

PRAYER – WHY BOTHER?

Look at this – a colouring book for adults!

If you go in to a bookshop these days you'll find that they are all the rage.

In France - a country famous for its food, colouring in books for adults are outselling cookery books.

The UK is not far behind.

So why? What's the big deal about colouring in?

It's not something new. It's something for kids, right?

Turns out that 'colouring-in' is very therapeutic.

It's actually good for us.

It helps shut our brains down for a while and gets us out of our routine.

It's recognised as a way to combat stress and anxiety, and it helps us to focus in on one thing instead of sitting with our heads full of tasks and worries and business.

Some doctors are now prescribing 'colouring in' for their patients.

Who would have thought it?!!!!

It's amazing the things that turn out to be good for us after all.

One thing I like to do is draw. And for a while I can switch off and get engrossed in that.

But with drawing there's the pressure of making the drawing good and not making a mistake. Whereas with colouring in, it's much harder to make mistakes. There's much less to think about.

There's no pressure and that makes it so simple and effective.

Increasingly people are beginning to realise that the most simple and ordinary things can be really good for us.

One thing we've done already in our service today is pray.

And that's not unexpected.

Because, after all, everyone knows that this is one thing that people do in a church.

And even if you never or rarely pray, and even if you don't really attend church, you would probably think it strange if we didn't pray – if we had a service here and there were no prayers.

That would be strange.

But prayer itself is pretty strange.

What's going on when we pray?

Who are we talking to?

And isn't it sort of the opposite of 'doing anything'?

A writer called Ronald Dunn wrote down an image he had of prayer from a young age. (*R. Dunn: Don't Just Stand there ...Pray Something p11-12*)

There's a man standing outside a Spanish mission in the desert.

He's a monk, wearing a course brown robe.

He's gazing up at two people on horseback in front of him – the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

These two have drawn their guns and their faces are fixed in a grim stare.

The monk says something about going with them.

"You are brave, Father," says the masked man, "but it will be dangerous. You better stay here where it's safe."

"But I want to help," says the monk. "I want to be of use."

The strong but kind eyes of the masked man looked down to the man of God.

"You can pray."

Suddenly the great white horse rises up on its hind legs and with a mighty *"Hi yo Silver - Awaay,"* the Lone Ranger and his faithful Indian companion are galloping off into the danger.

The monk slowly walks back into the church.

Now you are the one with the camera. Where is the camera going to go next?

Are you going to go back into the church to film the monk praying or are you going to go after the two heroes?

Of course we will follow the Lone Ranger and Tonto. Because that's where the action is.

They are the ones who are getting things done. They are making a practical difference. The monk praying – well, that does not seem like much.

Now it's true that sometimes we need to do more practical concrete things rather than pray – actions can speak louder than words.

But is there **ever** a place for prayer? Or is the cynic right?

When we tell someone we will pray for them it's really just a fancy way of saying we are not going to do anything at all?

How does prayer work?

And, in fact, **does it work?**

Clearly there are people praying about things every day and their prayers aren't all answered.

Now I know that there are enough stories of answered prayer out there to make me believe that prayers are sometimes answered

I know for example of people who have been healed through prayer who could never have been healed any other way, and I'm reminded of Jesus when he said that some things can only be dealt with by prayer.

But beside that are the other stories of people who were sick and who died even though they were prayed for.

It seems like asking God for intervention is not going to be a full proof way of changing situations around.

So if we are not guaranteed that God is going to miraculously grant us everything we ask for then why pray?

Why bother with prayer?
What's the point of doing it?

The answer is – that praying is good for us.

PRAYER IS GOOD FOR US.

Prayer may not change God – but it changes us – and for the better.

Now that might be a bit of a surprise.
Because not only might prayer seem like not doing much (or a waste of time) there are those who argue that prayer is unhealthy.

For example, what about this idea of thanking God all the time?
What's *that* about?

What's the point of thanking God?
Why does God keep needing our thanks?
It's not God that needs it – it's we who need it.

Think of saying thanks in general.
Were taught to do it as kids. But is it only about being polite?

What's the big deal of saying thanks to someone else?
Why does it matter?
The answer is if we don't do it we won't feel it.
If we don't say thanks for what we receive we stop being thankful people.
We lose our sense of gratitude when we don't take time to express it.

