

Enjoying your prayer life?

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] So, what we're thinking about today is, I guess, both a challenge and an invitation. We're! thinking about this theme of enjoying your prayer life. And it's a question and a challenge, because as we said last week, I imagine lots of us at different times, maybe we're here at this moment, and praying is a struggle for us, for a number of reasons. It's a struggle to make time. It's a struggle because of all the busyness we have. It's a struggle to fight the distractions that keep us from praying, and maybe it's a struggle to find joy as we pray. It is one of the big battles of the Christian life to have a healthy prayer life, a healthy and a growing relationship with our God and Father.

Many years ago, Martin Luther said, I am too busy not to pray. But if we're honest, maybe it's more often the case that we're so busy that we forget to pray.

And again, if you find prayer difficult, if you wish your prayer life was better, more enjoyable, Jesus is giving us an invitation here. And we need to think about what that is.

And if you're here today and you're not yet a Christian, you're exploring what Christianity is all about, let me invite you to listen in, to consider what it is that Jesus offers when He teaches us about prayer. Because here is Jesus, and He is talking to us, the eternal Son of God who's always lived in a perfect relationship with His God and Father, the one who taught His disciples because they came to Him as a man who obviously spent and enjoyed time praying, Lord, teach us to pray. It's this Jesus who's speaking to us today. And when we listen in to Jesus, we discover that at the heart of prayer, and the key to us enjoying prayer, is an invitation to relationship with God as our Father in heaven.

How to enjoy our prayer life is about enjoying that wonderful relationship that we have when we are saved by faith in the Lord Jesus. There's a TV show some of you may have come across called The Man on the Inside. Charles Newendike is the main character. As we meet him, he has lost his wife, and he's kind of lost his bearings in life. And one of the things that he struggles with is an open, honest relationship with his adult daughter. And there's one scene towards the end of the first series where they're on this long car journey, and they're discussing their relationship. There is that desire for both of them that it change, that it be healthier. But they're asking the question, well, what would that even look like? To which there was the great line, I think we'll know it when we see it.

[3 : 1 4] If you're here today, and you want to know God, you want to be a Christian. Or if you're already a Christian, you want to grow in relationship with your father, and you're wondering what would it even look like to have this kind of healthy, joyful relationship? This is it right here. It's what Jesus shows us. There's a book I read many years ago. It's a wonderful book. It tells the amazing story of a Pakistani Muslim woman who converted to Christianity because, as she happened to hear some Christians pray, and she discovered a new level of access with a creator God she never imagined possible. And the title of that book, I think, is the key to enjoying our prayer life, I dared to call him father. That's it.

When we understand that the creator of our universe, the Lord over history and over our lives, says, I am your father, and I want you to enjoy life with me, that's the key to enjoying our prayer life.

And to help us to see that and to enjoy that, Jesus gives us what's known as the Lord's Prayer. We've already prayed it together. We've read it together. So, we know it's very short, but it covers a lot. So, just think about the Lord's Prayer and maybe how we can use it before we even get into the details. It is a model or a pattern for us in prayer. And lots of people have got helpful ways for how to use it. So, some people use the image of each of these phrases being like coat hooks. And so, you can hang your own prayers onto these hooks. Or if you like music, some people have the idea of this prayer being like jazz. You know what happens with a jazz musician? They take a melody and then they spend the rest of the piece kind of riffing on it and changing it up a little bit. We can do that with the Lord's Prayer. We take one of those phrases and we make it our own. You might

find it helpful to simply repeat each of those phrases. And when one of them stands out, to really focus in on that.

It's a wonderful prayer. And many of us, I imagine, have it memorized, maybe since we were kids. And that's a great thing. There's a great benefit in that because we're learning the Word of God. But it also means we have a prayer that is portable. We can take it with us wherever we are. And so, one thing, you know, you might want to do is when you're out walking, you take the Lord's Prayer with you. When you find yourself in a moment of waiting, here is a way to use our time wisely, a chance to pray. If you have a quiet moment when you're working. And as we've done this morning, in our worship, we can use the Lord's Prayer really helpfully and beneficially for our prayer life. Of course, when we come to a passage, famous passage like the Lord's Prayer, we probably recognize there's a big challenge. People have written whole books on the Lord's Prayer. If you want to know which ones of those are really helpful, I've got a list I can give to you. But we want to cover it in just a few minutes. And to help us to think about the Lord's

Prayer and to help us to think about enjoying our prayer life, three priorities we'll focus on that really come from this prayer. The first priority that we're going to think about from the first half of the Lord's Prayer is seek your Father's glory. To enjoy your prayer life, seek your Father's glory. As I was thinking about this, I ended up thinking about our own royal family, and especially Prince Harry. Maybe some of you have read that autobiography that came out not too long ago. But maybe all of us, if we know anything about that, we know that he struggled with his life as a royal. There is that sense all through his life, he didn't really want his life to be bound up with the royal story. He struggles to know how to relate to his father as king, and he thinks about himself as his spirit. Maybe we can sympathize with him on a human level.

