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## Prayer - what is it?

(A summary of the teaching at the recent TCFNSW Getaway by Harley Mills, President, TCFNSW)

A dictionary definition of prayer is: *intercession, supplication (petition and request), worship, a contemplation*. It can be *an utterance, complaint, a hymn, an oratory*.

My, off-the-top-of my-head, explanation to someone would be that it is "speaking to God". A more biblical New Testament assessment would be that it is asking God for something or to do something, which is a bit of a surprise since we are often challenged over our self-centred prayers.

The two Greek words translated as 'prayer' or 'to pray,' *proseuche* and *proseuchomai*, (used 121 times in the New Testament) always refers to the act of asking or requesting or seeking something from God. The other two Greek words that are sometimes translated 'to pray' are the everyday words *aitew* ('to ask, ask for, demand') and *deomai* ('to ask, request, beseech, beg').

In asking God for something or to do something, our prayers are directed to a person not an inanimate or unknown thing. Prayer is a relational activity using words and is therefore often verbal.

Our whole approach to prayer needs to be shaped by knowing who we pray to. What is the God of the Bible like?

Firstly, we know that he is the capable and able Lord of the universe able to speak and bring the world into existence. (Psalm 33:6-9) He also continues to sustain the world, keeping it going and in doing so, allows us to live and rejoice. (Psalm 104:10-15) He is also the listening and speaking God, not like idols of silver and gold made by human hands. (Psalm 115:5-7)

He is the real God who made the world and acts, helps, remembers and blesses. He has both a voice and ear, able to speak and listen to our words. Words are part of the very nature of God and the people he has made. (John 1:1). In creating people, God made us creatures who also could speak, using words to form and express our thoughts to each other and him.

He is the holy God, too pure for us to meet. (1 Timothy 6:15-16) (Habakkuk 1:13) (Romans 3:10-11) Incredibly, He is the merciful God. In the old covenant we see this in God's gracious and constant rescued of his stubborn, sinful people. He dwells in their midst, listens to their prayers, and provides a means for them to approach him and then find forgiveness through the sacrificial system. (Psalm 65:1-4) And in the New Testament the repeated ceremony of the Old Testament sacrifices is replaced by the reality of the eternal sacrifice of the Son of God in our place. (Hebrews 9:11-14)

### **Why should we pray?**

We should pray because the great all-powerful God who made the world, instead of eliminating us as his enemies, has instead rescued us from our rebellion and adopted us as his children. Through Jesus actions, God has become our Father. We first repent in words, seeking His forgiveness, and continue the Christian life in faith seeking on-going forgiveness as we struggle with our continual rebellion. (Matthew 6:12-13)

As children of the Father, our relationship with him demands continued, constant prayer. We are no longer pagans who run after food, entertainment and clothes as if our lives are controlled by chance or our own hands. Nor do we live as if things are all that matter in life.

We are now dependent children who need to talk to our Father expressing our gratefulness to him for rescuing us from eternal damnation and providing every good thing we need. We seek to give him honour and glory in all that we do. God is never more honoured and glorified than when we humbly ask him for things, when he grants them to us in his mighty power and generosity, and when we pour out our thanks to him for his kindness. This is an incredible change in our lives that will be reflected in our prayers.

We also pray because God commands us to do so. In his kindness he reminds and exhorts us to pray. (Deuteronomy 8:11-17; Ephesians 6:17-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Romans 12:12; Colossians 4:2; 1 Samuel 12:23)

We can pray because God promises to hear our prayers. (Matthew 7:7-11)

### **Why then, don't we pray?**

The obvious answer is: *Because we are sinful, hard-hearted fools*, which is true but not a very helpful statement. One of the main reasons we don't pray is that we have distorted views of God, harbouring misunderstandings about him, sometimes without even realizing it.

We may doubt that God is able to act in this world in answer to our prayers. For instance, we believe he is limited in his actions by the natural laws he has put in place to direct our world. We think that he will not intervene to over-rule these laws but the Bible shows us many instances where he has done so. If we don't think God can intervene in our lives to change things, then you have an inadequate view of God's power. We stop trusting him to do things and rely only on your own resources to handle life's issues. Prayer isn't needed because we think it is ineffective. For many of us, our lives are easy, filled with material blessings and entertaining distractions. We are not forced to rely upon God and call on him

in prayer until illness or death threaten our continued existence. Our implied belief is that God doesn't intervene and actually do anything significant now in the world.

