

TIME WITH OUR FATHER



INTRODUCTION

“Read your Bible. Pray every day ... And you’ll grow, grow, grow. ... Don’t read your Bible. Forget to pray... And you’ll shrink, shrink, shrink.” Despite all my internet searches, I could not find the author of the song nor when it was written. It is one of the first songs that were taught to us at a very young age in Sunday school. Reading the Bible and praying are fundamental to our relationship with God and remain true whether we are 5, 25, 50 or 95. It perfectly captures the dialogue the Lord has with us daily: He speaks to us through His Holy Word, and we talk with Him through prayer. But despite it sounding so simple, prayer is the one area where we often battle most in our relationship with God.

Even the disciples were unsure how to pray. As Jews they would have been accustomed to a longstanding tradition of prayer. Their prayers would have included 3 prayers per day and many prayers in the synagogues. But then something changed. John the Baptist appeared on the scene as a total “non-conformist” wearing clothing made from animal skins and living of a diet of locusts and honey. John may have been 2,000 years ahead of his time – many scientists now say that if we want to save the planet, we must all become entomophagists i.e. insect eaters.

John’s ministry was focused on repentance and baptism to prepare the way for Jesus. He also introduced a non-traditional way of prayer to his followers. The Bible does not record the prayers of John the Baptist. But we do know that it was different to what the disciples was accustomed to. Their form of prayer was also different to the way in which Jesus was praying. So, after being with Jesus for some time, they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. In Luke 11:1 we read: *“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his*

disciples said to Him: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." Luke then continued to record the Lord's prayer.

If you are sometimes battling with your prayer life, know that you are not alone. Prayer does not come naturally, and it must be taught and learnt. The disciples also had to learn how to pray. Two weeks ago, Ros shared a most helpful prayer guidance in her testimony. In today's sermon, we will be adding to what Ros has guided us to do. The topic of prayer could be covered in a series of sermons and today I just want to share a few observations from Jesus' prayers.

COMMUNION WITH OUR FATHER

I wonder if we could truly understand what Jesus must have experienced as a human here on earth. He was fully human, yet without sin. At the same time, He was fully the Son of God. Being God, one could be tempted to think that he could have paddled his own canoe whilst being on earth. But He never did. He was frequently in communication and in communion with God the Father through prayer. This is the first fundamental prayer point that He taught to his disciples to pray to God the Father: ***"When you pray, say: Father..."*** Luke 11:2 and ***"Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven..."*** Matthew 6:9.

Do we have a real appreciation of who our Heavenly Father God is? How amazing is it that the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe is prepared to engage with each one of us in prayer. God, who loved the world so much that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. It is the same Father who raised Jesus from the dead and who said that through the death of Jesus we have now been reconciled with Him.

Did you know that our amazing God the Father delights in your prayer to Him? In Revelation 4 and 5 John described his vision of the Throne of God in Heaven. He then saw the prayers of all Jesus' followers and described it as ***"a golden bowl full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."*** Rev 5:8. What a wonderful blessing to know that our Lord finds our prayers attractive as incense. King Solomon also said: ***"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord but the prayer of the upright is His delight."*** Prov 15:8 KJV.

If we know that the Lord delights in our prayers, why would we not want to be more dedicated to being in daily communion with the Father through our prayers? Jesus taught us to commence our prayers by glorifying and honouring God the Father – ***"hallowed be Your name"***. But I often find my words and perhaps my understanding of the glory of God lacking. In our reading from 1 Kings 8, we also see how King Solomon prayed and acknowledged the glory of God: ***"O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart."***

King David had a deep understanding of how awesome God truly is. We read it in many of the Psalms. I find it so valuable to use the Psalms as a prayer to glorify and praise the Lord for who He is. Some examples are Psalm 103 and Psalm 113. So, when my words are inadequate, I often say the words of the Psalms in the first person in my prayer.

CONTEXT OF OUR PRAYERS

When we have a clearer understanding and appreciation of who we are praying to, the next important point is what should we be praying about. Jesus taught the key topics that should be in our prayers and we include these in our prayers in each Sunday service. But it is often tempting to rush the first part of acknowledging who the Father is and glorifying Him and then spend a disproportionate amount of time on our requests: our needs and the needs of others. Jesus did in fact say that we should be praying for our needs and the needs of others. Give us this day our daily bread covers all our earthly needs: our health, work, school, finances, relationships, well being etc. But all of this must always be in the context of ***“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”***

Matthew recorded the Lord’s prayer in chapter 6. In the same chapter, he recorded two further teachings to place our priorities in the correct order:

- Firstly, we need to focus on our treasure in heaven and not on earth: ***“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*** Mat 6:19-21
- Secondly, if we first seek the kingdom of God, the God of the Kingdom will supply our needs: ***“Therefore, do not be anxious saying: What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? Or What shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them all. But first seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*** Mat 6:31-33