[7 : 46] But why are we talking about Harry? Because as Christians, as children of God, we are children of the king, and your story and mine is to be all about his glory, and our place in that royal story. And so, Jesus places this first in his prayer that he gives to his disciples for that reason.

So, what's the focus of the first half? How do we seek our Father's glory? We'll see there are three words, three phrases for us. Boys and girls, if you've got your sermon worksheet, here's the first word that you're probably trying to figure out. It's the word, hallowed. Hallowed be your name. What are we praying when we pray, hallowed be your name?

Well, we're praying that we want God to be honored above all. We want the holiness, the supremacy, the uniqueness of God to be our number one priority. And we recognize as the children of God that God's name has been put on us. We get a new birth certificate, and so we pray that we would not dishonor that family name, that we would choose to live and act and speak in such a way that he would have glory, that his glory would be seen and recognized in and through our lives. We seek God's glory when we pray, hallowed be your name. And then Jesus says to pray, your kingdom come.

So, are we praying when we ask for the kingdom of our Father to come? Well, again, when we think about it personally in the first place, we're asking that he would rule over every area of life.

There wouldn't be parts that we would hold back from God. We wouldn't say, well, God, you can have Sunday, but the rest of the week I'm going to live on my own terms. We also know that there's that ripple effects as we pray for ourselves. We're also praying for the people around us. So, we're praying that the rule of Christ would extend through the world. So, as we pray this prayer, we're praying about the mission of God. We're praying for the spread of the story of the good news of God's salvation for us through giving us the Lord Jesus. We're praying and asking that we and our church and our world would increasingly be obedient to Jesus as Lord. And as we pray your kingdom come, there's also a sense of longing. We're longing for the return of the King because we have that promise that when King Jesus comes back, evil will be done away with forever. The world will be restored to perfection, and God and His people will live together forever. And so, as we seek His glory, we're seeking for more of His kingdom, more of His rule in our own hearts and lives, and in the lives of others.

[11 : 08] And then He says to us, pray, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And as we pray that prayer, we're asking that we would more and more submit gladly to God's Word, that when He speaks, we would listen and we would do. The angels in heaven, they're those obedient messengers, and we're praying that more and more we would be like them, obedient to the Word of God. But when we pray your will be done, we're also asking for the humility and the wisdom to submit to the circumstances of our life.

Maybe some of you know that old hymn, whatever my God ordains is right. It's praying to have that perspective of Romans 8, that whatever God sends is for His glory and for our good. And so, as Jesus teaches God's children to pray, He begins by teaching us to seek our Father's glory. To pray this prayer, we will be asking questions like these. How can I be here for Jesus? If I want to see God's kingdom come and for God to be honored, how can I make a positive difference in the life of my children or among my colleagues or in the community where God has placed me? We'll be asking questions like, how can I do this for Jesus? Now, that might be something as mundane as doing the household chores. How can we do that in a way that God is glorified? How can I set my household budget? How can I care for elderly parents? How can I work my job in such a way that God gets the glory and I'm doing His will? We'll be asking questions as we pray like, how can we together as a church be pointing others to Jesus? How can the way that we live together, how can the things that we speak about allow others to make steps towards Jesus? Either encouraging Christians in their faith or pointing people who aren't yet Christians towards faith in Jesus. How can we be about the business of making disciples is included within the Lord's Prayer. We'll also find ourselves, I think, asking, how can we seek actively, willingly seek the glory for our Father, that our little local church might shine a light on our great, glorious, global God and Father in heaven. And so, Jesus encourages us to focus on the glory of our God to let those priorities of His honor, His kingdom and His will shape our priorities and then direct our paths. So, to enjoy our prayer life, it begins with recognizing who our God is and we'd be seeking our Father's glory. But then secondly, in the second half of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus invites us to depend on your Father's help. Now, up there, there's a famous photo from the Oval Office in the 1960s. There's a whole series of them. You see JFK, the president, and he's surrounded by his advisors and members of his staff. And you'll see in the back corner under the desk, little JFK Jr., and he's playing really happily. And we recognize here is this child with total access to the most powerful man on the planet. We can imagine if he was to tug his dad's trouser leg, he would be heard, he would have an audience, he would get what he wanted. And friends, Jesus wants us to know that as Christians, our access is greater to a Father who is more powerful and who is more wise and loving.

