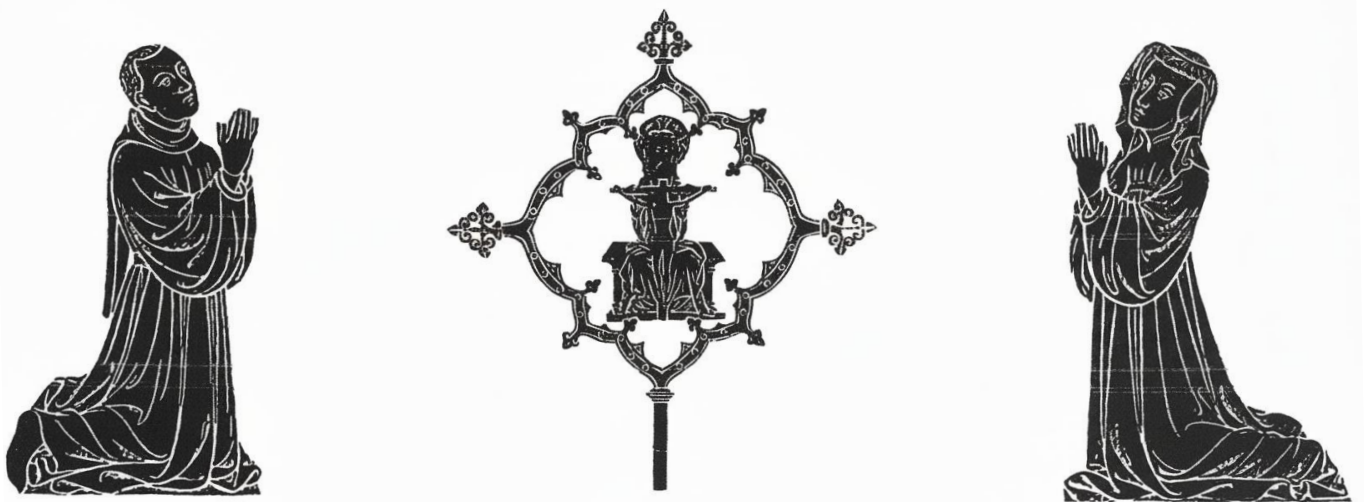


THE ADVENTURE OF PRAYER

A Sermon Series for Summer 2026
Sundays at 10am



“Prayer begins as the opening of my heart and mind to God's love for me. And it never ceases to be that, however wide the demands of that love are discovered to be ... For how can I love my neighbour as myself unless I am deeply aware of what I am, that I am being loved into fullness of life by the Father of us all?”

(Harry Williams CR, *Becoming what I am*)

St Mary's and St John's Kidlington with St Mary's Hampton Poyle.

The Adventure of Prayer
A Sermon Series for Summer 2026

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| 1. Being Loved:
David Meara
3rd May (Easter 5) | Romans 5 : 1-8
John 3: 16-17 |
| 2. How do I pray?
Liz Bendor-Samuel
10th May (Easter 6) | 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-23
Luke 11: 1-4 |
| 3. Prayer Ministry
Penny Pedley
31st May (Trinity) | Romans 12: 9-16
Luke 11: 5-10 |
| 4. Being Attentive
John Morris
7th June (Trinity 1) | Ecclesiastes 3: 1-11
Matthew 25: 1-13 |
| 5. Being Justified
David Meara
14th June (Trinity 2) | Romans 4: 18-25
Luke 18: 1-8 |

PRAYER

1. WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is not:-

- i) a mechanical formula by which we become automatically holy,
- ii) a useful means of twisting God's arm to get him to do things for us "God is not at our service. To claim to penetrate His secrets, know His signs and have His power at our beck and call is not faith, but magic." (Paul Tournier) see Mark 8:11-12.

Prayer is:

i) Fellowship with God. The key to eternal life is relationship with God through Jesus Christ. By meeting and conversing with God we enter into a growing relationship, which needs to be regularly sustained.

A person who never prays may know a lot about God, but only the prayerful person can know God!

