

3rd January 2021 10 am MOT: My Prayer Life

Service led by Lindsey Attwood, Activity by Naomi, Interview of Rosie by Naomi, Talk by Andrew Attwood, Response by Lindsey, Intercessions by Naomi, Paula and Esther
This transcript is only of the interview, the talk and the prayerful response.

Interview with Rosie: Approaches to Prayer

[Naomi:]

We're going to have a chat with Rosie now about her experiences with prayer. [...] And hopefully, Rosie is going to come and chat to me. Hi, Rosie!

[Rosie:] Morning! Happy New Year!

[Naomi:] You too! How are you?

[Rosie:] I'm really well, thank you.

[Naomi:] Good. And how did you celebrate New Year? Did you stay up and see the New Year in?

[Rosie:] No, I did not. I was watching TV and then I fell asleep. So no, I didn't. So I woke up with God in the morning.

[Naomi:] I think that's about the average way that we spent New Year this year. Yeah. So just before we talk about prayer, I just want if you could just tell us a little bit about yourself.

[Rosie:] Yeah. For those who don't know me, I'm Rosie, and I'm a member of St. John's Church in Kenilworth. So, yeah, I'm, my rôle, my job, I'm in the community. I'm a carer and I support clients with memory problems, dementia, things like that. So fantastic rôle as my career. Right.

[Naomi:] Thank you. So how easy do you find it to pray?

[Rosie:] Well, I do find it really easy to pray. I'm a big fan of praying. I prayed from a very, very small age. So I don't really find it difficult. I pray in the morning, I pray in the day, I pray throughout the day. You know, sometimes I pray when I'm walking, when I'm working, there's all various things. So yeah. What I've found, though, is as I get older, my prayer becomes deeper, and that makes a difference as well. Sometimes I'm distracted, and it is not always easy to pray, we get distracted, you know, we pray for things, and we get distracted and don't focus all the time, and, you know, things happen, and, you know, we become complacent, things like that. So, prayer is really, really important. And obviously, it's a special time with God. And communicating, it's a relationship. I do have lots and lots of tools as well, I use to help me. Can I show you a couple?

[Naomi:] Yes, do please.

[Rosie:] I have my cross, my prayer cross, that stays with me all the time. And I take that with me. I've had the 'how to pray'¹ as well. And that's been a real big focus in my life over the years. We did this in our prayer group. And I've got prayer dice, and I use that every morning to pray. And I've got 10 little items I pray for, like, I pray to God, I pray for God to bless my family, to bless the family of God, all different things.

[Naomi:] So you have a list with different things on and then that numbers on it. Okay,

[Rosie:] I memorise them now. So I know that number one is always thanking God. So if I get number one, it's to thank God. Number two is family. I've got Meet And Eat as well We do Meet And Eat, that's on my list as well. So I've got all different things. But when you put it together, I'm praying for everybody. But it's lovely with the dice. So that's another way. Yeah.

1 By Pete Greig – ISBN 978-1529374926 <https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/44008436-how-to-pray>

[Naomi:] That'd be a good one to do with children as well, I guess?

[Rosie:] Yeah, definitely.

I've got my little prayer book, when I'm praying for people or different things, I use this. I've been using this now for the last four years. There's lots of little things in there. Also, I've just become a member of Mothers' Union, in November. And one of the things they're very focused on, which I'm learning, is about the prayer diary. And there's a prayer every day. So that's another way to help me to focus on my prayer. And just by coincidence, as well, I've been loaned a book by one of our church members, Dot Powell. And it's called 'The Grace Outpouring.'² And it's about actually blessing others throughout prayer. I will Yeah, amazing. So yeah, I love praying.

[Naomi:] I'm sure we can send out the references for those books?

[Rosie:] Definitely. [see footnotes below]

[Naomi:] So can you tell us about a time when God has answered a specific prayer?

[Rosie:] Yeah, God answers my prayers. Psalm 23, you know, that's 'The Lord's my shepherd', I always pray that every day. So He answers a prayer when I say, "Give me today my daily bread," which I think He does every day. So He answers prayers in that way. I do ask Him as well to forgive me for my sins and trespasses. So He answers prayers in that way. And I also pray not to lead me into temptation and deliver me from evil, so Psalm 23 is very big in my life every day. So in that perspective, He does answer my prayers.

