

# Prayer

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Hello, everyone. Welcome back to Foundations. This is session four, where we focus on prayer.

! We've talked about the gospel, the good news of Jesus. We've talked about what it means to become a Christian by accepting the forgiveness that we find in Jesus.

We've talked about baptism, which marks God's people, sets them apart. It's the marker of God's grace in our lives. And now we're going to turn our focus to the Christian life.

And we're going to ask, what does it mean to have a relationship with God? And what does it mean to belong to God as we do in Christ? And the first thing that we want to talk about when we ask that question is prayer, because prayer is of central importance in the Christian life.

One of the markers of what it means to be a Christian is that wherever we are, wherever we find ourselves in the world, we can, at that moment, turn our attention to God and pray and know that he will hear us.

[ 1 : 1 3 ] And so we're going to talk about prayer in this session. And I want to ask you just to get started to reflect on the word prayer itself. When we talk about prayer, what kinds of feelings arise in you? Is prayer something that a place where you find great joy?

Is prayer a source of frustration? Does prayer bring up a sense of guilt? I know I should be praying more, but I don't.

It has lots of associations depending on who you are. One of my favorite quotes about prayer comes from Anne Lamott, who's always painfully honest. And she says, here are the two best prayers I know.

Help me, help me, help me. And thank you, thank you, thank you. And I can very much identify with that. Most of the time when we pray, I think we are praying in times of desperation when we need God to act and we're praying for God to intervene.

Or times when something wonderful happens and we're crying out to God, thank you, thank you, thank you. When Jesus talks about our hearts, he says something very interesting.

[ 2 : 1 9 ] He says, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. We now typically think of that as something that applies only to money, but he's talking more about our hearts and how they work.

Essentially, he's making this point that our heart follows where we put our money, but in the same way, our heart follows where we put our prayers. Wherever we are investing that time and energy, our hearts are going to follow.

This is illustrated very often when we commit to praying for someone with whom we may have a disagreement. One of the things that we will often do in marriage counseling when people are in bitter conflict is to just call them to a season of praying for one another.

We don't take any steps toward giving any techniques or practices to incorporate beyond just saying, why don't you spend some time praying for each other over the next few weeks?

And you would be amazed what happens in your heart if you commit yourself to praying for somebody. If you have feelings of hostility or animosity or anger or resentment toward that person, over time, the more you pray for them, you will find often that your heart softens.

[ 3 : 3 5 ] And that is really illustrating the principle that Jesus is talking about. And this is related to a principle that you will find in the core of Anglican spirituality. It's articulated in this Latin phrase, *Lex Arandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi*.

And that is loosely translated as the way we pray shapes what we believe and how we live. So our prayers shape our beliefs, which in turn shape our lives.

And so we as Anglicans believe that prayer is absolutely central in the life of spiritual formation. It is the way that we learn and teach theology.

And it is a central way that we go about reforming and reordering our loves so that we can follow Jesus more faithfully. And so that leads us to the next question when it comes to prayer.

If prayer is so important, if it plays such a formative role in our beliefs and in our lives, if it is often something that can lead our hearts in the right direction, where do we learn to pray?

[ 4 : 46 ] How do we know how to pray in ways that are going to form us in the ways we ought to be formed according to Jesus? And there are two primary sources that we can look to in order to learn how to pray.

The first is Scripture itself, the whole of Scripture, the Bible. That is a great source to turn to to learn how to pray. And then within the Bible, there are certain prayers in the Old and New Testament that we can look at and focus on to learn how to pray.

Chiefly, we can look to the Lord's Prayer. So for the rest of our time, let's talk first about Scripture and then specifically about the Lord's Prayer. Learning how to pray, in a sense, means learning how to turn the Bible into a conversation that we have with God.

We believe that through Scripture, God is already speaking to us. And when we respond in prayer, we are responding to a conversation that God has initiated.

And the best way to do that, one of the best ways to do that, is to pray God's Word back to God. To take God's Word and turn them into prayer that we then use to respond to God.

[ 6 : 01 ] Now, one of the best places to start doing this would be the Psalms. The Psalms are essentially the prayer book of the Old Testament. And we see in Jesus' ministry that they were really Jesus' prayer book.

On many pages of the Gospels, as Jesus is engaging in ministry, as he is facing his suffering, and even in his final moments before he dies, Jesus is continually quoting the Psalms.

He knew them by heart. This was the language that Jesus prayed in. And so if it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for us. So we can look to the Psalms and really see there the anatomy of the soul laid out.

