

What's the point of Prayer?

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[0 : 00] On this day when the world remembers those who gave their lives and the cost that war brings to individuals, communities, countries and nations, men, women and children.

When we often feel so powerless when we look at the news on the issues and situations that we feel are often way beyond our control of where we can influence, people turn to prayer.

There's nothing like a crisis in life or a need in a time of war when a nation comes together to pray. Look at any situation, disaster or incident in a community or people flock through church doors to light candles, to sit, to weep and to pray.

I remember one of my first as a child I remember is the Aberfan disaster in our churches. People just gathered in this church in Somerset because they were so moved by what they were seeing and what they were hearing as they came together with a community miles away.

But it touched our hearts. In May 1940, the British expeditionary force of 375,000 soldiers were trapped at Dunkirk.

[1 : 24] One of the greatest disasters in UK military history seemed to be in the making, with the British army seemingly cut off, unable to retreat and facing devastating loss of life.

And casualties. There was only one place where the naval boats could come and they could rescue soldiers due to the shallow sea.

Churchill's advisors estimated at that time that they could rescue only 30,000 soldiers would get out alive. If you do the maths, that was a potential loss of 245,000 lives.

What do you do? It's a pivotal moment and then something happened that has only happened in our nation a handful of times.

King George VI, on a radio address to the nation, called the nation to a day of prayer. Thousands upon thousands, queued outside of churches and thousands and thousands and thousands upon people at home cried out to God, praying for their loved ones, pleading with God for him to intervene and rescue them.

[2 : 41] Many who had been sceptical, doubting, even faced with the enormity of the crisis and with concern for their loved ones, responded to the king's call to pray.

And the nation prayed. Prayed as one for what seemed like the impossible. Yet people saw that answer to prayer.

Foreign forces made strategic mistakes. Freak localized storms, grounded attack aircraft. Usually calm waters for small boats were there.

There was fog cover. Personal stories of courage and protection. 330,000 soldiers were evacuated that day to our shores.

As we remember this miracle of Dunkirk, let's remember the real story. As well as the courage and self-sacrifice of all caught up in this event, let's not forget that when a nation humbled itself, when a nation got on its knees, when they called to God, when neighbors saw neighbors praying, no matter what their denomination, whether they had a faith or not, when they came together, what's the point of prayer?

[3 : 58] A nation prayed and lives were saved. What's the point of prayer? Because lives are saved. Friends, I hope you share my heart, but there are people in this community now that need to be saved.

They need to be rescued from the culture that says there is no good, there is no hope, and the Christian life is irrelevant, outdated, and inconsequential. What's the point of prayer?

That's the point of prayer. We pray. Because it builds relationship with our Lord and Savior. He is our case. He is on our case.

He will never leave us or forsake us. In our Bible reading this morning, Jesus is encouraging his disciples. He is encouraging you and me for us all to get connected into him. The vine is the life giver, the source. When we get disconnected from the vine, we get disconnected from that power source of hope and life, of what can be.

[5 : 01] The source, the energy giver, the source of being. Remain in my love, Jesus says. Be enveloped in it. Understand it. Get connected with it. Know what it means.

This is my Father's will. This is his will and his glory, that we, that you, bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Fruit doesn't grow without a source. It needs feeding. Jesus told another parable about growth, or rather lack of it, in a fig tree in Luke 13.

A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard. He went to look for fruit, but he didn't see any there. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, for three years now, I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree, and I haven't found any.

Cut it down. Why should it use up the soil? Sir, the man replied, leave it alone for one more year. One more year. And I'll dig around it, and I will fertilize it.

[6 : 08] If it bears fruit next year, fine. If not, then cut it down. Do you know, I sense in that reading, in our reading this morning, there is a sense of urgency.

There's a sense of urgency to tend and to dig deep into our prayer life. That call away from complacency that has crept into our wider and national church today.

Because, I don't know about you, I'm not content with just a few withering little figs on a tree. That's not what God called us for in our scripture this morning, or in his coming for us.