[Naomi:] Yeah. So another helpful thing is using Bible verses to pray. Thank you. And have you found the past year has affected your... you know, we've been in lockdown and everything that's been going on. How has that affected your prayer life?

[Rosie:] Yeah. I've had to find different ways to pray. I mean, going to church was a big thing for me. And that was one of my favourite places of praying, in church. I know we can pray anywhere, but praying in church was really special for me. But I found now since lockdown, my bedroom is my prayer room. My bedroom is my office. My bedroom is everything. So, yeah, I've struggled through lockdown, and you know, seeing people, you know, I'm a real people's person. So I've found that really, really difficult. But God has been good in a way and helped me in different ways to communicate with others in different ways.

[Naomi:] That's fantastic. Thank you so much Rosie for sharing with us.

[Rosie:] You're welcome.

[Lindsey:]

Thank you, Naomi and Rosie, and thank you, Rosie actually, you've really inspired me by the way you pray, and the different things you have, like the dice and the books: I quite like that, so I'll have a chat on one of our walks about it.

Reading: Matthew 6:5-15

5 "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

2 By Roy Godwin and Dave Roberts, on the story of the prayer centre called Ffald-y-Brenin.

ISBN 978-0781408462 <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8646063-the-grace-outpouring>

9 “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

10 your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.’

14 “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Talk

[Lindsey:]


So I'm just going to pray for Andrew before he comes and talks to us.

Father God, I want to thank You for Andrew this morning, and I know that he listens to You and he seeks Your voice all the time, and Your heart. And I pray, Father, that that You would speak through him right now, and bless his words to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[Andrew:]

Amen. Thank you, Lindsey. Morning to everyone. Good to see you. And a very warm, Happy New Year to you all. It's good to be heading into a new year that may have hopefully some better news than this past year has been. So, like Lindsey mentioned earlier, this is an MOT, this is a kind of a check. There's a reason why I thought it would be useful to think in terms of MOTs. At this time of year, every January we get a little reminder in our calendar that we need to sort our car out. And inevitably when we're dealing with things practical, you have to take it to someone who will check the spark plugs, check the oil. They do a kind of a general overview to see how things are going. And so it is with the Christian life, with the Christian heart, that we need to review how things are going.

[...]

So, the subject of prayer. I wonder how your breathing is, how is your breathing? Some of you may recall, I've got mild asthma, I've had mild asthma since I was about, I think 12, and it's never completely gone away, but I've always had medication. I've always had medication for emergencies, and as a preventative, so most of you may know how asthma inhalers work: you have a blue one, that's if you start to feel tight-chested and you need some immediate relief so it's a kind of reliever. But you also have another one of these  and you get different strengths of these depending on the seriousness of your asthma. This is a preventer. And so this has a little bit of steroid in it that gradually and over time develops a bit more space in your airways so you don't need to use your immediate reliever quite as much. If you have a cold or if you're feeling stressed you use a bit more of this, so that you don't have to keep on being relieved.



Breathing is one of those kind of metaphors that helps describe life itself: you can't live without breathing. And for every human being, you need to be regularly breathing, you need to have breathing at rest, and for the sake of physical health you need to have increased breathing when you're exercising, so there's a range of different kinds of things that happen at a physical level. I just wonder how that relates to our picture of the health of our prayer life, our spiritual breathing:

- breathing in a regular way,
- breathing at rest,
- and breathing in a focused way, like exercising.