So, this is the real challenge in our prayer life – what proportion of our conversation of God is focused on our mission to seek and build God’s Kingdom here on earth versus our daily needs? In addition, are our requests for our daily needs in line with what is needed for God’s will to be done and for His Kingdom to come? This context is critical in understanding why some of our prayers are “apparently” not answered. As an extreme example, Jesus said that we could ask the Father for anything in His name and it will be given to us. I have asked for a new Bentley, why is my prayer not being answered? Perhaps I have too little faith? Or should I perhaps reconsider how asking for the Bentley will support in seeking the Kingdom first and laying my treasures in heaven? Also remember that God never promised to give us what ***we want*** but what ***we need***.

It does become tricky when we pray for issues such as physical, mental or spiritual health. Also, prayer matters like “why is our church not growing?”. The issue is often that we do not see the bigger picture. Our time frames are also so different to God’s time frames. But we must trust and accept that everything happens for a reason and a purpose. Everything must and will fit into the bigger picture of the Kingdom of God, and the will of God that must be done.

This is where the High Priestly prayer of Jesus is so remarkable and an incredible teaching for us. John recorded the prayer in Chapter 17 after Jesus explained that He must leave and that the

Helper will come in His place to be with us. At this point, Jesus is close to his persecution and must have already felt anxious for what lied ahead. Yet He focuses on glorifying the Father, fully accepting the will of the Father and accepting his role and purpose in letting the Kingdom come on earth. In verse 4 he prayed: ***“I glorify you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”*** The prayer gives me goosebumps when I read how Jesus is in communion with the Father, his absolutely focus on doing the will of the Father and making the love of the Father know to all. He interceded for all his Followers, including the generations to follow: ***“I do not ask for these only, but also for all who will believe in Me through their word.”*** John 17:20

THE HELPER, OUR PRAYER PARTNER

This brings me to the final point. If we try to pray in our own power, we are unlikely to succeed. Jesus said that he will send to us the Helper: ***“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever...You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”*** John 14:16 – 17. Our Helper, the Holy Spirit, is indeed there to help us with our prayer also. In Romans 8:26 -27 Paul said: ***“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings to deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”*** How grateful should we be that we have the Helper as our prayer partner, who takes our weak and inadequate prayers and presents it as perfect incense to our Father in heaven.

With this in mind, we must accept the outcome of our prayers and trust the Lord will do what is right for us in the context of his Kingdom. This is why Paul said in the immediate following verse: ***“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”***

In our reading from Galatians 6 today, Paul gave the well known description of the whole armor of God. Paul reminded the Galatians that the wrestle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers and the spiritual forces of evil. Again, we are reminded that we are called first and foremost for a purpose and a battle for the Kingdom of God. He concludes the list of what is needed to prevail in this spiritual battle with the importance of prayer. Specifically: ***“praying at all times in the Spirit”*** Eph 6:18.

CONCLUSION

Brothers and Sisters, towards the end of his ministry, Jesus said that when we pray to the Father and have requests, we should ask for it in the name of Jesus. ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”*** John 16: 23,24. We must call on this promise in praying for what we need in our mission to build the Kingdom of God on earth.

Whenever you do feel that your prayers are not answered or you don't know what or how to pray, turn first and foremost to Jesus. Just as he taught his disciples to pray, He will also teach you how to pray. Please read the Gospels carefully again and observe where, when and how

Jesus prayed (often alone but aloud). Also be mindful of the Helper and be confident that the Helper will intercede for each of your prayers, no matter how weak it may seem, and present it as incense to delight the Lord our Father.

AMEN

Collect (Prayer before the readings): Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than either we desire or deserve: pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Readings: Old Testament: 1 Kings 8: 1, 6, 10 – 11, 22 – 30, 41 - 43
New Testament: Ephesians 6: 10 - 20
Gospel: John 17: 1 - 26

Hymns:

1. 609 (Common Praise): To God be the glory
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>
2. 383 (Common Praise): Be still, for the presence of the Lord
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZugvUQ4m90U>
3. 880 (Mission Praise): Lord, I come to you
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vazsKSuu90Y>
4. 881 (Mission Praise): Lord, I lift Your name of high
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03MdMcBFNdk>

Testimony re Prayer by Ros Tasia (Warden St Barnabas Isle of Man)

In one sense what I'm going to share, this evening, about prayer, is personal to me as I feel I need to give more time and focus to my own prayer life, and doing this study has helped me realise the essentials of prayer.

- When to pray

Daniel 6:10b 'Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.'

Daniel is a dynamic example of what it means to lead a life of prayer. Even in the midst of great danger and against all odds, his faith was unshaken. God heard his prayers and saved him from certain death.

