

Awe for Prayerless days

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. My name's James. Nice to see you this morning. I'm the kind of person that has large, crazy, and sometimes over-the-top and very big harebrained schemes.

And my wife is very good to me. She often brings me down to earth, no, you can't do that. That's just a little bit silly, that idea. No, that's not practical. And it was just over four years ago that I had another of these crazy, large, harebrained schemes.

I'd seen a post on Facebook that there was this guy called Sam Lowe leaving St. Paul's Chatswood. And I thought, we used to be at St. Paul's Chatswood. Wouldn't that be...

I wonder, I wonder if I got in contact with Steve, I wonder if they're looking to replace Sam. So I got in contact with Steve, had a conversation with him over a lovely lunch nearby in Chatswood.

And now we've been here for four years. I took this idea to my wife going, I wonder how my wife's going to respond to this large, crazy, harebrained scheme.

[1:07] You know, what if we did this big thing and moved from one side of Sydney to the other side of Sydney? I wonder what would happen if we took our kids out of school and moved them to another school. Very big change.

And my wife on this occasion said, yeah, let's do that. That's a great idea. Let's go. And Sam was very excited. Thank you, sister. But sometimes I think, you know, sometimes I keep my crazy harebrained schemes inside because I've learned to just tone down a little.

But I wonder if we do the same thing with God. What kind of requests do we bring him? Do we only bring him small and manageable requests because I don't know about those big ones?

Maybe he's not going to answer those. And if we do, if we only bring small things to God, what does it say about our view of him? What does it say about our relationship with God if we only bring him small things?

I wonder if the way we view God impacts the way we pray. If I only have a small view of God, I'm only going to bring him small requests.

[2:18] God, you know, help me find a parking spot. God, please help the rain to stop. Maybe that's a big prayer, actually, in this season. But I wonder if we have a big, grand, and incredible view of God, we will pray prayers in line with that.

Last week, we started a series seeking to restore our awe of God as we head towards Easter. And we saw the value of regularly gathering the week-in-week-out rhythm that God has designed for us as we are people who consume things all week to come back and be people who consume Jesus in the Lord's Supper as part of that, but are dependent upon God.

And the challenge for us today is to consider how we view God and how we pray prayers in line with that. As we seek to restore our awe of God, I think it's important for us to get our prayer right.

And we're going to do that today by looking at the last hours of Jesus' life as he is in the Garden of Gethsemane and comparing Jesus' prayer with the disciples' prayer or even the lack of prayer.

So let me start by doing that. Let me pray for us and we're going to have a look at the Bible.

Heavenly Father, I thank you so much that we do indeed have the privilege of being able to talk to you.

[3:40] Thank you for your word to us this morning. Help us to know how big and awesome you are and help us to pray in line with that. Amen.

Firstly, this morning, we're going to have a look at the disciples' prayer. So have your Bibles open. We're in Matthew 25. Is it 25? 26, Flora. Thank you, dear sister.

Matthew 26. Matthew 26, verse 36. And so Jesus is facing the last painful hours before his crucifixion. He knows he's about to be arrested.

He knows he's about to have a mock trial and then be executed. And so he goes to pray. Matthew 26, verse 36. Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane.

And he said to them, sit here while I go over there and pray. And he took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him. And he began to be sorrowful and troubled. And then he said to them, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

[4 : 44] Stay here and keep watch with me. Jesus is overwhelmed with emotions. He's sorrowful. And he asks his disciples to help him. This is the Jesus who has raised the dead, who has healed people.

He calls God Father and he asks his three closest friends, Peter, James and John, to stay with him, to help him, to keep watch, to be alert, to bear this burden in some way with him.

But the heartbreaking truth is that they can't. Verse 39. Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, my father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.

Yet not as I will, but as you will. Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. Couldn't you men watch with me for one hour? He asked Peter. Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. This is painful to read. The disciples can't stay awake. It's another aspect of the sad story of betrayal of everyone departing Jesus.

[5 : 56] Even in these last moments, they're betraying him. He asks them to watch and pray so they wouldn't be tempted. Jesus is telling them to do the exact same thing that he is doing.

Jesus is praying, I don't want to be tempted. I don't want to sin. I've got this crucifixion coming up. God, help me. And he's saying to his disciples, don't be tempted.

Jesus is praying to God that he would obey God. That he would not fail God. And he's wanting his disciples to do the same thing. To pray in line with that.

But they fail. They fail three times. Again in verse 33. And again in verse 45. Their flesh has let them down.