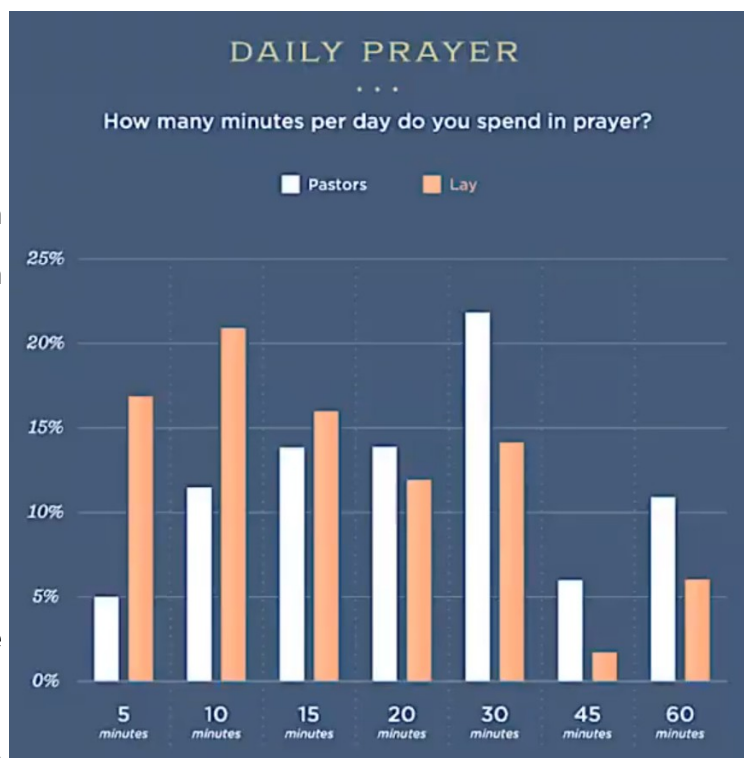
Now when I wonder what prayer life should look like, inevitably I'm going to look to Jesus Christ. Jesus is our perfect model of what prayer life looks like, and it's clear you will find different moments throughout the Gospel accounts of Jesus talking to God during His day. I'm always entertained when you see that story in John's Gospel, just before He raises Lazarus from the dead, and He openly prays and He says, "Thank you, Father, that you are going to do this for those folks standing around rather than me." And it's clear that that's a window into His regular communication with His heavenly Father, during the day Jesus spoke. We also know that Jesus withdrew, it's almost a cliché to say that Jesus withdrew, but it's clear that He needed to be away from people sometimes, to be with God, and you get a glimpse of that perhaps in His teaching which I'll refer to in a tick. And there are also times in Jesus' life where He prayed earnestly, perhaps most famously in Gethsemane, where He earnestly prayed repeatedly for the same subject, because He was seeking God, and seeking God with great emotion.

All of these aspects of prayer are things that Jesus modelled to His disciples, and He taught them to do the same. You will recall in the reading that Lindsey's just read to us that He talks to His disciples about private personal prayer. He talks about going to your room and closing the door. These are very practical suggestions from Jesus, saying, "You need to do some praying that is separate from everybody else." Perhaps during this last year, God has compelled us to do something separately, so that we can go deeper into these aspects of our relationship with God. To be physically healthy we need to move, exercise and rest, to be spiritually healthy, we need to move, exercise, and rest.

- We need to be in regular communication with God.
- We need to be seeking Him in dedicated times,
- and we need to be resting in His presence.

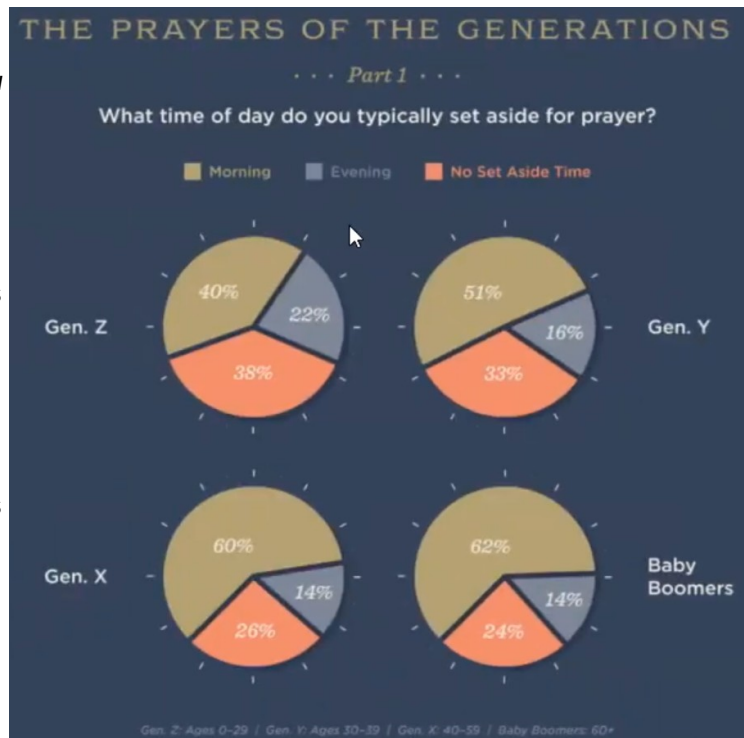
We're all going to nod. We're all going to go, "Yes, we've heard this 1,000 times, Andrew, we know, we know, we know." But then there's the question, how are we doing?

