Say A Little Prayer - 16th April 2023

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Preacher: Dave Moss

[0:00] Good morning. We've had an inspiring few months of talks on joy since Christmas. And then, of course, recently we've just been celebrating Easter. So it falls to me with this little slot on Lowesland Day to say something before we have our church meeting next week. So it's just a little slot here. So it's just a few thoughts this morning on prayer. It's such a big topic. There's no way I can do it justice at all. But if there's just one little takeaway for you here, I'll be delighted. So that's what we're going to look at this morning.

And please bear with me because these reflections come from different angles. But hopefully at the end, we'll have a chance to have a bit of discussion here and take a little time to break together. Now, I don't know if you were here the week that Ian was talking to us with a bit of science. You know, these people like to show off. And there we are. So we had this science here. And he was telling us about proton collisions and the release of quarks and gluons. Yeah. And it was truly amazing. And to be quite honest, quite hard to take in.
And then a few weeks later, Matt was at it. And he was telling us that the universe was so vast that it would take us four years and four months traveling at the speed of light just to get to the nearest star. Yeah? And a staggering 93 billion years traveling at the speed of light just across the known universe. That's what we got from Matt. And as he says that it's absolutely staggering. But this, my friends, is not the only way of looking at things. So I'm going to do a bit more science this morning. Okay.
We'll start with some basic questions. The sky is... In a world where it feels like nothing is as it seems... Blue. It's blue. Of course. Oh, the sky's blue.
The sky's blue. One plus one is... Two. Two. Two. Two. There's at least one truth we thought was indisputable. And the earth is... Flat.
[2:20] Flat. The earth is flat. My reality, my senses tell me that the earth is flat and stationary. Or so I thought. But for the people attending the first Flat Earth International Conference here in Cary, North Carolina, their earth is indisputably not round.

Everybody here can agree on absolutely one thing, which is it is not a globe. For centuries, a flat earth was accepted as certainty until science and sailboats said otherwise.
One of the rules of power is you never admit that there's someone bigger than yourself. But in 2015, this guy, Mark Sargent, posted his flat earth clues. Part of a series of clues that can help you get your head around both the design of the flat earth system we live in...
You're kind of the, like, father of this movement. Oh, my God. How would you... Don't do that. You're the one who sort of started it all. I did not invent flat earth. All I did was walk up to a door, point at it, say, you know what?
I think there's some really interesting things on the other side of this and check it out for yourself. If flat earth is a university, you know, FEA, then I would be the freshman recruiter.
[3:29] People have traveled from around... Actually, Mark would say across the flat world to attend. The first rule of flat club is you don't talk about flat club. Until now.

You know, I have a poem about that. It's right here. Amy Nicholson wrote a book of poetry about her flat earth journey. A few months flat and seven months to rally.
Kim Gurley came to the conference from Houston. I haven't really come out all the way yet. I'm still a little in the closet. The North Pole's in the middle. Lainey Inavali came from even farther.
I've mixed with quite a lot of flat earthers in New Zealand. You know flat earthers. I guarantee it. But you don't know who they are because they're afraid of talking about it. One, two, three.
We're not crazy! Like many modern movements, this one has grown in large part out of the internet. With rappers like Odd TV evangelizing to hundreds of thousands of subscribers.

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[4:28] No more living on a cartoon ball. And YouTube channels like... Globebusters. Encouraging skepticism about what you've been taught. For the serious students here at the conference...

This has got to a point now where it's becoming real. It all comes down to proof. When it comes to science, there's things you can test right now, right? Fire burns, water's wet, drop something, falls to the ground.
That appears to be gravity. Those are things you can test, right? But the curving horizon, the sloping sea level, the spin of the Earth... Unless you can see these phenomena with your own eyes, they may not be true.
A lot of people are going, this is crazy, right? But think about this. For the last 20, 25 generations, this is what we've told people. Unlike what we've been told in school, some flat earthers imagine the Earth looks like a snow globe.
Round, but not sphere. The North Pole is at the center of most flat Earth maps. With the ice of Antarctica holding everything in. So are you certain this is what the Earth looks like?
[5:31] Pretty sure. Almost. I mean, there are some details to be worked out, sure. But the basic concept is sound. Absolutely sound. And one thing, again, we absolutely know for a fact, this ain't it.

So those iconic blue marble images seen from space, flat earthers denounce them as fakes. You start seeing words like composite or animation or, you know, something that tells you this is not an actual photograph of the Earth.
Yes, question. So if you think you have questions... Feel free to line up and ask them while I'm reading the opening statement. The flat earthers have many, many more.
So there we have it. This is what the Earth really looks like. Who would have thought it? Flat as a pancake after all. And the video goes on to explain how the space program, rocket launches, moon landings are really a hoax.
And they didn't really land on the moon. It was just actors out to fool us. And we all really knew it was a mock-up in a TV studio, didn't we? And I was a great fan of Star Trek.
[6:40] So, and I used to build airfix models. So actually, it's pretty easy to see how they fooled us on that one. And the video also goes on to explain what the Bible says.