[15 : 35] And so, our prayer life is to reflect that as we depend and we trust on our Father. So, what do we need our Father's help with? Well, when we're humble and we stop to think about it, we recognize that actually we need our Father's help for everything.

But let's think about these headings that Jesus gives. He teaches us in verse 11 to pray, give us today, give us today our daily bread. A reminder again of the need, the value of daily prayer. What do you and I need each day? Well, Jesus uses this theme of bread because bread speaks to us of what we need to survive. So, when we pray, give us this day our daily bread, we're praying for our material needs, but we're also praying for more. So, we ask our Father in heaven who loves to give and give generously. And again, one way that you might find it helpful to use the Lord's Prayer is to tie it to your daily calendar or your timetable. And this is something I've certainly found helpful going back to this week at the start of the day. Take some time to work through your day, anticipate what's coming, and to think about what do I need in these different moments and events. We need our daily bread, but we need so much more. So, you might find yourself praying for wisdom because you've got some difficult decisions or conversations coming up. You might pray for energy because you're not feeling at your best, but you've got to care for the kids. You might want to pray for patience because you know there are some tricky customers that you're going to spend time with. You might have to pray for focus or for guidance or for courage. But as we begin the day in dependence and trust, we want to lay the day out before God and say, please give me what I need today so that I can give you the glory that you deserve in this day. And as we remember, and we were here last week, Jesus, when he was tempted, turned these stones into bread. He said, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Ultimately, our greatest need today and every day is more of God himself. And wonderfully, God loves to answer and to give us more of himself.

Verse 12 reminds us that we also need our Father for our spiritual needs. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Now, just to be clear, Jesus isn't saying, if I forgive people well enough, then God will forgive me. That's not what this phrase is saying.

Our forgiveness of others is not the root of our salvation, but it is the fruit of our salvation. That when God pours out his grace upon us and forgives us that we don't deserve it, that changes our

hearts so we're willing to forgive others. But it's important for us that Jesus says to children of God, we should pray for forgiveness. As Arthur was praying earlier, as Christians whose debts have been fully canceled at the cross of Christ, those who have been washed from sin by the blood, the sacrifice of Christ, those for whom the penalty and the power of sin has been broken, the presence of sin still lingers.

[19 : 44] Every day in our words, our thoughts, our actions, our attitudes, we still sin. And so, we need to confess and say sorry to God. And to use the Lord's Prayer most helpfully, I think we are probably invited and encouraged, especially as we think about how other praying people in the past have done this. They slow down and they think deeply. Where do I need forgiveness?

Where have I been guilty of breaking God's law today? When did I lack love? How did I miss the mark?

We'll be taking a look at our habits, looking at our conversations, confessing specifically and quickly and honestly. Because we know our Father. Our Father has saved us if our faith is in Jesus, and He won't turn His back on us. He won't reject us. And so, we don't need to stay in hiding.

Rather, we bring our sin into the light, knowing that if we confess, we are forgiven. So, Jesus is saying to us, we need our Father. We need to depend on Him for our material needs, our daily needs. Also, for our spiritual needs, but also for those moral, ethical needs.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Reminding us that life is complex, that the Christian life is spiritual battle, and so we stand in need of protection.

[21 : 26] Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one is a reminder that your faith and mine will be tested. And so, as we pray, we pray that we would not give into sin. To go back to that little reading from Proverbs 30, give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me my daily bread. And did you notice why? Because if I have too much, then I might sin, because I may become really proud and say, I don't need God. But if we've got too little, we might sin by dishonoring God.

It's also a recognition, deliver us from the evil one, that our faith will come under fire. We have a spiritual enemy who is active like a roaring lion. And so, we pray, depending on the strength that our Father gives that we would not be overcome in the battle.

So, Jesus says the Christian life is fight, it is struggle, but He does not leave us on our own, and He doesn't want us to go into these battles unarmed. But just as Jesus, when He lived on this earth, we have the Spirit of God, God. And we have the Word of God. And we have access in prayer to God our Father. And He is willing to help, to protect, to deliver. For those of us who are parents, we know we can remember how willing we are to help a child in need. We know the sense of joy to be that hand that they reach for.

And remember, we are imperfect. How much more is that true of our loving Father in heaven? Think again of that picture of JFK Jr. As we recognize that prayer lets us live in the presence of our King and our Father. We don't want to miss out on what He offers. And we don't want to miss His help in self-reliance. So, to enjoy our prayer life involves depending on our Father's help.