They've struggled physically to watch and be alert. It says in verse 43 that they were sleeping because their eyes were heavy. They were physically tired.

[6 : 55] It kept them from doing what Jesus was doing, praying. I'm sure we've all had that feeling of having heavy eyes. Hopefully, you know, whether it's been watching a movie late at night, I've definitely had this experience of micro sleeps happen while I'm driving.

That's a terrifying one. You know, open the window, get some cold air. My wife's always asking me, why are you slapping yourself in the face? Oh, no reason. Or even praying late at night.

You know, trying to get through your prayers at night. And just your eyes, you're just going to sleep.

You know, those moments driving, they're pretty bad moments. But this is a really terrible moment. Jesus has bared his soul to his three closest friends. My soul is overwhelmed to the point of death.

And they didn't have the ability to read the importance of this situation.

They didn't understand what was about to happen. Even though Jesus has told his disciples that he's going to the Father, that they're going to all for the way, they didn't heed his warning.

[8 : 10] I wonder if it's because their view of themselves is still too big at this point. The disciples are still full of pride. Peter, in particular, his view of himself is too big.

Only in the verses before what was read, Jesus says to him, you are going to fall away. And Peter says, no, I'm going to go with you even if it means I die.

And then when Jesus is being arrested, Peter tries to fix the problem. He tries to save Jesus by pulling out a sword and cutting off a servant's ear. Peter still thinks he's in control.

Even though Jesus has told him, you're going to fall away, and then I'm going to be the one that saves you, his view of himself is still too great.

And his view of God is too small. And so he's too self-sufficient, too self-confident. And where does God fit? Well, Peter has heavy eyes.

[9 : 10] A right view of ourselves leads to a right view of God. When we know who we are, then we can have awe of God. When we know how small and humble we really are, it's so much easier to understand how big God is.

We can't be in awe of God when we think that we are self-sufficient, that we have self-control, that when we are in control of things. It's one of those things that happens in movies.

There's this very common trope that happens in movies, that there's this arrogant character, and they think they know everything, and you're just like, oh, I really want to see this person be knocked

down a couple of pegs.

They're going around saying they know everything. Peter needs to learn this lesson of humility to be able to understand what God is doing. The disciples' lack of prayer here indicates their view of themselves, their view of their situation, and their view of God.

They're still acting self-sufficiently, and they're not dependent yet on God's grace. And they will be. Jesus will restore Peter, but that happens later. And so we're going to compare the disciples' prayer, or lack of prayer, with Jesus' prayer.

[10:28] And we very briefly looked at Jesus' prayer, but we're going to spend some more time looking at that now. So we're going to go back to verse 37. Back to 37, we're going to look at Jesus' prayer. Verse 37, He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him.

Then he said to them, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch. Jesus knows what's about to happen. He is sorrowful, and his posture says that. Verse 39, He fell on his face to the ground and prayed, my Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.

He falls on his face, sorrowful, while his disciples are lying down sleeping. And he implores God three times, take this cup away from me, yet not as I will, but as you will.

So what does this tell us about Jesus' view of God? Well, two things, I think, in particular. It's both very personal, and it's also full of awe.

[11:35] It's personal because Jesus, even as he's about to die, still calls God his Father. Jesus prays very intimate prayers to God.

It's one of the key reasons that the Jewish leaders want to kill him, because he continues to call God his Father. And so they want to kill him for that. And yet he prays prayers that are full of awe to God.

He has the right view. He knows who God is, and he is going to obey him. He knows how powerful and sovereign God is, so much so that Jesus can pray big, radical requests.

Jesus can pray, if it's possible, take this cup away from me. God, if it's possible, bring salvation another way. God, I know you are the one who saves.

I know that you are both just and generous. I know you are full of grace. Is it possible that there's another way that you can work out salvation? Jesus has such a high view of God, he can actually say to God, is there another way?

[12:44] You can't bring that kind of prayer to God if you have a small view of him. Jesus can only say, not my will, but your will, because he has a very large view of God, of God's love and compassion, his holiness and his sovereignty.

That even though this is going to be incredibly difficult for Jesus, he knows that God is good.

Knowing the awesome God means Jesus prays differently to the disciples.

Knowing his grace and wisdom and power and love means he can ask for big things. God, is it possible that we can do this another way? But if not, I'm going to submit to you and I will obey.

Because Jesus has been raised from the dead, because he has given us his spirit, because he has brought us into his family, we can pray big, radical prayers too.

