

# Regular Prayer

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, I'm really excited to be starting this series on prayer off because prayer is powerful. It has the power to bring healing, to create miracles and the power to save lives.

And it's one of the greatest gifts that God has given us. So what is prayer? That's a good place to start. Prayer is simple. We make it complicated because there's just so many questions that we can ask.

How long am I supposed to pray? If I do really good things, will my prayers be answered? Is it better out loud or in my head? Can I open my eyes or keep them shut? It goes on and on.

But we need to know that prayer is simple. It's just a two-way conversation between you and God. It's talking and it's listening. That's it. That's prayer.

It's the lifeline in our relationship with God and it's essential. So over the next few weeks, we're going to be exploring prayer. And it would be my prayer for us as a whole church that's a consequence of what we discover both this week and over the next few weeks.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] That our prayer life will take a step in the right direction. And will become something that we do a bit more regularly. And that we will find refreshing and will also enjoy.

Because I don't know if I'm the only one here. But sometimes prayer doesn't seem that enjoyable to me. And when we talk about prayer, I often feel guilty that my prayer life isn't better than it is.

And if I asked you here, I don't expect you to put your hands up. But if I asked you here, how many of you think that you pray enough? Some of you might think, yes, I pray loads.

But actually, I imagine most of us would say, no, I definitely don't pray enough. And one of the problems with this is the question, how much is enough?

Does it mean I've got to pray for five minutes a day? Or do I have to lock myself for three hours a day? How much is enough? And so because of this, we often feel condemned.

[ 2 : 1 2 ] And again, it might just be me. But sometimes when I pray, it doesn't really feel sometimes that God is listening. It doesn't feel like he's here at all. And I feel that sometimes I'm just sat in a room on my own, praying and talking to myself.

And so with this, I can get a bit discouraged, a bit fed up, or maybe a bit stuck in a rut with my prayer life. And for some of you here, it may be that you just don't really know how to pray.

You may have come from an unchurched background and really don't have any framework for prayer. Sometimes, also, if we've grown up in church and been taught to pray, sometimes it doesn't really inspire us to do it very much.

But Jesus is a person that we want to turn to if we want to learn how to pray better. That's what his disciples did. And so he taught them the Lord's Prayer. So just before we look at the Lord's Prayer, just some practical things that may help us to pray more regularly.

If you notice from that passage, Jesus tells them to go into their room and close the door and pray. So the first thing is place. If we want to grow in prayer, one of the things that could be really helpful is to find a certain place away from distractions where we pray.

[ 3 : 27 ] A place that becomes the place that we always pray. So it might be our bedrooms, our spare room, in a summer house, in our conservatory, maybe a spot in the garden. Or it may be for you that a practical thing to do is maybe you pray on the bus or walk into work or school.

But one thing that can be really helpful is to have a place that becomes that place of prayer. The second thing is time. Another thing that can help us grow in this can be to have a regular time to pray.

All of us have different times that we're at our best. But to have a regular time is really helpful. My time now generally, I say, is in the morning and for a few minutes at night.

But when I had young kids, I was completely all over the place and I just couldn't do it in the morning. So it was generally in the afternoon for 10, 15 minutes whilst the children were having a nap.

I had twins, so it's just like I barely survived really. But having a certain place and a regular time when you generally pray at that time can be really helpful. And finally, the third thing, what do we pray?

[ 4 : 33 ] It can be really helpful if we have a bit of a sense of what we want to pray about when we come to pray. But you don't always have to have that though. And as we've been discovering at our evening gathering in the well, through contemplation and meditative prayer, that can be really helpful too, just sitting in silence with God.

And sometimes, you know, when we're completely exhausted, it can be a really good thing to do. Sometimes I can't even think straight, let alone put a sentence together.

And I just say, look, God, I've got my body here. I don't quite know where my brain is, but can we just sit together for a bit and just be in each other's presence? So if you haven't done this before, it's helpful to get into a comfortable position and just breathe in and out and just focus on maybe a verse, something like, be still and know that I'm Lord.

So we're just going to try this now for like 30 seconds. So just close your eyes, get into a comfortable position and breathe in and out. In and out.

Be still and know that I am Lord. Amen.

