

Why Pray?

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[0 : 01] Good morning everyone. Good to see you, especially if you're visiting. It's great to see you. What a great scripture to start from this morning as we start our new series as we talk about prayer.

And as we think about prayer this morning, one of my favourite weeks on an Alpha course is how, why and how do we pray? It's really interesting. There was Oswald Chambers said, we have to pray with our eyes on God, not on our difficulties. And this morning, in fact, if you were a little bit early, you would have seen this place was packed with families and they were talking about the enormity of God. And as we think about prayer, we talk about this connection with the enormity of the God that we worship. So I get to kick off this series with why do we pray? So why do we pray? Firstly, because God, Jesus told us to, and he showed us.

I suppose I could sit down now and say that's the end of the sermon and many of you will be really pleased. Because Jesus told us to. We are told, we are commanded to do that. It's an essential part, but mostly it's an essential part of our relationship with him. We want to build relationship.

When you get to know somebody, you want to build that relationship with them. You want to know about them. You're interested in them. The thing is, it's just not, you're not praying, you're not speaking to somebody, connecting with somebody in a vacuum. The whole intention about prayer is about relationship.

Imagine if you can, with the one you love, not actually communicating with them. Maybe that resounds something, maybe even, or if it's a one-sided conversation all the time, maybe that resounds a little bit more sometimes in a relationship. The thing is, this is an intentional two-way conversation that we're talking about. It's not just this one-way thing that we're doing. In the next few weeks, as we rapidly approach Advent, we're going to explore what's the point of prayer? Why didn't God answer my prayer?

[2 : 31] And how do I pray? But the question this morning is, we've encountered this morning, is the disciples just before this reading, where Jesus actually gives them this explanation and actually talks to them about, tries to unpack this, they have actually, he has actually given them a prayer to pray, which is the Lord's Prayer. And my guess is that they had seen Jesus doing this thing. And they had said, teach us how to do that. Because we see that it works. We've seen you doing this day in and day out. You're going off, you're praying, you're connecting with the Father. And then out of that, amazing things happen.

So how do we do this? Show us, tell us how to do this. And my guess is that they had already answered the question, why pray? Because they'd seen it happen. Prayer was front and center in Jesus's life.

And therefore, he wants to do the same, for us to do the same as he was showing us, to live that life, to be a part of that. Remember, you know, this was a culture at the time where you had to jump through lots of hoops to even talk to God. And yet Jesus was saying, now you can cut all of that out. And you can have this direct approach. You know, if you remember, you know, when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain was torn in two in the temple. There was that division that had always been there. And there was this physical thing to say, no, that is no more. There is this direct contact and relationship with a God that wants to have a relationship with you and I in the everyday, 24-7. But why pray?

I think relationship is a good place to start. You know, we have been given this direct access and communication with God. The maker of heaven and earth, the one who threw stars into space, the one who created us and shaped us, our sovereign Lord. And if that doesn't fire you, then I'm not really sure what does. Because this is the awesomeness of prayer. We know that Jesus intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father. He told us he would do that. He is an advocate for us. And there's nothing better than an advocate in your life who knows about your life because Jesus lived it. Jesus lived that life. He knows our joys. He knows our pain. He knows our challenges. He knows our temptations. He knows, on our case, he knows that we are not alone.

And likewise, it says in Romans 8, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

[5 : 46] Have you ever worried about not what to pray? What do I pray about? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you.

What do you say? With this huge accessibility to the Lord Almighty, my question is, why don't we pray as much as we should? I don't know what your prayer life is like. You probably don't know what mine is like. You probably think I'm on my knees 24-7. You'll notice my knees aren't worn out.

But it is about prayer 24-7. It is like breathing. And if you manage a team, if you manage a team, maybe you have been leaders, maybe you're in a management setting, maybe you've been part of a team, you will know so well that you will normally discover that your team are far more effective and efficient, happy and empowered if they know why they are doing what they've been asked to do.

And we have been asked to pray. That's our call as Christians. Prayer is the same. We are called to pray. So why do you pray? Now it's an 1115 service which is really interesting because we get to that point where we get to talk to one another. Now maybe if here, even if you're a couple and you haven't talked together this morning, this is a great opportunity. But the question is this morning, and it's quite simple, why do you pray? It's that simple. Why do you pray? We sung about we bring everything to God in prayer. Pray in Greek, which I won't even try to attempt to pronounce, but literally means to give thanks and to make requests. And in Philippians 4-6 it says, don't worry about anything, but in everything through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. Bring it to God in prayer. I've heard so many people say, oh God, God won't be bothered with this thing. He's got bigger things to worry about. That isn't the case. In our relationship and what we say is we bring everything to God in prayer. That's what he wants. In other words, when we pray, we need to come to God in an attitude of worship. And in that mind, we need to bring those requests and bring our questions. Firstly, I sort of broke these things into four things. And the first one is this, on our slide we'll come up. Prayer does not inform God.