Sometimes, we think God has the power to step directly into the world to alter events and believe he won't because he has an unalterable plan. God will do what God will do, whether we pray for something or not. This view of God and prayer is directly contradicted by Scripture. James 4:2 says *You do not have, because you do not ask*. What does that mean if God does not respond to our prayers by giving us things? In the Old Testament there are a number of incidents which speak of God 'relenting' in response to heartfelt prayers, and not visiting upon people the wrath and destruction he had intended (e.g. Exodus 32:9-14; Jeremiah 26:19; Joel 2:13). Why also would God promise us that we could *call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you* (Ps 50:15) if our calling upon him had no effect, that is, if the outcome of the day of trouble would have been precisely the same, according to God's eternal will, whether we had prayed or not? And what do these words about Elijah mean if not that God acts in response to human prayers? (James 5:16b-18)

Scripture assumes that God will graciously hear and respond to our prayers, that they do have an effect on what happens, which must encourage us to pray. Even if we accept that God can act in response to our prayers, we still doubt that he will because in the past he has not acted in the way we wanted. He has not answered our prayers as we wished. For example, we still have an illness. The pandemic has broken out again. My child died.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed: *Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will* (Mark 14:36). The Father, in answer, did not send his angelic "cavalry" to rescue his only son from a cruel, unjust death. God achieved his plans, not in spite of sin and evil, but through them. (Acts 2:23). Unless Jesus had died, the innocent for the guilty, we could not have been reconciled to the Father. We still would be his enemies condemned to hell.

Sin and evil, misfortune and natural disasters do not thwart God's plans. He is able to work even through these things to achieve his good will as Joseph told his lying, treacherous brothers when talking of his slavery in Egypt: (Gen 50:20). Whether we can catch a glimpse of the good that God is bringing out of the evil or not, the godly response is exemplified by Jesus: *Yet not what I will, but what you will*. Obedience and faith must be our response to God's answers to our prayers. Sometimes we will see and understand his answer but other times we may not. At these times we need to remind ourselves of God's goodness and love for us, after all: *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things*. Romans 8:32

### **Prayer is a verbal expression of our trust in God.**

As we ask God for things, we are giving voice to our dependence on him for everything. But trust in God includes trusting his words and commands and instructions for our lives. It means hearing God say, "Do not lie", and believing him when he tells us that we must not do this, both for our good and for the good of others. This is why the opposite of faith in the Bible is not simply unbelief or faithlessness, but disobedience. (Hebrews 3:15-19) Why then, is it hard to pray? We fail to pray, primarily, because of our sin and because the enemy does not want us to pray.

Prayer, at its heart, is an acknowledgment of need. It expresses our frailty and dependence, and our desire for help. This acknowledgment is hard for sinful human beings to accept. It forces us to admit that we are not independent or self-sufficient creatures and Satan, the Father of Lies, wants us to keep believing them. He wants us to stand tall and go it alone, not humbly kneel and express our dependence on God for everything. (James 4:4-10; 1 Peter 5:6 & 7)

## **How then should we pray?**

Prayer is verbal, made up of words spoken by us to God. Prayer is responding to God by presenting our requests to him. We can do this only because of what he has done for us, through Jesus, in initiating a relationship with us. We pray as dependent sons and daughters of our loving heavenly Father. He has commanded us to pray, and promised to hear us and give us every good gift. *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!* (Matthew 7:11)

We only pray because God enables us to, by his Spirit. Left to ourselves, we couldn't pray. After all, by nature we are rebels against God. By nature, we are spiritually dead as Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:2.

It is only by the secret operation of God's Spirit stirring and reviving our dead hearts that we turn to him in the first place and put our trust in Christ. In giving us his Spirit, God himself comes to dwell with us and in us. (John 14:15-17, 23)

He is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. So, when the Spirit is poured out richly upon us, the Father and the Son come to make their home with us. Because of the work of this same Spirit, we call out to God as our Father in prayer. (Romans 8:14-16)

## **We pray through the Son.**

Christian prayer can only take place through the Lord Jesus Christ. (I Timothy 2:5 & 6) There are two parties. The one and only God and humanity, between which, bringing the two together, is Jesus. There is only one go-between, the man Christ Jesus, who is both God and man, and who gave himself as a ransom for all. God provided his own Son as the mediator—the one who would reconcile a hostile and sinful humanity to himself. The point is that there is no other person, living or dead, that can act on our behalf as mediator between us and God, not priest, saint, Mary nor bishop. We must only pray then, through the Son, and only Him.