And the Bible teaches us that, you know, the Earth is flat. And there's no mention of the word globe in the Bible. So therefore, it must be flat.
And you can prove this quite easily. Get your spirit level out. And it proves everything's flat. You don't buy curved ones, do you? They're not out there.
So, Sean, you're laughing. But this is serious science we're talking about here. Last summer, I stood in front of this. It's impressive, isn't it?
Proof surely that the Earth is round. But I wasn't out in space. I was actually in a park. And that's what it looks like in the daylight. So it's pretty easy to see how you can con people believing that, you know, this painted balloon hung from the trees and the wood can fool people to thinking the Earth is actually round when it isn't.
[7:50] So, from an understanding of the Bible, this is how some people see things. So, I don't know how well you can see that from there. But you've got Earth in the middle line there.

And then the firmament, or the heavens up there in the top, chambers of the heavens. And the waters above the firmament. It's all in the Bible there. And then below, we've got shale or hell and the pillars of the Earth holding it up.
So that's how a flat Earth works. Heaven's up there. Hell's down there. Yep. That's how it is. And God, of course, is above all that.
He's way, way up there looking down on us as we get on with our lives down here. Have I played with your minds enough by now?
Have I made you think a little bit? Hang on, what's going on here? I think most of us would say there was enough proof, actually, to say that the Earth is indeed round. And that space travel is indeed real.
[8:52] But actually, many of us still believe in a flat Earth when it comes to our Christian faith. Many of us still believe in a flat Earth when it comes to our Christian faith.

We hold on to the idea that God is up there in heaven somewhere far away. Okay, he came down as a baby to see us for 30 years or so, and then has gone back up there to heaven.
And our job down here is to get a ticket to heaven so we can get up there to join him. Meanwhile, we just get on with our lives down here, hoping we do not end up in that other place down there.

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That's our job, it seems to be. And many people think like this and live their lives like this in this way of thinking.
The trouble is then, with modern science and the magnificence of the proton collision, is that it can give us the message that while all these things are true and fascinating, we end up feeling that God is too busy designing and maintaining these for the vast complex of the universe, rather than being bothered with us at all.
[10:17] If there's so much going on out there, God's got to be looking after it. What on earth would he be looking after me for? And if the known universe is so vast, then somehow the heavens, you know, if they're up there, and how many million years was it to get, then he must be even further away, beyond that.

And therefore God perhaps is even further away than I thought. And for many people, he remains distant and is not really interested in us.
This is indeed if we see heaven being far away from earth. And I think we need to think hard about our view of heaven and exactly where we think God is.
Where do we think God is? Yuri Gagarin, the first cosmonaut, speaking in 1961 about becoming the first human to enter space, is quoted as saying, I looked and looked, but I didn't see God.
He got above the firmament, so to speak, above the heavens. He was looking around for God and didn't see him anywhere. And it's this mistaken belief that God is somehow out there, away from us, in a distance.
[11:37] He's not here, he's out there. There is so much that could be said here, but perhaps that's a subject for another time. It is interesting to note that Yuri Gagarin later said, And also he said, An astronaut cannot be suspended in space and not have God in his mind and his heart.

So that's a bit of a turnaround, isn't it? Well then, why do you believe what you believe? Why do you pray the way you pray?
If we see God as far away and too busy for us, then this will affect how and why we pray. Why should we even bother to pray if God is so far away and removed?
You see, this is my problem. Somewhere in the back of my mind is the nagging feeling that God is indeed somewhere far off.
Busy looking after those in heaven, the whole of creation, and hopefully listening to the prayers of perhaps people who are in more need than me.
[13:06] God is so, so busy doing all these things. And if I think this, if I go along this road, then it translates into, God is a million miles away from my situation, so I wonder if I should even bother to pray at all.

And then if I do pray, then I am perhaps just hoping that God is listening, and I'm just hoping I've got the words right somehow. Some people think the opposite, actually.
Very, very much the opposite. And they think that, well, actually, Jesus is my best friend. He's great. He's my chum.
He's my pal. He's beside me all the time. He's not far, far away at all. He's my best chum. And actually, there's a problem with this kind of thinking, too, that he just becomes somebody who indulges you and says, well done, and yeah, I'll sort it out for you.
And we're missing the other part of him, the fact that God is here in all things and so on. So that's another problem if we just only see him as a mate.
[14:20] So then, why do you believe what you believe, and why do you pray the way you pray? I would argue it's time for a rethink about prayer.

