

Pathways of Prayer

Journey through Lent with BBC Radio 4, BBC Local Radio and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Two people are walking along a pathway together. As you watch you can see the changing relationship between them. Sometimes they talk animatedly together, but at other times they travel in silence. Sometimes they seem to be arguing. At other times they seem close as lovers. Sometimes they appear to lose contact altogether...but then they are reunited and travel on together.

Christian life is a journey. But it's not a journey we make alone. As we travel, we have God as our companion. Everything that passes between us and God as we travel is what we call prayer. Prayer is the road we travel on, and it is our occupation on the journey.

But prayer takes many forms. Christian spirituality offers not one but many pathways by which to come to God. Each pathway has been formed in Christian communities through the centuries, and each has depth, wisdom and experience to offer in approaching God through prayer.

We are all different, and each of us finds some types of prayer more conducive than others. The aim of this Lenten series is to offer participants insights into six types of prayer - six journeys - or better still, six modes of travel.



The path of holiness

week 1

*Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your Holy Name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Traditional

The Holiness Tradition emphasises the need to have our hearts and motives ‘holy’ and right with God. This is something that takes effort - we have to work at it. The Puritans called it “heart work”. But paradoxically, we can’t achieve ‘right-heartedness’ by our own efforts. Instead, we offer our lives and intentions to God and God meets us at our point of effort.

Setting off

- In the middle of the busyness of life, stop. At the beginning of this Lenten journey, make some time to listen to God. Before you do anything else, do nothing. Spend a few minutes in quiet. If it helps, play some gentle music. In the quietness, try to picture yourself in front of God. What do you see?
- 21st Century life is full of distractions - things that divert our attention from God. What are the biggest distractions in your life?



Bible

King David was the leader of the people of Israel. He was heroic, gifted, godly...and deeply flawed. As a child he was brave enough to save his sheep from lions and took on the giant Goliath in mortal combat. But as an adult he sent his Generals into battle while he stayed at home. While they were away fighting he was distracted by seeing his neighbour’s wife taking a bath on the roof. He slept with her, then covered up his sin by arranging for the man to be killed in battle. The whole sorry story is recorded in 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25.

Then, in a dramatic turn, God sent the prophet Nathan to call David to account. In a moment of revelation David realised the enormity of what he had done - and how badly he had failed God. This is his prayer...

Read Psalm 51

- 1 *Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.*
- 2 *Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.*
- 3 *For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.*
- 4 *Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.*
- 5 *Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*
- 6 *Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.*
- 7 *Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*
- 8 *Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.*
- 9 *Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.*
- 10 *Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*
- 11 *Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.*
- 12 *Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*
- 13 *Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.*
- 14 *Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.*

15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.

18 In your good pleasure make Zion prosper;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then there will be righteous sacrifices,
whole burnt offerings to delight you;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Consider:

- How do you picture David as he prays this prayer?
- List the things that David asks God to do for him.
- In this prayer David is returning to a God whom he knows well, but from whom he has strayed. What characteristics of God does David call upon here?
- In verses 12-15 David makes various promises to God. What does he feel he can offer to God that God will accept?
- Look again at verses 16 and 17. What kind of sacrifice does God not want from us? What does God want from us? What do you think is meant by “a broken spirit”?
- What do you imagine David did after he prayed this prayer?

Moving on

Try to identify one thing that regularly distracts you from having your heart focussed on God. Decide to give it up between now and Easter. Each time that distraction arises (and it will!) focus instead on God. You could use David’s prayer *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

If you are using these studies as part of a group you may want to tell the others in the group what you are giving up.

If you are using these studies alone, make yourself a note to remind you. You could write the words *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me,* and put them in the place where your distraction usually occurs - on the bathroom mirror or even the front of your TV set.

The path of social justice

week 2

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me love.
 Where there is injury, pardon.
 Where there is discord, vision.
 Where there is doubt, faith.
 Where there is darkness, light.
 Where there is sadness, joy.
 O divine Master,
 Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
 To be understood as to understand;
 To be loved, as to love;
 For it is in giving that we receive,
 It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
 And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
 Amen.*

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Some people pray on their knees...but others pray with their hands. Working for peace and justice can be a form of prayer - and prayer and protest are closely linked in the Old Testament. When Jesus cleared the money-changers from the Temple he was praying out of anger, but also making a calculated act of worshipful defiance. Initiatives like the Iona Community and the Faithworks movement have given fresh impetus to this deep stream of Christian spirituality that includes figures like Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Setting off

Many products we buy these days have a phone number to which customers can direct their complaints or queries. If God had a customer service department, what would you like to complain about?