## **We pray to the Father.**

Prayer is directed to God the Father. In the New Testament, the characteristic form of prayer, beginning with the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9) and Jesus' own prayers, is to pray to the Father. Of course, it is not wrong, to pray to the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, there are a couple of examples in the New Testament of people calling out to the risen Jesus. As he is about to die, Stephen cries out, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit* (Acts 7:59) and at the very end of 1 Corinthians, Paul begs Jesus, *Our Lord, come!* (1 Cor 16:22; cf. Rev 22:20). Neither would it be wrong to pray to the Holy Spirit, since he is God—although there is no reference in the Bible to anyone praying to the Spirit. However, the biblical pattern is to pray to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.

## **When should we pray?**

Now. The best time to pray is any time and at all times. The length is irrelevant. He hears us and answers because of his goodness and not because he is impressed with the quality or length of our prayers.

We should pray constantly. We are commanded to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and to *be constant in prayer* (Rom 12:12). What is important is that we constantly and continually express our trust and confidence in God by calling upon him in prayer.

## **What should we pray for?**

When teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus didn't give instruction on posture or style, or exercises to get in the mood; he taught the disciples six things to pray for:

1. The Father's reputation: *Hallowed be your name.*
2. The Father's reign: *Your kingdom come.*
3. The Father's rule: *Your will be done.*
4. Our provision: *Give us today our daily bread.*
5. Our pardon: *Forgive us our debts.*
6. Our protection: *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*

What blessings does God long to send down? What are his desires for us—his wishes, plans, priorities and aspirations for us? What does God want for us? (Psalms 37:4)

As we delight ourselves in the Lord, our thinking and wishes and aspirations will become more like his. We will want what God himself wants. The desires of our hearts will become the desires of God and he will surely give them to us.

What is God's purpose for each one of us? That we be conformed to the image of his Son; that we become part of a new people who are purified from their sin and zealous for good works; and that we stand firm and live in holiness, and finally obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ;

.people who produce the fruit of the Spirit - Galatians 5:22-23

What is prayer? It is a work of God's Spirit within us so that we approach our heavenly Father in faith, through the merits and death of our Lord Jesus, to ask him for things. It's our relationship of dependence upon God, expressed in words. Prayer is audible faith.

Further reading: "Prayer and the Voice of God." by Phillip D. Jensen (Matthias Media 2019)

Harley Mills

## Prayer points

- Pray for teachers and students as they re-adjust to school life.
- Pray for wisdom for students having to make important decisions, for example, high school subject choices and those finishing practical work for the HSC.
- Pray for protection of SRE teachers as many are in the older, more vulnerable, age group.
- Pray for wisdom for those proposing changes to the NSW curriculum, the place of general religious education in that curriculum and a broad education for all students.

From members:

- Don - Pray for staff and students to patiently wait on God as they re-adjust to regular loads and responsibilities following remote learning.
- Patricia - Thank God that she got the first job she was interviewed for as she returns to work to support her family members who have lost their jobs. Pray that she will make a difference to the lives of the children she teaches.
- Robin - Pray for the technological challenges of teaching music due to Covid 19. She has spent more time praying during restrictions to activities.

- Roger - Rushing to catch-up students with the practical aspects and experience of subjects, especially Years 8 and 11, which can effect their choosing of TAS subjects for next year.
- Greg - Pray for making-up the learning gap with students after disruption. Give thanks for opportunities during the shut-down to prepare lessons really well for on-line delivery and do virtual professional training from other places.
- Mel - Pray for her on-line Science teaching at TAFE using SM Teams.

## What do a corny Dad-joke and the British Cycling team have to do with teaching?

Dr Jenn Phillips, High School SRE Advisor, Youthworks

If you, like me, have a creative bent, you've probably found that inspiration can strike in the most unlikely of places: I often wake up in the morning with a tune in my head that I've never heard anywhere before, and my most profound thoughts often happen in the shower.

With teaching, inspiration has struck me in two very odd places. I've found both of these have led me on a journey that has radically transformed my teaching practice and I hope it can help you, too.

The first is a corny old joke my dad used to say, and the second is the story of the British Cycling team. What do these two strange bedfellows have to do with teaching? Read on to find out!