It involves God. It involves God in what we do. In Matthew 6-8 it said, your father knows what you need before you ask. Matthew 6-8 demonstrates, interestingly, a point about God's inimpotence.

[8 : 57] God is already informed and knows ahead of time what we need. For me personally, the good thing is, is that I know that God's not shockable. You know, don't think that you can shock God.

You can tell him everything. So why pray? Why pray then if God knows everything? And I've known so many people who have used this verse as an excuse not to pray. Why do I bother to pray? Because God knows everything. Yet on the contrary, God wants us to bring our life and our heart and our needs to him in our concerns and our joys. He wants to be involved in that. Why wouldn't he want us to do this?

You know, it is because he wants to be involved in our everyday. That he wants us to do life with him. Not just exclude him, it's to some place elsewhere. You know, why would he want to do this? It's because he wants to be involved. If you've raised children, if you've known what children's like, when they're very young, they come home and you say, what did you do at school today? And you get this great thing, don't you? About what they've done in great, great detail of what they've done at school. And they tell you, it's just wonderful. What a great picture of us with God. But sadly, some of us have moved into that sort of adolescent phase where, what did you do today at school? Not much. Well, what did not much?

Well, you know, we did stuff. Really? Well, what did that stuff look like? Oh, what times tea? You know, I've interviewed prisoners that are easier to do that with than to interview. You know, suddenly we get into this relationship with God where it all just becomes very complacent.

God is really interested. Why pray? Because God wants to be part of what we do. You know, that's what this verse is saying, is that God knows us. He also knows what we need better than we know ourselves. So therefore, why not be in a conversation with him to actually gain what he wants to share with us? Therefore, it's logical to seek and to share and discuss our day. Two Chronicles said, for the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. Where wouldn't I want that affirmation and confirmation from God? You know, to hear that well done. It's well done, Clive. That's okay. You're doing well. You may have had a tough day, but you're doing well. Isn't that great when we hear that? This simply reiterates that God is actively interested in us and our daily needs to give us our daily bread as it prayed just before Jesus shares this thing with his disciples, giving us his life presence and power. By spending time daily in prayer and worship, we invite God in. God wants to hear from us. Secondly, next slide, is God does not change, prayer does not change God. It changes us. You know, I hope we aren't presumptuous to think we can change the character of God. I've been in a few prayer meetings where people have tried to change the character of God by telling him what his job should be. You know, okay, that's okay. John, I think you should be doing this. You know, you get that reply, are you sure? Are you really sure you want it that way? I remember many years back, there was the, it was really, it was when we had heavy snow and ice, and Russ and I were at the end of Russ's road. And we saw this car slipping slowly, uncontrollably down the road. And it was all sort of hands on deck, people got out. And there was a guy that stood at the side who said, oh, I wouldn't have brought, I wouldn't have brought a car out on a day like this.

[13 : 23] Thank you so much for that observation. God just doesn't want to stand by and just say, oh, I wouldn't have done that if I was you. God actually wants to get involved. That's this thing, prayer does not change God. It changes us when we allow him to be involved. God is our rock, a solid place and character on which we stand. This deep relationship with him changes us.

A great film that I love is *Shadowlands*, which is the story of C.S. Lewis. And if you remember, he fell in love in later life with this wonderful lady called Joy. And shortly after they fell in love and had that wonderful beginning of a relationship, Joy was diagnosed with cancer. And C.S. Lewis was very honest about this. He later wrote a book called *A Grief Revisited*. But again, in the film, what really struck me is that we can often come out with platitudes. And yet C.S. Lewis was really honest.

It doesn't change God, it changes me. It just flows out of me. And that's why so many Christians, I believe, so often walk away from God. It's because when their shopping list of prayers aren't seemingly answered the way in which we expect them to be, or at least the way we want them to be.

And if you ask a Christian if prayer was important, they will answer yes, of course it is. If I were to ask you if prayer, if you pray as much as you know you should, then your answer may probably be no.

The issue is that it should just flow out of us, just in an everyday conversation and part of our life with God. Because why? Because it doesn't change God, it changes me. Prayer without ceasing, as Paul encourages us to do. Prayer changes us. It opens up a new aspect that God wants to reveal in us. And for me personally, and I don't know about you, the thing that I find prayer helps is it helps me in my character. It helps grow character into me, godly character, in the way I think, in the way I react, in the way I respond. Well, how do I react to this person? How do I react to this situation?

