

DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER

Early one morning, as the sun was just beginning to touch the tree tops with lazy fingers of light, we were forced to a dead stop in the road. Some sleepy little Vervet Monkeys were beginning to wake the rest of the troop. It was a delight to watch their mischievous antics, as they tumbled across the asphalt and chased one another up and down trees. Others just sat in the grass, lazily gathering their thoughts, or lovingly searching the coats of family and friends for parasites. They were completely unperturbed by our presence.

As we watched them play, I noticed one lone monkey sitting on the edge of a branch, high up in a tree. They sleep in trees and are active during the day, so I was not surprised to see him still perched there. However, there was something different about this monkey – he appeared to be praying! He had his little cupped hands crossed over each other across his chest, as he solemnly sat with his eyes closed. I watched him quietly, trying to decide if he was just sleeping, when suddenly a naughty little neighbor swung onto his branch from nowhere, almost knocking him off his perch. Without moving his hands, he steadied himself, ignored his visitor and closed his eyes again. His agitator jumped around beside him and got the hairy eye ball once or twice, but finally resigned himself to the fact that this was not a good time. I expected the newcomer to go off on another adventure, but instead, he snuggled up beside the “praying” monkey and just sat quietly – the perfect prayer partner!

I don't know about you, but when I settle down to spend time praying, the distractions begin to come thick and fast. My phone rings, or someone knocks on my door. The dogs bark or the wind slams a door. If I have preempted as many potential distractions as possible, my cat Toby, can be relied upon to show up and headbutt my Bible, climb on my lap or knock something off the shelf! It is so frustrating! I could identify with that monkey – I don't know if monkeys pray, but just as his solitude was rudely interrupted, my prayer solitude is almost guaranteed to be broken too. Sometimes I just give up and join the disciples in their failure to stay focused. *“When he came back to his disciples, he found them sound asleep. He said to Peter, “Can't you stick it out with me a single hour? 41 Stay alert; be in prayer so you don't wander into temptation without even knowing you're in danger. There is a part of you that is eager, ready for anything in God. But there's another part that's as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire.” ~ Matthew 26:40-41.*

I learned something from that Vervet Monkey that morning – he knew what his mission was and he was not about to be swayed. His determined little distracter eventually got the message and gave up. What if I ignored the cat and the barking dogs and the ringing cell phone? What if I refused to allow any interruptions to my discussion with my Jesus? Jesus himself said: *“Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace” ~ Matthew 6:61.*

Well, I tried it and a reward followed! Giving Jesus my full attention earns me an audience with my King right in His Throne Room!

Prayer Response:

Lord Jesus, sometimes I wish I could find my off button! Please forgive me for the times I struggle to stop thinking, am not listening or am being distracted. I long for more time alone with you where I can just soak in your presence and peace. Lord, it is my heart's desire to put you first in all things. Help me to start by giving you my full attention when I pray.

