

Prayer: How and When?

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- [0 : 0 0] I'm going to pray for us, and then we're going to, we've got this four-parter that we're thinking about prayer. Last week we thought about the what's and the why's, what is prayer and how is it possible.
- This week we're thinking more of the how to pray, and when as well, when to pray. Let me pray for you as we start. Almighty God, we praise you and we thank you for this gift of prayer.
- We thank you now as we come before you, as we hear from you speak to us in your word. We just pray that you'd open our eyes and our hearts to hear and to know what you want to say to us.
- We pray that you'd change us, help us to fix our attention unto Jesus. And we pray that you would grow us in thinking about what it means to speak to you, to know that we have your ear waiting and listening and hanging off every word that we say.
- And so we commit it into your hands, in Jesus' name. Amen. How and when we choose to pray, this is what we're thinking about this morning, how and when we choose to pray, it's all really connected to what is going on in our hearts.
- [1 : 0 7] It's connected to the things that matter to us in our lives. It's connected deeply to what we value and what we're motivated by. Now, in our lives, a lot of the time, the reason we do things, the reason we're motivated to do anything really, normally is because of the end result, isn't it?
- You do something because of the end result. And in lots of instances, there's nothing wrong with that, is there? The reason we do something is because of what we get out of it.
- The reason people, if you're going to apply for a job, the reason you apply for a job is because of the end result. You hope to get that job. That's why you fill in the application form.
- But the end result of that is, there's a reason for that, isn't there? Why do people want a job? It's driven by the end result of earning money. Which is right, isn't it?
- You need to earn money. That's an end result because we need money to live. There is an end result. There is a reason, a motivation for doing something. It drives the job application in the first place.
- [2 : 1 4] And it probably keeps driving you when you don't want to go and you're knackered and can't be bothered. The end result of earning money to live is what keeps you getting up and going to work.
- When it comes to most of the decisions we make in life, it is driven by the end result. It stands to reason then, doesn't it, that if we pray, if we're praying people, that that kind of way of doing things will probably affect the attitude that we come to prayer with.
- We can come with that kind of results-driven approach. This is the situation I'm in and I want God to sort out my situation.
- I want to see a result because of what I'm going to say to him. If that is the real driver, if that's the real driver from how and why we pray, it will actually affect the way we pray.

It'll affect the way we pray. Because we'll begin to think that perhaps there's a certain way of praying that might make our prayers more effective. Maybe there's a special way to pray.

[3 : 28] Maybe there's a technique, phrases that need to be said. Maybe even there's a job that might make you, you know, maybe you think a minister or a priest knows what to say, the secret key that means you're heard by God.

I'm here with really good news this morning about prayer because there are no special phrases. There's no special technique. Everyone who follows Jesus, which we thought about last week, everyone who is a Jesus follower can have confidence that every word is heard, every word is listened to, and every word is answered by the living God.

The real issue, the real issue is not behaviour with prayer, but the real issue is our hearts. It is what's going on in here when we come to God.

It's really about what motivates us to pray in the first place. And so we're thinking about how we pray, when we pray. And there's four things that we're going to think about this morning.

Four sort of ideas of what it means to pray. First, pray genuinely, pray secretly, pray God's concerns, and then pray as a needy, dependent person.

[4 : 48] Genuinely, secretly, God's concerns, and then as a needy, dependent person. What Jesus says here, as we've read in Matthew 6, it comes in a big long speech that's in Matthew's Gospel.

This big long speech goes from Matthew 5 to 7. It's often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Lots of teaching in there. Lots to think through. And in it, Jesus is explaining what it means to live in the Kingdom of God.

He's explaining what the Kingdom of God are like. That if you belong to God's Kingdom, if you're a Jesus follower, this is what it looks like to be part of that Kingdom. That's what he's explaining.

And he's doing this, part of the explanation is what it means to pray. So the first one is pray genuinely. Jesus wants his people to pray genuinely, with authenticity, with genuine intentions, and genuine motivations.

And so, right from the off here, when we see this passage, he gives the people who are listening, his disciples and others in the crowd, he gives them two warnings. The first one comes in verse 5.

[5 : 56] Look with me. Page 970, if you want to follow along. When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, to be seen by others.

At its root, the word hypocrite is connected to being an actor, to wear a mask. That's what an actor does, isn't it?

An actor, they pretend to be a character, they're not, in a show, or in a film, on stage, and good actors are the ones that are better at pulling off different characters.

As you watch a good actor, you increasingly believe that they are representing that character, that they're paid to sort of represent.

And their performance captivates the audience. Professional actors want to get better at different types of role. It means they're admired, they have more potential, they can have more things that they can do on their CV.

