

302 Why bother praying?

Today I'm excited and daunted in equal measure. For my whole six-year journey I've really struggled with prayer-as-intercession. I simply can't see the point – well, I couldn't.

I totally get prayer-as-worship: the gospel is really, really Good News to me now, so I can't stop thanking and praising God. Indeed, I had to give a 5-min talk to 60 Year 6 kids from the local CofE junior school about 'Why do Christians worship?' and that was easy-peasy. (I'll tell you what I said, if you like.)

And I love spending time in silence with God – which is (one kind of) prayer, right? I do keep a notepad by me, so I can write down (and dismiss from mind), 'Buy milk'; and if people come to mind, I write their names down, and pray for them after my 20/25 mins.

But I really can't (couldn't) see the point of praying (interceding). OK, yes, Jesus did it, and, OK, the Bible *tells* me to do it, but I've always struggled with the 'Because I say so' thing – and not just when I was a kid. 'Why should I?!'

I *didn't* see the point of praying, but I think I see a chink of light. Please bear with me...

Thanks to Brad Jersak,¹ I'm working a few things out. Jesus was 'self-emptying',^[Phil 2] (technical term: kenosis, adj: kenotic) and he only did what he saw his father doing.^[Jn 5:19] I get that. But hang on, if God is like-what-Jesus-is-like, then is God (the Father) self-emptying too? No, I assume not: to put it crudely, he's the Boss: God can just do what he likes, when he likes – we can't argue. Jersak's not so sure. (Blue is how I used to think.)

No! God's will *is* supreme – nothing happens without his say-so, right? Jersak's not so sure, and he quotes Bishop Desmond Tutu: '*For whatever reason, since humankind showed up on the scene, God does nothing without a human partner.*'² Quite a statement!

Now, how did Jesus do all his miracles? Well, he was God, so it was easy for him, right? But maybe, having self-emptied, Jesus only did miracles by *co-operating* (partnering) with his Father. And so maybe we should do the same sort of thing?

And maybe this is *three-way*? 'The Spirit intercedes for us, with sighs too deep for words.'^[Rom 8:26] So I can see the Spirit as being kenotic, as Jesus was (is?) but God is more difficult. Does God the Father say, 'I'm not going to insist on my own way; I'll allow you to totally decide for yourself, and I won't interfere'? OK, suppose I need a car parking space for a very important delivery, maybe God would say, like, 'Pray to me, and we'll see what we can work out. Maybe I'll prompt you to turn down a side street.'

I'm still thinking this through, but this idea of prayer (interceding) as partnering is starting to make sense – thanks, Brad – but then it's a daunting responsibility!

Paul Bev. 11.12.23

¹ A major factor is Bradley Jersak's *A More Christlike God – A More Beautiful Gospel* – read in 2018, now re-reading.

² Jersak, chapter 8.