Bible

Habakkuk was a prophet who lived in Israel about 600 years before Christ. Beyond that we don't know much about him. But we do know a bit about the world he was living in. It was a time of great violence and destruction. There was a spirit of anarchy. One group of people was constantly at war with another. The law of God was being flouted by everyone. You get the sense that the whole society was unravelling, like a woolly jumper with a thread being pulled, and Habakkuk was afraid. He couldn't see where it would all end.



In lots of ways, the Middle East at the time of Habakkuk seems like a very familiar place. It has so much in common with the world we're living in today. And that's what makes Habakkuk's experience so relevant for those of us who are trying to live as Christians today.

One of the things that was most disturbing for Habakkuk was that it was clear that the winners in all of this were not the good people but the bad. Time after time it seemed like might was on the side of the evil people. Isn't that familiar? Doesn't it feel, if we're honest, as if God's people are on the losing side time and again?

There are two "voices" in this reading - Habakkuk and God. Read Habakkuk 1:2-7 and then 3:17-19

Habakkuk's complaint

*2 How long, O LORD, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not save?*

*3 Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrong?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.*

*4 Therefore the law is paralysed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.*

God 's reply

*5 "Look at the nations and watch-and be utterly amazed.
For I am going to do something in your days
that you would not believe,
even if you were told.*

*6 I am raising up the Babylonians,
that ruthless and impetuous people,
who sweep across the whole earth
to seize dwelling places not their own.*

*7 They are a feared and dreaded people;
they are a law to themselves
and promote their own honour.*

Habakkuk's promise

17 *Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,*

18 *yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.*

19 *The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to go on the heights.*

Consider:

- How do you picture Habakkuk as he makes this prayer?
- As he looks at the society around him what does Habakkuk complain to God about? As you look at our society can you see any contemporary parallels to the problems in Habakkuk's world?
- Was Habakkuk right to complain?
- Is God aware of Habakkuk's concerns? What does God ask Habakkuk to do (verse 5)? Do you think Habakkuk was surprised by what God said?
- How did Habakkuk decide to respond (v17,18)? What aspects of God's character does Habakkuk rely on?
- What do you think Habakkuk means when he says that God "makes my feet like the feet of a deer" and "enables me to go on the heights" (v19)?

Moving on

We are bombarded by news on the TV and radio and in the newspapers. Much of it is puzzling or depressing. But we can turn it into prayer. Watch a TV news broadcast, or listen to the radio, and as you do so talk to God about each item. Or you could do the same thing using a copy of today's newspaper to prompt you.

Your prayers may be quite specific - asking God to put right some injustice or bring peace in some area of conflict. Or you may simply want to express your feelings to God like Habakkuk did..."Why God? Where are you? What are you going to do?"

In the week ahead, watch out for any ways in which God has acted in response to the prayers of his people. Like Habakkuk, you may be 'utterly amazed'!

The devotional path

week 3

*Most gracious God,
in whom alone dwells all fullness of light and wisdom:
By your Holy Spirit, illuminate our minds,
in true understanding of your Word.
Give us grace that we may receive it
with reverence and humility.
May it lead us to put our trust in you alone;
and so to serve and honour you,
that we may glorify your holy name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

John Calvin (1509-1564)

Christians believe that God has revealed himself to us through his Word. Evangelical spirituality places special emphasis on the way God speaks to us through the Bible. So 'devotional' time spent in prayer and Bible study are centrally important. But studying for its own sake is not enough. The word of God has to shape and change our lives; it has to call us together into God-centred life in the church; and then it has to be shared with the world through preaching and evangelism.

Setting off

- Christians sometimes speak about 'knowing God'. What do you think they mean?
- Look back to the very beginning of your Christian experience. When did you first become aware of Christ's presence in your life? Has that awareness changed or grown since then?

Bible

Saint Paul had visited the church at Ephesus at least twice before, once for about three months (Acts 18:19-21) and once for three years. So he knew and loved the Christians there. Tradition says that the letter to the Ephesians was written from Paul's prison cell in Rome around 62AD. In many ways it is a love letter to the church. Paul has two great longings for them: that they should know God better and experience unity in their life together. Chapter 3 verses 14-19 form a single sentence in the original Greek - probably one of the longest sentences in the whole Bible. They represent an out-pouring of passionate prayer from Paul.



Read Ephesians 3:14-21

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Consider:

- How do you picture Paul as he prays this prayer?
- Who does Paul direct his prayer to?
- What do you think Paul means when he says that God's "whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name" from the Father (v14)?
- What does Paul want most for the people he is writing to?
- Paul mentions power three times. What power does he want his readers to experience, and why does he want it for them?