Virtually every emotion, every human experience. Not just our highs, not just our joys, not just our times of celebration, but also when we find ourselves in the depths of despair.

When we find ourselves hopeless. When we are envious in comparing ourselves to other people. When we believe that God has abandoned us. Or when we're wondering if there even is a God.

[ 7 : 04 ] All of those things you will find represented in the Psalms. And they are a wonderful guide to teach us how to bring the full spectrum of human emotions into the presence of God.

In ways that are emotionally honest. In ways that facilitate greater self-awareness. And in ways that help deepen our relationship with the Lord.

So the Psalms are a great place to start. There are also, as I mentioned a moment ago, many other prayers that are recorded in Scripture. Times when God's people have prayed. And we can look to those prayers and turn those prayers into our own prayers.

One of my favorite things to do with the Psalms or with some of the other prayers that we find in Scripture. Is to, in a sense, riff off of them. I will begin praying in the language that I see in Scripture. And then I will just allow myself to free associate. To use that as a jumping off point. To continue to pray in ways that reflect what's going on in my own heart.

[ 8 : 04 ] So we have the Psalms. We have various places where prayer is recorded in Scripture. Another way as Anglicans that we learn to pray is by using the Book of Common Prayer.

We have the latest version of the Book of Common Prayer that was published in 2019. That is used by our denomination, the ACNA. But this is really just an updated version of a prayer book that has been used by Anglicans since the late 1500s.

Or actually the mid-1500s. And so we are, we inherit a tradition of prayer out of that. And people who don't come from an Anglican background may ask, Well, if I have the Bible and if I have the Lord's Prayer, why would I need another book to teach me how to pray?

Why not just use the Bible? Well, essentially the Book of Common Prayer makes it easier for us to use the Bible in our prayer life. If you look at the contents of it, about 80% of the content of the Book of Common Prayer comes directly from Scripture.

The vision of the Book of Common Prayer was to organize Scripture so that it can be used effectively in prayer and worship, not only by individuals, but by congregations.

[ 9 : 20 ] So it reformats Scripture in a way that allows us to pray it more readily, more easily, more accessibly. And you're actually going to learn more about the Book of Common Prayer, and you're

going to begin learning how to use it in the in-person session coming up this week.

So you can look forward to that. The point of all of this, though, is simply to say that all of our prayer should flow out of a deep immersion in God's Word.

God's Word is what anchors our prayer life. So prayer and Scripture need each other, right? Scripture is the anchor that roots our prayers in God's truth. And yet prayer is the place where we experience the truth of Scripture.

Prayer is the place where the head and the heart connect, where the truths that we believe intellectually come alive in us, where the Word becomes flesh in us, where the Holy Spirit takes these truths and presses them into our hearts in ways that are formative and transformational. And so prayer and Scripture really need each other. So that's how we pray Scripture using the Bible, using the Book of Common Prayer. But there's also a place in Scripture where Jesus' disciples specifically ask Him to teach them how to pray.

[10:39] And His response is what has come to be known as the Lord's Prayer. We see Jesus, of course, teaching His disciples to pray in all kinds of ways, both implicitly and explicitly.

He set a powerful example of prayer in His own life. He healed people with prayer. He taught that the temple should be a house of prayer. He said that some demons can only be cast out through prayer.

He prayed often. He prayed regularly. Sometimes He prayed in tears. We see that in Hebrews 5, verse 7. He sometimes prayed all night long, stayed up all night praying.

The Holy Spirit came upon Him and anointed Him as He was praying. We see that in Luke chapter 3. He was praying when the transfiguration happened. We also see that in Luke, Luke chapter 9. He prayed all throughout the great crisis of His arrest, His mock trial, His torture, His execution. He prayed all the way up to the very end of His life before His death and resurrection.

[11:43] He died praying. So, this is a man who, by example, taught his disciples how to pray because he was praying continually throughout his entire life. And then he taught them explicitly how to pray in the form that we call the Lord's Prayer.

And we can treat the Lord's Prayer as a kind of pattern that is really meant to shape our whole approach to God. It's really a pattern that shows us what a life of discipleship really entails, what it means to have a rightly ordered relationship with God.

It begins, if you look at the structure, it begins with an address. And then it goes on to make a series of petitions. And then some versions of the Lord's Prayer, the Lord's Prayer that we often use in the Anglican world and in the Protestant world, add a doxology at the end, a kind of prayer of praise to God.

And then it concludes with an Amen. So, this is a prayer that begins with God's glory and His kingdom and His kingly rule as the highest priorities. And then at the very end, it comes back to those things.

