

PRAYING AND THE LIFE OF PRAYER

PART I – INTRODUCTION

- The aim of this article is to give you a 'map' of the spiritual life especially regarding prayer. Prayer may, as you know, be corporate, individual, silent, aloud, formal, informal, and so on.
- My 'map' will explain many of the facets of prayer and their relationship to each other.
- It will also help those who may be worried by the fact that their attitude to verbal prayer has changed over the years, and may feel confused or guilty about it.
- This article should help you to fit your experience into the wider scene, and it may even shed some light on what other Christians get up to!

When you read the word ‘PRAYER’ what's the first thing that comes to mind? As likely as not it was WORDS that came to mind, a verbal activity, perhaps spoken by a leader at a service, or more informally by folk at a prayer meeting. Or, you may have thought of the mental-speech of praying alone, perhaps with an intercession list.

There are two aspects, or 'sides' of prayer

- **THE WORDS OF PRAYER**
- **THE LIFE OF PRAYER**

The two are not the same. They should be closely linked, but need not necessarily be.

PART II - THE WORDS OF PRAYER

This ‘side’ of prayer is primarily *talking*. Either -

- Words spoken aloud – *external and audible*
- Words spoken mentally – *internal and silent*

1. Words Spoken Aloud

Advantages and Disadvantages

A prayer that is spoken externally has both advantages and disadvantages. These vary depending on our mood and the prayer’s content.

An externally-spoken prayer has these advantages -

- it may easily be shared by others
- it is the easiest form of corporate united prayer
- the person praying may feel a ‘part’ of what is going on, and experience the ‘fellowship’ of prayer.

The Prayer Meeting

There is a restriction on the useful range of external spoken prayer, so prayer meetings usually have very safe, narrow and limited expressions of prayer.

Understandably, prayer meetings tend to ‘run’ on externally spoken prayer. One result is that if spoken prayer runs dry, folk will either try to restart the flow, or will tend to think that the meeting has been a failure! Conversely, if there *has* been a constant flow of externally spoken prayer, folk attending will almost automatically feel that it was a ‘good time’, i.e. with no embarrassing silences!

Jargon

Such meetings can exert enormous psychological pressure upon us to produce spoken prayer-words, and when we do so, to keep them in tune with the customary content, style and choice of words. Indeed such may be the narrowness of style that ordinary English has to be dropped and a ‘religious’ style of speech adopted for the occasion. *Lord, we do just pray, that thou wilt vouchsafe, in a very real way, to, etc.* Hardly the language of real-life.

Limitations

Prayer meetings are limited in their expressions, and appropriately so. Christians who experience, with Jesus and the Psalmist, a state of dereliction would find that a genuine heart-rending cry: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!’ would come like a bombshell to such meetings! We should not feel that the prayer meeting is, therefore, a complete or the fullest expression of Christian spoken prayer.

2. Words Spoken Mentally

I've looked at the familiar advantages and disadvantages of prayer aloud. I shall now turn to silent verbal prayer. We all differ in our mental processes, but some – perhaps most – will find that words drift in and out of mental prayer.

Some Advantages

Because such a style of praying cannot be overheard, its obvious advantages are -

- its content does not have to comply with some group's expectancy;
- our language can be our own
- we can be jargon free
- we can be natural
- we can use 'shorthand'

(Although not 'prayer' in the narrow sense, the Gospels' descriptions of Christ's temptations probably refer to the painful reality possible in mental dialogue rather than to an audible conversation.)

Without others listening we do not have to form whole sentences. In our prayers for others their *name* is often enough.

Arrow Prayers

The well-known 'arrow' prayer is often of this sort, and need contain no more than the single word 'Help!' It is based on the sound truth that while our Father-God may delight in his children telling him things, he never needs to hear a full description of our needs before he can respond to them. (This is not always remembered!)

His Name

Many Christians find that the name of Jesus is a wonderful prayer-focus. When you find yourself in one of life's many storms, to recall the name of Jesus will quickly lead you to the stillness at its centre – and is also good at stilling the storm! This may go beyond intercession to moving into God's presence just to be close to him for who he is.