We can pray, God, I know you are generous. God, I know you are the one who brings salvation. Will you save my friend? Don't let them die without knowing you.

[13:55] God, I know you are powerful and wise and sovereign, and it seems impossible, but I know that you are in control. God, bring an end to COVID. But also, God, not my will, but yours.

Our third point this morning, prayer and awe. What's the connection here between our prayer and our view of God? Our awe of him. Well, when our awe is restored, we pray prayers in line with our view of God.

If we only have a small and insignificant view of God, we'll only have small and insignificant prayers. But when our view of God is in awe of him, so will be our prayers.

I wonder if the way to do this is actually by getting our prayers right to build a bigger picture of God first. I wonder if speaking rightly corrects our view of God.

I think it's almost like how I'm trying to teach my children respect, not by saying, respect people.

None of them are looking at me. That's fine. But instead, teaching them, you know, you say, please.

[15:08] You say, thank you. This is how you do it. I'm going to teach you the practice of it, and you will get respect for other people. I wonder what our prayers are like in this season.

I wonder if we did a quick poll how our prayers would be. Are they distracted prayers? Are they short, quick?

Are they non-existent prayers? Do we pray quickly at mealtimes, but not for too long so the food doesn't get cold? Do we just bring random ad hoc requests to God as we're going throughout the day, you know, that, God, I'd really need a car park because, you know, it's school holidays now and everybody's going to the shops.

God, help me, you know, kill this mold in my house. Maybe that's a big prayer too. Or do we even pray like the disciples with heavy eyes, just with great difficulty?

We need prayer like Jesus, prayer that has a right view of God and is very personal. And so I think, firstly, I want to come to how Jesus teaches us to do this in the Lord's Prayer.

[16:19] The Lord's Prayer is a wonderful prayer. It is so instructive for how to pray. And it starts by getting the address to God right. How does it start?

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done. It's so wonderful and simple for us.

You can teach this to a child. This is a prayer I still pray regularly. It starts with a posture of awe. You are a father and you are in heaven.

You are hallowed, which means holy. You are the boss of the world and your will should be done. This is such a prayer that separates us and him.

God, you are so much bigger than me. I should be following you. It's a prayer that is wonderful to use.

[17:19] I've definitely used it and it takes me out of the bad habit of just praying for immediate needs and it reminds me of who my God is.

One of the things I've done in the past with the Lord's Prayer is spend time praying through each line and I can preach another sermon right here on the Lord's Prayer but I'm not going to do that. I'm going to put that there. I think we did recently. We spent some time going through the Lord's Prayer and it was wonderful. Another structure of prayer that I've used is the word acts.

A-C-T-S. It's a structure. Adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Asking for stuff. And again, I think it's really helpful because it starts in a place of going, God, you are awesome.

Let me adore you. I want to do what a lot of the Psalms do and just talk about how wonderful you are. And then, as we've done today, acknowledge that I'm not like you and I need to confess but I want to say thank you and then ask for things.

[18:21] I think it's a helpful structure. But what would it actually look like for us to sit in that first letter in adoration? What would it look like to pray prayers in line with God's awesomeness?

To pray prayers reflecting on His grace, His wisdom, that He's everywhere, that He's in sovereign control, that He has great and boundless love and that He's made the world, that He's eternal. I wonder if we spent more time praying prayers in line with that. I wonder how we would grow as disciples.

I wonder if we were praying prayers like that. We might even just be able to pray prayers in line with how awesome God is, how in control He is. And then, when we spend some time remembering that, maybe we're not even going to ask for anything because we're going to remember that He's trustworthy and that, you know what, I know God knows what I need and so I don't even need to ask for them.

A little while ago, one of my kids asked me a question that just stopped me in my tracks. They asked at breakfast time, hey dad, can we have food today? And I just went, what do you mean?

[19:43] I think it was just the way they worded the question because we don't ration food in our household. My children don't have to come to me with stamps, you know, food rations or anything like that.

I said, I was actually just getting you breakfast, just give me three seconds, you can have food. But I wonder if that's actually how we bring prayers to God. God, I desperately need these things and God's like, like I know what you need.

It's actually okay. You're actually praying for really simple things. I've got you. You don't need to fret about these things. And that actually frees us up to pray for much bigger radical things.

God knows the things we need, but I wonder if far too often we're just praying for the very small things. And that is really good. God wonderfully calls us to come to him like children and pray childlike prayers.