But here's the third thing, and in a sense it's the most basic and fundamental. To enjoy our prayer life, we must enjoy time with our Father. Now, I think it's easy with the passing of time to miss the revolution that Jesus brought when it comes to prayer. So, in His day, if you were a religious Jew, you wouldn't dare to speak God's name. And there was this perception that God was distant and far above and beyond. How does Jesus teach His people to pray? The same way He prayed, our Father in heaven.

[24 : 32] J.I. Packer wrote and said, here's how I would summarize the essence of New Testament religion. It's the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. So simple, but so profound to think the one true and living God invites us to call Him Father, to have that privilege of being known and loved and to have full access. But that's exactly what Jesus says we have. And to teach it, He gives us three portraits of praying people. Two of them are negative. One is positive. Boys and girls, you'll see your little portrait frames to fill in. The first portrait is the portrait of a Pharisee. Verse 5, Jesus says, when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites. And He's thinking of the Pharisees, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Don't pray to put on the religious show. You know, here are the guys that say, I want you to know that I'm serious about my faith. I'm really holy. So they've got their prayer voice and they've got their prayer posture. And maybe even when they pray, they pray with one eye open to make sure that other people notice them.

And that's a trouble that I guess people today, we can still fall into. We can do religion. We can do the religious thing. But we can miss what Jesus offers, which is real relationship with the Father. We can miss the real reward, which is here, verse 6. When we pray to our Father, your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. The wonderful thing when we honestly come as children to our Father is that He meets with us. And we enjoy relationship. Here's another negative portrait in verse 7.

Another type of person who doesn't enjoy their prayer life because they don't really know God as Father. When you pray, don't keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they'll be heard because there are many words, so babbling, you know, like baby talk where there's lots of noise, lots of semi-words, but there's not really a lot of meaning. We come across it in our evenings when we're looking at Elijah. We'll come across it with the prophets of Baal when they spend all morning shouting and dancing and crying out. Because there can be that idea, well, if I have enough volume, maybe enough volume or enough passion or maybe just enough volume of words, well, maybe that's how to get God's attention. Maybe that's how we win God's approval. But the trouble with that, the trouble with the people that pray like this, like the pagans, is that they mistrust God. They don't really believe that God is their Father who loves and who knows what we need and is ready to give. And so prayer can become an attempt to twist God's arm to get him to answer, piling up words, because we're not really sure that he's for us as our Father. Jesus says, don't pray like that.

[27 : 53] Like any good relationship, we need time with our Father and we need to trust him as Father. So we pray confident that he loves us and cares for us because we're in Christ. So there's two negative portraits, but then there's the third portrait, the portrait of the person of God. And what does Jesus say in verse nine? How should we pray our Father in heaven? The awesome God of glory and greatness before whom the angels bow down is our loving personal Father. We dare to call him Father because we come in Jesus' name.

We enjoy life with him as Father because that's the privilege Jesus has bought for us. I remember years ago listening to a missionary speaking about working with street kids.

So she was part of a team that would go out in an evening to find kids that had no family and no homes, to look to meet with them, to care for them, provide medical help. And when there was space, to bring them back to a home. Here's a warm bed, here's a warm bed, here's some food, here's protection, here's education. But she said it was so sad how many of those children who were rescued from the streets would really quickly run away again, would never really learn to trust, would never really learn to find the security and the love that they were being offered. And Jesus' message to you and to me is simply don't be like that. Don't miss out on the love of your Father in heaven. Enjoy the greatest grace and privilege that is afforded to us that through faith in Jesus we are adopted, we call God

Father. And when we remember this, then we find that joyful motivation that sometimes is lacking. Not just the duty, well I know I should pray, but the wonder I get to pray, to talk personally to the King of the universe knowing that He loves it because He loves me. It's what explains the mission of Jesus.

Why did Jesus come? Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who enjoyed perfect, unbroken relationship with His Father in heaven. He became one of us. And His life was marked by a devotion and a joy in prayer.

[30 : 50] But His life led Him ultimately, as we know, to suffering and death on the cross before His resurrection and return to heaven. Now, why did Jesus make that journey?

Well, He did it to rescue us from our sin, from our guilt, from our spiritual death, but He also came to restore us to peace and to life with God. Why did Jesus go to the cross? Why was He loaded up with sin?

Why did He pray in agony? Why did He pray in agony? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Here's one answer, so that you and I could pray. That you and I could know the love of God as our Father in heaven. And to know this is truly the key to enjoying the Christian life and prayer.

So, let's pray now that we would share that joy and that we would enjoy that relationship.