

Lessons in Prayer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 June 2011

Preacher: Philip Grant

[0 : 00] I told you the last time I spoke in our church, I tend not to sleep very well the night before I preach. I toss and turn and bits of the sermon go through my head.

And the last time I preached at home in Cork Baptist Church on Curtin Street, the dream I had was that I was really tired and I fell asleep during the service. And when I woke up, Pastor Eddie Duane was preaching because they couldn't wake me up and I didn't preach.

Well, last night my dream was, I was in Cork Baptist Church at 10 to 12 when I suddenly said to Alwyn, I'm meant to be down in Carragalline preaching this morning.

So I don't tend to put too much authority on what I dream as guidance. Anyway, I know you've been going through Joshua and I'm going to continue, I think, where Johnny left off the last time.

And I'm going to be looking at prayer in Joshua, or not prayer, as we read this morning. So I just want to read a few verses to go back a bit and then read some verses from chapter 10, or from chapter 10.

[1 : 14] So if you could turn first of all to Joshua chapter 7, this is what you would have done the last time. Remember how Achan had sinned and the Lord had sent judgment on the people and had been defeated by the Gibeonites.

And we read in chapter 7 and verse 6. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell face down on the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening.

The elders of Israel did the same and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, Ah, sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us?

If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan. Oh Lord, what can I say now? Now that Israel has been routed by its enemies, the Canaanites and all the other people of the country will hear about this.

And they will surround us and wipe us out, will wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your great name? That was one of his prayers.

[2 : 35] And then we read, going to chapter 9, what Ralph just read. And we read there that they did not inquire of the Lord.

When they didn't pray, Joshua had prayed. You see an example now of him not praying. I just want to go to chapter 10. And verse 12, 14.

They again attack the Amorites in this time that they're successful. And this is a prayer. On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel, O sun, stand still over Gibeon.

O moon, over the valley of Ajalon. So the sun stood still and the moon stopped till the nation avenged itself and its enemies. So there are three examples of prayer.

And I want to take, what can we learn about prayer from Joshua? Now, I think, I think, learn at least 13 things.

[3 : 44] 13 point sermon. So we should be here till nightfall. No, I hope to get through it in 30 minutes. So Johnny said, you can preach for longer and then they won't think I'm long. There you go.

So looking at verse 15, they did not inquire of the Lord. And why didn't they inquire of the Lord? Well, because they thought they had got it all covered.

You know, they had been suspicious. Maybe these people had come close by so they asked the right kind of questions. They'd investigated. They were quite thorough about it. They asked lots of questions.

They even went as far as tasting the food to see was it moldy. They looked at the cracked wineskins. They looked at their sandals and saw they were all worn out. They had all the angles covered, they thought.

Everything checked out. So they didn't bother inquiring the Lord. Now I ask the question, is there something that I'm going through? Is there something you're going through?

[4 : 47] Some decision you have to make. And you've weighed up all the pros and cons. You've got advice. You've looked at it from all the different angles. You've considered the various options.

And with everything there, it's all very neat, all very straight. You've calculated everything. You think, that's the decision I'm making and I'm going with it. You've made up your mind because you're clear about it.

Have you asked God? Even for those straightforward decisions. They thought they were making a straightforward decision here. They'd forgotten that they should inquire of God.

In my preparation for this, it's been funny how many times I've been brought up short by the Lord and said, Philip, have you prayed about this?

Straightforward, ordinary decisions. Do we bring them to the Lord? Because if we don't bring them to the Lord, it's a bit like saying, you know, I come to you with the big stuff, God, but, you know, these kind of things, I can handle them on my own, to be honest with you.

[5 : 49] I actually don't need your help with these. I'm okay with this by myself. In fact, that's what we're saying if we don't bring these things to the Lord. It smacks, perhaps, of arrogance on our behalf.

We shouldn't just ask God when we're in doubt or unsure. We should constantly be asking God's advice, constantly coming to Him. I wouldn't want this to paralyze anybody.

I'm not saying that we should say, should I clean my teeth? How long should I clean my teeth for, Lord? You know, it should liberate us, bring everything. To the Lord. James chapter 1 says, in verse 5, if any of you lacks wisdom, ask God, and it will be given to Him.

Proverbs chapter 3, in verse 5 and 6 says, trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. That's what the people were doing. They were leaning on their own understanding.

They thought they'd worked it all out. I say that to anybody here. I say it to myself. If you think you've got it all worked out, you're leaning on your own understanding.

[6 : 56] Know in all our ways, we should acknowledge Him, and He will direct our path. We should be praying about everything. Colossians 4, verse 2 says, devote yourselves to prayer.