So far I have distinguished between two sorts of WORDS OF PRAYER

- those spoken *externally*
- those spoken *internally*

There is another distinction that applies to both of these:

Verbal praying, whether aloud or silent, can be experienced:

- alone, or
- corporately

3. Praying Alone

Advantages

Praying alone has many advantages

1. It does not have to conform to the expectancy of those around
2. Its timing, content, style, length, language, continuity, volume, etc. are all our choice
3. It can, of course, be aloud or silent

Prayer alone can contain a much broader spectrum than praying together. I can address God directly, and if I have a Christian view of his love and fatherhood, I know that he accepts and loves me as I am, and understands how I am feeling and what I am trying to say.

Reality

This means that when we are upset, and we don't feel inclined to conform to the traditional public language of prayer, we are still *praying*! This is good news to those who think that our sharing with God has to take on some special style to be valid. (For prayer is essentially about our relationship with God and being *real*, not about some style of religious behaviour that we can – or cannot – produce.)

If we feel upset, we feel better if we can share it with God and can feel the healing of his acceptance.

That does not, and cannot, happen so readily in the presence of others.

The church is called to be a healing community but all too often we have to leave our real selves behind! Many Christians find it easy and natural to be real in the 'world', but feel they have to pretend to be more-religious-than-they-really-are – in church circles.

Guilt

Some Christians may feel guilty that their prayer when alone bears so little resemblance to their praying with others. Don't be!

It is all too easy to assume that the church activity is the *real* thing to which one should conform. In fact the *opposite* may be true! One's prayer when alone is likely to be the more real, and the praying when together to be too heavily influenced by pressures to conform and feel secure.

What we share with God in private may seem to some Christians as a return to the 'un-spiritual' side of themselves that they had hoped they had grown out of! They feel guilty at the hurts, angers and frustrations that surface when alone, and because these would be socially unacceptable among other Christians, can feel that their 'real' Christian life is sliding back downhill! To such folk I have good news!

The Spirit of Truth

The work of the Holy Spirit is to lead us into all *truth*. So it is the prayer of *truth* that marks the Spirit's work and rests on the strength of our relationship to God.

The prayer of pretence (however acceptable, well-intentioned or customary) is not the standard to which we should strive, but that which we should strive to out-grow!

4. Praying Together

In spite of its limitations, mentioned above, praying together has enormous strengths, especially in worship:

- It can serve as a check against things 'getting on top of us'.
- It reminds us of the context of our faith and life and keeps things in perspective.
- In worship especially, such prayer is set in the context of Scripture.
- It should open our minds and hearts to the needs of others.
- If led, it can lift from us the responsibility for the order and the content of our prayers.

So far I have distinguished between

- verbal prayer aloud
- verbal prayer in silence

and between two different contexts in which such praying may be done
alone
in company

I shall now make two further distinctions of verbal prayer. That is to say between the

- formal, and
- informal

By temperament we would perhaps each have a preference – but God preserve us from letting temperament limit our spiritual diet when we are called to *grow up in every way*.

[Ephesians 4:15]

I will say a little about each; pay particular attention to the one you find the more difficult. Christians must avoid any rigid insistence on one at the expense of the other. Each complements the other, and gives strength to the other.

5. Formal Prayer

Strengths

The strengths of formal prayers can be

- structure
- balance
- trustworthiness
- efficiency

These may not seem very attractive until formal prayer is compared to praying that *lacks* structure, *lacks* balance, that can *not* be trusted, and is *inefficient!*

Structure and balance are not 'dry' things, but can be the means by which God is given his rightful place, our priorities are put in place, or prayer is focused and rightly directed.

Our Lord's teaching

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the words of what we now call 'The Lord's Prayer' it was very, *very* carefully structured, and very carefully balanced. It was designed to be learnt and known by heart. That is why it has been in use non-stop for 2,000 years and still demands everything of us.

*Our Father, which art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done,
in earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.*

Structure and Priorities

The Lord's Prayer has a *structure* that puts everything in the right place. It is *structure* that puts God first, and leads us to pray for the hallowing of his name, his kingdom and the doing of his will – rather than the promotion of our *own* name, influence and will.

It is the structure that demands we put God *first* before bringing our physical and spiritual needs to him.

It reminds us that we should be forgiving others before asking the same of God.

Throughout, it is acting as a check against an over-preoccupation with ourselves, with our needs or with the devil.