[ 6 : 00 ] Amen. And that is great and could be a brilliant prayer time or part of your prayer time. I often will do this for the first maybe five minutes of my prayer time just to slow my busy mind and connect with God. But when we do have our brains in gear we want to be thinking about what I want to talk to God about and how does this prayer time become something that gives me life and where I see things happen as a result of the things that I'm praying. And that third thing once we have the place and the time the thing of what to pray I think is exactly what God is pointing to when he gives us model prayers such as the Lord's Prayer. And there are lots of model prayers throughout the Bible. If you read through the Psalms they're real prayers that you can pray through in the Semen Acts and Ephesians 1 and 3. And sometimes I think as evangelicals we can be a bit worried about contemplative prayer and also maybe nervous about model prayers too. Maybe we think that we want to be freer than that and we don't want to be too liturgical or legalistic. But I think actually they're really helpful. So if we look at the Lord's Prayer now and how we might pray through this just give you some ideas. So he starts off with our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Well what a powerful thought that God is our Father and that we can approach him and trust him as a father. Just that one thought can change the way we think. And then he goes on to say your kingdom come your will be done on earth as in heaven. What I love about this part is that we're trusting God to build his own kingdom and we're asking him to do it. Because I think for loads of us the pressure can be that we think it's our job completely to build God's kingdom. And while it is true the book doesn't stop with us to establish God's kingdom, it stops with God. We're to partner with him to do the stuff that God is doing and be part of building God's kingdom here. But we don't tell him what to do, it's his agenda not ours. And if we put too much pressure on ourselves to build his kingdom, me, myself, some things that naturally I'm quite good at, if I put a load of pressure on myself I'm thinking oh my words they've just asked me about Jesus, it's all on me now. If I don't tell them all about him in the right way that's it, they're ruined, they're never going to see Jesus again.

But it's your kingdom God and you will build it. And that's a prayer that he loves to answer. So if there's a person that you want to come to know the Lord, pray for them. Tell them about Jesus, yes of course. Love them in the ways that they need to be loved, but pray because it works. And then the next thing he says is give us our daily bread. And with God it's just so practical. We can think that God is just up there floating on a cloud and he's only interested in stuff like if we read our Bible enough. And we can think that he wouldn't be interested in the things that we're concerned about. Maybe we've got an exam next week or worried about our finances. But the physical and the spiritual go together and he cares deeply. And you know if I only cared about the spiritual side of my kids life and I didn't give a monkeys about their physical needs, whether they're eating enough, whether they're getting enough rest, whether they're coming home before six o'clock in the morning, and whether they've got everything they need to thrive as people, what kind of a parent would I be?

And so he says bring me your worries, bring me your needs. None of us can sustain ourselves without God in our life. So tell him about that stuff. Ask him to help with that exam you've got coming up, or the job interview you have, or the fact that you're worried about your heating bills, or that you're struggling with a relationship. There is nothing that is not spiritual. There's nothing you can't pray about. It's just our daily bread, what you need. So ask him.

Next thing, forgive us our sins as we forgive others. Asking God to forgive our sins is a prayer, unfortunately, that I think we're going to need to pray regularly this side of heaven, because we always get it wrong. We don't mean to get it wrong, but we just do, don't we?

[10:19] And I think that if we pray this prayer regularly, it's a sign that we're in a good place. Sometimes I've got it wrong. I've done something wrong. I know I've done it wrong. I can feel it in there, but I just ignore it. I think I'm just going to not talk to God about it. I'll just leave him a bit like to calm down and forget about it. But that never really turns out well for me.

And the way that we should go about it, as soon as we get it wrong, we know we've messed up. We should just come straight to him. And that's a sign of a healthy relationship. But you say sorry quickly, and you ask for forgiveness. And part of asking for that forgiveness is actually receiving it from him. And I think the mistaken image sometimes that we have of God is that he wants us to beat ourselves up and completely grovel. But you know, all the pictures and images of the Bible of God forgiving people is the complete opposite to that. He longs to forgive us and restore us and give us our dignity back. Like when the prodigal son returns and the father is like, oh my word, he's back. Let's celebrate. Now I'm still on the journey with this, but as my understanding of forgiveness has developed, now when I repent of things, I say sorry quickly. And I'm expecting him to be happy and pleased that I've said sorry and I want to turn away from sin and go the other way. So forgive us our sins. And then the next bit can be a bit more tricky.