1 Thessalonians 5, verse 17 says, pray continuously. Philippians 4, verse 16, bring everything to God in prayer. So, to sum up, point 1 of 13.

Never forget to keep on praying about everything all of the time. Point 1. I'm glad to see that Joshua did learn that he needed to bring everything to God in prayer. We see at the end of Joshua, when he was dividing up the land that they had conquered to the different tribes, he brought that to the Lord and asked God's direction on it.

How did Joshua pray? What was his attitude? What was his demeanor? In Joshua 7, verse 6, we read, he was face down to the ground.

Earlier on in chapter 5, when he realized he was in the presence of the Lord, it says, Joshua fell face down to the ground in reverence. When he prayed, he was very reverent.

[8 : 11] He was submissive. He came in great humility. When we pray, we must remember who it is that we're praying to. He's the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the One who is above all others.

He's the Great I Am. He's the Almighty. Psalm 11, verse 9 says, He is holy and awesome. That is the kind of God we're coming to.

I found it very useful looking back at Joshua 5, when Joshua fell face down to the ground in reverence. And he asked, What message does my Lord have for me? Now listen to the answer. Take off your sandals for the place you are standing. It's holy. Holy ground. I know we're always in the Lord's presence.

We must remember that. But in prayer, we are coming in a very special way into the very presence of God. We are seeking an audience with the King of the universe, with the Almighty.

[9 : 21] We mustn't come flippantly. I hear people talking about God, and they talk about God as the man in the sky, the man up above.

Almost like he's some sort of buddy of ours. Now God is our friend, absolutely. But we must come to him with all due reverence.

And it was very helpful to me to consider that I am standing on holy ground, or kneeling on holy ground, or driving on holy ground. That's where I'm praying. When we come into God's presence, we are on holy ground.

And we should do it with much dignity. When we consider God's holiness and his awesomeness, and we consider our sins and our frailties, surely like Joshua, we will feel like we need to bow down with our faces to the ground in reverence.

But in light of all that I've just said, isn't it amazing and wonderful that we read in Hebrews, let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence. Or let us approach the throne of grace boldly, so that we may find, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[10:40] The second point, we need to hold these two things together. Come to prayer with great reverence, but come to prayer with confidence. Point two. Straight on to point three.

We pray to a God who listens. When he came in the prayer of chapter 7, he laid out his concerns to God, and then we read, and then God said to Joshua, he spoke to him, told him what the problem was.

In chapter 10, when he prayed for the sun to stop, it stopped. God listens when we pray. The Bible makes it very clear that God listens to our prayers.

Psalm 10, verse 17. You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted. You encourage them and listen to their cry. Psalm 116, verse 1.

I love the Lord, for he heard my voice. He heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on his name as long as I live. That wonderful verse, Isaiah 65, verse 24.

[11:49] Before they call, I will answer. And while they are still speaking, I will hear. When we pray, our prayers don't just bounce off the ceiling and come back.

They go to a God who listens. God doesn't just listen and sit there and go, hmm. Interesting.

No, God listens. But we pray to a God. Point four. We pray to a God who responds.

The sun stood still. The moon stopped. In Joshua chapter 7, when he came and said, Lord, why will we be destroyed by the Amorites? What's happened? I don't understand. We're going to be wiped out.

God listened. And God responded and said, like you learned last week, this is what you need to do to resolve the problem. This is why you were defeated. God listens.

[12:51] Point five. God listens. God responds. We listen. We respond. Throughout the book of Joshua so far, we've seen this recurring theme.

And the Lord said to Joshua, and then Joshua does what the Lord has said. Think of the Jericho example. You know, when the Lord told Joshua how to defeat Jericho, he didn't say, oh, God, I'm not sure that's such a great idea.

I mean, the way you defeat cities isn't like that. I'm a military man. I know how to do it. No, he listened to what God had said. In Joshua 7, the way they had to deal with Achan and his family, I'm sure that was very painful.

It was very difficult what had to happen. And yet he had to do it. If we pray about something and ask God's guidance, he hears and he responds.

Well, how does he do that? Do we hear his voice audibly? Perhaps sometimes, yes. But mostly, he does it through the Holy Spirit as we read his word. We must listen then to what God leads us to do.

[14:03] We must pray acknowledging that God is sovereign and acknowledging his lordship. Ultimately and simply, we don't get to tell God what to do.

He lovingly tells us what is best for us. And we as his children must listen and be obedient. And yet, aren't there times when we feel mystified and confused and full of doubt, and we don't know why God is doing certain things in our lives.

