



Newsletter #8 Spring 2011

“Realistic Praying”

One day, I'll do a survey of Christians to find out how many of them feel guilty about the shape or state of their prayer life. I suspect it's a great throng, and I know it includes me. At the same time, I know that guilt rarely induces me to changed lifestyle or behaviour. It's more likely to drive me into a darkened room, where I can keep my eyes closed until I half-forget, feel better, and carry on much the same as before.

The New Testament's approach to most things, including our prayer life, is to remind us that we are loved by God, who knows our failings much better than we know ourselves. Then, it shows us clearly where we are lacking and sinful, and reminds us that we are redeemed by the grace, the sheer gift, of God. Finally, it draws our attention to the work of the Holy Spirit, who wants to collaborate with us in our spiritual journey.

Improvement is possible, and the starting point is to recognize that God has created each of us with personality, preference, gifts and weaknesses. What the Holy Spirit wants to do is to work first of all with our strengths. In relation to our prayer life, that means playing to our strengths, our character, our style. A classic discussion of this can be found in Chester Michael and Marie Norrisey's *Prayer and Temperament*. It's very refreshing to read there that you don't need to pray exactly as others do!

What I don't want to do in this short article is to box us all up into personality types or characteristics. I simply want to draw your attention to the fact that some ways of praying are more congenial or comfortable to you than others. This is a good starting point for improvement in your prayer life. If praying a psalm a day has blessed you for years, pray more. If praying in your car with the music turned up loud works in the morning, try it in the evening too!

FOR YOUR PRAYERS

We would love you to pray for the following things that are really close to our heart:

- Adrian, teaching at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford on 'Inhabiting the Scriptures' on May 4th.
- Our Simeon Community gathering on May 6th, and members of the Community who are moving to new places and posts.
- Adrian, speaking at Oundle School to the Religious Studies Society on May 10th.
- Bishop Stephen of Ely's first visit to Ridley Hall late in May, for shared vision and close collaboration.
- Adrian, speaking at an Ely Diocesan Children/Youth Leaders' event on 18th June.
- Plans for *Dying Well: Faith and Compassion in Dialogue* (September 15th to 17th 2011).
- Ridley Hall's inspection by the Ministry Division of the Church of England in November, and all the preparations for that. It is in some ways like an OFSTED!
- For God to show us how to resource wisely the increasing demands on the Centre's work and ministry.

Don't get me wrong. More may be better, but it isn't bound to be. It may be that it would be good to do the same amount of praying in familiar patterns, but in a more measured, steadier, slower, more thoughtful way. Most of the time it's probably better not to time our prayer life at all. Holding on until the 15 minutes is up just to prove something to God isn't really very helpful at all.

From this familiar place, it's good to experiment, maybe in conversation with your spiritual director or mentor, or a friend. Try something new, try something unfamiliar. This isn't a way of introducing 'nasty medicine' into your prayer life, and there's no Lenten merit in making yourself miserable. Rather, if familiarity is the starting place, a willingness to be stretched in prayer is the place of growing up, of maturing. Think what fun you could have laughing together with God at your ineptitude in a new form of prayer. God would be as delighted with you as a parent is when playing with a clumsy child and its new toy.

In conclusion, a thought about hope. I'm a fan of the Kate Atkinson novels about the detective Jackson Brodie, and am currently reading *When will there be good news?* [out of order!] I'm finding it much less satisfying than the others [which will horrify some of you]. Why? Kate structures her novels in such a way that a number of seemingly disparate stories gradually come together: fate in the end shows that they belong together. But in this novel, the coming together is delayed just a little bit too long, and my patience is being tested. Prayer's a bit like that. If we have to wait too long for the good prayer, we may be tempted to give up. We need hope in our prayer life now. The best way to recover that hope is to pray in ways that work for us in this season of our lives.