Evil is dealt with last. Our minds are discouraged from dwelling on it or our time spent describing it. Our primary relationship is with God; in him is our security and protection. Once this is (re-)established we can deal with evil, and pray deliverance from it.

Whole books can easily be written on the Lord's Prayer, but I have simply used it to illustrate all that is best in formal prayer.

One merit of formal prayer is that it doesn't waste time! The Lord's Prayer takes only 30 seconds to pray. Few people would be able to cover the same range of topics and priorities in informal prayer without taking ten times as long!

Formal prayer can usually be trusted. When we add our 'Amen' we make it our own. A prayer that is known can get our assent without the strain of having to 'weigh' it. (I have experienced some informal prayers that in conscience I could not assent to.)

The use of formal and known prayers is of particular importance when folk are old or ill, and we do not wish to make demands on them. (That is why I have used the 'old' translation of the Lord's Prayer here.)

Using a formal prayer that a person has known for decades allows them to rest within its reliability. They do not have to strain to grasp it, or work to assess it.

6. Informal Prayer

You will have experienced it being done well and being done badly.

Those who do it well manage to bring to it the structure, priorities and balance that occur more easily in formal prayers.

Those who do it badly, lack the structure, priorities and balance. When this happens, the prayer can become a *distraction* to communicating with God rather than an ideal vehicle for it.

[See also the article **Leading Intercessions in Worship** for more material on this.]

Wrong Sort

What follows is an exaggeration of what I mean when structure, priorities and balance get lost. It will 'ring bells' with some readers I am sure.

‘...and we are reminded, dear Lord, that the Sunday School outing is at three o’clock, and that those wishing to get transport on the 1st, no sorry, the 3rd, should see Mrs. Smith afterwards. We pray, that thou wilt indeed bless the children, dear Lord. Last year the outing went to the beach and it was very successful. Oh, and give your numbers to Mrs. Smith whose phone number is 01234 56 78 90 if you happen to miss her over coffee at the end of the service. For it was your Son who took the little children in his arms and said, 'Let the children come to me and forbid them not...'

This sort of praying shows confusion about whether God is being addressed or the worshippers; items of 'notices', items of teaching and items of intercession get all muddled up. It goes in three different directions: Us to God (intercession), Us to each Other (notices), and God to Us (teaching).

As well as the tendency to lack the strength of form and structure, informal praying has these dangers:

- It can be so 'relevant' that it dwells too much on us, not God.
- It can be so 'personal' that the personal traits of the person praying can dominate the structure and content.

When someone is perhaps ill, worried or frightened, he/she does not want a prayer that spells out the focus of all his/her fear, for this merely underlines it and strengthens the very thing that it is our ministry to alleviate! I have heard prayers for those who are ill that have seemed to wallow in what is wrong – and I think this is perhaps the verbal equivalent of that urge that many have to peer at accidents.

As for personal traits, we all, of course, have to pray 'as we can, not as we can't' (and that is good advice). But even so we must try and avoid stamping our style so heavily on the content that folk groan inwardly when we start and say to themselves "Oooh! Here we go again!"

To offset these dangers I have often heeded the advice, when praying extempore, to 'go Trinitarian'! With my thoughts deliberately focused on God the Father, on God the Son, and on God the Holy Spirit, whatever I pray is likely to be right in direction and its content will not be badly wrong.

We must never lose sight of the fact that God is *sovereign*; does not *need* to be told. His response does not depend on our supplying him with detailed and accurate accounts of people's situations, motives, or illnesses. He already knows infinitely more about the situation than we ever shall! So relax, and pray accordingly!

Right Sort

When informal praying is good it may be the exercise of a very wonderful and special gift, which enables specific prayer to lift us above the specific problem - where God's particular 'word' to a person or group can be imparted.

In my own life, some of the most moving and wonderful times have been when Christians have prayed over me, and, without my first sharing with them, have prayed off-the-cuff and spoken God's healing word to me with a miraculous rightness and precision. And in case you think that I am well-known and have been prayed-over by well-known leaders and that that accounts for it – let me assure you that the most remarkable praying has often been by the most ordinary folk, rather than by those who are well-known.

