

Prayer walking

No. 1

Prayer is keeping company with God

Many of us are taking a daily constitutional walk in compliance with government instructions, keeping that careful two metres apart of course, unless out with a family member. Some of you may take a playlist with you either on your phone or on an MP3 player. Some of you may be developing a fresh appreciation for silence and birdsong, given the lack of traffic on our roads. Can this daily walk be more than just exercise though?

Can this time be channelled into intercession and time spent listening with God rather than simply a means of drowning out our internal soundtrack of anxious thoughts?

Prayer walking around our neighbourhoods is an illuminating and loving way to interact with our surroundings. Perhaps you are a pro at this but perhaps you have never tried to pray as you walk. Here are some pointers to help us begin.

First Step

Pause before you start. This pause may be about making sure you are dressed for the weather or have the right music with you. Without any attempt at cheesiness, I have found something like Walk with Me by Jesus Culture, a great song to have in my head before I begin a prayer walk. It is a song of praise and invitation, here are the lyrics:

*Author of the world, walk with me
Ruler of the earth, walk with me
Calmer of the storm, walk with me
Healer of my heart, walk with me
How I need You
How I need You, oh Jesus
Walk with me
Light for every step, walk with me
Giver of each breath, walk with me
How I need You
How I need You, oh Jesus
Walk with me*

You can find it in YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ee8BnSd4Ueg&list=RDMMee8BnSd4Ueg&start_radio=1

You may prefer to carry a Bible verse in your head, a favourite or one that stood out to you from Morning Prayer today, for instance.

*How I love You
How I love You, Oh Jesus Walk with me
In Your presence Lord
There is peace
In Your presence Lord
There is life
In Your presence Lord
There is peace
In Your presence Lord
There is life that never ends
In Your presence Lord There is joy, there is joy
In Your presence Lord...*

Okay, now you're ready.

As you leave your house, start off slowly and find a comfortable pace, a pace that allows you to notice your surroundings.

- Begin with wonder and praise; praise for creation is easy when you are outside and of course points us straight to the Creator.

Use your eyes and your pace together to really notice; small birds, plants budding into leaf, hedgerow flowers, the sheer size of trees. Use your ears to listen – how many types of bird song do you think you are hearing?

- Praise can turn very easily to gratitude, so as you walk begin to thank God for the different things that are coming to mind.

Thank God for the people in the houses you have passed, it doesn't matter if you know anyone or not. Take your time. This process of prayer walking is as much about listening to God as it is about pouring out your thoughts to him.

- When you feel yourself coming to a natural end of thanksgiving, turn your thoughts to confession.

Invite God to speak to you. Confession may be centred upon yourself or something you notice on your walk. Have you walked past shop fronts that are boarded up? Is there a lot of litter? Is there waste ground that has become a dumping ground?

- Now you are ready to intercede.

Allow yourself to be guided by what you are seeing on your walk together with what God is pointing out to you. Notice what makes your heart ache and bring it before the Lord.

- As you return to your home, can you summarize?

Where did your noticing take you as you were praising God – is there a phrase or something more that you would like to jot down when you arrive home?

As you gave thanks, did someone in particular come to mind – is this the time to give them a call or text and let them know you were thinking of them?

In your time of confession, is there now a relationship to put right? In a season of being more aware of our own mortality, now more than ever, is the time to keep short accounts with one another.

From your interceding is there an action you can take?

Is it time to make a change in some of your habits?

Do you need to encourage someone?

Is it time to keep a list of answered prayer or start keeping a journal to remind yourself of the different ways God has spoken to you on these prayer walks?

Prayer walking

No. 2

On Monday, we explored prayer walking for the first time and had a simple framework to use for future walks. Today we will use the same framework, only this time with some more creativity to help us pray.

One thing I have noticed during this strange season of isolation is how much friendlier people are when we pass them out in the street. Yes, there are a few who simply want to remind us to keep our 2m distance but most people smile and say hello. The desire for human connection is increasing the more isolated we become. Prayer walking around our neighbourhoods is an illuminating and loving way to interact with our surroundings and today we will invite God to speak to us more about our neighbourhoods.

First Step

Pause before you start. This pause may be about making sure you are dressed for the weather or have the right music with you. You may prefer to carry a Bible verse in your head, a favourite or one that stood out to you from Morning Prayer today, for instance.

Before you leave the house, spend a moment listening to God. Specifically, ask God for two words to use as you pray. Using a biro or sharpie, write the words, one for each foot, on the souls of your shoes. If you don't think God has said anything to you, then cast your mind back over yesterday's walk. What stood out for you and can you derive two words from that, that you could turn into prayers?

As you leave your house, start off slowly and find a comfortable pace, a pace that allows you to notice your surroundings.

- Begin with wonder and praise; praise for creation is easy when you are outside and of course points us straight to the Creator.

Use your eyes and your pace together to really notice; small birds, plants budding into leaf, hedgerow flowers, the sheer size of trees. Use your ears to listen – how many types of bird song do you think you are hearing? Can you collect something (e.g. leaf, mossy twig) from this walk to add to your journal or help you contemplate more once you get home?

- Praise can turn very easily to gratitude, so as you walk begin to thank God for the different things that are coming to mind.

