# Exploratory Prayer

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Preacher: Revd Clive Jennings

[0:00] Morning everyone. Who prayed for a long hot summer? Well done. Excellent. Devote yourself to prayer. This morning as we think about exploring prayer and that's what we're going to do now for a few minutes is just explore what prayer is and how we use exploratory prayer and in this series of great prayers of the Bible Paul who is at this point in prison, he's in chains, there is no excuse for not praying because Paul finds himself in that place yet here we've got this outpouring where he's encouraging the early church to pray for one another, to devote themselves to prayer, for asking them to pray for him and for others as well, to share their faith, to share the good news of Jesus with others. This is a great prayer and but as we explore this month we have heard that and maybe you've been listening to the podcast while you've been away or if you've been away, prayer is about a relationship. It's about that relationship, it's not a one-way thing, it's not a transaction. Jesus says he calls us his sheep, he calls us by name, he knows us and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. The thing is in exploratory prayer is hearing what the Lord is saying to us and not just hearing what the Lord's saying to us but responding to it as well. So I'm going to ask you, whose voice is familiar to you?

What is that voice that you instantly recognise? You see, many of us, if we've had children or maybe grandchildren, there is something inbuilt in us, isn't there, that in the middle of the night all you hear is a squeak and you wake up, you're attentive, you know, that's it. And so in our prayer relationship with Jesus we need to get to know his voice, what he's saying, how he speaks to us, the way in which he communicates with us. And if we're in a prayer relationship with Jesus we need to fully explore more and more how that is for us and how we can respond to it. So welcome, welcome to the exciting world of exploratory prayer.

And we're going to think this morning about different ways and maybe challenge ourselves as to how we respond. So how do you talk to God? And more importantly, what do you talk to God about?

Because often we think, maybe think of something specific maybe, maybe healing, maybe for a decision you're having to make, maybe something missional, prayer for increased confidence maybe in sharing your faith, prayer for more opportunities to come alongside people. What are we praying about?

What are the opportunities? So many people say to me and probably say to you as well, if they know that you're a Christian, oh send one up for me, will you? And it's an interesting one. I think the response is I'm happy, you know, I'm happy really to fire off a few prayers for people. But it's really nice to say to people, well, you know, maybe join me, I pray with you as whatever you want to pray about, you know? But sometimes these rocket prayers, I call them, or arrow prayers, are quite a part of our life.

[3:55] I thought we'd try that this morning. So rocket prayers. Oh yes. No. You see, it's really good. I mean, the way we communicate with God, it's not wrong.

When there's an immediacy that something needs to happen, it may well be it's, oh Lord, I need your help now. Now. Or even now. You see? And also as well, maybe it's your immediate prayer for somebody.

Is there a young person that would like to come and have a go? I'm sure there would be. Even an adult. Come on, we're all children at heart. Oh, come on. Well done, Jim. Give Jim a hand.

You see, I mean, whatever Jim's rocket prayer is at that moment would be. Yes. Send one out. Well done, mate. Round of applause.

There is nothing wrong with rocket prayers. Immediately arrow prayers. But, as Paul says, that can't really sustain us all the time. If life is just about immediacy, about prayers, so we explore how we prayer. I'd like to suggest that prayer isn't a spectator sport. We all get involved. We all get into the

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relationship. And if you're not used to praying, if you don't get used to talking to Jesus, if you don't know about the power of the Spirit, if you think that God is remote, then today is a good place to start with exploring prayer in our relationship and how we talk with him, how we react with him, how we listen to him. But what's the barriers? What stops us? And like you, I hear it so often. [5:57] You know, God isn't speaking to me. God's not talking to me. God's not answering my prayers. Why? Explore that for people. Explore that with them. Why? Maybe it's like the man in this clip. He lives in this life in his everyday. He lives in his everyday. Yet, he isn't aware that God longs to speak to him.