Moving on

- What are your chief goals in life? Where does the goal of knowing God fit into your other plans and ambitions?
- What steps are you taking (or could you take) to know more of God's love in your life?

The sacramental path

week 4

*Almighty God,
For inasmuch as without you,
we are not able to please you,
mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit,
may in all things,
direct and rule our hearts,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Adapted from “The Book of Common Prayer”

‘Sacrament’ is simply a word for a place or time where God meets with his people. Of course God is present always and everywhere. Nevertheless God does seem to give us special moments when heaven breaks through to earth. It might be a moment of revelation in the middle of the city, or a breathtaking view on a country walk. It can happen in the silence of the Quaker meeting or the solemnity of the Mass. So the challenge of the sacramental path is two-fold: to recognise God’s presence in our everyday lives; and to create a discipline of prayer and worship in which we open ourselves to meet with him.

Setting off

- What helps you to pray? Are there any special places, sounds or ceremonies that help you to feel close to God?

Bible

This is the story of a family. The father is Elkanah, a generous and gentle man who sets an example to his family by taking them to worship God regularly at the temple. His first wife Peninnah has several children. But Elkanah’s second wife Hannah is infertile. It’s a cause of great sadness to Hannah and her husband. And (not surprisingly) there’s an ongoing rift between the two wives. We’re going to look at Hannah’s story.

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-18

1 There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.



3 Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. 4 Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. 6 And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. 7 This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. 8 Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

9 Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. 10 In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. 11 And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

12 As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14 and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine."

15 "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. 16 Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

17 Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

18 She said, "May your servant find favour in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

19 Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. 20 So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

Consider:

- How do you picture Hannah as she prays this prayer?
- Hannah's infertility made her desperately sad. What do you think helped her in her sadness? Why do you think she went to the temple?
- Hannah prayed in silence, but even her tears seem to be prayers. Can we learn anything from this story about the nature of Hannah's relationship with God?
- How do you think Hannah felt as she arrived at the temple (verse 7)? How do you think she felt as she left the temple (verse 19)? What made the difference?
- What do you think is meant by the phrase "the Lord remembered her" in verse 19? Had God forgotten Hannah?

• Hannah gave her problem to God in prayer, but that didn't mean it was resolved straight away. Are there unresolved problems or unanswered prayers in your life? Is it possible to give them to God and leave them in his care?

Moving on

Hannah kept up a routine of praying and going to the temple even though her soul was bitter. In the routines of your day and your week, is there a time and place for prayer? If not, could you create one? Try to establish some 'sacramental' moments in your week. It is best to keep your plans small and manageable.

If you are using these studies in a group, you could agree a discipline of prayer together. For instance, you might agree to stop wherever you are at 12 noon each day and pray for two minutes. Or you might decide to break bread or attend Eucharist together before you meet next week.

The contemplative path

week 5

*Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,
For all the benefits thou hast won for me,
For all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me.*

*O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,
May I know thee more clearly,
Love thee more dearly,
And follow thee more nearly,
Day by day. Amen.*

Richard of Chichester (c.1197-1253)

Anyone who has been in love knows what it is like to simply gaze and gaze upon the person you love. It can be a holy moment. Just by looking intently, love seems to pass from one person to the other - and with it usually comes a great sense of peace and fulfilment.

The Contemplative tradition in Christian spirituality describes the steady gaze of the soul upon God. Contemplatives give up all other distractions - noise and busyness of all sorts - just to focus on God. Some Christians have gone into the desert or joined a monastic order to give themselves more fully to God.

Ironically, when you gaze at a lover for a long time, you can't help being aware of how separate you are - how frustrating it is that you can't take the final step of love and become one person. In the same way, Christians contemplating God often experience times of loneliness or darkness, a thirst for God that can't be satisfied. But in that process the contemplative Christian is gradually changed from the inside out to become more and more like Jesus.

Setting off

- Most of us have experienced times when life is stormy or the world seems to be in chaos around you. What do you do to feel safe when life is tough? Are there any special places where you go to find peace?
- Have you ever felt that God was speaking directly to you? What were the circumstances? What did God say? What did you do about it?



Bible

This Psalm is one of the 'Songs of Zion'. We don't know its origin, but it was almost certainly a hymn used in the liturgy at the Temple in Jerusalem. It even has a returning chorus in verses 7 and 11. You can almost hear the crowds shouting out these verses in response to a cantor. This is a Psalm about the character of God - in particular God's strength and protection. For the people of Israel that character was summed up in the 'city of God', which they thought was inviolable. As it turned out, they were right about God's character, but not about the city of Jerusalem, which was later to fall.