So, the entire prayer is enfolded in recognition of God's glory and His supremacy. And this prayer ultimately shows us the primary elements that constitute our relationship with God.

[13:10] So, let's just walk through this briefly, if you will. The entire prayer is a movement toward God and what it means to belong to Him.

And we see that in the very opening words, Our Father, who art in heaven. This reminds us that God is indeed not only our king, not only our ruler, not only the one to whom we submit, but He's our Father.

He's our loving Father. In fact, He's our Abba. We're called to refer to God in a very familiar, loving term for Father. Father, the great J.I. Packer says in his book, Knowing God, which, by the way, if you haven't read, I would strongly recommend you read Knowing God.

But he says this, What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father. So, Christians are not just people who believe in God.

We have a relationship with God. The kind of relationship that God wants to have with us is He has called us to be His children. So, every time we pray, we are climbing into the arms of a Father who delights to hear our prayer.

[14:30] And then we go on to say, Hallowed be thy name. We begin by praying that God's name, which includes His personal being, His name represents His character, His power, His purposes.

We pray that that would be set apart and honored above all other names in the world. We pray that that would be true in our own hearts. We pray that that would be true in the world, that God's name would be holy.

It would be set apart as special. David Wells, one of my professors in seminary, says that it is this loss of the traditional vision of God as holy that is now manifested everywhere in primarily, he says, the evangelical world.

It's one of the things that we have lost that has produced all kinds of symptoms. He says, It is the key to understanding why sin and grace have become such empty terms.

He says, What depth or meaning can these terms have except in relation to the holiness of God? Divorced from the holiness of God, sin is merely self-defeating behavior or a breach in etiquette.

[15:38] Divorced from the holiness of God, grace is merely empty rhetoric, pious window dressing for the modern technique by which sinners work out their own salvation. Divorced from the holiness of God, our gospel becomes public morality, and it's reduced to little more than an accumulation of trade-offs between competing private interests.

Divorced from the holiness of God, our worship becomes mere entertainment. He says, The holiness of God is the very cornerstone of Christian faith, for it is the foundation of reality. Sin is defiance of God's holiness.

The cross is the outworking and victory of God's holiness. And faith is the recognition of God's holiness. Knowing that God is holy is therefore the key to knowing life as it truly is, knowing Christ as he truly is, knowing why he came, and knowing how life will end.

He says that in his book, No Place for Truth. And that quote has always stayed with me. The holiness of God is the key to perceiving, to understanding reality as it truly is.

Then we move on in our prayer to say, Thy kingdom come. Now we are invoking the whole story of Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation, which is all about the heavens and the earth being joined together as one.

[16:54] God's kingdom coming and being fully established in his creation. Ever since we rebelled as human beings against God's kingship, God has been at work to restore his kingdom.

And God's kingdom is wherever he is proclaimed and hailed as king. And this is foreshadowed in the Old Testament. It's inaugurated through the coming of Jesus, and it will one day be fully realized when Jesus comes again.

And so when we live in God's kingdom, what that means is that we define ourselves as his children, and we define ourselves as citizens and heirs of his eternal kingdom.

And it means we follow him as our ultimate source of authority, above all human authorities. It means that when human laws, human authority comes into contradiction with God's law, that we follow God, even in defiance of human rulers and authorities.

Then we move on to pray this, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And you know, as we said a moment ago, God's kingdom comes wherever and whenever his will is done.

[18:10] Wherever God's will is done, there his kingdom is being enacted. And so we pray that as that happens in heaven, so the day would come when that happens all through creation, that God's kingdom would come.

Now, how do we know God's will? Well, we see it reflected in scripture. We see God's desire for us reflected in places like the Ten Commandments, expounded upon through all of scripture.

We ultimately see it culminating in what we would call the law of Christ. What is God's will? That we would love God and that we would love one another. Love for God and love for neighbor, the summary of the law.

We'll get more into the law in future sessions. Then we come to this petition for ourselves. Give us this day our daily bread.

Now, I heard this for years and thought, wouldn't it be a lot more efficient and make a lot more sense if we just prayed for all the bread at once? And if God answered that prayer, then we would be set.

[19:10] And of course, that's the whole point of this prayer. This tells us a lot about human nature, right? It tells us a lot about how our hearts actually operate. Think back to the reference that this prayer comes from.

Think back to the book of the story of the Exodus. Think about God's people in the wilderness crying out because they're starving. Think about God providing manna for them in the wilderness.