### (1) Start with Why - My Dad's Corny Joke.

My parents tell me that when I was a young, inquisitive girl of around 3 or 4 years old, my favourite word (and one which I'd repeat ad-nauseum) was "why". I'd like to think I was asking profound questions about deep things of life and the universe, but I was probably just as likely to ask why I couldn't watch another She-Ra or Smurfs cartoon when it was time for bed.

Once my dad inevitably got sick and tired of my seemingly unending questions, he would stop answering and instead say: "because Y's a crooked letter and you can't make it straight." Get it?

I'll never forget how frustrated I would feel when my dad would say that joke whenever I asked a "why" question. I think that's why the work of Simon Sinek has resonated with me. In 2009 Sinek gave a well-known talk where he explained that the best leaders don't focus on what they do (for example, Apple sells technology), or even how they do it (the products Apple sells are stylish and desirable status symbols), instead, they start with their reason, purpose, cause or belief - their **why** (which for Apple is to "think different" as their slogan says).

Sinek claims that most people think about the world as a series of whats and hows, but he believes that the leaders of our world (the likes of Apple, Amazon and Elon Musk) stand out and succeed precisely because they allow their why to drive their **how** as they do their what.

What about us as teachers? It's easy to think of our "what" as teachers - it's to teach! Our training and experience have also given us a strong handle on our "how" - our methodology and pedagogy. But the "why: is harder.

Ask yourself: Why do you want to improve in your teaching practice?

Your answer will be different to mine of course. For me in my current role as High School SRE Advisor for Youthworks, I want to improve in my teaching practice so that I can lead other High School SRE teachers to create engaging, thought-provoking and stimulating lessons through which Bible truths are communicated clearly and effectively.

With my why clear, I can move on to my how. What about you? Why do you want to improve as a teacher?

## **(2) An example of How - The British Cycling Team**

Let me be the first to admit that I am not a cycling fanatic - if faced with the choice between a good night's sleep or watching the Tour de France on SBS, sleep will win every time!

I was introduced to the story of the *British Cycling Team* by James Clear in his book *Atomic Habits*. Clear chronicles the reversal of fortunes that the team undertook after David Brailsford became coach in 2010. Before Brailsford took the job, the Brits had never won a single Tour de France, and their stocks of Olympic medals were anemic to say the least. But by 2012, not only had Brailsford led the team to victory in France, but they took home 70% of the medals in the London Olympics.

How did he achieve such a feat?

Brailsford's approach was called the "aggregation of marginal gains". Simply put, if you regularly, routinely make small improvements, over time the increases in performance will compound. For Brailsford and the cyclists, the results were obvious, the means were less so. The obvious things were optimised: nutrition, the team's training regimen, and all parts of the bike - seats, chains, grips, tires. Less obvious optimisations included the type of pillows and mattresses the cyclists slept on, and even teaching them how to best wash their hands so not to get sick (in a pre-COVID world, no less!).

As reflective teaching practitioners, we are often seeking our own cycling team improvements, but perhaps we get lost in the everyday rather than thinking about how these small regular improvements can have a huge impact on the efficacy of teaching over time.

Now that I've started with the why and how, in my following article in the next edition, I'm going to share the what: 5 steps you can take to minimize classroom disruptions, increase student learning, and create activities that impact student's heads, hearts and hands.

Jenn Phillips

## **TCF President's Report, June 2020.**

To say the least, this year has been very different for schools, students, teachers and principals. Many of the certainties of life have been challenged and even thrown out the window. One day schools were open and the next they were closed to all but the children of essential workers with teachers told by their principals to work from home! We have been use to floods or vandalism closing schools for a day or two and even fires affecting

individual schools for a few years, but not in living memory has our whole state school system had to shut down! Schools and teachers have done a remarkable job in moving all their teaching and contact with students online in a few days and then weeks later, back into the classroom. Through this pandemic our world has been reminded of the frailty of life along with our dreams and aspirations but also of the joy of being with others. Specifically, teachers have learnt that they are nothing without their students and that they miss them like crazy - even the difficult ones.

For each of us, this epidemic has provided opportunities to stop and reconsider what is important in life, what is of eternal worth and value. God has been very gracious to our country with minimal deaths and reduced economic upheaval compared to many other places around the world. What we do with that knowledge in our own lives and in our interaction with others shows us who we belong to: ourselves, like the rest of Australian society, or Christ. As teachers we can be just teachers in our schools or Christian teachers honouring the God who saved us and who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. This is a mission that requires the support and prayer of others, to which TCF seeks to be part of - Christian teachers sharing and challenging one another to be faithful to our Lord.

