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Prayer & Prophecy - 3
The Art of Communication Jesus' Way:
Sharing from the Heart

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to PRAAYER.” Acts 2:42

If each time I meet you I just used polite formal phrases, what sort of relationship would that reflect; a close one, or a surface one? We all use those polite phrases when we meet people; ‘Hi, how are you going’ but we aren’t really asking how well you are, we all know that this is just a way of greeting people.

What sort of communication would best suit the type of relationship Jesus is devoted to having with us; a nice polite conversation or one that comes from the heart?

Some people when commenting on this text believe the word ‘Prayer’ refers to ‘the Prayers’ which are ritualized patterns that have already been accepted. Set forms of prayer, where we repeat the same words each time reflect what sort of conversation? That which is nice and polite or intimate and from the heart? I think I know what sort of conversation Jesus is devoted to – passionate and from the heart.

In the Gospel we have the ‘Good Shepherd’ who ‘knows’ his sheep. This is not polite ritual, but the sheep recognize his voice and they follow him. The image is one of trust, one where there is a significant relationship, and you don’t build significant relationships by repeating ritualized patterns of speech.

Depth in any relationship comes when two people take the risk of sharing from the heart. Allowing themselves to become vulnerable, revealing themselves. Isn’t it interesting that we call the bible, revelation? God, risking being open and honest, revealing what’s on his heart.

Why is revelation risky? Because people might reject you. Who knows they might even crucify you. It’s really risky when its revealing the fact

that you love someone. Now that’s putting your life on the line. You risk being rejected, being broken hearted. But for any relationship to grow there needs to be this risk of self-revelation.

Jesus has taken the risk and revealed to you what’s on his heart. The amazing thing is that what’s on his heart is his love for you. In Jesus, the God of the universe risks your rejection, risks ridicule by others, so that he might love you and that you might risk loving him. That’s Jesus’ passion.

Do you think repeating the ‘Lord’s prayer’ mindlessly over and over and over again is the sort of conversation that Jesus is after?

The Psalms is an interesting book because there you read people expressing their inner most feelings. At times it gets pretty raw and anger is expressed, and despair is laid bare, and there are also expressions of great happiness and joy. I think when it comes to prayer, that’s what God is after, you expressing your inner most feelings, knowing that you are talking with your most trusted friend.

The sheep don’t follow a stranger. Jesus has revealed his inner most feelings because he doesn’t want to be a stranger.

In the gospel reading we had the image of the gate. The gate which keeps the strangers out because we don’t know their intent – do they come to steal and kill and destroy? The gate stays closed because you can’t trust the stranger. Trust needs to be proven – which is precisely what Jesus did.

Notice that Jesus never forces himself upon us, that would be a very unhealthy and abusive relationship. Definitely not what Jesus is after. Rather Jesus shows through his life that he can be trusted. He lives a life of love. He keeps his promises. He lays his life on the line for us. Jesus takes our place so that we never have to taste the horrors of being rejected and unloved by God.

Jesus is not a stranger, his life is an open book for all to see and answer for themselves, can he be trusted? For me Jesus crucifixion powerfully says; ‘most definitely, yes’.

Do you notice I haven't talked about technique at all, because what lies at the heart of prayer is your attitude. Are you speaking with a friend heart to heart, or are you trying to butter up some influential person to get what you want.

My friend is sick, I'll soften up God with a few nice words and he'll deliver the goods. But that's not how friendship works. I go to a friend and pour out my heartfelt pain, and my friend is there to love and support me, to help me in my time of need.

I don't have to practice for hours so that I say the 'right thing' and then get the outcome I'm after. If a friend of mine came in and started sucking up to me, being artificial, I'd wonder what was wrong.

The other day I got this telephone call looking for a donation. If they had just come out with their request I would have listened, but they started off sucking up to me; 'Hello mister Koch, we're looking for a donation, we know you're a nice guy' – right there they'd lost me, and I closed the gate.

This stranger was just wanting to break in and steal. He wasn't honest. He wasn't interested in me as a person. I was just a means for him to meet a target his organisation had set. Jesus isn't interested in this sort of rubbish, what he wants is for you to simply talk to him heart to heart.

Isn't that an amazing gift; that Jesus has already revealed his heart to you, so that you can be totally honest and open with him. Fearing nothing for your talking with a person who actually is more passionate about you than you are!

Why would you waste your time with set formulas, empty ritual and manipulating? The bible is full of examples where God says I'm fed up with this sort of stuff. From Isaiah; "Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me... I cannot bear your evil assemblies... I hate with all my being." (Isaiah 1:13,14) The Israelites had turned their relationship with the LORD into religious practice. Rituals to get God to do

what they thought was right, not listening and obeying. Not coming to him, trusting his promises and talking heart to heart.

That's what Jesus wants; heart to heart conversation. Are you able to do that?

At times people tell me they can't pray – I don't believe it. What I hear them saying is that they feel prayer needs to be some wonderful eloquent presentation. But that's not the sort of prayer Jesus is after at all. So I guess it's good when people don't even try and pray that way. Pray isn't meant to be an opportunity to impress others or God.

Jesus clearly says that; "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others" (Matthew 6:5) – prayer isn't a performance for others. "When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words." (Matthew 6:7) Jesus isn't interested in lots of wonderful words, he just wants a few real ones from the heart.

You can have your hands in the air, or folded or in your pockets, just let your heart be real, as you seek to be as real with Jesus as you know how, risking opening the gate that Jesus might come in.

He can be trusted. And as Jesus comes in, he doesn't come to use you to get what he doesn't have or to meet some unfulfilled need, he comes that you might have life and have it to the full.

He's no stranger, but your friend who's given his life for you. He's revealed to you what's on his heart because he wants you to trust him enough to reveal what's on yours. Are you game?

Let's pray.

Jesus, thanks for risking your life for me. Help me grow to be more and more like you. Amen.