Read Psalm 46 :1-11

- 1 *God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.*

- 2 *Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,*
- 3 *though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.*

- 4 *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.*

- 5 *God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.*

- 6 *Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.*

- 7 *The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

- 8 *Come and see the works of the LORD,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.*

- 9 *He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear,
he burns the shields with fire.*

- 10 *"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."*

- 11 *The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

To consider:

- In verses 2 and 3 the Psalmist describes the most extreme disaster he can imagine. What disasters, natural or otherwise, do people fear today?
- What do you think the writer means when he describes God as a “refuge”?
- How did the people of Israel understand God’s intervention in international affairs? Does this Psalm describe God as a warrior, or a peacemaker (v 8,9)?
- Why does God instruct people to “be still” (v10)? What might “being still” mean in practice in a busy world? What happens when people are still?
- Verse 10 is couched in the actual words of God to his people. In what ways does God speak to his people today? If you felt that God was speaking to you directly, what steps might you take to check that you weren’t simply imagining it?

Moving on

If you are taking your first steps in contemplative prayer, a good plan might be to choose a spiritual picture or an icon. Ask God to speak to you through the picture. Decide to spend time looking at the picture intently, waiting for God to touch you through it. Some gentle background music may help you to focus. If you are using this study in a group you may want to share your thoughts with others.

Alternatively, use the words of God recorded in the passage “Be still, and know that I am God”. Carry the phrase in your mind for a few minutes, and keep it there until you move beyond the words to hear the voice of God speaking to you through it.

You may want to repeat this exercise at other times this week.

The charismatic path

week 6

*Lord you are great and greatly to be praised!
awaken us to delight in your praises,
for you made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
'till they find their rest in you.
Amen.*

St. Augustine (354-430)

Theologian Andrew Murray said that “the Holy Spirit is nothing less than Divine Love descending to indwell us.” Charismatic spirituality focuses on the immediacy of this internal experience of God and the consequent response of worship. So this pathway invites us to engage with our bodies and our emotions as well as our intellect. The prayer of praise will be at the centre of this week’s service. How do we praise God - particularly in times of looming darkness as we approach Holy Week?

Setting off

- British people are notoriously reserved! But what events or occasions can you think of where people throw caution to the winds and express their emotions in public? Have you ever had a moment when you felt so full of joy that your heart would burst?
- Think through the emotional ups and downs that Jesus’ disciples experienced as they accompanied Jesus from Palm Sunday through Good Friday to Easter Day.



Bible

The ‘ark’ of the Lord was a most sacred cabinet. It was the focus for the presence of God within the temple in Jerusalem. So when the ark returned from captivity to God’s city it was a moment of great solemnity and also great joy and celebration. A thousand years later, when Jesus made his way into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday there were similar scenes of joy and excitement.

Read 2 Samuel 6:1-23

1 David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all. 2 He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark. 3 They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart 4 with the

ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. 5 David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.

6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 7 The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.

8 Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.

9 David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?" 10 He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. 11 The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household.

12 Now King David was told, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. 13 When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. 14 David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, 15 while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

16 As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

17 They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. 18 After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. 19 Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.

20 When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"

21 David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel - I will celebrate before the LORD. 22 I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour."

23 And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

Consider:

- When Uzzah touched the ark of the Lord he immediately died (verses 6 and 7). What does this strange story tell us about the character of God? What questions does it raise?
- King David doesn't seem to have cared what people thought of him - he danced before the ark wearing nothing but his vest! How did he explain this to his embarrassed wife (verse 21)?
- David offered sacrifices to God and also gave gifts to the people who had travelled with him (verses 18 and 19). Why do you think he did that? What's the connection between worship and giving? Is there a connection between worshipping God and giving gifts in your own spiritual life?
- Michal accused David of being undignified in his worship (v20). But David didn't seem to mind a bit (v22)! Do you think our worship should always be dignified?
- What range of emotions did King David go through in the course of this story? What does his emotional journey tell us about David's experience of God's character?

Moving on

As you journey through this Holy Week ask God to touch your heart directly - to help you experience the excitement of Palm Sunday, the horror of Good Friday and the joy of Easter Sunday. Why not watch the dramas on BBC1 each evening? Instead of simply watching the programmes as an observer, try to imagine yourself being there - a participant in the unfolding story of Holy Week.