But I think one of my issues has been I think I've gotten stuck praying those childlike prayers. So to help me this week move away from just asking for those immediate small picture things, small prayers, I've been using the act structure of prayer, but to try and spend more time meditating on God, I've needed help because I'm really poor at this.

[21 : 08] I don't know where to go. Go and read some Psalms if you're like me. Go read some Psalms. They've got wonderful, wonderful ways to pray to God and his awesomeness.

But because my brain is a bit of a wet sieve, I actually need a structure of prayer to help me. And so I've come up with one this week. Ali's going to put it on the screen for me. It is the word awesome. And I really like this graphic as well. The word is awesome. And the love heart there is important. It's an O, but it's actually really important with this acronym. So the structure for me this week has been to meditate on God's, A, his amazing grace.

Secondly, his wisdom. Then, that God is everywhere. Meditate that God is sovereign and in control. And then this was the letter that I spent so long trying to get this acronym right. It was very difficult for me. The O is a love heart. God's love. His boundless love.

[22 : 11] M is that he is the maker of all things and E is that he is eternal. I've been using this this morning. I used M this morning. I got to church and I spent some time in prayer and I spent some time meditating that God is the maker of all things.

And I found it a really helpful way to remember how big my God is. That, you know, we looked a little while ago, Psalm 8, God, it talks about God making with these fingers.

He intimately made the galaxy, sun, stars, moon, ants, my organs. And then, and I was, again, I was just blown away by the size of God.

How I want to have a deeper prayer life. And I know what will happen when I pray to an awesome God who, let me go through these letters again if you're writing them down, who has amazing grace for us.

Who is wise. He is so wise. He, he is everywhere. He knows everything that's going on. He is sovereign and in control of all things.

[23 : 20] He loves. He has boundless love. He's the maker of all things and he is eternal. My desire is that as I pray this, I'll grow deeper in trust of him, deeper in knowledge.

And I'll be able to trust him with the small things I pray and then like Jesus pray, radical big prayers. Jesus' prayer here is a wonderful balance for us.

A balance of awe and intimacy. Jesus obeys God's call but also calls him father. I heard a story recently of a royal, a king holding court, making decisions on people's lives.

There's, you know, armed security there. People speaking in hushed tones around the king.

Countries bringing requests for aid and allegiance. When suddenly, a screaming child runs in, straight past the security, straight up to the monarch and jumps on the king.

Only to be greeted by a hug and a child asking the parent, the king, what's for lunch? This is true of God.

[24 : 32] We are called to run to him. We have incredible access to our wonderful king. We can come to him like that child. We can come to him and bring all of the requests because Jesus died on the cross and was raised to life.

There is no barrier. But I wonder if we only bring him those small things, those small requests.

We can come to him like a child but it doesn't mean we only need to pray childlike requests. We run the risk of missing out on how awesome our God is and how powerful and generous he is.

I know there is at least one person here today that has burdens on their back that is carrying anxieties. I know that there are people here today struggling.

I know I have been recently. There's been a burden on my back and that's been my youngest son, Micah, who only two days ago got his first vaccine because he's only just recently turned five.

[25 : 34] And for me, hello my son, he's giving me a sour look. For me, this whole year, ever since I had COVID in January, there's been a weight on my shoulders.

When are my kids getting vaccinated? When are they going to have that protection? And then going months waiting for him to be five. There's been this underlying sense of uneasiness and fear and I don't even want to think about it.

But our God wants us to trust him in uncertain situations. Our God wants to heal broken hearts. He wants to see lives changed.

He wants to see addiction ended and relationships healed and friends saved. He wants to see relationships between families and children and parents healed. We have a God who wants us to bring big prayers to him.

So let's pray to this awesome God right now. Dear God, we thank you that you are indeed awesome. We thank you for your amazing grace to us.

[26 : 44] That you would choose to love us even though we are small and insignificant. That we don't deserve anything good from you.

We thank you for your wisdom that you know everything that is going on and you have a good plan. Thank you, Lord, that you are sovereign.

That you are in control. Lord, help us to trust you. Lord, thank you that you are loving, that you have boundless love.

God, we thank you that you made us, that you know how we are to be and that you know what the good life is to look like following you. Help us to live that life, Lord.

And Lord, we thank you that you are eternal and that you invite us to be with you forever. God, grow our picture of you and help us to pray big prayers.

[27 : 47] Help us to come to you with childlike faith, totally dependent on you. but Lord, help us to give you the burdens of our lives because we know that you love us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.