In a moment we're going to look at some slides just to compare the different kinds of things that are happening across the generations, when people are praying, so let's have our slides and look at the different things that are going on

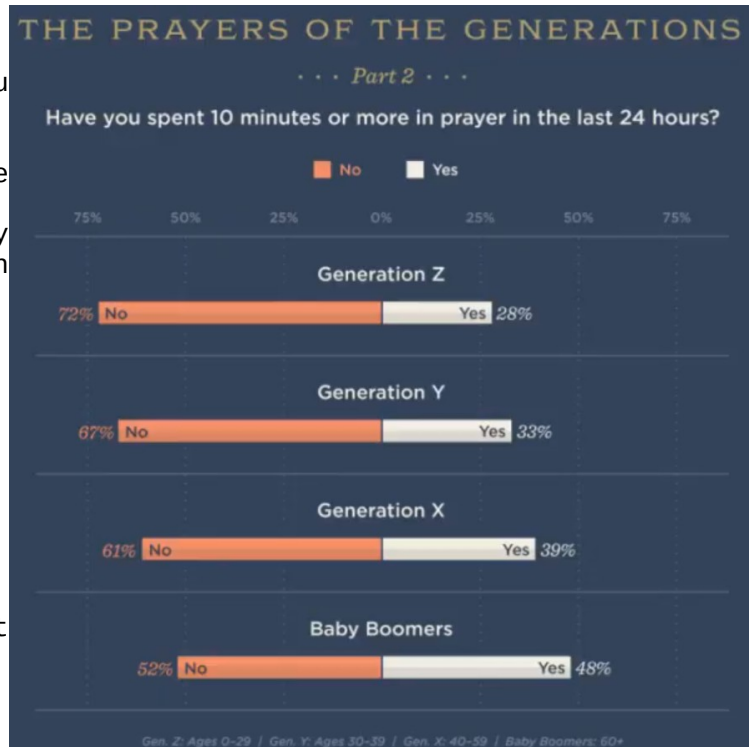


in people's prayer lives. This was a survey done by crossway.org [see previous page]. And it talks about how many minutes you might spend in prayer. Okay? And it was talking about actually comparing church leaders with people who were just members of churches.

