

Recent Experiences of Learning to Pray

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Prayer is still far from being as much a natural part of daily life as I would like it to be. But here are a few recent thoughts on the prayer life journey of the Cooper family.

Routine prayer is often difficult. And one of the prayer routines we have is that some of the kids always ask me to say a 'good night' prayer when they are in bed. With the eldest it is a bit different: I need to ask if it's okay to come in, sit down and ...say a prayer. Sometimes it is 'yes', and sometimes, it is, 'I'm ok'. But I realized because these bedside prayers happen every night it can be a challenge to avoid my words becoming ritualistic and superficial.



Mark & Eddie walking together to school in the morning

I'm learning not to just launch in to the words, but to take a moment to feel and think, beforehand. And I've noticed also that I have to gather all of myself into that moment. One current theme that has broken out of the ritualistic pattern is for us to talk with God about how we are growing as a family, to acknowledge we are on a journey of faith together, that we are still finding our identity in Him, and to ask that we might be able to identify more deeply with him when we are at school or work.

But maybe even more than just finding a non-ritualistic theme, is the need for me to just catch my heart as a father and link that to what I feel is God's heart for the children. When that happens, even the ritualistic words about praying for the

children to have a restful sleep feel profound, even if we have left out the rest of the world from our prayer.

Last week, I heard a very down to earth talk about praying for healing by Pete Craig in Brompton Road. It focused on testimony and the few stories he shared were mainly personal and authentic, 'does God heal today?': <http://live.alpha.org/node/134>

I recommend it.

When we went to HTB on a Sunday recently I asked the kids about the Sunday school and was really happy to hear that they had been learning about how to pray for other people and in this instance about how to pray for people's healing. They had even experimented with it in the class and asked if anyone had any pain, and then prayed for a couple of painful knees.

I guess one of the other times we pray as a family is at the dinner table. And that is always a challenge when people are hungry and not everyone has sat down. Invariably one person is eating or moving around the room while someone is praying. But it has been a nice time to include the children's friends in prayer, when they come over to play. And I always say thank you to God that so and so is able to be with us for dinner.

Chieko, my wife, says she prays constantly most of the time when she is busy. Personally I prefer and usually want a quiet, peaceful, and solitary space for prayer. So I guess she gets to pray much more than me. I recently asked her what she prays about, and she said her main prayer is 'that our family can be useful to God's will in the future.' I asked her what His response is, or if she gets any message coming back. At the time, we were on the move, but she said briefly that she doesn't have so much of a conversation with God speaking back to her during that prayer. But for her and I that conversation is one we should explore more. At least for me prayer that is only going in one direction is often quite limiting in the end.

Recently on Sunday I was speaking about how prayer is like learning to read a map and when we learn all the different symbols and how the contour lines work we get a bird's eye perspective on our journey and a much more significant sense of where we are..... when compared to using a Sat Nav which might get you in a very linear fashion to a postcode you have inputted, but will allow you to learn very little about your surroundings and normally scold you forever attempting to explore different routes. 'Please make a U turn in one mile!'

I shared about how prayer can often start with us having some agenda but turn into us realizing that there is a much bigger agenda out there. So there is nothing wrong with having an agenda, and then just to allow God to influence it.

The other Saturday morning when I prayed for Damon's safety as he went off to some birthday party. And I caught something from God in that moment that went beyond what I sense is sometimes a slightly superstitious prayer. And then because I felt His spirit, I realized I couldn't very well pray for Damon's wellbeing, but then leave out his friends who he was in the car with, and then I found myself praying about their friendships, and I finished with talking to God about the kind of friend Damon could be to his friend whose birthday it was. Along way on from: 'please protect my son'.

God tends to get to us through our conscience.

So as we pray for people to be healed in our community or for people's protection as they travel abroad, those prayers are often a door for God and us to share about so much more; deep things that we have never noticed before.

Through prayer we can discover a whole new world of existence.