Sermon: **Is anyone among you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? He should sing praises** (James 5.13)

2 things about prayer: all know we should do it; all think we are no good at it.

We get confused by images of nuns praying daily for hours; by stories of John Wesley, rising at 4.00am to pray; by Paul exhorting the Thessalonians “Pray at all times”; hymns like “Pray, without ceasing, pray”.

Instead of encouraging these become oppressive.

It is like deciding on Monday to do a bit of hill walking, and then on Tuesday being signed up for Everest. Instead of having a go, we give up the activity as hopeless. Let me try and help.

[1] Prayer as relationship with God

Think of how you keep in contact with a close friend/family member who does not live in your home.

How long do you spend? Hours?

Sometimes it takes a bit of effort, but if no contact is there a relationship left?

Prayer is at heart our relationship with God. No single way to do this.

[2] Prayer as natural activity

Do you remember church prayer meetings? How they were vibrant when there was a specific purpose, and more difficult when more routine? Why? Former seemed natural. This is not to denigrate prayer meetings.

They are not the only way. Often for most individuals they are not the best.

In what places do you feel closer to God? Beach, clifftop, woodland, by a river, in the garden?

Doing which activities do you feel closer to God? Walking, worship, washing up?

Some find it easier to pray on their own, others in groups.

Whatever is right for you, is right for you.

[3] Prayer on all occasions

TEXT. James relates prayer to troubles, happiness, illness, need to confess.

There are no inappropriate times/places/occasions for prayer.

But being specific is when prayer sparks.

Too often we end prayer with “if it be your will”, as if we are not convinced. Compare Jesus at Gethsemane.

Who Wants to be a Millionaire? Eventually contestant has to choose. He may Phone a Friend, or Ask the Audience. If we want prayer answered we can ask others, but ultimately we should be definite & specific.

Child in womb about to be born – “I’ve got to breathe! But how?”

In the end when it comes to prayer, don’t panic, but like breathing, just do it!