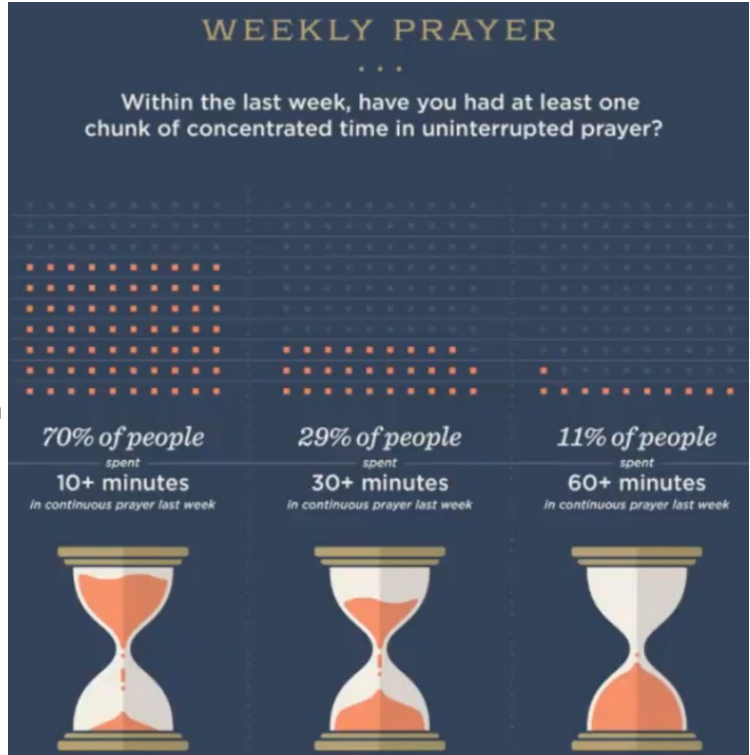
In the second slide, it talks about what time of day do you tend to set aside for prayer? Now there's a presumption behind the survey. There's a presumption that you do actually set aside some time for prayer. If you can look into the slide you'll see some pie charts there, and it talks about different generations from the baby baby boomers all the way through to Generation Z and the different proportions there, of people who set aside time in the morning, or the evening, or no set aside time at all. There seem to be differences there across the generations, as to people who do pray at certain times and when they pray as well. There seems to be a majority of people who seem to pray in the morning. There are no rules, but it's interesting just to look.



We'll have a look at the next slide. The next slide questions things in the immediate: have you spent 10 minutes or more in prayer in the last 24 hours? I don't know how much prayer you've been doing during the Christmas holidays or do you have a holiday from God when you come to gaps in your calendar? Have you spent 10 minutes or more in prayer in the last 24 hours? You'll try you'll see a trend here, when you're looking at these visuals on the slide, that there appears to be an increasing neglect of prayer, as people come through generationally. We seem to be moving into a time where people are less focused and less disciplined in praying. It's just an interesting measure as to how things seems to have shifted in these last decades.



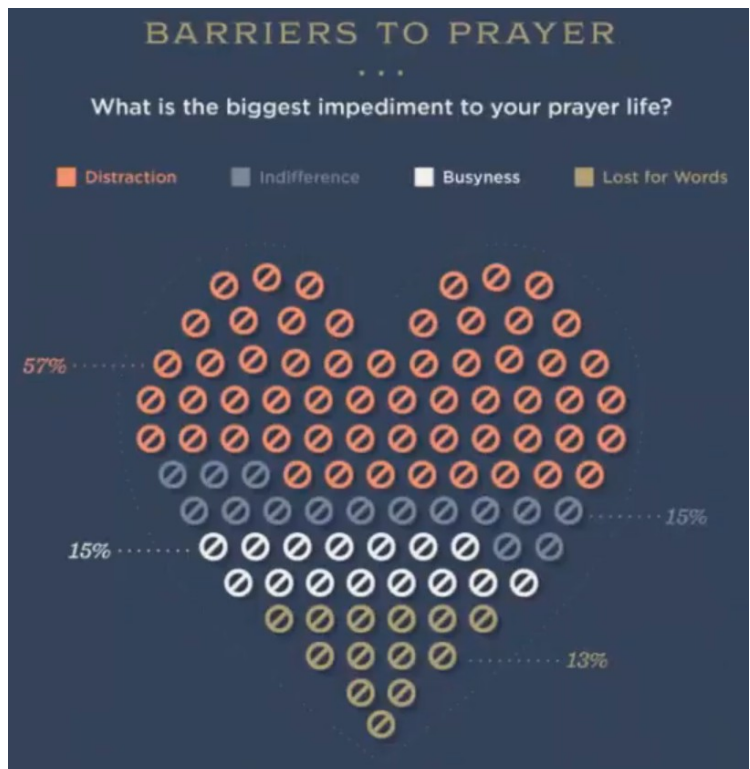
We'll have the next slide. What about this one? Within the last week, have you had at least one chunk of concentrated time in uninterrupted prayer? I think there's some good news here, 70% of people, according to the survey, spent 10 plus minutes in continuous prayer last week, just 10. minutes plus and then it goes to 30 minutes, 30%, just about 30 minutes in prayer. And only 11% spent an hour of uninterrupted prayer. Uninterrupted prayer is an interesting question. Our lives are so full these days, so easily interrupted. But where is prayer in our plan?