[7 : 12] And the reward they get is by, they make lots of money, because they're admired as a great actor. Because they can do different roles, they can present somebody that they're not.

That is exactly what a hypocrite does. Doing one thing on the outside, like an actor, but very different on the inside.

Presenting something that's not what's going on on the inside, in the heart. In Jesus' day, being asked to pray, either in the temple or in the synagogue, was a great privilege.

Only the highly respected members of society would be asked. They'd gain a lot of respect from those who saw them. Often this was the religious elite or the high flyers, maybe those who'd done well for themselves.

Jesus calls them hypocrites, because he knows that they're acting. They look godly, people assume they must be close to God, of course, they've been asked to pray in the synagogue.

[8 : 14] They must know, they must have done well in life, but it's a show. It's a show, it looks on the outside, correct and right, but on the inside, they are far from God.

Jesus says, don't be like them. You see what he says at the end of verse 5, truly I tell you, they've received their reward in full. Their hearts are far from God.

What he's saying is the respect, the admiration, the thing that they're actually looking for, that is their reward. The praise of men and nothing more.

So that's the first one. Don't be like the hypocrites who pray for the well-dones and the pats on the back because they love to hear what people say about them.

Second warning comes in verse 7, look with me. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

[9 : 17] Here Jesus is not talking about the religious elite, but the pagans, the surrounding nations, the Greeks, the Romans, perhaps. You know with their, as we know, if we know anything about Roman or Greek mythology, they had a whole array of different gods that they would, that were connected to different things.

Mars, the god of war, Neptune, the god of the sea, Dionysus, the Greek god of fertility. And so if you wanted something that was connected to a certain part of life, that's the god you would go to.

The praying practice of the pagans would be to reel off long, large lists, thinking that if how what they said or the way they said mattered, maybe they had to pronounce the god's name correctly.

It was like uttering magic incantations and chanting and repetition in order to twist the god's arm so that the god as his arms twisted would eventually have to do what whoever it was was praying said.

In other words, the gods could be manipulated and controlled. Jesus says, don't be like them either. The living god does as he pleases.

[10 : 34] The living god does as he pleases. His arm can't be twisted the more times you ask him. You can't manipulate him. The reason why, look what he says, verse 8, do not be like them for your father knows what you need before you ask him.

What is Jesus getting at? He's saying, pray genuinely. What Jesus is getting is that when you come to God in prayer, it's your heart that matters. If we're coming with a self-centeredness about us, either to get some acclaim or to get what we want by thinking we can twist God's arm, we're coming with the wrong heart, the wrong motivations, the wrong intentions.

We're not being straight with God. And God knows that about us. He knows our hearts better than we do. Pray genuinely, honestly.

It means making yourself vulnerable. It means admitting to him what's going on. He already knows you inside out and back to front. He actually knows your heart and yourself better than you do.

He knows what you need before you ask. So that's the first. Pray genuinely. Second one, pray secretly. Verse 6, but when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your father who is unseen.

[11 : 56] Then your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. God's unseen. We know that. But even though he's unseen, he sees you and he hears you wherever you are and hears whatever you say.

There is no moment that you cannot pray to God. You can pray out loud or you can pray in your head. Closing your door and praying removes the desire to be seen by others.

It means your relationship with him is free of distractions. I have friends that I catch up with one to one.

I'm sure we've all got those people in life that we like to just have special time with. Just them, catching up, either going for a beer or for a coffee. And when you do, you'll know moments in your life there's certain conversations aren't there when that's the right thing to do.

And you'll even have, I'm sure, memories of important moments in your life when those times were precious. Either you delivered exciting news or, but sometimes you needed that special friend to be the shoulder to cry on.

[13 : 15] Or maybe even you just like being in one another's company without the conversation from everyone else. Those, those people are important.

You would not have some of those intimate conversations with everyone else staring on. But if your friend in that moment that you regarded special, was more concerned with what others thought in those moments as they're listening to you, you can tell they're looking at other people and you can tell they're not really listening.

It'd frustrate you. the moment that you thought is not now intimate and close and personal. When you're alone with the living God, your Father in heaven, there is a freedom, isn't there?

There is a freedom to pour out your heart. More than you would the most trusted person you know. He's unseen, but he sees all of you, including your heart.

He sees all of you. And so, you don't have to hold anything back. And he wants each of us to have that personal relationship with him, where we can have those intimate moments with him.

[14 : 35] We close the door if you see anything we like, but he sees, he knows. He knows your heart. Pray genuinely, pray secretly.

Then, we come to the Lord's Prayer. Perhaps the most famous prayer of all time, and I would suggest that if you are wondering and you're thinking how do I pray, or maybe you've become a bit lost in your prayer life, and you often don't know where to start, this is always a prayer that I would say is the best place to start.

