

WHY PRAY?

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation (Psalm 62:1 RSV)

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation (Mark 14:38 RSV)

There are many ways to pray. In this paper I shall discuss only one: wordless prayer, known in the Bible as 'waiting on God' and in the mystical tradition as contemplative prayer. Essentially it involves spending time in silence before God. I know of nowhere where this is more plainly taught than by Andrew Murray's timeless little book *Waiting On God*, written over a century ago and still as encouraging and powerful as ever. Why do we do it?

(1) First and foremost, *prayer honours God*. It demonstrates who takes the priority in our lives: God or ourselves. It is significant that at the very start of the prayer which Jesus taught His disciples He placed the words 'Hallowed be thy name'. As a simple act of obedience this should be reason enough.

(2) *Prayer makes us available to God*. It signals to Him that we are 'open for business.'

(3) *The attitude of prayer enables the Holy Spirit to probe our inmost being*, exposing and bringing to the surface areas that need confessing, putting right or healing. In the words of the psalmist,

Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

(Psalm 139:23-4 RSV)

So Jesus included in His model prayer the petition 'Forgive us our trespasses.'

(4) *Prayer slows down the pace of life* to the point at which we can begin to hear God's voice. This is the principal point I was trying to make in the [series](#) of articles I called *Alternative Christianity* in 1988-9 (see [Section I](#) of my website www.brainwaves.org.uk)

(5) *Prayer unscrambles the brain*. As human beings we are [all](#) born with scrambled minds which cannot be trusted to discover wisdom. This is a major consequence of the condition Christians refer to as the fall. It is the essential problem Paul describes in the first chapter of Romans (vv.21, 28) before going on in subsequent chapters to expound the good news about the action God has taken to rectify it. The culmination of this process he describes at the start of chapter 12:

[P]resent your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but *be transformed by the renewal of your mind*, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 RSV; emphasis added).

We come before God in a physical attitude of prayer, whether kneeling, sitting, lying down, standing or in any other posture, and He transfigures our minds. (The word 'transformed' is the same as Mark uses to describe Jesus' glory in the Transfiguration, 9:2. We get from it the English word 'metamorphosed'.) This is the culmination of the process Paul describes as salvation. It is entirely in tune with the understanding of the psalmist quoted above (62:1).

(6) *Prayer enables God to bring about His kingdom*. Having got us safely where He wants us, He is free to operate elsewhere without damaging us. And so He is able to bring about solutions to problems which never had solutions before.

That's why!

Martin Mosse, July 2013.