We want a life in ministry to be as fruitful as possible. Yes, the national church is in decline. In some areas, it's in free fall.

Racked by doctrinal divisions, some dioceses are looking at bankruptcy. One bishop was quoted to have said that his job was now to manage decline. Where are the figs?

[7 : 13] Where is the growth? Even the early church forgot that they were an Easter people, a people with power and joy. They were called to follow the resurrected Jesus, the giver of life and the giver of growth.

We are the people who carry hope today. We are the hope bringers into our community. People won't come to Jesus because we have a better worship band, because we have amazing facilities, or we have better coffee than anybody else.

People will come because they want to experience Jesus and meet with him. The fruit of the resurrection in their life.

And often they will be drawn by what they experience through us, his people. I pray you've had a good welcome this morning. I pray that we have had a warm welcome, that we are known and loved by God in this place, that we would know his hope, his kindness, his compassion, his hospitality, his love and his sacrifice expressed through us.

The early church waited until they were clothed with power, power of the Spirit, to live in that living, God-giving, Spirit-filled, Pentecost life that transforms people.

[8 : 34] God didn't send his Holy Spirit to manage decline. God sent his Holy Spirit to bring life, life in all its fullness. In our Alpha Holy Spirit Day yesterday, there were many who experienced that new life in a new way yesterday.

What do you do when a few weedy, withering figs on the tree, what do you do when you see that? We dig a trench and we pray, we fertilize, and we work with Jesus.

And an essential ingredient of that fertilizer is prayer and commitment. Connect back into the life-giving vine. How do we know what you may be asking?

Maybe especially if you're listening to this podcast. What are you asking? Connect with Jesus. Make Jesus front and center always. That is the simplest way to start.

Make Jesus front and center in all we do. Sadly, a large section of the National Church has forsaken their first love. When did you first fall in love with Jesus? Maybe it's today. Maybe you're falling in love with Jesus afresh today, even for the first time.

[9 : 47] Never forsake your first love. What's the point of prayer? To help fertilize the ground of our community for Clevedon.

Our call needs to be the ageless, age-old call message. Come to Jesus. Come back to Jesus. Come closer to Jesus.

Three simple things. Spend time with him. Get to know him in prayer and in scripture. Encounter him afresh in the power of the Holy Spirit that comes and dwells with us and in us.

In the pulpit here, when we had a pulpit, if you climbed up into the pulpit, there was a message there. And it was from Charles Spurgeon. It says, Sir, we would see Jesus.

It was a message that people, that we long for people to see Jesus afresh, to meet with him, that all our preaching, that all our teaching should be put Jesus at front and center.

[10:50] Let's share Jesus more and more. Offer to pray with people. Make him known in the power of Jesus. Why? Because we know it makes a difference as they did in 1940, as it does in many places in our lives, as it will again as we see a whole nation.

I pray, come back to Jesus. It will make a difference. Ask him as you pray to give you words and pictures for people. Be bold and courageous to impact their lives.

Pray as you read the Bible each day. Pray that the gospel would come alive afresh, that the words would come off the page, that they would speak to you.

Pray this week, especially for those who are making decisions regarding doctrine and general synod. Don't be diverted from the truth of gospel messages.

The world may change, yet God's word stays the same. That's the point of prayer, to be real and authentic. Why? Because he loves each and every one of us. And I need you to hear that message.

[11:56] I need to hear that message that the world needs to hear, that wherever we are, whatever we come, however we come, we are known and loved by God and his love will never end.

there's a true story of a man who wanted two puppies. And this is, I'm told this is a true story.

Sadly, he responded to an advert in the paper, don't do that, he should have gone to a recognised breeder. And as always, he was called to meet a man in a car park.

He actually met this person in Morrison's car park at night. He handed over 200 pounds for each puppy in the darkness.