The command to 'pray continually' in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 shows us, that prayer is, among other things, an attitude. It's obviously not possible to be speaking to God all the time, but like Daniel our lives should be rooted in prayer, always in touch with God.

- Unanswered prayer

Matthew 7:11 'If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him.'

There's no such thing as unanswered prayer, even when God does not answer our prayers in the way we would like or expect. For example, a child sees a knife on the table and asks his father to give it to him. The loving father answers that request by putting the knife out of the way. It is fortunate God knows what we need, whereas we only think we know what we want. Philippians 4:19 tells us 'my God will supply all my needs'. It is said that God answers prayer in 3 ways, 'Yes' 'No' or 'Wait'. We can trust God who desires to give good gifts to His children. Therefore, we can **ask** with expectancy, **seek** with persistence, and **knock** with assurance.

- The Lord's prayer

Matthew 6:9a 'This, then, is how you should pray.'

'Our Father.' The supreme example of prayer opens with the words that emphasises God as a loving Father and us as His children. He is enthroned in glory in Heaven and yet we have access to Him at any moment. Hebrews 4:16 'Approach the throne of grace...to help us in our time of need.'

The sequence of the Lord's prayer teaches us to begin with worship, that the interests of the kingdom come before merely personal interests, that we must accept the Father's will, whether to grant or to withhold, that personal petitions should mainly concern present needs, leaving the future to the Father's care and love.

We cannot pray 'Your will be done' unless we mean to apply it to our lives. We are guilty if we add (perhaps unconsciously) 'provided Your will is the same as my will'. The will of God is not an evil to be endured but a blessing to be acquired.

- Hindrance to prayer - sin

Psalms 66:18 'If I had cherished sin in my heart the Lord would not have listened.'

Prayer is like radio communication; we can only transmit and receive if we are tuned in to God's 'frequency' and our equipment is in order.

Barriers to real prayer are not only 'sin' but also the 'cherishing' of sin. Also an unforgiving spirit, the harbouring of a grudge, the subtle wish for another's harm, the envy that corrupts the heart – these attitudes always prove impassable barriers to spontaneous prayer and break the circuit.

Isaiah 59:2-3 states, 'Your iniquities have separated you from your God...so that He will not hear.'

- Hindrance to prayer – anxiety

Philippians 4:6 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'

The sense of the first part of this verse is 'do not be full of care for anything.' We must, of course, be careful, but the trouble is when our care turns into anxiety. We can gain encouragement from Romans 8:28, 'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.' So we can confidentially trust God rather than being left worried or anxious. If you worry, you do not trust; if you trust you do not worry.

- Hindrance to prayer – lack of thought control

Philippians 4:8 'Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.'

Augustine said, 'An evil thought passes your door first as a stranger. Then it enters as a guest. Then it installs itself as a master.' As we think so we live.

In prayer we need to 'take captive every thought' (2 Corinthians 10:5). In the matter of concentration, some may find it helpful to pray aloud, if tired to stand up or make a note of things to pray about later.

Sometimes distracting thoughts are a spiritual attack. If they are temptations, pray that you will be protected and guarded from sin; if irrelevancies, that the Lord would grant you clear thinking; if they are responsibilities that you have, pray that you will be conscientious and efficient. In this way you can turn distractions into prayerful victories.

- Hindrance to prayer – lack of sincerity

Mark 6: 7-8 'And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.'

Jesus taught that our prayers do not need to be long and 'impressive'. He is more interested in quality not quantity.

Our sincerity can be judged by the effort we put into prayer. We get an insight into what prayer meant to the Lord when we read how much it cost Him, 'He prayed more earnestly and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.' (Luke 22:44)

Lack of faith is a hindrance to prayer. We read in James 1:6-7 'But when you ask Him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave in the ocean that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.'

Hints on prayer

- Think of a prayer as cooperation with God
- Realise the importance of prayer
- Before praying wait in silence, realising the wonder of what you are about to do
- Prayer is simply talking to God, you can be absolutely natural and share everything with Him
- Prayer is not trying to get God to do our will, but aligning our will to God's
- Read the Bible and pray first thing each day

Nehemiah's prayer (Nehemiah 4:1-11) is a great example of what to include in your prayers

- Meditation – Reflecting on God His majesty and love (verse 5)
- Adoration – The worship of God (verse 5)
- Confession – Telling God about our sin (verses 6-7)
- Intercession – praying for others (verses 8-10)
- Petition – Personal requests (verse 11)

Father God, You know us so well. You know our thoughts and words before they are even formed on our lips. You even know how hard it is for us sometimes to simply sit and pray when there seems so much we need to do. Please forgive us for this and help us to rest in Your presence and experience Your closeness when we come to You in prayer. And please help us to wrestle in prayer and to be persistent, trusting in You alone.

In Jesus name, Amen