A Trap

When the Holy Spirit renews the lives of individuals and their spiritual life is transformed, it is very easy for the devil to lead them to think that the language of their earlier experience was 'dead' – when the truth is that it was they who were dead to the language!

It is easy, in the thrill of new life, to reject the old for the wrong reasons and feel that because there is 'life' in, say, informality that the formal is life-less.

7. Formality plus Informality

As Christians open themselves up to the richer and wider experiences of the Holy Spirit and to growth into the things of God, so what might appear to us as options and alternatives are seen as just different aspects of the one thing.

Both formal and informal styles of prayer need the constant renewing of the Holy Spirit. Both formality and informality without the Spirit can become dead. The Holy Spirit works to bring life to both and to bless us with a rich interplay that reflects both the greatness of God and his closeness.

- Spirit-led formality can prevent the informal becoming endlessly trivial.
- Spirit-led informality can prevent the formal becoming endlessly 'heavy'.

8. Adoration, Tongues and Tears

Hearts before Heads

We worship God with our whole being: with our bodies, our heads and our hearts. The praying-in-words that I have considered so far, whether it is formal or informal, alone or with others, has required the use of our minds. For language requires thought, remembering, ordering and assembling. We are not verbal by instinct – language is only an acquired skill – as will have been brought home to you if you have ever tried to learn another language!

But our prayer should not always, or inevitably, come from our minds. Our relation to God is, indeed, a *love affair*. It should be natural for our hearts to communicate with God without mental domination.

Such a heart-response is quite a normal feature of life, it is not weird.

The greatest and most beautiful things in life may leave us speechless, or leave us with clichés like 'I love you', or 'Thank you'. Indeed we use the phrase 'I don't know what to say!' The times when our hearts 'overflow' may rightly render words useless.

Adoration

Many Christians find, as they grow closer to God, that words become more and more inadequate.

‘We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains he had to bear.
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.’

St. Paul writes *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift*. [2 Corinthians 9:15]. What sort of gift? – how can we put it? – ‘beyond words’! Precisely!

So naturally Christian prayer includes styles of adoration that are not word-bound.

The name of *Jesus* said quietly to oneself and repeated has been, and is, for countless Christians, a means of coming into his presence - more to enjoy his company than to intercede for his help.

One of the blessings and rediscoveries of the renewal movement is the overflowing of hearts in adoration, often among Christians who previously had a faith that was very cerebral. Much

'renewal' music adds to earlier styles of hymn writing by the use of simple words. A good example of what I mean is the worship-song that begins:

Jesus, name above all names
Beautiful Saviour
Glorious Lord
Emmanuel, etc...

It has maximum *worship*-content, and minimum word-content.

Praying-in-Tongues

‘Speaking in Tongues’ fits in naturally here. For those who have this gift of prayer it liberates them from all the mental sorting and sifting that has to go on for intelligible speech. The gift frees words from the narrow restrictions of the intellect, the head and the reason, and enables them to be fluid vehicles of the heart, of our feelings and of our love.

This is not something totally strange to us. Language, as I have already mentioned, is only an acquired skill. It is not natural. Before we learnt it we were well able to express our delight at our mother’s approach, our satisfaction for a meal!

The Gift of Tears

The 'gift of tears' has many roles in the Christian life, and for some they express the inexpressible. They can occur – without emotion – in times of worship.

[This is dealt with very fully in the article 'Tears – Gift of the Spirit?' on this website.]

So far I have outlined the following –

- The distinction between words of prayer spoken *aloud* and thought *mentally*.
- The distinction between such spoken prayer taking place *formally* and *informally*.
- The distinction between such spoken prayer experienced *alone* or *corporately*.
- The distinction between such spoken prayer which is *mind-based* and which is *heart-based*.

Part III - THE LIFE OF PRAYER

This is the 'other side' to the Words of Prayer outlined in Part II.

- Those who are skilled and active in WORDS OF PRAYER may not be equally mature in the LIFE OF PRAYER.
- Similarly, maturity in the LIFE OF PRAYER is not measured by skills with the WORDS OF PRAYER.

1. Making the Distinction

We can make an analogy between the love that exists between God and ourselves and the love which can exist between two people.

The Lover and the Beloved will have conversations in which things are said between them. They will respond to one another, learn more of one another, and share their thoughts together. Such activities are not confined to those who love one another. They also take place between friends and acquaintances.