Do you remember what happens in the book of the Exodus when God gives his people manna? He says, only gather what you need. No more. Only gather what you need for the day.

Do they obey? Absolutely not. They hoard it. They gather up as much as they can carry. And what happens? It rots. Right? So what this petition encourages us to do, how it encourages us to think, is along the lines of what we might call a theology of provision or a theology of enough.

When we have more than we need in life, we tend to make God peripheral. We forget that we need him. We tend to deny God, deny our need for God, when we have too much.

[ 20 : 23 ] When we have too little, we can end up becoming desperate. That can lead us to criminal behavior. That leads to all kinds of human evil as well. And a theology of enough says, God is the sole provider of all we need.

And what we need to learn is how to rely on God, how to trust that God will provide exactly what we need, when we need it. And this is a great thing to remember, no matter what we're praying for, that God knows what we need, and God will provide what we need, and only what we need, when we need it.

Another way of saying it is, God always answers the prayers we would have prayed, if we knew everything God knows. God knows what we need. And our ultimate aim in prayer is to learn how to trust him, to provide what we need, when we need it.

We move on to the next petition. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Now the word trespass is simply an old word for sin. Any action, any word, any thought or attitude that is contrary to God's perfect will.

And a prayer must include times of confession. Praying this means that we take our sin seriously, that we understand the value of confessing our sin to God regularly.

[ 21 : 43 ] It brings us back to the core truth of the gospel, that God forgives us not because we deserve it, not because we've earned it, not because we've impressed him. God forgives us because God is a God whose nature is always to have mercy.

It is his great mercy that guarantees forgiveness when we ask. And Jesus teaches that our willingness to forgive others is evidence that we truly believe that we have been forgiven.

He says that the more we believe we need forgiveness from God, and the more we are in touch with that, the more inclined we will be to extend forgiveness to others. Then we pray our next petition, lead us not into temptation.

Temptation is anything that entices us to abandon total trust in God, to give us what we need, to be there for us, to hold us up no matter what.

God never leads us into temptation in a way that would cause us to sin, but God does allow us to be tested.

[ 22 : 49 ] He allows us to be tried. He allows us to face situations where we have to decide, am I going to trust God and cling to God, or am I going to abandon God and go after this other thing?

So he doesn't cause us to sin, but he does create situations where we have to choose. Am I going to cling to God, or am I going to go after this other thing that promises to give me things only God can give me?

And we see references to this if you want to read more about it in places like Hebrews 5, Genesis 22, Judges 2, James 1, 1 through 8.

We need to recognize that God even allowed Jesus to be tempted. He allowed Jesus to be tempted, and yet when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, we see this in Matthew chapter 4, Jesus was victorious over that temptation.

And so anytime we are struggling, anytime we are weak, we can come to Jesus in prayer and pray to the one we know can give us victory. And it's in his victory that we find victory when we face temptation.

[ 23 : 50 ] Then we pray, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Evil is the perversion of God's will. It's the twisting of God's will, the defiance of his holiness, the marring of his design for creation.

We believe that evil existed before the fall of humanity in the form of spiritual evil, in the form of Satan who rebelled against God. And we believe that God ultimately delivers us from evil through Jesus Christ.

We believe that God is not only able to conquer evil, but he's able to redeem and repurpose evil for good. We see that in the wonderful story of Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery.

And then 13 years later, Joseph finds himself in a position of great power and influence in Egypt. And a famine strikes, and his family comes and they're desperate. And they recognize this official that they're talking to as the one who was sold into slavery. His father thought he was dead. And they're terrified because they think that Joseph is now going to exact revenge for this betrayal.

[ 25 : 00 ] But instead, Joseph chooses to have mercy. And he says that that which they had intended for evil, God intended for good. It's an amazing way of thinking about God's power to redeem and repurpose even the worst evil to accomplish his purposes.

So we pray, God, deliver us from evil. And then we pray the final doxology. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. This points us back to the beginning of the prayer.

And it declares that ultimately, all of our prayer is about God's glory. So I think that's a good place to stop. This is a lot to chew on.

I hope as you are praying this week, you will spend some time in the Lord's Prayer. I hope that as you're praying this week, you will spend some time in the Psalms, that you will see these as reliable guides to teach you how to pray, to teach your heart more of what it means to follow Jesus faithfully. I've spent some time praying for you this morning, and I'll continue to do so. I pray that this is a blessing to you, and we look very much forward to discussing this more in person. God bless you.

[ 26 : 13 ] Amen.