Adrian Chatfield

Spirituality for Ministry Day in Ely

Sometimes it's hard to discern whether Adrian and Jane are wearing their Ridley Hall hat or their Simeon Centre Hat. This event, for lay leaders in our own diocese of Ely, was one such example, but since our intern Nicky was also involved let's claim it for the Simeon Centre!

On March 5th Adrian, Jill, Nicky and Jane went to Ely to lead the Spirituality for Ministry module for the accredited lay-ministers in training. It was a full and rich day with over seventy participants. With so many coming from parishes across the diocese it was great occasion to spread the news of The Simeon Centre!

We put together a mix of worship, teaching sessions (an introduction to private and corporate prayer, spiritual accompaniment and rule of life) and prayer opportunities. As the day progressed there was the chance to pray alone as well as to talk and share in small groups.

We were delighted to be able to build on ideas that had worked well on the Ridley Prayer Weekend back in February, where we had offered a number of options to enable prayer. Nicky and Jill did a sterling job laying out a Prayer Labyrinth ably created by one of the ordinands – Phil Greig – this certainly proved very popular on both occasions. Jill also led a workshop where participants could make and then pray with a set of prayer beads to pray the Lord's Prayer. Adrian led a session of praying the Psalms and Jane an imaginative contemplation. Together with a host of opportunities to pray with the help of a variety of handouts we hope there was something for everyone.

It was very satisfying to share with a group of ministers in training as a team, sharing gifts and encouraging each other. It was great too to know that so many of the Simeon Community were praying for us – it felt very much we were ministering together and for that we praise God!

Jane Keiller



THE PRAYER OF ASKING

No doubt about this one – it was a regular simeon centre quiet day. It was a long time since our delightfully noisy 'creativity day' in September and we had a full house. The topic was intercessory prayer. Attendees from the september day were pleased to see Simeon friend Tricia Troughton again. Adrian and Tricia both led sessions (Jane was at Ely Cathedral for Bishop Conway's installation) and intern Ruth Norris brought a dynamic young team from her home church. Over to you, Ruth...

On March 5 2011, over 50 people gathered for another Simeon Centre Quiet Day, this time to consider together the prayer of asking. We began with a time of worship, centring ourselves on the Lord, after which Adrian encouraged us in the discipline of persistence in prayer. His gentle provocations acknowledged our human frailty yet left us encouraged in the certainty of the Spirit's strengthening power and the value of our perseverance.



In our second session, a visiting artist, dancers and musicians sensitively led us in an exploration of alternative prayer languages. Together we took small, joyful and liberating steps into praying through music, dance, and, art, as well as considering the gift of Tongues. Whether or not we considered ourselves "creative," we were given access to new expressions that we could incorporate into our own intercession, helping us to voice the depths of prayer that go beyond words. In the afternoon seminars many of us chose to explore such themes further, through visual arts, dance and poetry, whilst others received anointing for prayer. (The photo below shows one of the more active of these workshops!)

Tricia shared some helpful thoughts on our powerlessness in prayer, again highlighting the Spirit's enabling power. Finally we concluded with an act of worship, a fitting response to God's precious gifts to us throughout the day.

Our thanks goes to the speakers, seminar leaders, and those whose hospitality made us so welcome. Above all we thank the Lord for a day in which we enjoyed fellowship, silence, freedom and His beautiful presence.

Ruth Norris

"I found the whole day a moving spiritual experience, where I came into the Lord's presence by opening up myself to receive his empowering and his blessing. I experienced a deep longing to be waiting quietly, and then to raise my hands in worship. And this sense of joy and expectation stayed with me all the next day, and the day after. In fact my life has changed. Above all, I want to be radiant with His love, to be filled with gratitude for His healing, and to shine for Him wherever I am and whoever I meet."

*Feedback from a participant in
The Prayer of Asking*



Window on the Simeon Centre

We've been busy on the top floor of Ridley Hall! The Simeon Centre has been involved in so many fantastic events, quiet days and retreats recently. As interns, we are involved in many of these, and it is always immensely encouraging to hear the stories and read the accounts of how God has blessed people.

