

PRAYER THAT WORKS IN TODAY'S CULTURE

At a recent conference Mark Green spoke of 4 aspects of genuine Christianity as we face up to the challenges of discipleship in the present climate and culture. He called these Quadruple A Christianity: Things that would excite and stimulate and connect with post modern people.

AUTHENTICITY

AWE

AGAPE

ADVENTURE

I have asked the question, “To what extent is our prayer life a reflection of these distinct marks?” Let’s explore.

AUTHENTICITY -- My Oxford Dictionary tells me that this word means trustworthy, genuine and not forged. When I approach God am I being real and true to myself? God knows all about me anyway. Is there any point in hiding? Perhaps in the past we have assumed that to come into God’s presence needs to be done in a certain way, maybe prescribed prayers, or length of time. More likely if conscious of sin we have wanted to hide – prayer can be really difficult with such constraints. The Psalms give us the greatest evidence of saying it to God just like it is. Pick up any one of them. See how the Psalmist pours out just what he is feeling or thinking. I think it gives God the greatest pleasure when we come honestly to him. The Garden of Gethsemane is another classic example of authentic prayer in the midst of crisis. “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me....Yet not as I will but as you will.”

AWE – Defined as reverential fear, or inspiring I am reminded of that song which goes, “... takes your breath away.” I saw Riverdance the Show just last night. Judi my wife was quite worried because I was largely quiet through the performance. In reality I was awestruck, amazed, overjoyed and delighted. It touched something deep in my psyche. When we approach God we are not coming to a pal. We are not on equal standing. He is the “high and lofty One....who lives for ever, whose name is holy. (He) lives in a high and holy place...” For me this often generates stillness. What and who we are entering into demands a response in my heart which is worthy of the place and person. Worship of the highest and best quality would not be good enough for this God. How so he can accept the poorest morsels from we who are both rebellious and pally at the same time. Quiet, worshipful, respect like this can often be helped by symbols and pictures, which help engage all the senses. Thankfully this is an aspect of prayer which evangelical Christians are rediscovering.

AGAPE – This word is rich in meaning for believers but rarely used in society at large. It is love which is costly and sacrificial, that always desires the best for the other one regardless of self. It is the basis of our salvation for God loves with a steady, consistent never changing pattern. We can rely on what he says for we know him to be reliable and trustworthy. He will

not change his mind as other more fickle Gods might do. “Lord to whom shall we go...?” Love of this nature should be a stimulus for our prayer life. He first loved us. As we grow to understand more of the depth of this love we want to reflect something of that back. Do I come to meet him in prayer because I have to or because I want to? Am I finding myself increasingly committed to God’s very best interests in the world and taking pains in prayer to make that a reality? If I am concerned in this way for my neighbours, friends, family or work colleagues I will take action, for prayer is the place where the world can be changed.

ADVENTURE – One of the most helpful statements I have heard recently comes from a study book by Henry Blackaby and Claude King called, “Knowing and Doing the Will of God.” Part of their summary says that God is always at work around you. He invites us to become involved with him in his work. Inevitably this leads to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action. We have to make adjustments to our lives in order to join God in what he is doing. This is adventure of the highest order. Abraham ended up on a journey, Moses led a people, Jonah eventually got to Ninevah, Mary gave birth, Peter preached a sermon and visited a Gentile, the Church has over the centuries been marked by adventurers. Where do these adventures start? Can I suggest in prayerful relationship with God. He continues a love relationship with us both individually and corporately. As we lay aside time to be with him, he will gently lead and guide us into new adventures appropriate to the 21st Century and what he is doing now.

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