As we forgive others. Unfortunately, this is part of the deal. We have to forgive others too. And this is not so easy. But unfortunately, he makes it really explicitly clear in the Bible that as we receive our forgiveness, we also give that forgiveness away.

Excuse me, sorry. And I'm just speaking from my own experience. I find forgiving people hard. I'm so good at forgiving people that really haven't actually done anything to hurt me. You can be just a bit annoying or do something a bit stupid and actually that's not a problem. I forgive you all the time. But if you do something that really damages me, that messes me up inside, where I feel betrayed or let down or rejected, I find it really hard to forgive. And what is easier than just forgiving is to just get really, really bitter. We think bad thoughts about the other person, wishing that they fail at everything, feeling really sorry for myself and stroking and feeding that bitter feeling. Maybe it's just me, I don't know. I mean, that's how often we can react to other people. But forgiving others is very difficult. But it's the only way that we find freedom. And if we don't forgive, what happens is that we become trapped in a cycle of bitterness and we become miserable. They're not being affected. They might not even know that they've upset us. But it's like we're drinking poison and we're expecting them to die. So forgiveness sets us free. And the hardest thing to forgive sometimes is the deepest pain. But my advice on it from experience is to do this as a decision every day. So when I pray that bit, I forgive others regularly now. And certain people have come to mind, some of them from years and years ago, that I'm still forgiving even now because it still hurts me. But I have to forgive them until it stops hurting me. And that could be another two or three years, I don't know. But we have to choose and decide that we're going to forgive that person. And then the final thing, lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. Prayer is really helpful when you're feeling tempted. It's not just about choosing not to sin and accountability, though that's good. But actually prayer is a really powerful weapon. Jesus says in Matthew 41 to his disciples, pray that you might not fall into temptation.

And really what that is about is asking for help in areas of life that you're struggling with, whether it's money or greed or lust or anger or pride. Say sorry, I've got a problem with this, Lord. Can you help me? And the moment that we do that, the Holy Spirit partners with us and he joins with us to help us with that wrestling with that issue. And it's not to say that when we do this, we're never going to be tempted. But when we ask God for help, the Holy Spirit will partner with us to help us battle with it. So I wonder what temptation might be a battle for you. One of mine sometimes is to take on too much responsibility that actually doesn't belong to me. And from that comes a load of anxiousness and worry. There's nothing sinful about anxiety at all, but Jesus doesn't want us to live in that worry. But sometimes we can just get so used to living that way that it's kind of comforting. It's almost like a destructive friend that we live with sometimes. So for me, praying that I wouldn't always give in to that temptation, that I always need to worry, has been a really practical thing that I've been trying to do in my life regularly. So I don't know what that will be for you. But hopefully what I've said will give us some tools for this week to start regularly praying or to develop our regular prayer time. If you've never really prayed before, if all you do is say the Lord's Prayer or maybe run through a psalm and that's it and you find five or ten minutes in your day, next week you've done really well. You've prayed the way that Jesus taught you to pray.

[ 15 : 51 ] But this can be a springboard to keeping company with him in a new way. And I look forward to this whole series where we're going to be learning about other great prayers in the Bible. So please join us over the summer as we work through these. So at the end of the service, our prayer ministry team will be here to pray with anybody who'd like prayer for anything. But as I finish, I'd just like to end with a prayer. So let's invite the Holy Spirit to partner with us now. Close our eyes. Dear Lord, help us to connect and reconnect with you in a different way. Help us to use these tools of silence and solitude and model prayers like the Lord's Prayer to really help us to develop an inner and outer life with you.

So Holy Spirit come. We acknowledge your presence in this room. We believe that you're among us now and we ask that you speak to us and guide us this week as we confess that every one of us has room to grow in our prayer life and how we connect with you and what you're doing in this world. Father, help us to believe more fully that you love us and you want to partner with us as we intentionally grow and develop our prayer life. And may we see answers and transformation in people's lives through our prayers. Make us more like you, Lord. Amen.