As a result of the Corona Virus shut down, TCF has been forced to cancel our planned events for the first half of this year but we have been able to continue with our online activities. The TCF website has been updated with a layout refresh which we hope will be more attractive to casual viewers. We have continued to write and seek up-to-date, classroom-relevant education articles for *TCF News* and for publication on our website. We have moved to online Zoom committee meetings and of course for our AGM today. Appreciating the underlying importance of prayer for all we do and say, we have revived our published prayer list in *TCF News* and are seeking to hold Zoom prayer meetings. As well we have been using our Facebook account to raise educational issues and notify people of upcoming events. The Committee would welcome other Christian teachers to add to our online posts and share them with others. Make sure you join our Facebook group. Maybe with the further lifting of restrictions we will be able to meet in person at our annual *Get-Away* on 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> July. If not, we would still like to interact live with you in some studies on *Prayers from the Bible*. Stay in touch for a last-minute update and please contact the office to indicate your interest to attend.

Harley Mills

## Secretary's Report for 2019 to the Annual General Meeting

### Communication and Resources:

- *TCF News*: Thanks to John Gore who faithfully continues to write relevant articles for and edits the bi-monthly publication. Robyn Thomas was asked to co-ordinate prayer points for each edition of *TCF News*. She has kindly agreed to do this in 2020.
- A leaflet was produced to promote TCF to university students as opportunities arise.
- Grammar resource for Early Stage 1, Stage 1 and Stage 2 were finalised and available for members by email. Each resource outlines the objectives, content, practical ideas and tips for teaching.
- The membership brochure was updated.



- *TCF Facebook* is not widely used. It is difficult to get members to post comments.
- The website has been ‘cleaned up’ with older articles being deleted and dates added to when articles are written. The Committee is looking at possible ways for the layout of the website to be modernised.
- TCF continues to respond, as the opportunity arises, on updates from the NSW Curriculum Review Taskforce.

**Activities:**

- \*A dinner was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> March at Castle Hill Baptist Church. 48 attended, 13 members and 35 non-members. Those who attended appreciated Eddie Woo’s input on *How does faith affect my teaching?*
- There were 8 full time and 1 part time at the *Get Away* on 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> October at Stanwell Tops. Harley led the studies on *Jesus, the Teacher*.

**TCF Promotion:**

A letter was sent to principals of Christian schools encouraging them to speak to their Year 12 students about considering teaching as a career. TCF information was enclosed with the letter.

**Membership:**

In 2019 there were 8 resignations. Geoff Webster, a long-standing, faithful member, was called home to be with his Lord and Saviour. Total membership as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 was 69.

**Office:**

- In May a new office printer was purchased.
- The office continues in the same location thanks to the generosity of John and Elizabeth Gore.

**Committee:**

There were seven Committee meetings held in 2019. The following show the number attended.

Harley Mills (President)	7	Pam Griffin (Secretary)	7
Ken Silvester (Vice President)	7	Lyn Searle	7
Dianne Young (Treasurer)	6	Karen Allsopp	3 (from 3)

In June Karen Allsopp tendered her resignation from the Committee. It was accepted with regret, but understanding. Her ten years of faithful service is greatly appreciated.

**Thankyou:**

Thanks goes to those who work faithfully work behind the scenes to keep TCF going - John and Elizabeth Gore, Colin and Cathy McKay, Harley Mills, Ken and Bronwyn Silvester, Dianne Young and Lyn Searle.

Thanks too, to the many members who faithfully pray for Christian teachers and TCF in NSW.

Pam Griffin, Secretary.

## Treasurer's Report 2019

The accounts of the fellowship have been audited. This is an abridged summary and the full accounts are available from the office on request.

### Statement of Receipts and Payments for year ended 31 December 2019

#### RECEIPTS

Subscriptions	3609
Donations	2705
Conference fees	1689
Getaway fees	1040
Interest and other	<u>626</u>
	<b><u>9741</u></b>

#### PAYMENTS

Salaries	4836
Office costs	459
Stationery, printing and postage	1251
Marketing and promotion	0
Insurance and fees	545
Conference meeting Costs	1282
Getaway	982
Missionary Support	180
Function and meeting costs	25
Gifts	<u>100</u>
	<b><u>9683</u></b>
<b>Surplus</b>	<b><u>75</u></b>
Net worth as at 31 December 2019	<b><u>23,674</u></b>

Dianne Young. Treasurer

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