One of my tasks is to draw up the monthly prayer calendar for the Simeon Community. I love doing this. There is a sense of connection that exists, amongst a geographically dispersed community, where joys, hopes, sadness, concerns and other prayer thoughts are shared. In a sense we are living life together and distance does not matter.

God really is reminding me, on a daily basis, that people matter and that prayer matters (however falteringly we attempt it) and that He reveals Himself through both.

Nicky Redsell

SIMEON COMMUNITY NOTES

One facet of the vision of the Simeon Centre has been the creation of an online, dispersed Community of Prayer, whose members take on a simple rule of life, and pray regularly: for Ridley Hall, the Simeon Centre, one another, our country, the world, and specific and often confidential needs which we share online.

Sometimes our praying is joyful, filled with 'gallant and high-hearted happiness' as one member recently described it. At other times (in my experience at least) we feel all the weightiness of the things for which we are joining in prayer.

These people are our 'special troops', supporting the Simeon Centre in its wider ministry through prayer and the sharing of resources and talents. Members come from the Cambridge area and sometimes from far beyond. We try to meet in person at least once a year, generally on a Friday evening, to share together in this amazing fellowship of prayer. Just recently we added a lunch meeting for members who are able to come at that time. We were most encouraged to have

19, some of whom had driven some distance, sharing together over a simple lunch of soup and bread.

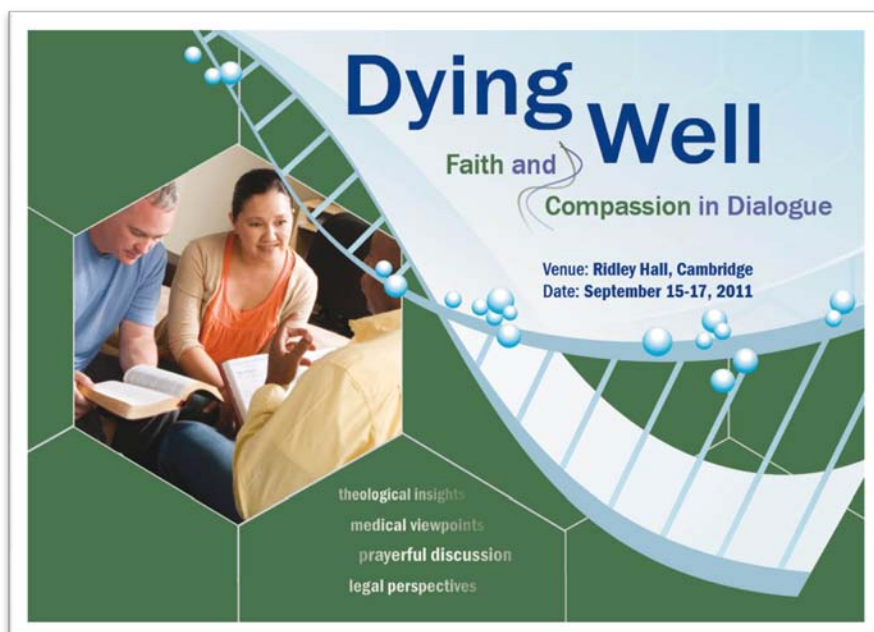
We see our Community in the context of the 'new monasticism'. We are not sure exactly what God is calling us to, but the following extract from William Stringfellow (*An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange World*) seems to describe us:

Dynamic and erratic, spontaneous and radical, audacious and immature, committed if not altogether coherent, ecumenically open and experimental, visible here and there, now and then, but unsettled institutionally. Almost monastic in nature but most of all... enacting a fearful hope for human life in society.

Rosemary Kew

Dying Well: Update

Bookings are coming in for this conference, the programme is being fine-tuned, and our anticipation is growing. This is a little more specialised than 'Restoring Prayer', our last big residential conference: we are reaching out not only to the general Christian public but also to those professionally involved, medically, theologically, pastorally and legally, in this topic which is of interest to us all.