What do we think is happening when we pray? And where do we think God is when we do pray? Here are some thoughts to get you started.
And I'm sorry, there's a lot of text on here, but I won't be referring to all of it. So in the middle there, after he had dismissed them, Jesus went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.
Later that night, he was there alone. So very simply, I'm sure we've read this lots of times, but when Jesus prayed, he often withdrew to a quiet place, to a thin place, some would say, where God's presence was tangible, real, and intimate.
He was then ready to face the things that followed. Very often he'd come down and there was something that needed sorting. How often do we do that?
[15:37] Simply withdraw to be with God in his presence here and now, just to get away. His presence is here in this very place God is invisible.

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Heaven is not visible, and yet God is present. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. God made manifest.
Isn't this what Jesus shows us time after time? From Romans. In verse 12, Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
The Apostle Paul tells us, in this letter to the Romans, that faithful prayer is part of love. It starts off, love must be sincere. Love is much more than an emotion.
The dynamic of love includes prayer. If you love someone, you pray for them. If love is genuine, it includes this faithful prayer.
[17:02] Hate what is evil, cling to what is good. Prayer is part of that process of good, overcoming evil. If we love, we will pray amongst other things.

Prayer is as much part of living together as sharing and giving. And again from Romans, Prayer brings us together with one mind, one voice to glorify God.
This is no remote God looking over us, but a God for whom prayer becomes the lifeblood of the Christian life, the breathing heart of the Christian community.
Prayer is the lifeblood of the Christian life, the breathing heart of the Christian community. The passage, May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind towards each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
From Ephesians, there's a lot of text there. Paul, Paul in the letter to the Ephesians wants them to know that thanks is a part of prayer. Thanking God for who they are as Christians.
[18:30] Prayer leads to the glory of Christian hope. Prayer deepens faith. Prayer leads to unimaginable blessings. From the screen, For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

I keep asking that God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope of which he has called you.
The riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people and is an incomparable great power for us who believe. And again from Ephesians, our prayers go to our universal Christ who is over all things.
And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.
And again from Ephesians, Paul addresses his prayer to a triune God, Father, Spirit, and Christ, calling on every aspect of a loving God.
[19:55] So not some remote being up there, but every aspect of a loving God, Father, Spirit, and Christ. A prayer that keeps us rooted and established in love. How often do we pray that?

To be rooted and established in love. This is no trivial stuff, but a passionate, heartfelt prayer that we may know the power of the Spirit and the indwelling of Christ.
And the last passage here. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.
Amen. God is able and willing to do all that Paul is praying for to fulfill God's infinite purpose and blessing.
I said I'd give you some thoughts and so I have, I hope. But now I'm going to ask you to do something.
[21:07] Okay, so this might be scary, but don't worry, the people around you aren't scary. They're nice. Okay. So I was going to ask you, I've got five to eight here, just to turn your chairs around and find some nice looking people.

If they don't look too nice, look the other way. But find some nice looking people and try and have a little conversation about this. Don't worry if you haven't got anything to say. It'd be nice to listen to what other people have to say.
But prayer essentially is a conversation with God. I think that's what we've learned. It's easy in principle, but why do so many people find that difficult? What are your thoughts on that?
Why do so many people find that difficult? And then perhaps one or two people might like to share what helps them to pray. And then I'll call you to order and I'll do a bit of feedback if that's okay.

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So would you like to find some friendly people and perhaps just have a little few minutes discussion on who you think the answers to that might be? Okay.
[22:10] If we could draw our conversations to a close, please. And I'm going to start by asking, you don't need to move your chairs back. We'll carry on sitting like that for a moment.

Has anyone got anything to share on why perhaps some people feel that prayer can be difficult? Any offerings? Perhaps it might not be people in here.
You might all find prayer a doddle and you're all finding it dead easy. It might be other people outside. Any thoughts? It's just a thought, but God, I ask you to put your hand up if you find prayer easy.
Is praying something that you have to work hard at or are you able to pray easily? My mother was 94.
She died a month later. So ever since I've been living alone. But throughout my life, I've always taught with God, everything, you know.
[23:15] I've always been with my mother and I'm single, everything like that. I've always been talking to God. I've never had any problem with God because talking to God is life.

It's like your breath. When you breathe, you breathe in and you breathe out. So prayer is just like that. Sometimes I admit that I get cross with God and I complain.
But the thing is, it's something that I do all the time because prayer is life. Were you able to tell us what helps you therefore to pray like that?
What helps you to do that? Well, the experiences. I'm always prompted by experiences. But every moment I, from the very moment I get out of bed, I say, thank you, Lord, I'm alive.
Thank you for, it's thankfulness. Thankfulness. That is the start of my day. I'm just thankful to God for existence and so on.
[24:15] That's really helpful. For a lot of people, they pray, they feel they don't get an answer and then they give up. You see what I mean? That's where I'm coming from on that one. Anyway. I think Noel summed it up then.