We'll go to the next slide. This one really speaks to me more than anything else. What is the biggest impediment, or distraction perhaps, in your prayer life? And it gives these different options:

- distractions,
- indifference,
- busyness,
- or simply lost for words.

The biggest thing that is an impediment to prayer life according to this particular survey is distraction, things that just come in from nowhere, and suddenly we're no longer focused on God.



I'm going to drop the slides for now: we'll not do the next slide. And there are so many things in the modern world and the modern experience of life that distract. People talk about people having an increasingly short attention-span. People eventually getting a set of different priorities, deciding not on God and preferring other things, or perhaps simply just not understanding that these things are important. How many of us are spending ages on our devices now, hours and hours, not just minutes, but hours and hours on our devices. It's an interesting review, not to make us feel guilty, but to raise questions about what gets in the way of what we say should be our most important relationship.

Do you understand the importance of this?

I want to talk about myself really, because I think I ebb and flow when it comes to praying. I've probably got an advantage from most people, because it's my job to lead people towards God. So everything in my circumstances points me in that kind of direction, but I'll be honest with you, even I can get distracted, I can go down cul-de-sacs and not focusing in the way in which would be useful.

But what about you? I can I can say from a personal point of view, there are things that aid my praying. I was out walking yesterday. I walked to Ashow and back. It probably took me about an hour or so. And during that time, because I was on my own, in other words, it was personal time, I was able to find myself in a prayerful attitude. I was able to chat to God on the way. I was able to lift up to God just a few things that were of concern to me. And as well as that, there were times of my walking when I said nothing. There are times in my walking where I was simply being quiet, in the lovely surroundings, and just trying to be a little bit more aware of God's presence, a little bit more aware of not just what I want to say to Him, but what He wants to say to me.

Now for me, there are a range of different things that seem to help, but those mixtures of prayer I have to return to on a regular basis: regular prayer during the day, deep times in God's presence and focused prayer. Now why are these things so important? Why would I highlight these three areas? Let me give you some outcomes. In regular prayer, during the day, if you have a habit of turning to God during the day, when you're at work, or walking between places, or first thing in the morning, or when you're eating, or getting ready for bed, these regular moments of turning to God mean, you could potentially be more likely led by the Spirit in your day, during your day. If you're regularly in communion and conversation with God, He's more able to prompt you, to lead by the Spirit. So that's one thing that is necessary, if you want to be led by the Spirit, regular prayer.

If you are serious about becoming more like Jesus Christ, the only way that can happen is if you have deeper times in His presence where you're still. Remember back to me having an operation, I had to lay down and let somebody else do something that I couldn't do. And in stillness, in His presence, God gradually works Christ's likeness into us, when we can't just do it through gritted teeth, where He works things in us as we rest with Him. So if you want to be changed into His likeness, you need to have longer periods and more regular periods of simply being with God, to catch His influence more deeply. What about focused prayer times? The exercise-y bits, when you bring to God a particular need: focused prayer. When you read in the Bible examples of the apostles praying, like in those early chapters of Acts where they're under persecution and they need God to intervene, focused prayer actually changes life around you, when you say, "I want this to change, Lord, we need this circumstance to be different, we need this situation to change." Focused prayer means you actually get to change the world, the real world around you. Or do you just kind of shrug and go, "It is what it is, I can't do anything about it." So all of these different areas of prayer have consequences:

- regular prayer during the day means you can be led by the Spirit;
- deep times in God's presence means you can be changed into the likeness of Christ;
- and focused prayer means you can begin to shape life around you as God guides.

How are you doing at the moment? Which areas do you think you would want to concentrate on as you push into January 2021? I want to be realistic here, I think people change very slowly. I've cut myself a bit more slack over the years. I think the older I've got, the more I've realised it takes a long time for Andrew Attwood to change. So I need to set before you and to set before me one thing, rather than multiple things, because you can get disheartened, if you

think you've got tons of stuff to do. Out of those three areas, I just wanted to have a moment of stillness just briefly to consider which do you think God is putting His finger on today for you?