(Psalm 73:25-26, John 10:27-30).

ii) Giving to God and receiving from him: Any mature human relationship has a mutual 'give and take'. Because of who God is, we receive far more than we can ever give, but we are required to offer:

Praise - appreciating and enjoying him for what he is (Psalm 96:7-8)

Thanks - for his gifts in creation and rescue (Psalm 116:12-19)

Penitence - confession of our imperfection and failure (Psalm 51:16-17)

Ourselves - willingly, gladly, at his disposal (Romans 12:1-2)

But prayer cannot be offering before we receive. We can only give back those things we have already received from him. His greatest gift is himself (Romans 6:23). If we ask for him each day, we shall be in a better position to use unselfishly the gifts he brings with him.

iii) Co-operation with God. He has so ordered the world that our co-operation is essential (Genesis 2-3). This demands total frankness and honesty on our part, and a willingness to let him use all the resources he has lent to us. And being willing to let him work his purposes out through what we do and what we are. In prayer we discover his mind (Ephesians 5:10, 17) and join in his purpose. Prayer and working go together (James 2:18-26).

2. HOW DO I PRAY?

Practical Advice:

Silence is essential for prayer, especially 'internal' silence.

First wind down and relax the body.

Give your mind time to settle.

Physical posture is important, sit in an upright but comfortable chair, or stand.

Breathe slowly, deeply and regularly.

Use a phrase from the Bible or a hymn to keep your mind concentrated.

Set a time limit at first - shorter rather than longer.

Try to find a small amount of time each day to 'be quiet' in this way.

Useful Phrases:

'Be still and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10)

'Make me a channel of your peace' (St Francis)

'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me' (The Jesus Prayer)

'Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in you.' (St Augustine) 'Lord, I thank you for the gift of my life'.

'Merciful Redeemer, friend and brother, may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, follow you more nearly, day by day. (St Richard)

OR

Take a prayer you know, say it very slowly - one word to each time you breathe out.

OR

Let your whole being fill with one idea of God - his love, his greatness, his presence; come back over it again and again.

OR

Turn the talking to yourself in your mind into talking to God - saying quite exactly what is on your mind or what you are concerned about.

NOTE: Don't try to do too much; just take one of the alternatives above. It is more helpful not to think too much. Rather, let the noise of your mind be still, and just rest in the presence of God and be thankful.

Other things to remember:

i) Learning by doing: No doubt we'll make many mistakes, and feel (as well as sound) foolish, but don't worry, God has a sense of humour too! Make regular times, places and patterns for prayer, and don't be wooden about them if you get 'fed up'. Pray alone and with others (Matt 18:20) because as in any family, we do not learn to speak in isolation.

ii) Learn from Jesus Christ: Luke 11:1-13, starting with his great 'pattern' prayer (Matt 6:9-15), going on to meditations like John 17. Learn from his example (Mark 1:35, Luke 22:39f) as well as his words. Learn too from other great men of the Bible (Abraham in Genesis 12f, Moses in Exodus 3f, David in Samuel 7, 22, and Paul in Philippians 1:3-11, Colossians 1:3-9).

iii) Learn from books: A wise learner doesn't start from nothing - don't be afraid to build up a good supply of prayer books, and use them, especially if you don't feel inspired yourself. Others' words will lift you up in the right attitude. Variety is the key.

3. CAN I BE SURE THAT PRAYER IS ANSWERED?

i) We can ask for things in prayer because God delights to give, and it is part of his very nature to have our best interests at heart (Matt 6:24-34, 7:7-11, Luke 11:5-13).

BUT we must:

ask - James 4:2

ask selflessly - James 4:3 - for the right thing

submit our will to God's - James 4:7, 15, 1 John 3:22.

come forgiven - James 4:8, 5:16

persevere - Luke 18:1-8

ii) Remember that 'answers' do not always come in the form we expect or at the time we demand!

We can be the best answer to our own prayer (Matt 14:15f)

Sometimes, silence means 'No!'

Sometimes, if He appears not to answer, maybe he wants us to start loving him for what he is, and not for what we can get out of him!

Prayer through symbols: Light

(a) Begin with some relaxation or quietening down.

(b) Light a candle and if possible sit in a room dark enough for the candle to shed some light.

