

Prayer and Doubt

John Wolfenden 03 August 2008

Let's just pray ...

Hang on, what did I say? "Let's just pray". What do I mean by that?

What is the meaning of 'just' when used like that?

Let's look at some other examples

I'll just be a minute ...

It's OK mum, we're just going to the movies ...

'Just' here has the sense of 'only' or 'merely' – as though to downplay something.

So why would I say "Let's just pray"? Just a figure of speech? Common usage? Christian culture?

I have heard many people in this church use that expression – Let's just pray. Do they all really mean – Let's merely pray? I certainly don't think its meant at a conscious level, but I wonder if it does reflect something perhaps deeper than that.

As I have pondered this, its led me to wonder if perhaps we have developed a culture of trivializing prayer. If so, what could possibly have caused *that* to develop over the years?

Well, I don't know that I have the answer to that, but in thinking about it something else has occurred to me. I wonder if, deep down, we have trouble with our belief in prayer?

Oh yes, we can all affirm that we believe in prayer, and most of us will pray out loud with other Christians at different times. And I expect we all engage in quiet prayers just between us and God.

But how do we actually think about prayer? Does it really work? Will it actually work for me? Should I really pray for others expecting God to listen?

What about all those unanswered prayers (or prayers that seem unanswered to us at least)?

Read Yancey p.207-208 (examples of unanswered prayers).

How do these stories, or similar sorts of things that you know about, affect your belief in prayer?

Mark 9:17-27

17A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

19"O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

20So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

21Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. 22"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

23" 'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

24Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

The Bible's sweeping promises (Yancey 226 – 228)

Jesus himself prayed. His disciples prayed. He invites us to pray. It's right and proper that we do pray, and that we expect God to answer. Prayer is a declaration of dependence on God.

Despite the problem of apparently unanswered prayer, we should keep praying. We should also ensure that that we don't let little doubts about prayer erode our faith. Take stock. Explore your innermost thoughts. Is it 'just prayer' for you, or is it PRAYER?

Yancey, Philip 2006. *Prayer – does it make any difference?*, Hodder, London. Available from Koorong Bookstores (www.koorong.com.au).