

# A String of Pearls

## Sourcesheet 7: Personal Prayer

Worship offers us special points at which we, individually, respond to God. We have already come across one of these times when there is a moment of reflection at the confession (penitence). There are other moments too, most noticeably during the giving of communion - both before and after receiving the bread and wine.

The Peace is a point at which word and action come together. Exchanging signs of Peace is a practical and demonstrative point of participation in the service.

Perhaps the most personal aspect of the communion service is the receiving of the Bread and Wine, a point at which there is almost a physical intimacy with Jesus. This is the point at which we encounter God's grace directly.

Worship is not confined to single services, in part 5 we noted the church seasons which change the nuances in worship. These seasons can have significant impact on our personal expressions of faith.

Many of us have favourite seasons and make a special effort to attend church on these occasions.

We also have favourite services or favourite parts of services; some of us appreciate quiet, reflective worship, others boisterous and lively celebrations and there is always the possibility of finding both uplifting!

As we have seen, worship consists of a range of actions and words but there are also symbols intertwined with them. Our churches host many symbols of Christian faith which range from the simple such as crosses and candles to the often very complex stained-glass windows. Christians often have symbols in their homes, these too can have a seasonal flavour - the way that we use Christmas decorations for instance can be more or less expressive of faith. There are several understandings of how the bread and wine are Jesus' body and blood, and whilst this is not the place to discuss these, whatever we believe about how Christ is present in the sacrament, the bread and wine are always symbols both of the last supper and of the person, Jesus Christ himself.

As you think about worship you may wish to think of opportunities for worship which are not centred on church: For example, **personal private worship** . When do you find yourself feeling and expressing thanksgiving for God's goodness or celebrating in the wonderful beauty of creation say in a fall of snow or a dramatic sunset; or **small group worship** such as on retreats, in home groups or on pilgrimage.

In fact, perhaps we should be aiming to live our lives in such a way that everything is worship. Perhaps that is what Psalm 8 is trying to tell us ...

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O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.  
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?  
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honour.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.  
O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
*(Psalm 8)*

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The Covid crisis has altered the way in which many people participate in worship. There are several ways in which people have been accessing worship. This has made the performance of worship widely accessible. What has been harder to facilitate is the opportunity to *participate* in worship. YouTube allows for limited written comments, Zoom will permit spoken comment but attempts at shared responses or prayers do not meet with great success.

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## Talksheet 7 —Personal Prayer

### Exodus 33 and 34

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#### **WELCOME – Breaking the ice (*Aim for 10 mins*)**

##### **Psalm 100**

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,  
and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;  
his steadfast love endures forever,

To start the session read Psalm 100 together.  
After a moments' stillness read it again and  
think especially of the line—

*Worship the Lord with gladness;*

Each time we worship we respond to the word  
and presence of God.

**Does worship fill us with gladness?**

**What else does it fill us with?**

#### **WORD – Applying the truth (*Aim for 45 mins*)**

When we really want to get to know someone, there is no substitute for spending time together. The same is true for our relationship with God. Throughout the Gospels we see that Jesus placed a high priority on being alone with his Father. Despite the overwhelming demands on his time, “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5.16). This discipline can be seen in the lives of the great men and women of the Old Testament as well. Moses was one such person.

Returning from Mount Sinai, Moses finds the people of Israel worshipping a golden calf. He is infuriated, yet he intercedes before the Lord for his people. While we will probably never spend forty days and nights alone with God. Moses' heart for God and time in his presence is a good example of what a quiet time is all about.

1. Spending time regularly with God is difficult for many people. What are some of the reasons for this?
2. Read Exodus 33.7-23. What do we learn about the purpose of the “tent of meeting” in verses 7-11?
3. Describe Moses' relationship with God as depicted in these verses?

4. In verses 12-23 we are allowed inside the tent of meeting while Moses converses with God. What requests does Moses make in verses 13, 15 and 18?
5. How does your desire to know God compare with Moses?
6. Read Exodus 34.1-10. In verses 1-3 what commands does God give to Moses?
7. Why do you think God demands that Moses come to him alone, apart from “even the flocks and herds” (v3)?  
How might Moses’ example relate to our meeting with God?
8. What distractions hinder you from spending quality time alone with the Lord?
9. In verses 4-5 Moses carefully obeys God’s commands, and the Lord reveals himself to him.  
What does Moses learn of God’s character (v6-7)?
10. What else do we observe about how Moses spent time with God (v8-10)?
11. Read Exodus 34.27-35. In these verses we see the conclusion of Moses’ time with God and some of the results of that time. How are the Ten Commandments (v28) a partial fulfilment of Moses’ request in Exodus 33.13?
12. In verses 29-35 Moses comes down from Mount Sinai and returns to the camp. How was he affected by his time in God’s presence?
13. In what ways can we expect to be changed by our times alone with God?
14. In many ways Moses’ experiences with God were unique and unrepeatably. Yet what practical help for our own quiet times can we derive from these chapters?

## **WITNESS – Reaching out to others**

(Aim for 20 – 30 minutes)

### **Giving Thanks to God**

Thank God for something that helps you to praise God.

### **Praying for one another**

Ask everyone to share something they would like prayer for.

Then go round the room and pray for the person to your right,