him to be.

Over 11 Sundays between now and the start of Advent, we shall examine the person of God, and the relationship between God the Father and Jesus His Son, **as revealed to us in the prayers of Jesus.** Who better would know God the Father, than His Son Jesus our Christ? After all, Jesus did say, *I and my Father are One*, and *The only way to the Father is through me.* Gillian has published the programme of sermons in this series, in September's Grapevine.

Metaphorically speaking, I hope this series will help “lance the boil” and release the poisonous ideas about God many Christians have about Him, and allow the healing to put us on the right track to a positive relationship with Him.

Before we get into the series, lets spend the remainder of our time this morning, asking ourselves the question, ***Why pray? What is so important about prayer?***

At a conservative extreme, some view prayer as a solemn act of worship - “proper” words, read in the “proper” tone, on “proper” occasions. At the other extreme, some of us want to dispense with the formality of prayer, and want a comfortable and casual, ***buddy*** relationship with God, what may seem to many, like an irreverent conversation with *Daddy God.*

To build this series on proper footings, I offer you a **four-pronged framework**, on which to build your life of prayer.

**First**, we must accept the fact that God is not one of us; we are one of Him.

In the Genesis account of creation, God spoke everything into existence, including all plant and animal life, which He created, each ‘*after its own kind*’ (a grouping, a belonging and an order to all creation).

We humans are not evolved from animals, or plant life, or sea life, not even some primordial slime, as our science fiction films would have us believe.

We are God's special creation, made in His image, His likeness. Ours is not a physical likeness, because God is Spirit and we are not, but in forming us with us own hands and breathing into us His Spirit, God gave us a mind to think His thoughts (access to His intellect and wisdom), to live according to His moral likeness (to be Holy as He is Holy), and enjoy His social likeness - God shares an intimate relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit, who together exist in perfect love; we have been created to live in this harmony.

God is not one of us; we are of God! The first footing on which we build our life of prayer, is a deep understanding that we are made Holy, as God Himself is Holy. Don't let anyone fool you into believing otherwise.

The **second** footing on which to build our life of prayer is, to acknowledge we don't have what we need, we aren't who we should be, and we don't see what we must see. If you want a definition of sin, this is it. Sin is not about **doing bad**; sin is about not wanting to admit and surrender our weakness, our inability, to live by the strength and power of God. Not to admit our weakness and live by our won wisdom and strength, results in doing what is not glorifying to God.

Jesus' greatest teaching on prayer was to encourage us to, *"Ask and it will be given to you! Search and you will find! Knock and the door will be opened for you! Everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks, will have the door opened... if you know how to give good gifts to your children, evil as you are, how much more will your father in heaven give good things to those who ask him"*<sup>1</sup>

Sin deprives us of the strength of God and distracts us from the wisdom of God. We need to make every effort to, *ask...*, *search...*, *knock*. God is waiting to give more than all we need, but we have to take the first step, to ask, to search and to knock.

The **third** footing on which to build our life of prayer is to develop a language of praise and of worship. Prayer **IS** communication between ourselves and God, but sadly most of our prayers are a monologue of misery and distress, melancholy, regret and despair.

Prayer is not about telling God what He already knows; it is about worshipping God who literally, moves Heaven and earth to make sure our needs are met.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:7-8

As with learning any language, start with the basics. The Psalms provide us a rich vocabulary on which to build our own prayer language. This language is personal, it is intimate and it is richly rewarding. Learn to speak this language.

The **fourth** footing on which to build a life of prayer, is to know that you are appealing to the Character of God. You pray because God is always true to His character. The Bible is full of proof that God is consistent, unchanging and very predictable.

The Psalmist declares in worship, *You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.*<sup>2</sup> God told the prophet Malachi in no uncertain terms, *I, the LORD, do not change*<sup>3</sup> and the writer to the Hebrew people declared, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*<sup>4</sup>

Over the next several weeks, we shall examine Jesus' teachings on prayer, and after that, we shall study several of Jesus' prayers, to learn how to pray.

Four footings to build your life of prayer:

1. Acknowledge God is not one of us; we are one of Him. He has made us Holy, as He is Holy.
2. Accept the fact, by dwelling on our weakness and inability, we deprive the power, strength and wisdom of God to help us. Take the first steps by asking, seeking, and knocking on the door of Heaven. God will not only answer, He will fill us to the brim and overflowing with more than we need, to be a blessing to those around us.
3. Learn the language of prayer and make it your own. The Psalms are a great place to start to develop your own prayer vocabulary.
4. Finally, as you learn to pray, know that you are appealing to the character of God, who is unchanging and therefore dependable.

As we progress through this series, I pray you discover these fundamental principles on which to build and grow your life of prayer.

**AMEN.**

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 102:27

<sup>3</sup> Malachi 3:6

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 13:8