The difference between those who deeply love each other and acquaintances is that with those in love there is something between them which is not dependent on words. They are content to be in one another's company and enjoy BEING, rather than merely doing or talking. They will have begun by talking, and as the relationship developed the talking will have become less.

Partly this will have been due to the fact that they no longer have to impress one another; each has a deep loving acceptance of the other.

Much the same is true of prayer and our relationship to God.

Being rather than speaking

There is a side of prayer which is more about the quality of the relationship than it is about the quality – or quantity! – of the talking that takes place.

It is less about something we do than about what we are. It is not so much a state of spiritual *busy-ness* as a state of spiritual *being*.

Those who equate prayer with *words and intercession* may find their use of the word 'prayer' stretched when it is applied to the dynamics of our relationship with God. Do not react against this, for the foundation of verbal communication with God is our relationship with him.

2. Different beginnings

There are different 'streams' within Christianity, and individuals start at different places. As it is the work of the Holy Spirit to *increase* our experience, knowledge and love of God, this often means that we appreciate for the first time Christian styles that previously we did not understand.

Christian lives have to begin somewhere, and that place differs for all of us. Some Christians are introduced to prayer by experiencing 'Words of Prayer'. These may begin with prayer meetings, intercession lists and the pressure upon them to 'pray aloud'.

[See the article '**But I Can't Pray Aloud!**' if this, or other people, trouble you.]

Other Christians may begin their pilgrimage by starting with the Life of Prayer.

An hour's silence

I recall a television programme that showed a Christian leader challenging a group of teenagers to give a year for God. He began by introducing them to a pattern of life that put God first.

At five o'clock in the morning they gathered in his house for an hour together of silence, which was expected to be – as indeed *was* for many – a deep encounter with the living God. The leader was not aiming to get them good at *saying* prayers, but was teaching them a disciplined pattern of life that would keep them close to God, and bear fruit in a Life of Prayer. Words were not, to him, either first or central; skill in their use might perhaps come later, but if it did, it would not in itself mark holiness or maturity.

The Life of Prayer is essentially a moment-by-moment living relationship with God, and is the aim of the spiritual life. When St. Paul taught us to *pray without ceasing* [1 Thessalonians 5:17], the very last thing he would have wished for the Thessalonian Christians was to spend their lives at prayer meetings! (Some Christians do – as a religious escape from life!)

'*Pray without ceasing*' can only mean that our life *is* prayer; that what we do and what we are constitute a dynamic relationship with God. What must never cease, or be allowed to get eclipsed by other things, is God's living relationship with us, and ours with him.

3. 'To work is to pray'

When we understand the Life of Prayer in this way, we can make sense of Augustine's dictum 'To work is to pray'. He is not (as some might hope!) saying that you should skip attending Church in order to wash your car!

The truth he is getting across to Christians is: the offering of their work to God is part-and-parcel of their religious life. That it is their *whole* life that relates to God, not just its 'spiritual bits'. That God is as much interested in the quality of the work Christians do and offer to him as he is in their offerings of prayers.

4. Psalms

Some of the Psalms would sit very uncomfortably indeed in prayer meetings or general worship. The reason is that they do not arise out of a narrow verbal tradition of ‘saying one’s prayers’ but out of that all-of-life-spectrum that we call the ‘Life of Prayer.’

The Psalms may teach us a great deal about the Life of Prayer in which everything is seen to be held within God's hand.

The great thing, indeed the hallmark of the Psalms is their *reality*. They are not pious or precious; they are not super-spiritual; they are not pie-in-the-sky. They come out of an utterly real, down-to-earth no-nonsense relationship to God. Complaining, anger, despair, frustration – it is all there and not kept apart from God for fear of offending him but accepted as an integral part of any life shared with him.

<i>My soul also is struck with terror,...O Lord – how long?</i>	[Psalm 6:3]
<i>Put them in fear, O Lord;</i>	[Psalm 9:20]
<i>O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger,...For your arrows have sunk into me,...</i>	
<i>There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation;</i>	[Psalm 38:1-3]
<i>I say to God, my rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me?’</i>	[Psalm 42:9]
<i>My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.</i>	[Psalm 69:3]

5. The Real Thing

The milk has just boiled over, the baby is crying, the phone is ringing, you’ve run and tripped over the cat – knocking to pieces your 21st birthday present – gashing your finger which stains the wall-paper as you reach to answer the phone to learn that the doorbell is ringing and you’ve left the tap running!