He wants to speak to him and wants to communicate with him like he does with each and every one of us, moment by moment, day by day, minute by minute. This clip is a reminder of how many times we could respond and hear God if only we listened. You know, I'd love it if I returned home and found my house covered in post-its. But on the other hand, I would feel slightly guilty of the fact that he needed to do that to seize my attention. You know, what is it that God needs to seize our attention in order to have that deeper, real prayer relationship with him? Paul's direct prayer is direct. Get into a relationship with God who is longing to deepen the relationship with you. Make the most of every opportunity. Pray that we may proclaim Jesus and encourage others. How do we do that? Be real with
God. Like Pete Gregg says, be real with him. Encourage others. Be real with God. People put a lot of effort into maybe shaping well-crafted prayers, frankly crafted sometimes, and I've done it and I'm guilty of it, which were crafted for other people and not for God. It's being real. I've used flowery historic Christian language because it fits with the setting in which I'm in, but it's not real. It's based on a, you know, theology rather than a conversation with the one I love. I found it helpful to talk to him in the voice that he gave me. I always loved my gran. My gran was very down to earth, very Somerset, and yet I remember as a child, when she answered the phone, it was totally different. Hello. It's Yeovil 369. This is Mrs. Jennings. To whom am I speaking? You know, how often do we do that with God? Oh Lord, it's me again here today, and I'm using this voice so you just know who I am.
You know, be real. Be real. God loves us to be real with him and him with us, and can I just bust the myth, if I can, which if you've been a Christian for years or whether you're new, prayer isn't complicated. Prayer is just about living in the everyday and speaking to God. Be yourself, the real you. Maybe start exploring being the real you in prayer, talking about the things that you think in the past that God hasn't been interested in, but really is, and to be real in that. Secondly, be in tune for his response, watching for the answer, watching for his guidance, watching and waiting sometimes, having the wisdom and patience to wait. For that, maybe God's response will be a quiet response. As I've often found, the quiet response is because he wants me to be part of the answer as well, rather than just receiving it all nightly tied up. As Pete Gregg says, keep it simple, keep it real, but most importantly, keep it up. Keep it up. Explore persistent prayer. Like you, I have been praying for years for many people to come into relationship with Jesus. I won't give up. I won't give up. [10:15] God honours us in persistent prayer. But I can share with you lots of ways in which to pray, and I think Paul is saying to his listeners, his readers, to us, it's about the heart. It's about our heart of how we relate to him.

Explore that connectivity and conversation with Jesus. Maybe we got stuck in an old language. That's okay. Explore something new. Maybe we got stuck a veer towards selfish prayers.
Me, me, and me, and more about me. Maybe explore something that's more outward looking. Prayers that avoid us. Maybe we rambled on in our prayers. It became, rather than actually getting to the point, going round the houses, when actually God, when any conversation wants to get to the point, and says, what are you really wanting? What are you talking to me about? I'm talking about this.
Yeah, okay, I get it. Maybe we've avoided prayers that have challenged us, and have avoided us being challenged by him. That impacted us, encouraged us to make changes to our lives, and our attitude.
Prayers that went something like, please, Lord, please, Lord, would you grow your church here? Would you bring more people to know you? Yet, when we pray that prayer, we've got no intention, maybe, in our heart of giving a lift to people to church, of being bold, inviting our neighbours to Alpha, of actually being the solution to the prayer. And so the Lord sometimes challenges us in that.

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[11:55] Lord, you know, we pray for so-and-so in their bereavement. Lord, we know, we know how much they need you. Maybe the answer to the prayer is we knock on their door and say, why don't you come to the bereavement course with me? Because that might be the answer to the prayer that we're praying.

I haven't seen so-and-so in church, Lord. I pray you'd bring them back. And the Lord says, have you followed them up? Have you given them a call? Have you dropped round? Have you gone round with the cake? Have you knocked the door? Because it's up to you as well. We're working together in this.
I pray, Lord, for those who will be energy of poverty this week, this autumn, who will be suffering from the cold. Lord, be with them, please. And the Lord says, well, why don't you invite them around a couple of days a week into your nice warm lounge and have tea with them or do knitting or whatever? Why don't you invite them in? We are the solution to the prayer. It's not just a one-way experience. And when we explore what prayer really is, we realise more and more that it responds to prayer by wanting us to get involved with him. Prayers are more than a fleeting nod to his sovereignty and his wisdom and his action. Exploratory prayer is, as Paul says, being watchful and thankful.
Explore more and more of him in our thankfulness. Explore ways of praying, maybe that are focused on giving thanks for the everyday. And how much more of our prayer time is where I'm challenged, is more about asking than thanking? Maybe that needs a shift in our exploratory prayer. Maybe more about thanking than asking for things. Paul says to the early church in Thessalonica, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. And Paul is living it out in chains. And Paul says, pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim Jesus. It's about the everyday. Explore prayer in new ways this week.
[14:12] Maybe on the way to school, on the way to shops, on the way on holiday, the person in the car next to you at the traffic lights, just praying for them. People in the news, articles in the local newspaper, things around you, give it a try. It's really exciting. And on the way to the shops tomorrow, maybe a scenario. Lord, I went to church yesterday. And I heard this sermon, and it said about talking to you in the everyday. So here I am on my way to the shops. Lord, would you just show me maybe whether this really works? Whereupon, you are drawn to a lady that stood there, as you're approaching, and she looks really crestfallen. You say, Lord, is there something you'd like me to say to this day? The Lord says, that's really strange you should ask.