If anybody doesn't know Noel, it's his first time here. It's good to see him. I think as individuals, we do pray easily in one sense because we're just having a conversation with someone we love.
When we get into, when we come into church and we're asked to do this in small groups, it becomes more difficult because we're afraid that we're not going to say the right things.
So I think as individuals, it's easy for most folks to pray, but in small groups, it's more difficult. Thank you. I think there's a lot of truth in that, isn't there? I've wanted to say this for an awful long time, but about two years ago, I was in dreadful pain and the people of my house group know this and I didn't know what to do.
I couldn't lie down. I couldn't stand up. The drugs weren't working. And so I called out to God and I said, God, you're the only person who can help me with this.
[25:33] Please help me. And you know, almost seconds later, I fell asleep and I've never had the pain back. And to me, that says everything about God and prayer.

Thank you. Any other thoughts on why people find prayer difficult or what helps you to pray?
I think it's difficult sometimes because there's not that real person there in front of you. I mean, I could talk for England, you know, but I think it's more difficult in that sense.
But then I think as well that we forget that actually we're praying all the time. You know, when the Bible says pray without ceasing, and you're just like, how can we do that? You know, we've got to concentrate on our jobs or whatever.
But actually, I think it's just that relationship we know is there always. We are just throwing things up all of the time so it becomes a natural kind of reaction and like what's just been said, when you're here, you think, oh, I've got to say the right words or I'm ashamed to pray because I'm not saying that.
[26:37] And actually, it shouldn't be like that. It should just be a genuine, because God knows everything on your heart anyway. So it should just be that genuine conversation that just does go through your everyday life.

Anybody else? Just a very quick one. I find that there is a difference between my personal prayer and the prayer that I'm called upon to make prefaced by the words let us pray.
Because I don't necessarily know what the let us pray refers to. But I do know what my own prayers refer to. And sometimes I feel with let us pray, do we go through the motions rather than be able to

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communicate deeply with God?
What I'm about to say, I hope, is a word of encouragement. And yet, in a way, it sort of isn't, but it is. Many years ago, when I first gave my life to the Lord, I went to see a young man in hospital who was in fact, and did in fact die.
I prayed for that young man to live, and he didn't. And it broke my heart. But over the years, I've probably learned not to give up on it.
[28:04] we have no idea what that young man may have been like if he had lived. It might have been a good life, it may not have been.

But it did break my heart when he didn't live and he didn't deserve to die. He just, he just got sick and just died.
And it was very sad. Thank you. Just a few thoughts there from everyone. It may be, as you're listening to this, you're thinking, I wish I was like that person and I could just pray like that.
I wish I could wake up in the morning and just be in that thing. And I think, this is why I think we need to have a little bit of a rethink sometimes. Because obviously, some people do find prayer easy and other people don't.
All I would say, there isn't a queuing system up there. That was a well-worded prayer. I'll answer that one. Sometimes, as we've heard, it's just help.
[29:06] Sometimes it's just, I don't know what to pray. Sometimes it's, well, what's happening now? And I'm sure most of us could testify that we've prayed and prayed about something and we feel nothing's happened.

Or later, we realise something has. I don't know. It's such a big, big topic. But I hope I've just made you think a little bit differently this morning. I'm going to finish just by, if we put the slide up, let us pray.
What I'm going to ask you to do is just stay where you are. I'm actually going to say something and then we're just going to sit in silence just for a minute or two. And then at the end of it all, I'll ask us all to say a prayer together.
Okay? And I've just put some suggestions here. So, close your eyes if you wish. Hold your palms open if you wish. Whatever you feel comfortable with. But just, let's pray together.
Prayer doesn't need to have lots of words. Lord, grant us the ability to pray and listen.
[30:13] Listen. Lord, enfold our shared community here at St. John's with love and prayer.

Lord, help us to be a part of the wider community and be a blessing to it.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Remember all those affected by the war in Ukraine and indeed in all areas of the world where there is conflict.
We bring before you all those who are struggling and unwell. We're going to finish by saying this prayer together.
[32:27] And often when we say prayers together, it's easier to use words like this because we can come behind it. But as you go through it, just look at the words and think, yes, that's my prayer too.

If it isn't, that's fine. But if you feel that. So let's say together, Lord, we offer you ourselves this day for the work you want accomplished, for the people you want us to meet, for the word you want to be uttered, for the silence you want to be kept, and the places you want us to enter, for the new ways you want pioneered.
Go along with us along the way, Lord. Enable us to realize your presence at all times and in all places. Our loving Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

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