In such a situation, whatever words we use (outwardly or inwardly!) do not easily belong to the ‘Words of Prayer’ - for people would not be edified by them.

But what we say, mentally or aloud, on such occasions *does* have its place in the Life of Prayer. For in the Life of Prayer we have not shut-off God from the nitty-gritty of our lives, but know him to be real and welcome his presence in the strains and traumas as well as in our ‘religious’ times of quiet.

The Life of Prayer is real and the whole of life. It excludes nothing from the God-relationship.

I recall hearing of a man who always popped into his local church for a few minutes every lunchtime. It was natural for him and the caretaker to get to know each other. One day the caretaker plucked up courage and asked the man what he did or said so regularly in so short a time.

The man replied, 'It is very simple, I just say *Jesus, Jimmy is here* and then I wait for his reply. When He says *Jimmy, Jesus is here!* I thank him and leave!'

That says more about the Life of Prayer than the Words of Prayer.

PART IV - Relating the Two

Understanding the two 'sides' of prayer explains two important things.

1. Verbal and less verbal

Christians who are not 'verbal'

It explains, for instance, the sanctity and holiness of many Christians who nevertheless do not measure up to what some others would expect in their ability to pray aloud or pray extempore. It is likely that they have some maturity in the Life of Prayer and, as I have said, verbal ability is no measure of Christian maturity.

Christians who become less 'verbal'

It also explains what troubles those who have been brought up grounded in the 'Words of Prayer'. Some find, as they grow older, that all the activities formerly linked with Words of Prayer, now seem less important and less essential. Perhaps that long intercession list is not quite so obligatory, or the prayer-meeting is somehow no longer the greatest expression of prayer.

What is happening is that they are allowing the Holy Spirit to move them forward into the Life of Prayer. They are moving from being dependent on words to a liberty with words, moving from a verbal-based relationship into something stronger and deeper, which is not word-dependent.

Not Guilt but Growth!

Unless this is explained to them their spiritual tradition leads them to feel guilty because they now appear to be doing badly what in earlier years they did well! Is this advance or retreat? In most cases, clearly, advance!

It is within this move from the Words of Prayer to the Life of Prayer that the value of that which is non-verbal begins to be appreciated.

(This 'move' as I have called it is not a 'switch' from one to the other but an expansion from the one to include the other.)

2. Silence

Breakdown or Breakthrough

For many at the beginning of their spiritual journey, silence is when nothing happens! Silence is akin to the projector breaking down! It tells us that something has gone wrong, and we rush to try and restore sound once more.

One of the first things that marks those who are growing into the Life of Prayer (and overflowing the Words of Prayer side of things) is a growing appreciation of that which is not verbal – especially silence.

For those a little further on in the spiritual life, however, who increasingly realise that God’s person, God’s love, God’s work in Jesus, the Cross are all ‘quite beyond words’, for them silence enables them to move more closely to God.

Are there any everyday counterparts? I think there are.

Those who are single might experience nothing in their room but the gentle breathing of their dog and the simple delight of being together. The married might delight in the gentle breathing of the spouse asleep alongside them. In a similar way, in silence, it is as if we put words aside just to enjoy God's presence.

We can 'feed' into such silences (if we feel the need to) the name of Jesus, or words of adoration. But words have really been left behind.

Silence in worship

When we are together, silence can enable many different things to take place at the same time. In worship, for instance, it enables God and each of his children to have a moment or two on their own, doing whatever it is that is right, according to an individual's need at the time.

So some will hear an extra personal message from God during a silence in worship, a message which was not for all. Others will be able to share more deeply their pain; others extend a little longer their praise. Others will perhaps follow-up a Scripture verse in their Bibles; others will note down a Word from the Lord which they have received during the worship. Others will enjoy a moment or two to bask in the sunshine of God’s presence. Others will simply take a well-earned 'breather' from the receiving or the transmission of *words*!

At a service silence saves individual Christians from all being served the same spiritual menu. Almost anything may take place in it, according to God's purposes for each.