

What is prayer?

By Christine Sine



There are probably more books written on prayer than any other Christian topic, yet we still come to Jesus regularly asking: teach us to pray. For some of us prayer is confined to intercession. For others it focuses on meditation. For some it is always spoken in the mind, for others it must be shouted out loud to be effective. Usually our concepts of prayer revolve around words and responses which I think is part of the challenge we face.

The problem is that prayer is not about words but about relationship and relationships are constantly growing, changing and requiring new ways of interacting. The speaking of words can become rote and repetitive, even boring at times, the developing of relationship requires flexibility, creativity and constant willingness to change and to grow.

What the disciples saw in Jesus' prayer life that they craved because it was so different from what they had grown up with, was the deep and personal intimacy with God that was at its heart. I think they also craved a prayer life that did not depend on rituals performed at certain times of the day but rather was based on a whole new way of looking at the world. The disciples longed for a relationship with God that wove through every part of their lives. They wanted to develop the same dynamic, living relationship with God that Jesus had and realized that to acquire it they needed to learn not just new techniques for prayer but a whole new understanding of prayer.

Richard Foster's wrote, "I imagine prayer as any process that draws us back into the garden of God where we walk, and talk and commune with God in a place of abundance and peace. I imagine prayer as a new way of looking and listening and interacting with the world so that we are constantly uncovering the presence of God which shines through every moment and enlivens every creature."

This kind of understanding of prayer is a constant journey of discovery which demands we give God our full attention in each moment. It is not easy. We are so easily distracted by busyness and worry and work. We are so easily waylaid by the needs of the world and our desire to find solutions.

We definitely need to come back to Jesus for a new understanding of prayer.