How to structure you and think about prayer. You cannot go wrong with praying like this. The reason you can't go wrong is verse 9. Jesus says, this is how you should pray. We don't need a better invitation, do we?

How do I pray? Jesus says, this is how you should pray. It's a model of how to pray. What the Lord's prayer, I mean, you can say it verbatim, you can just repeat that and memorize it.

It's a good thing to teach children, but it doesn't mean you only have to say these words. It can often be a model of how to pray. What you pray about and how to think about what you're saying, how you structure your prayer.

[15 : 49] There's no better place to start. Now, I'm not going to go through it line by line in detail. I want to point out two things about the Lord's Prayer. The first thing in the Lord's Prayer I want to point out is this.

Pray God's concerns. Pray God's concerns. As we look at the Lord's Prayer, what you notice is that it's actually it comes split in two.

What comes first in the first half of the prayer is what God's concerned about. Initially, we get the address, don't we, to the person we're praying, to our Father in Heaven. We address him as Father because we're children of God.

We approach him with the same confidence as Jesus Christ, when you come in his name, he cares as much about what you say as he does his own son. We thought about that last week. No less, we address him as our Father because that's who he is, our Heavenly Dad, who only wants to hear and to bless us.

Our Father in Heaven, that's the address. But from here on in it's God's concern. Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. First and foremost, prayer is about God.

[16 : 57] It's God using his people to do what he's already planned. Prayer causes God to act so stuff happens that wouldn't happen if you didn't pray.

I've said this quite a few times or something similar. I'm going to say it again. Prayer causes God to act so that things happen that would not happen if you didn't pray.

And I know what people say to that. They might say, well, if God's in charge of all things, if he's planned everything, which he has, wouldn't it just happen anyway?

If he's planned it, wouldn't it just happen anyway? This might surprise you, but the answer is no. It wouldn't happen if you didn't pray.

Let me run through what happens when a follower of Jesus prays. This, honestly, this blows my mind every time. I remember the first time somebody explained this to me, and it felt like somebody just put like a spiritual grenade in my brain.

[18 : 04] I just thought, what? I couldn't believe it. When you pray, the desire, the desire to pray, that prayer, it doesn't come from you.

Remember what happens when God saves us? He adopts us as his children, and God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, makes his home in us. It's his own spirit, the spirit of God. It's that spirit that lives in you that gives you the desire to pray, and the desire to pray specific prayers.

He gives you the desire to pray what he wants to happen in his plan. I'll say that again, he gives us the desire to pray what he wants to happen in his plan.

Now, there's no doubt about it, he could do anything without us. He could do it without us praying, but he has so worked it that in his plan for the future, the future of everything, to bring about that plan.

His spirit, his living spirit, works in our hearts, and so works in our hearts that he gives us the desire, the decision, to pray the things that he wanted to do anything.

[19 : 21] You see what that means for us when we pray? It means that the moment when you decide to pray about anything, the decision to start praying was God working in you.

He gave you the desire to pray before you speak, so that he could cause something to happen that would not happen because of what you say to him.

Prayer causes God to act, to do stuff, to do things, he makes things happen that would not happen if he didn't pray. His concerns. That's why we pray his concerns first.

Hallowed be your name, make your name holy, may your name across the world be your holy name. Your kingdom come, would the kingdom of God come on this earth now? Would it come in the heart of my neighbour, my work colleague, this community?

Would the kingdom of God come in my heart more and more? Would the church, would the kingdom of God come increasingly in the church? And would your kingdom come finally?

[20 : 31] Come Lord Jesus as the king to establish your kingdom here, your kingdom for you. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Would everything that you want to come to pass happen?

Your will? Would what you've planned actually happen? Would this world increasingly become governed by the lordship of Christ's will?

So we've had to pray genuinely, pray secretly, pray God's concerns. Finally, pray as needy, dependent people. First half about God's concerns, second half is about us being needy for God to provide for us, for God to provide for every part of our lives, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

However, what we notice is that the emphasis is on spiritual provision. The first one is, we know, verse 11, give us today our daily bread.

We've got one part of the prayer is about physical and emotional. It echoes here, doesn't it? We should hear echoes, reminders of God's provision to his people, the Israelites, when they travelled through the wilderness.

[21 : 45] After they had been saved from slavery to Egypt and walked through the Red Sea, they journeyed in the desert towards the promised land with God leading the way. You'll remember after they grumbled, it was God who provided manna, bread for them to eat.

Bread like wafers on the floor every morning. And how much did he give them? Only enough for each day. Only enough for each day. When they took manna for the next day, which they were told not to do, it didn't last.