That? And I'm glad you're there. Because while you're on your way to Tesco's, but other shops are available, while we're on our way there, she's actually got a problem with her foot.
Really, Lord? Yes, she has. Thank you. What would you like me to do? Well, just go over and have a chat to her. Hello, how are you? Oh, good to see you. Oh, hello, how are you? You're looking really sad.
Are you okay? Well, no, I'm not, actually. I'm not. I've been waiting for this operation for two years, and it's just got a little bit much today. It's your foot, isn't it? Well, how did you know that?
Well, strangely enough, I went to church yesterday. And there's this bloke who's giving a talk, and he said, we ought to listen to what God's telling us. And so, how is your foot? Well, I've been waiting for two years for this. Oh, really? That must be a real, real difficulty for you. Well, can I pray for you? Because the vicar said yesterday that it's all about prayer. Would you mind? She said, well, I've tried everything else. And I'd love you to. Is that okay? So, now, this is the point where you don't have to gather people from across the street to gather around and do the thing. You know, this can be quite non-threatening, quite simple.
[16:44] So, do you mind if I pray for you? Sorry, what's your name? Doris. Doris, my name's Clive. It's good to see you. Could I say a brief prayer for you? Yes, I'd love you to, actually. That's fine. Doris, Holy Spirit, Lord, would you come and would you be with Doris now in her pain, Lord? And would you bring healing to her foot, Lord? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Oh, thank you. That was a lovely thing to do. That's really brightened my day. By the way, so what was your name again?

Oh, it's Clive. And what church do you go to? I'll probably see you there on Sunday. That sounds really nice. Anybody like to try that tomorrow? Everybody. Well done. You see, it hasn't got to be difficult. It hasn't got to be difficult. And it makes going shopping far more exciting. Because you never know what the Lord's going to do. Because Jesus is faithful. And if it's in his timing and in his purposes, and if we are listening and prepared to respond, you sense him prompt you in some very

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exciting and unusual places, but in the everyday. And as we, this may sound, but I was just thinking, maybe in this exploratory phase that we're in of praying, maybe you are already asking, how do I explore this? On the desks around, if you're near a desk, is some post-its.
And over here is a table with some post-its. Now, I'm aware, and I have been aware in my life and in my Christian journey, it's great to be challenged with different ways to pray. And it may well be that your desire today is to say to the Lord, Lord, would you help me to do some of that stuff?
Would you help me to explore prayer, to be more open? Maybe it is, Lord, just make me more open to what you want to do in the everyday. Lord, maybe help me, like the man in the clip, to know what you're saying so I can respond. Help me pray more during the day. In fact, a lot more than I'm doing now. Maybe that's your prayer. Help me listen for you. Maybe like the man, you are just so busy that God's been speaking, but you haven't heard the fullness of what he wants for you. To hear his well done in your life. To hear how well and how much he loves you. Maybe he wants to stir up the gifts of prophecy in you. Maybe you would like that more and more. Jesus, I want to increase the way I can be more in tune with my work colleagues. How can I do that through my prayer in the everyday?
Jesus, I want to maybe, I'm sorry for the way we haven't talked for a while. Lord, I know I haven't been honest with you. Maybe that's our prayer. Lord, help me to be honest with you more and more about the real things in my life. Holy Spirit, I want to experience you in power in my life. Give me a tangible sign of your presence and of your love that I've been asking for for some time. Lord, would you do that? And Lord, I realise that it's been other people's prayers for me and not my own. Show me how to pray. Very simple. Lord, show me please how to pray.
[20:22] Lord, you know my life. You know my busyness. Where is the best place that we can meet each day? Where do you want to meet with me? And Lord, Clive talked about opportunities. Lord, would you help me to explore new opportunities for me to share my faith with other people through prayer?

And perhaps you're into long rambling prayers where God never gets a chance to speak. You know, maybe again, your prayer would be, Lord, help me listen more. Help me watch more. Help me look for where you're at work. And here is one. Ask for courage. Lord, would you give me courage to pray?
Courage to pray when I need to, when the opportunities come. The courage to pray. So this morning, maybe you'd like to explore courageous prayer. Explore bold prayers. Be expectant, knowing that he's active. Explore guidance. Lord, where do you need me now? What are you asking of me? Maybe that's a question for somebody here or somebody listening on the podcast. Maybe being humble in prayer. You know, we haven't got a corner on prayer. Maybe we need to be more humble sometimes. Humbling my heart. Where do you want me to be in this community, in this church community, in my workplace? Where do you want me to witness and share your love with others? Explore being active in prayer. Maybe the Lord's saying to you, do you know what? I love the fish on the back of your car. Why don't you just match the advertising and talk to the people in the garage when you go in?
What's that fish on the back of your car? Well, it's because I'm a Christian. Really? That's fine. You service my car all the time. Have you ever, have you ever thought about what can I pray for you for your business? You know, we put these signs up, don't we? But we don't follow them up. Maybe we need more courage. Lord, explore having fun with Jesus. The disciples didn't stick with him for three years because it was an exercise in monotony. They stayed with Jesus because he was fun to be around.
[22:53] We wake up in the morning. What's he going to do next? We've seen the fish thing. We've seen the food. what else is going to happen. Let's be expectant of what Jesus is going to do in us and explore that.

So are we up for this? Let's pray. Holy Spirit, would you come and would you reveal to us, Lord, new and exciting ways as we explore our relationship with you through prayer.
Amen.

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