Look at the flame and observe the life that is in it - its movement and brightness, how the flame is never still. Allow yourself time to watch the light it sheds, to watch the darkness and the shadows. Light is itself the gift of God.

Give yourself some more time in which to get in touch with the light of Christ shining in the dark places of the world. There is no need to try to think interesting thoughts - just stay with the light.

'The light shines on in the darkness and the darkness has never quenched it.'
(John 1.5)

The darkness will never overcome the light. As long as the light burns it is more powerful than all the darkness in the world.

Recall that Christ promised he would dwell in us. How easily we forget this! His light is in you, not simply outside you, and that light is wanting to shine out through you and enlighten the world. Give some time to this too, picturing the light in the heart of you, waiting till you allow God to make you, too, a light in a dark world.

(c) Think of that light shining in front of you and within you being carried out into the dark places of the world. Think of the dark places in the world and of the people you know who are in darkness and in need of light. Pray for them either in silence or aloud.

(d) Finally extinguish the candle but pause to recall that the light continues to burn inside you. Return to this thought whenever you can. 'He who follows me,' said Jesus, 'shall have the light of life' (John 8.12).

Prayer through music

Music plays a part in most people's lives and can be listened to on various levels of our intellect and emotions. The successful BBC radio programme 'Desert Island Discs' shows how important music is in the lives of even the most 'unmusical' of people. Music can also be used in our prayer life in various ways.

For some, music can be used as an introduction to their prayer time and maybe to round it off. For others, music is prayer, an excellent example being Taizé music with its repeated phrases.

It is good to be open to using a variety of styles and to be prepared to use 'secular' and even popular styles, as well as specifically 'religious' music. If there are any words, having them typed out is important in that it enables you to pray the words as they are sung.

Different types of music can be used for different topics in the prayer session, e.g. thanksgiving, penitence, petition, intercession, lament.

A list of suggestions is given below.

Petition

Anthem: God be in my head, John Rutter ('Gloria' Collegium COL 100 C)

Anthem: Jesu, grant me this, I pray, Edward Bairstow

Anthem: Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace - S. S. Wesley

"How He Loves" by John Mark McMillan / David Crowder

Holy Spirit

Veni Sanctus Spiritus, 'Canons and Litanies', Music of Taizé

Anthem: If ye love me, Tallis

"Better Than A Hallelujah" by Amy Grant

Praise

Surrexit Christus, 'Resurrexit', Music of Taizé

Anthem: O clap your hands, Orlando Gibbons

Anthem: Exultate Deo, Palestrina

Anthem: This joyful Eastertide, arr. Charles Wood

"Breathless" by Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds

"Equally Skilled" by Jon Foreman (which is Micah chapter 7 set to music)

**Churches Together in Kidlington
Week of Accompanied Prayer
Sunday 28th June – Friday 3rd July 2026**



What is a Week of Accompanied Prayer?

It is an invitation and opportunity to reflect confidentially on your personal experience of prayer, with support from a prayer guide. The guides will all be Spiritual Directors, trained in listening and accompanying people in their journey of faith. If you struggle with prayer, have questions about it, feel you do not pray enough, sometimes feel your prayers are going nowhere, or want to deepen your relationship with God, you are not alone. Many people do, yet prayer is something we rarely talk about. This is an invaluable chance to explore some of your questions and different ways of praying.

The week in Kidlington will be wholly ecumenical with all the mainstream Churches taking part and their members invited to participate.

How does it work?

You are asked, during the week, to commit to spending at least half an hour a day in prayer, and half an hour with your prayer guide, who will talk to you about your experience of prayer and may make suggestions for different ways of praying for you to try.

Forms will soon be available to take part and these will ask you to identify the best times of day for you to meet with your prayer guide and you will then be notified of the time and venue, usually in Church premises, of your daily meetings. As far as possible the venue will be the same every day and there will be tea or coffee available. You may also choose to meet on Zoom, if that is more convenient for you.

There will be an opening meeting on Sunday 28th, when you will meet your prayer guide, and a closing meeting on Friday 3rd July.

Look out for more information coming soon.