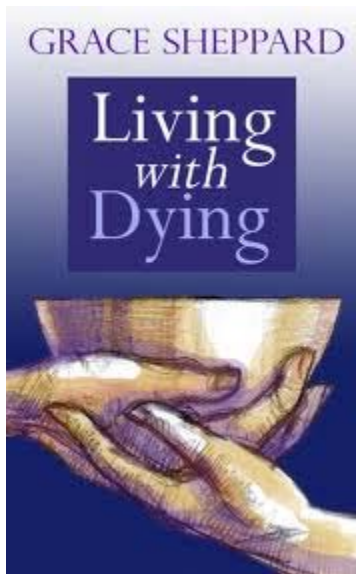
There is still room and we would encourage all readers of this newsletter to help us spread the word among those you know in the professional fields. Some bursary money is available. One of the surprises is that more people are signing up for residential places than as day visitors. So do tell all your Cambridge friends that the day rate is a bargain for a discussion that must engage the minds and hearts of all thoughtful Christians at the moment.

Details and booking at
www.simeoncentre.co.uk

Review of LIVING WITH DYING

(Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010)

Written in 2010 by Grace Sheppard, this is a book about her experience of caring for her husband in his last years. When David Sheppard, retired Bishop of Liverpool, and Ridley graduate, was diagnosed with bowel cancer in 2001, husband and wife embarked together on a 'journey of discovery'. A cancer survivor herself, Grace found that she was 'living with dying' as they experienced the journey together. Facing cancer, facing fear, experiencing and giving friendship – the themes of her previous life and writing – are covered in this her last book. She writes of the shocks, and of her 'shock-absorbers': family, friends, journal, spiritual director, garden, mini-respites, painting. Here is her invaluable tip to managing the volume of telephone calls: each morning she composed a new answerphone message, offering information and inviting a response, which would be heard, appreciated and answered as appropriate at the end of each day.



David & Grace (Liverpool Echo)

Along the twists and turns of the journey she describes giving thanks for small joys as 'banking resources for when the going became tougher'. She was asked to do a painting for Passion Week on 'The Agony in the Garden'. It was for her an agony, until she fell upon the verse in Luke's Gospel: 'And the Lord sent an angel to strengthen

him.' Then she comments on the many acts of friendship that had sustained them both: 'There is strength in the struggle for us too... Angels came and ministered to us: very human angels, but angels nonetheless and they strengthened us.'

This is a book about living as well as dying – about the carer as well as the cared-for. It is a treasure-trove for both. There is much 'before' and also 'after' David's death: the funeral; the aftermath; the therapy of tears, of music, of answering letters of condolence, of the kind of gratitude that is, in her experience, the hallmark of the Hospice movement; the picking up of a new rhythm, of being busy but not too busy, not afraid to be still. The intertwining of our own living and dying with that of family and friends creates (to use a phrase of Grace's) a 'beautiful patchwork' of love and friendship. 'I have found' she writes in her introduction, 'that the giving and receiving in faithful friendship has made all the difference to living with dying. We all have to die one day. The important thing is to be ready, and then we can get on with living.'

Grace herself died a few months ago, which adds to the strength and poignancy of this book.

Rosemary Kew

And finally...

There's always more to say than space to say it in, without turning this newsletter into a short novel 😊. Among the things that have surprised us recently is the increasing number of people listening to the podcasts on our website.

Then too, the presence and ministry of our interns is always a great encouragement; many of you were blessed by all they contributed to The Prayer of Asking. Nicky has recently taught with Adrian on two Prayer Intensives in the Cambridge Federation, and Ruth is this month representing us at a deanery event in a nearby diocese.

And in a moment of spring madness, Adrian wrote a blog on discipleship. You can read it at <http://simeoncentre.blogspot.com/>. Maybe you'll follow his example: it would be great to have more contributors, and an ongoing web conversation about our life in Christ.