- regular prayer, chatting to God;
- resting in God, being still with God and focused on Him in a different way;
- and focused prayer where you pray for specific situations to change or to move forward.

Which of those three things, regular prayer, resting in God or focused prayer, which area do you think is most needing attention at the moment? Just pause for a moment and have a consider for yourself.

[pause]

Maybe make a note. Regular prayer, resting in God or focused praying.

Just have a think. I would want to encourage you to make a realistic decision today. One of the things that's kind of helpful at the start of January is the idea of New Year's resolutions. If ever there is anything important to focus on, it will be our relationship with God. So can I encourage you to make a realistic decision in one of these areas to concentrate on during January. And if you can make a note of that and decide in your head or you can write it down, the final thing I'd want to recommend is this: can I encourage you to be accountable to somebody else, to another Christian, about what you have decided to do now. Some of you will be in groups, some of you will be in huddles, some of you will have someone who's already a prayer partner. Can you text them or talk to them or phone them, send them a note and say, "Ask me how I'm doing during January in this one area." Be accountable to someone else, so that you're motivated, through the encouragement of a Christian friend, to do something different: to be more regular in your prayer, or if it's resting in God or focused on particular subjects of prayer that God wants you to improve.

Remember what I showed you at the beginning: I have inhalers to help me breathe. I sometimes need aids. I sometimes need support systems, tools. Lindsey and I will sometimes pray together and we'll have maybe a commentary to listen to or the Lectio 365 app, which we find really helpful. If there are other tools that keep you motivated and moving, do do that. But I'm just going to hand back to Lindsey now, so that she can lead us in response to this time.

Prayerful Response

[Lindsey:] Thank you, Andrew, for that. It's a really good thing, prayer, it's essential as a Christian, to be a part of our walk with Jesus. I was thinking as Andrew was talking about prayer, for both myself and Andrew, because we no longer have young children, for instance, and we do have a bit more time, we're not key workers, it can feel easier to pray in a way, we have time. But I do feel I was thinking about people who may be out there thinking, "But I'm so busy, I'm stressed, I've got young children around. How do I pray at the minute?" The one thing, like Andrew was saying, like Jesus saying, it's about, not the long words, it's about... God can be with us anywhere. And I often pray in the shower, I chat to God in the shower. I often do jobs I hate doing like hoovering, which I don't like doing. And it doesn't have to be for a complete hour, if you haven't got an hour and you're thinking, "Oh, I can't be that focused! I feel a failure with praying," it can be anywhere. God just wants you. Give Him your day, like Andrew was saying. The more time you can just be open to hearing or listening to God, it sounds like... he can often guide you or whisper. It's often a still, small voice where he whispers in, and He can hear you. And also don't hide if you've messed up, if you've sinned that day or you've done something you feel regretful about, don't hide from God, go and talk to Him about it. Set your record straight quickly. You're always loved, you got to remember that: this is a God who absolutely loves you. And as Andrew was talking, I was reminded of Matthew 7 verse 7 which says,

‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened’

And sometimes he was talking about focused prayer. Persevere when it's hard, praying. You might give up when you think, "Oh, nothing's happening!" but God's encouraging us sometimes to persevere, push through, even with spiritual warfare, there's sometimes battles to fight, even through tears and depression. And sometimes I know for myself, God often says, "Don't always focus on yourself when it's really tough." I sometimes find myself praying, like Rosie was saying earlier, the Psalms, like Psalm 23. It means it focuses on Jesus, not on just your own situation, where you can keep looking at the water and it feels almost impossible. As you know, David who wrote Psalms was often in fear of his life and he wrote all these Psalms of prayer to God and reminds us who He was. So, push through with prayer, don't give up, and seek God, and let Him find you as well.

So I'm just going to pray a little bit [...]. So,

Lord Jesus, thank You, that You gave us a way of praying, and that You took away all the barriers like big words, having to be great, having to be knowledgeable, and You just call us into the quiet space, just me and You or You and whoever. You are open to people with an honest heart, and You desire to be with us and to communicate with us. So help us to to pray this month to really reach out to You in prayer and learn new ways of praying. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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