And the man said to him, by the way, they haven't been inoculated, you need to take them tomorrow to a vet to get them inoculated. And he said, these are, he said, what are they?

[12:55] He said, well, they're Labradors, that's what I've asked. Oh yes, they're Labradors, that's fine. He went next day to the vets with these two very small things in a box and the vet took a look at them and he said, what are you?

Are they? Are they definitely Labradors? And the vet looked at them closely and said, no, I'm really sorry. They're not Labradors. And he said, well, that's what it said in the advert. It said that they were, no, they're definitely not Labradors, I can tell you that.

The man looked devastated. The vet, the man said to him, so what breed are they? The vet paused and said, they're guinea pigs.

You've been sold guinea pigs. I'm told it's a true story. If we stay locked into the vine, the life-giving power and presence of God, you will know the real thing when you see it.

You will receive the real thing. We hold fast to the truth, you will not be sold a false guinea pig theology. Hold fast to God.

[14:11] Jesus chose you. That's a message I really want you to hear this morning. Jesus chose you in the setting in which you are.

If you don't know that, please hear it now. Jesus chose you. Why? To go and bear good fruit. Fruit that will last and not rot away because we are rooted in good soil and in the vine.

Like you, I have a passion to encourage a whole new generation of Christians. It may not be a surprise to you, but some churches are meeting today with no children in their congregations.

What a sadness that is. That we would know Jesus, that we would come to him, we would give our lives to him, we would grow alongside as a church of all ages and all stages.

That we would grow together. We need to pray for our next generation, people. I heard of a church recently where they invested heavily in young leaders.

[15:16] Spirit of God fell on those that were under 25. They were leading and they were preaching. A third of the church left because they didn't want young children amongst them.

Is that a sadness that breaks your heart? It breaks mine. And at the moment, a large proportion of Anglican churches have no young people in their congregations. Where is the fruit?

Grow the fruit. Connect into the vine. Make that invitation. We pray individually and together to make every opportunity. Why should we pray? Why do we pray?

Pete Gregg, who started the 24-7 prayer movement, said it quite simply. There are three things when you pray. Keep it simple.

Keep it real. And keep it up. Three simple things. Keep it simple. Keep it real. And keep it up.

[16:15] Pursue the presence of God in prayer. Draw close to Jesus. Ask for the power of the Holy Spirit. Maybe today afresh. If you haven't asked for ages, ask for the Holy Spirit to come and fill you.

The Holy Spirit dwells in each one of us, but maybe we haven't been filled recently with the Holy Spirit. Ask the power of the Holy Spirit to come into your life.

In the next two weeks, we have an opportunity. Next week, you will be given a card. It has five spaces on it to pray for people, maybe a family, to join you personally here over Christmas.

It's not just something to pray about. You pray and then do something active with it. And there'll be an invitation to hand to people, to invite them to come, to all the things that we invite them to.

What do we invite them to? I'd love you to bring them to the Christmas Tree Festival. Big shout out for the Christmas Tree Festival, for the carol service, for all the things that are happening here.

[17:22] But what is our sole reason for bringing them? We bring them to meet with Jesus. That's why they come, to meet with Jesus.

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples left their safety zones and went and grew church and grew the vine.

And the fruit is evident in the Gospels for us and in Scripture. And we can do the same. What's the best gift you're going to give this Christmas?

I hope it's Jesus. I hope it's Jesus to those that we know and love. Just want to leave you with a thought. If God can save 250,000 men from a beach in Dunkirk, I believe that he can save 19,000 plus people in Clevedon.

And it starts with prayer. Shall we pray? Holy Spirit, would you call us deeper back into the vine with you?

[18:45] Would you draw us closer into being a people of not only corporate prayer, but personal prayer? Would you stir our souls, Lord, to see those that we long to see in our lives, in our community, workplaces, in our families saved for you?

Lord, we know that you can do it. You have told us, you have shown us. Keep us faithful, keep us focused. And most of all, Lord, keep us connected with you deeply in prayer we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen.