

Sermon preached by David at St Alban's on Alpha Sunday 16.02.20

What is the point of praying?

A card for every occasion

This week Valentine cards have been dropping through letterboxes. Perhaps you sent one or received one. We have an American daughter in law who is amazed at the British passion for sending cards on every occasion imaginable: celebrating birthdays and anniversaries; congratulations on passing exams, new jobs, new house, engagements and weddings; sympathy cards for accidents, illnesses and deaths; thank you cards for meals shared and help given; not to mention Mothers Day, Fathers Day, Christmas and Easter Cards.



Sending cards is one of the ways we celebrate our relationships - sharing the journey of life together, both its ups and its downs.

This morning we read one of the Psalms of David who is one of the most remarkable figures of the Old Testament. He is well known not just for the David and Goliath story but also for his close relationships including David and Jonathan, David and Bathsheba. Well before the era of greetings cards he was adept at sharing his journey of life with others, both the ups and downs.

A prayer for every occasion

David was also a skilled musician and writer of many songs in the book of Psalms. In these songs we see beyond his horizontal relationships with people to his vertical relationship with God. For David these prayers were an essential element in his life, sharing his daily journey with God, both the good times and the bad times.

This relationship with God changed David's life for the better. "Prayer doesn't just change things, it changes us" (Joyce Meyer). Without prayer David would have drowned under his troubles and sins and become a bitter and disillusioned man. Instead, David was Israel's most famous and illustrious King. Using David's Psalms I want to share with you...

Four prayers that can change your life for the better.

Thank you prayers

Psalm 92 declares "It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord" and many of the Psalms are thank you prayers. When visiting french-speaking churches we have noticed that some prayers are simply a string of sentences beginning "Merci Seigneur pour..." It is all too easy to fall into the habit of grumbling every day.

Paul writes "Make your life a prayer. And in the midst of everything be always giving thanks!" (1 Thess 5:17) Thank you prayers help us to remember God's blessings even on the most difficult of days. They develop an attitude of gratitude which can change our lives.



Forgive me prayers

King David is not just famous for his triumphs and successes, but also for his crimes and failures, including adultery and murder. These threatened to break his relationships with others and disconnect him from God. But David was quick to recognise his sins, say sorry and ask forgiveness. “Blot out the stain of my sins, wash me clean from my guilt... and I will be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:2,7).



God's promise to us is that we can be forgiven. “If we confess our sins to God he will keep his promise. He will forgive us our sins and purify us from all wrongdoing” (1 John 1:8-9). Through the cross of Jesus, our connection with God can be restored. Every day can be a new beginning for us as we are set free from past sin and guilt. This is a life-changer.

Please help prayers

King David was often in danger of his life and the Psalms contain many prayers asking for help... deliver me, save me, please send your help. One of his descendants, King Hezekiah, prayed for God's help in a very dramatic way. Hezekiah regularly paid huge amounts of tribute in gold and silver to placate the King of Assyria, but eventually the King of Assyria invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. A messenger brought a threatening letter to the gates of the city: “the kings of Assyria have completely destroyed everyone who stood in their way.”

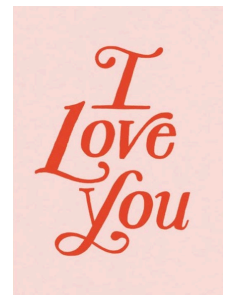


But King Hezekiah trusted God. When he received the letter he went into the temple and laid out the letter before the Lord asking for help. God's answer was both unexpected and miraculous (2 Kings 19).

Whenever we need help we too can carry it to God in prayer. We can physically lay out before God any letters, bills or emails we receive which trouble us. We can pray over photos of loved ones or newspaper articles which upset us.

Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

We have a choice: we can either be weighed down with our troubles or we can take them to God with a “help me” prayer. Prayer can change our lives by lifting the weight off our shoulders!



I love you prayers

Psalm 18 starts very simply “I love you Lord.” As David prayed day by day and night by night, he discovered that he was being drawn closer and closer to the heart of God. For me this is the deepest level of prayer: to say (or sing) “I love you Lord.” In doing this we follow the encouragement of Jesus to “love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength.” At Christmas we sing “O come let us adore Him” and this should be our aim all year round.

In fact just as all greetings cards are an expression of love to our friends, so all prayer should ultimately be an expression of love to God.