Thank God for the people in the houses you have passed, it doesn't matter if you know anyone or not. Take your time. This process of prayer walking is as much about listening to God as it is about pouring out your thoughts to him. Is there a particular garden that gives you joy at this time – make a note of street and house number and put a card expressing thanks through the letterbox in a few

months' time (this could be anonymous or the beginning of a new acquaintance). Silently pray a prayer of blessing over anyone you pass on your walk.

- When you feel yourself coming to a natural end of thanksgiving, turn your thoughts to confession.

Invite God to speak to you. Confession may be centred upon yourself or something you notice on your walk. Have you walked past shop fronts that are boarded up? Is there a lot of litter? Is there waste ground that has become a dumping ground? Forgiveness is a constant part of our lives as followers of Jesus so is there anyone you need to forgive today? Is there anyone you need to ask forgiveness from?

- Now you are ready to intercede.

Allow yourself to be guided by what you are seeing on your walk together with what God is pointing out to you. Notice what makes your heart ache and bring it before the Lord. Invite God into your prayers through using the words on the souls of your shoes. How does using these words change your prayers today in comparison with yesterday?

Joshua 1:3 "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you..." (NRSV) If you pray with this verse in mind, how does that change the way you pray as you walk around your neighbourhood?

- As you return to your home, can you summarize?

Where did your noticing take you as you were praising God – is there a phrase or something more that you would like to jot down when you arrive home? Can you turn your thoughts into a psalm?

As you gave thanks, did someone in particular come to mind – is this the time to give them a call or text and let them know you were thinking of them? What did you think about silently blessing each person you passed?

In your time of confession, is there now a relationship to put right? In a season of being more aware of our own mortality, now more than ever, is the time to keep short accounts with one another. If your thoughts were on your environment, often, we are the first step in any solution to a problem - can you take a bin bag and wear rubber gloves and carefully pick up rubbish on your next walk?

From your interceding is there an action you can take? Is it time to make a change in some of your habits? Do you need to encourage someone? Is it time to keep a list of answered prayer or start keeping a journal to remind yourself of the different ways God is speaking to you on these prayer walks?

These words written by J. R. Tolkien remind us that recovery is possible, this season will not last forever:
*All that is gold does not glitter
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes, a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.*

Rev Claire Elwood

Prayer walking

No. 3

Today, we are going to shift our focus slightly.

Let us be honest, this lock down season is producing many different emotions in us and we are all having difficult days. Today we shall be acknowledging some of our difficult emotions within the framework of our prayer walk.

First Step

Pause before you start. This pause may be about making sure you are dressed for the weather or have the right music with you. This may be a day for music without words. You may prefer to carry a Bible verse in your head, a favourite or one that stood out to you from Morning Prayer today, for instance. Psalm 142 is a good choice for today:

I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.

2 I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble.

3 When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way. In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me.

4 Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

5 I cry to you, LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

6 Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.

7 Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

As you leave your house, start off slowly and find a comfortable pace, a pace that allows you to notice your surroundings.

- Begin with wonder and praise; praise for creation is easy when you are outside and of course points us straight to the Creator.

The discipline of beginning with praise is a good one, it takes us out of ourselves and reminds us that we know someone bigger and more powerful than ourselves and our emotions.

- Draw into your awareness a difficult emotion or negative feeling that most wants your attention.

Maybe there is a memory repeatedly resurfacing at present; perhaps a recent incident that draws a particular negative feeling up in you; perhaps a fear associated with not seeing a loved one at the moment.

- Allow this feeling to become personified.

If this feeling were a person, what would it look like? What expressions would be on its face? What age or what name would it have? Without forcing anything, allow the image of this person to arise from deep within you. Allow this personified feeling to walk alongside you without being overtaken by the feeling.

- Keep pace with this person who is representing the feeling.

Spend some time just recognizing and being with this person who is your feeling.

- Now it is time to recognize that Jesus is walking towards you.

Allow Jesus to come close and fall into step with you and your feeling.

- What does Jesus have to say about this feeling?

Notice whatever grace is being offered to you. Notice where Jesus is in relation to you and your feeling.

- Be prepared to repeat this exercise with other feelings as they emerge.

We are not trying to make our feelings disappear but are taking time to recognize each one as it surfaces. Then, as we invite Jesus to be alongside us as we walk with this feeling, we find we can share the feeling. Perhaps the burden of the feeling is lifted and feels lighter as we walk.

- As you return home, consider the words attributed to St. Patrick:

Christ beside me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ below.

Christ above me, Christ beyond me, Christ within me, Christ with me now.

Christ on my right hand, Christ on my left, Christ in my neighbours, Christ in their needs. Christ in the silence, Christ in the sharing, Christ in the listening, Christ in the prayers. Christ in my working, Christ in my resting, Christ when I play.

Christ in my sleeping, Christ in my waking, Christ when I breakfast.

Christ in my laughing, Christ in my weeping, Christ all the day.

Christ when I'm wise and Christ when I'm gormless, Christ watching over me day after day.

If you have begun to journal this week, take time at home to think over today's walk. Read Paul's words in Philippians 4:5-7

The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

Write down any further reflections from your walk and be at peace.

Rev. Claire Elwood