The bread that they'd kept over, they'd find it, mould it. He's saying to them, I will give you enough for each day. Give me my daily bread, food to eat, shelter over our heads, coffee, a hot shower.

These are the things that God is providing for us each day. Emotional support to be sustained, to be up to the down, to be supported by God through everything.

give us our daily bread. Asking takes humility, but it recognises that everything we have comes from him. Provision for our homilies, for where they're ill, help to make decisions at work.

[22 : 55] We need the daily basis of asking God for everything that we have. That's physical and emotional provision. However, there's two that follow that are spiritual.

The emphasis is spiritual provision. Verse 12, forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors. And verse 13, there's asking for protection, help, guidance, and deliverance from evil and temptation.

The emphasis on what people need more is spiritual because they are our greater needs. There is nothing more important in your life, in my life, than forgiveness from the living God.

And what we have here in a nutshell is repentance. That's what we have, saying sorry for our sins, asking for help from temptation, and the trust in that is knowing that we're forgiven and trusting that he will make us more like himself so that we can resist.

It's repentance, saying sorry, asking for help, and being delivered. Repentance is turning away from sin, turning away from that life and turning towards living like Jesus, all made possible because of Jesus' death on the cross where he takes away our sin.

[24 : 16] The Lord's Prayer, God's concerns, and then us being needy and dependent. Spiritual, and there is a spiritual emphasis, but also, without forgetting it, of no less importance in many ways, our daily provision.

question, what are the emphasis of our prayer life? Does it reflect the emphasis that we see in the Lord's prayer? It's a question of the heart, isn't it?

This is a question of the heart. What's inside of you will come out of you in your prayers. You know, if you cut to the centre of any fruit, you take an apple, at the heart of an apple, at the heart of a plum, you find the seed, you find the stone, you plant that seed or stone, and what comes out is what is within.

You plant a plum, you get a plum tree, you plant an apple, you get an apple tree, what's at the heart is what comes out. What's in your heart comes out in your prayer life.

We're known by our fruit, and it's really seen in what we love to pray for. Pray God's concerns. First, pray as a needy, dependent person whose greatest need is to be forgiven by God and live like Jesus.

[25 : 38] The major emphasis of our prayer life is Jesus telling us of these two things. I just want to pause, I just want to say I'm not saying, definitely not, and I hope you don't hear me saying this, I'm not saying that we shouldn't pray for our health or getting a new job or when we've got an exam.

I'm not saying we should definitely pray for those things. And I hope that's not what you've heard, that I'm not saying we shouldn't. But what I'm emphasizing is that Jesus tells us to pray in the Lord's prayer does have an emphasis.

God's concerns first. His kingdom, his glory, his majesty, his will to be done. Our spiritual needs second, our forgiveness, our walk with the Lord. Our physical needs are there, but they don't have the same emphasis.

Jesus. The challenge to each of us, with all four, genuinely, very secretly, God's concerns and his needy dependent people, is that how we pray?

Maybe it is. Maybe it's a reminder, but whatever it is, let this be an invitation to each of us. The living God loves to hear us. He loves to hear us speak to him.

[26 : 55] So let's pray from the heart, not for sure. Let's pray without distraction with our attention fixed on Jesus, not on anybody else watching. Knowing that God loves it when we speak to him in the privacy of our own hearts, the things that matter to us.

He loves to hear us pray for his glory, his majesty, and the fame of his own name. And he loves it when you turn to him as a needy, dependent person, a child, asking, requesting, humbly, needing forgiveness and transformation.

But he also wants you to pray everything in between as well. Could this be an invitation for us this morning to go to think about how we speak to God, what we say, and to be directed by how Jesus tells us to pray?

Let me pray. Almighty God, we thank you we thank you so much for Jesus Christ, we thank you as we see Jesus that you were a man who was dependent on prayer, and if you needed to pray to your father, how much more did we need to do?

Lord, you prayed exactly like this, you were, every prayer you said was genuine, was honest, you made yourself vulnerable, you prayed openly in front of crowds, but you prayed, you withdrew to secret places, desolated places, and prayed secretly to your father in heaven, for hours on end.

[28 : 34] You were never a babbler, but you did have night long prayers, every word was meant. And you prayed like this, you prayed the concerns of your own father first.

So that was your primary goal, you had a reason, a purpose, a mission on this earth, to draw people to yourself, to win them for yourself, through the goodness of what you did on the cross.

And Lord, as we reflect on that, help us to pray. You also pray for your own needs, Lord, you knew when you needed support and strength physically and emotionally. the living God even sent angels to minister to you on the night that you were betrayed.

And so, God, as we see you and reflect on you praying, help us to be a praying people that models its prayer life on you. So we thank you for this wonderful, full of amazing faith that we get to.

Bless us now, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.