It's like love.
What's the point of telling someone you love them if you have already told them before? Do you really have to repeat it?
Because the words help keep the love current and real.

My dad used to love the joke about the grumpy, tight, miserly Scotsman who almost never bought his wife a present. Then on her 60th birthday he gave her a gift.

"Oh Angus, does this mean that you still love me?"
"Seemingly..."

Variation on the wife who says to her husband, *"You never tell me that you love me"* who receives the reply, *"I told you when we got married that if anything changes I'll let you know."*

Being thankful in our prayers helps us to be grateful people in general for all that we have. As we express thanks we become more thankful.

Another thing some people say is unhealthy about prayer is the business of confessing our sins and saying sorry for our faults and failings. Isn't that a bit morbid and negative?

After all we've all got our faults and failings.

The fact is that by naming and confronting our negative traits it can help us to do something about them, and try to tackle our weaknesses.

The great philosopher Socrates said *"The unexamined life is not worth living."* Trying to build on our strengths and tackle our mistakes by admitting them and openly facing them enables us to live a better more worthwhile life.

There's three kind of prayers.

There's speaking or reading words.

There's contemplation.

There's meditation.

All of these things are good because they help shape us and give us space to work on our values and what is important to us.

They keep us in relationship with God.

When we practice them they draw us closer to God.

Increasingly we are realising the value of silence – of switching off the noisy soundtrack that plays in our ears and in our heads every day.

Constant busyness isn't good for us.

Grasping materialism isn't good for us.

Thinking only of ourselves and our own needs and wants isn't good for us.

Living selfishly isn't good for us.

Instead of spending all out time on i-phones computers and electrical gadgets silence is a gift to help us find space in our usually hectic lifestyles.

People are realising the value of meditation and the importance of becoming aware of the now that is around us, and learning to be alive to the present moment instead of rushing from one thing to the next.

There are all sorts of practices (many of them ancient) that are being rediscovered by people (including those who are not conventionally religious), who now realise they are good things with much to offer.

Meditation,

Mindfulness,
 Capacitar,
 Silence
 Going on pilgrimage
 Walking a labyrinth

Just as such simple things as exercise and diet are good for the health of our physical bodies, these deceptively simple things are good for our souls – our spiritual health.

And they include prayer.

Moving to a new exercise regime or embarking on a new diet can seem strange and be tricky at first. You need to be prepared to persevere for a while before it becomes more like second nature.

The same is true of spiritual practices like prayer.

Like all practices, you get the most benefit from prayer by making it part of your schedule.

If the doctor tells you to avoid dairy products, and on one occasion you decide to forgo your usual glass of milk, your body is unlikely to be transformed.

If you decide to try jogging and you take a run round the block once, that on its own is not going to mean you're ready for a marathon.

Praying just once for a couple of minutes may not transform your world.

But it's as it becomes part of our life, as we get more used to it bit by bit that prayer has the power to do good in our lives –

to help us see what's important,

to give us perspective,

to get respite from the mad rush of busyness,

to tackle stress and anxiety,

to bring us (and keep us) in tune with God,

and awake to the wonder of life around us.

And there's all sorts of ways to do it.

Silence

Breathing mindfully.

Using the prayers of others and making them your own.

Reviewing your day and looking for what has brought you close to God and what has taken you away from God.

Reading a portion of the Bible and using that as the basis of your prayer.

Lighting a candle and focussing on that...

And even colouring in!

Here's what one woman does in her book; *Praying in Colour...*

Praying is good for us.

A chance to be real

A chance to be alternative and line ourselves up with the values of Jesus.

Every time we pray we will not see visions or have dramatic experiences of God, especially if prayer is new to us, but we will be putting ourselves in a place where we are more likely to encounter God in a meaningful way.

If we choose to put ourselves in situations when we are listening out for God, open to God's voice in the stillness –
then we are increasing our chances of being aware of God within us,
God around us,
God guiding us and helping us
to live our lives to the full.

Colouring in. Who would have thought it? It's actually good for us.

Prayer. Who would have thought it? It's actually good for us.

James 1:22-27

Matthew 6:5-13

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