

# Easter to Pentecost: A Season of Prayer

## Week 4: Focus on Scripture

We have thought a lot about how the Bible supports our prayers. Are there also difficulties we have to overcome? For example, calling God 'Lord' when we live in a liberal democracy?

We live in a world where celebrities and footballers are revered as gods. Despite liberal democracy it seems humanity needs something big to look up to and worship. However, I wonder if the language used in prayer sometimes alienates. Some of the young people I talk with assure me it does. My private prayers don't have any formal language, more a lot of umm and ah and incoherent thoughts. A sort of inner dialogue I suppose.

"Just" using the name Jesus in prayer is very powerful and can evoke emotions in others whether believers or non believers. In the New Testament to call Jesus 'Lord' was to ascribe all authority to Him. This invited opposition from the Jewish authorities on the grounds of blasphemy and from the Romans on the grounds of treason against the Emperor.

Language is a very personal thing. In prayers and hymns language, which some find powerful, using complex language and imagery can be difficult for those not brought up in the church to comprehend. Language which is familiar and easy to understand can still contain imagery that evokes feelings of awe and wonder.

Language is a medium through which we mediate between the personal and the group, between one generation and another. Rarely is meaning unambiguous and secure, and we respond to the sound and rhythm of words as well as their meaning. We also respond to how people look when they speak, making our umms and ahhs very expressive! And reminding us of Jesus as the embodied Word.

Yesterday while I was out for my walk, I was again struck by the beauty of our countryside bathed in sunshine and birdsong. I wanted to thank God for it all; but no words would come. Then I had a strong feeling of God's presence and his total understanding of me not finding the words.... so we walked together in perfect harmony and silence- wonderful!

I'm wondering whether there is a risk that if we use single Bible verses in prayer that we might change their context (as part of a longer passage) and meaning? If so, does it matter? Or is the fact that words written centuries ago can take on a new meaning part of the way in which God speaks to us today? For example, we were recently invited to consider images of nature in the Psalms and I was thinking about Psalm 84:3 'Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, Lord Almighty, my King and my God.' Elsewhere in the Psalm the Psalmist writes of his longing to be in the temple. Does the verse mean that the temple was in ruins? Or that the writer was in exile and unable to visit the temple (something that we can perhaps identify with at the moment) and he was envious of the birds? Or is it, like Matthew 10: 29-31, referring to God's care even for the sparrows? Or is it, like Psalm 148, inviting the whole of creation to join in praising God? Any of these might be a starting point for prayer.

You can read a very short, Methodist introduction to Lectio Divina here:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/prayer/creative-prayer/lectio-divina/>

You can watch a short video introduction to Lectio Divina by James Martin SJ here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i27Fqlyk2qY>

You can read more about Lectio Divina here: <https://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/lectio-divina-beginners-guide> and here: <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/253799/1-What-is-Lectio-Divina.pdf>