[16:00] How do I react to this email that's just come in? Lord, would you show me? Because it will change me, it won't change you, but it changes me. Thirdly, prayer does not get our will done in heaven, it gets God's will done on earth.

In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to the Father, not my will, but yours be done. Why pray? Why pray? And I would suggest to you, it's about building trust. We want to build trust. We trust, we say, we trust in God. You know, when the chips are down, the question is, do we trust? In trust, if you get to know somebody really well, in a relationship with you, you build trust, you build relationship with them, and we trust him for God's will to reign in us and through us. How often do we want our own will to be done in our lives, but not God's will? I love that verse in Jeremiah, for I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope.

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you, and you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart, and I will be found by you, declares the Lord.

The thing that jumps out at me there is with all your heart. With everything that we do, we need to start putting our trust in the Lord's will for our lives. In Matthew 6.10, Jesus taught his disciples to pray, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I think it's important we tell God what it is that we think that we need, and then allow God to show us what we really need.

But, the heavy emphasis on the but, we need to listen to God and find out what he thinks and what he knows that we need. Not my will be done, but your will. Why pray? Simply to experience what God's will in your life. Russ has given me a really, thanks for the advert, Russ, for the thing, but the, I was quite humbled to be asked to do a podcast by a lady from ITV, and first of all, I said no, because I was so humbled, and she said, no, I really think people want to hear your story.

[18:36] And as I thought about this, it came back to me quite starkly, that I had to really ask what God's will was in my life. But what is your will in my life?

And God's will in my life at this time for Mandy and I was to sell our house, to take a dramatic cut in income, to trust God with my family's needs, to cut off what was a certain status I had in the community and in my job. You know, it was nuts. It just didn't, you know, honestly, God, you are asking what? But prayer, if we're honest about prayer, is seeking and asking and knowing what his good and perfect will is in our life. You know, and reflecting back now, whose will did I want to be accomplished?

I'm so glad it was God's will. I'm so glad it was God's will. Just to think what I could be doing now if I hadn't responded. You know, we really only have two choices, people. It's our will or God's will. And it's really great to ask him to check in and say, what's your will for my life today, Lord?

What is your good things that you've got for me? And finally, finally, prayer is not because God needs us, but because we need God. And that may seem quite obvious. In Isaiah 40, it says, all the nations are as nothing before him. They are regarded by him as less than nothing and meaningless because God made us to serve him, not for merely God to serve us. And that might come as a bit of a shock to some people who think that God is a sort of cosmic slot machine. You know, you just choose what you want and you put it in and you expect him to deliver in the way in which we've asked. I'm so glad God hasn't responded to my prayers in that way because I probably wouldn't have got what I really wanted. Our sense is quite, if you make asks of God, know that God is secure in who he is, that he will know what is good for you. In Galatians 6, it says, for if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. It's because God needs us. God needs us to work with him. God is not complete, but we are complete. God is not complete in us, but we are complete in him.

And in him, you have been made complete, it says in Colossians, and he is the head over all rule and authority. Trust him. Trust him. Prayer is the key to being made complete in Jesus Christ, I can assure you.

[21 : 49] And this happens through prayer. And I suggest strongly, this is why we pray. Not to inform God, not to change him to our way of thinking, not to get our will done, not because he needs us, but because we need him, love him, and we long to worship him.

At the end of our verse this morning, it talks about God knocking on the door. If you've been part of the Alpha course this time, on this one particular week, this was one picture that on our Alpha course that caused a lot of conversation. Because this picture was painted by Holman Hunt. It hangs in St.

Paul's Cathedral. I remember as an eight-year-old, it was my only school visit where we ever went, and we went to St. Paul's Cathedral. I remember gazing at this picture. So impressed was I, I bought a bookmark, and I still have it. But here in this picture that Holman Hunt had painted, is Jesus the light of the world, is Jesus stands at this door. And at this door, there is ivy all over it.

You will notice when you look at it, there is no handle on the outside. Jesus is inviting us to open the door. Jesus says, behold, I stand at the door and knock, and if any person opens it, I will come in and I will be with them. The invitation here with prayer is that Jesus longs to come in prayer, if we open the door, to come and meet with us, to fill us afresh with the power of his Holy Spirit, to engage with the light of the world, to illuminate our life, to bring light and life to the fullness of the situations in which we find ourselves in, to bring his peace and his presence and his fullness into what we do in our lives, and to allow us to worship him fully, to know a freedom that the world cannot give, to experience him, to know his heart, his life, his purpose for us. So my question is, why not pray?

We pray because it changes us.