We come to God. We think, you know, you listen. You respond. But why are you doing this in my life? I just don't understand.

I want to read Joshua 7, verse 7 to 9 again. This is Joshua's experience.

He felt this confusion that we sometimes feel. Joshua 7, verses 7 to 9. And Joshua said, Ah, sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us?

[15:16] If only we'd been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan. Oh Lord, what can I say? What can I say now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this.

And they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your great name? He was saying, Look, but you promised. You promised to be with us. You promised we were going to defeat the enemies.

You told us the land was going to be ours. And now we're defeated. And people will hear about it. They'll gang up on us. They'll attack us. I don't understand. I love the honesty of this prayer.

You know, don't the Psalms do the same thing an awful lot? They say, Lord, I'm trying to live a good life. I'm trying very hard to follow you.

And yet my life is such a mess. Things don't work out. I'm disappointed time and time again. And I look at these people over there. They don't love you. They don't care about you. And their lives are running along really smoothly.

[16:16] It's not fair, God. I don't understand. Point six. Pray honestly. Tell him how you feel. Bring your confusion and your doubts to him.

Admit your concerns and your doubts. And then, like Joshua, wait on the Lord. Listen to him. Acknowledge his sovereignty.

Note how Joshua began this prayer. He was full of doubt. He was full of confusion. And he starts it off by saying, Ah, sovereign Lord.

So bring your concerns to the Lord. But remember, point seven. We pray to a God who is sovereign. We pray to a God who is in control and will do what is best.

He was confused. He was mystified. He was in great distress. He told the Lord the danger that they were in. And he asked the Lord to glorify his name.

[17:17] Verse nine. Sometimes life is so confusing for us. Life can be so difficult to us. Lord, we just have to place ourselves in the hands of an almighty God and say with Joshua, What will you do now for your own great name?

Lord, may you be glorified in this. Point eight. We should look in our prayers to the glory and honour of the Lord.

Now, that's not easy. Oh, when we pray. If you just think about the prayers you pray, don't we tend, our prayers tend to be taken up with, Lord, I want A, B, Z, D, E, F, G, H.

And that's what prayer often is, isn't it? We present our requests to the Lord. We present our needs to the Lord and we ask him to do things for us. And that's good and proper. But surely above all, what our prayer should be, and this is a difficult thing for us to learn, we need to take our eyes off ourselves and our needs and seek, first of all, the glory and honour of the Lord.

What then will you do for your great name? That was his concern. It's not about us. It's about God. A little aside.

[18:40] You notice when he prayed, he didn't pray by himself.

You see the beginning there. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell face down to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening.

The elders of Israel did the same. He wasn't praying by himself. He was praying with others. Nine. It's good to pray together.

It's good to come together in your home groups, your cell groups, and pray together. It's good to pray with the Lord's people. It's a huge encouragement. Don't neglect going to prayer meetings.

It's good to pray together. Point ten. It's good to pray alone. Joshua also prayed alone. We've seen that. Eleven.

[19:52] We pray to a God of power. Joshua 10 and verse 13.

So the sun stood still and the moon stopped.

It's impossible. I'm telling you, that is impossible. Like the Jordan River, rising up, it's not possible. I'm no physicist. I'm no astrophysicist. But I'm telling you, that is impossible. It cannot happen. If it did happen, I don't know what would happen.

The world would spin off and out of control. The universe would collapse. It's not possible. Is there anything that God cannot do?

[20:52] It says in Luke 1 verse 37, for nothing is impossible with God. If God created the universe, he is the sustainer of the universe.

If God wants to stop the solar system and it's tracked and there not be calamity, he can do that. God is a God of power. We pray to a God of power.

There is nothing too big for him. There is no problem too big. You might say to me, Philip, well, it's easy for you to say that. If you knew the problems that I have, if you knew the situation I was in, you would say, you can't pray like that.

We're praying to a God who can stop the universe. We're talking to a God who if he chose to stop the solar system in its tracks, he can do it.

There is no problem too big for our God of power. There is no sinner too sinful that cannot be saved.

[21 : 59] There is no failure in your life, Christian. That will keep you from the Lord if you return to him. He's waiting there to welcome you back.

Whatever your situation, God is able to handle it. But you might say, Philip, but I've prayed.

I've prayed to this God of power. I believe in this God of power. I've prayed to him. I've prayed for a job. And I haven't got it. I've prayed for a husband.

I've prayed for a wife. And the Lord hasn't given one to me. I've prayed. And I've prayed really believing and really trusting. I've really had faith.

I've prayed for healing. And the person died. What are you talking about praying to a God of power for when he doesn't answer prayers?

[22 : 59] I think there's a lot of nonsense and rubbish doing the rounds about what prayer is about and the purpose of prayer at the moment. You'll hear people say, well, if you have enough faith, God will answer your prayer.

So the reason you haven't got what you want is because you didn't pray with enough faith. Or, if you say, well, I did pray with huge faith. I really expected. Ah, well, it's because of unconfessed sin then, isn't it?

You obviously didn't deal with unconfessed sin. If you dealt with your own confessing, then God would answer. Other people would say, well, it's because you didn't pray it right.

You've got to find the right formula. And if you pray in the right way, then that's how you get God to give you what you want. That's the way you get God to answer your prayers.

A little story that really helps me with this is the story of the little boy who says to his sister, go and ask mum, can we have a bar of chocolate before dinner?

[24 : 07] So the little girl goes out to her mum and says, mum, can we have a bar of chocolate before dinner? And the mum says to her, no.

So the little girl comes back and the little girl says to her brother, oh, she didn't answer me. Well, she did give an answer, but the answer was, no.

We read this in the Bible. We read that Paul had his thorn in the flesh. He had this problem in his life. We're not told what it was, but there was some problem.

And he prayed with great earnestness. I am sure, being the Apostle Paul, he prayed with great faith that the Lord would take this out of his life, this problem, this difficulty.

He prayed three times. Everything leads us to believe he prayed with great passion that the Lord would take this difficulty out of his life. But the Lord said no.

[25 : 07] Our own Saviour, Matthew 26, verse 39, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, my father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.

Did Jesus have unconfessed sin in his life? No. He had no sin in his life. If there was a particular formula that needed to be prayed, if there was a certain way that had to be prayed, surely he would not.

He prayed with perfect faith. He fell down with his face to the ground and prayed, my father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken away from me.

Yet, not as I will, but as you will. Thirteenth point, pray in the will of God.

That's what we should be seeking to do, to pray in the will of God. When we're praying, yes, bring our requests, yes, bring our concerns, but ultimately, we should seek at all times to allow the Lord to change our hearts.

[26 : 20] Not that we would seek to change God. As I said already, we don't get to tell God what to do. He gets to tell us what to do. And we should be coming to him and saying, what is your will in this?

And that will change the way we pray. Yes, God is a great God of power. And yes, the sun did stand still. Yes, the moon did stand still.

Yes, Joshua prayed and it happened. But let's look at the context in which this happened. Verse 8, the Lord said to Joshua, do not be afraid of them.

This is the Amorites who had already defeated them. And now God was going to give them the victory. The Lord said to Joshua, do not be afraid of them. I have given them into your hand. I have given them into your hand.

Verse 10, the Lord threw them into confusion. Verse 11, the Lord hurled down large hailstones on them.

[27 : 25] The Lord showed that he was destroying these people, not the Israelites. He was the one in control. It says there's more died from the hailstones than died by the sword.

Verse 12, on the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel. Constantly it's getting us to understand this is the Lord's work that's being done.

Verse 14, surely the Lord was fighting for Israel. The passage is of pains to point out that what is happening here is God's will.

God is in control. Joshua didn't just suddenly think out of his own head, oh I'm going to pray for the sun to stop so that we can finish our job. I'm sure God laid it on his heart to pray this.

This was part of God's will. I'm sure that God directed Joshua to pray such a prayer. Pray in the will of God.

[28 : 33] Prayer should not be about seeking to force God to see things our way and to do what we want him to do. But we need to be guided by the Holy Spirit and by reading his word and we seek his will and his glory.

Seek in prayer to be in harmony with the Holy Spirit. And just to finish up, one thought that I found really helpful because sometimes I say, I don't know how to pray in the will of God.

I don't know what God wants me to pray for. I'm really confused. Maybe I'm praying the wrong thing. And that would be terrible. 1 John 5 verse 14 and 15 says, this is the confidence we have in approaching God.

That if we ask for anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him.

So we can come with confidence, knowing that we can ask for anything. If it's in his will, he will give it to us. Anything. Imagine that.

[29 : 44] Whatever we ask, if it's in alignment with God's will, he will do it. But still we're faced with a problem. What happens if I'm not praying in his will?

And with this, I promise, I'll finish. Romans 8, 26. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches their hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

So if you come in all honesty before the Lord, saying, and lay out your heart before him, we can have great confidence that the Holy Spirit knows the mind of God, knows the will of God, and prays along with us and even for us.

So there are at least 13 things we can learn about prayer in Joshua. pizza, armour,