

Prayer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 September 2012

Preacher: Sam Low

[0 : 00] As Chris already said, we are launching into three preacher's choice passages, if you like, over the next couple of weeks. And I decided today that we would have a look at prayer.

Prayer is something that I personally need to grow significantly in, but it is something worth wrestling with for all of us, I thought. So I'm not speaking today as somebody who is on top of it, but someone who hopefully, like you, desires to get better at it and to utilise the gift that God's given us.

So how about we pray and ask that God will help all of us as we work into it. Father God, we thank and praise you for your incredible love for us.

We thank you for your grace that we were reminded of this morning by Josh, that you use weak and unworthy vessels like us to achieve your purposes. And Lord, I ask that you would use me in that way this morning.

I pray for all of us that we would have soft, teachable hearts to hear you speak. Lord, and ultimately we ask that you would be glorified as our lives are transformed. Amen. We have a unique ability to transform something that is given to us as a gift into something that we think we are entitled to.

[1 : 12] I've noticed this in a whole bunch of different spheres of life, but in particular, in my previous ministry job, I was working in a church in Castle Hill. And we took all of our kids away for a camp in summer.

And it was quite a big camp. We had over 400 people go away for the week. And part of the week away was leadership training for our just graduated year 12s. And we called them Servant Squad.

They referred to themselves as Slave Squad. But we went for the more biblical word of servant. And basically their job for the week was we wanted them to know that leadership is hard and we wanted them to know that it involves doing the jobs that no one else wants to do.

So for them, camp started a day early when they had to drive down to the campsite and turn an empty gymnasium into an auditorium to facilitate meetings for 400 people. They had to, you know, abseil up onto the rafters to hang speakers so that we could have a sound system.

They had to put all the chairs out. But during the week, they did all of our mealtimes. They would be the ones in the kitchen. They would be the ones setting up. They would be the ones cleaning up. And whenever they had spare time, we would invent jobs for them to do.

[2 : 20] One year, they spent seven days putting bark on the garden. Even though it already had bark, it needed a bit of a freshen up. So they were shoveling bark into bins, walking it to the different parts of the gardens throughout the campsite, and then spreading it out.

All along the way, opening the Bible to be reminded of what leadership looks like. But one of the interesting side effects of this Servant Squad program that we had, which was a really great thing, was that after a couple of years, we got to the point where kids on camp didn't want to do anything.

It used to be normal that as a kid, you went on camp, and somewhere in the week, you would have to help clean up after a meal. You would be on an orderly's roster. And we thought, what a great way to bless them by taking that away and having some people serve them.

And it was amazing how a few years down the track, when we designed a special dinner for Servant Squad to say thank you, the one night out of seven where they didn't have to do orderly's, and the complaints we got from kids, because one time out of 21 meals, they had to go into the kitchen for 15 minutes to just wash their plates off, put them into the dishwasher.

It is incredible how we can take something that is a gift and suddenly think that it's something we deserve, something we're entitled to. I think that is the way that we have kind of taken the gift of prayer.

[3 : 34] We have this thing that God has given to us, this access to himself, and somewhere in our minds, we have shifted from thinking, what a privilege that I can speak to the creator of the universe.

And we have thought, why isn't he listening? Why isn't he answering with what I want, when I want at this particular time? Why is he whinging about the way that I pray? We have this sense that he should listen to me.

I've got important things to say. There's major things happening in my life. I mean, what, has he got better things to do? And we take this gift, and suddenly we pervert it, and it becomes something that we think is a right.

But thankfully, God challenges us in his word, and I want to have a look at the passage that Wendy read out for us, and hopefully a passage that is fairly familiar for many of us, because in it, Jesus teaches us how we should pray.

Say that again. He teaches us how we should pray, not necessarily what we should pray. The Lord's Prayer is a good prayer to pray out loud, but it begins in verse 9.

[4 : 43] This is the prayer he used to teach his disciples how to pray, not what to pray. So, simple things. We're going to go... There's two points. Because I'm time poor, and I need to follow Josh's fantastic example of word efficiency, I'm going to keep it very simple.

First thing we need to remember about prayer is that, one, it is all about God. Sounds simple, but have a look. Verse 9. This, then, is how you should pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. There's two incredible tensions wrapped up in that verse there, which we need to carry together when we come before God in prayer.

Firstly, God is our Father. We have a free access to Him, an intimate access to Him, but that doesn't change the fact that He is hallowed, that He is holy, that He is mighty, that He is majestic, that He is creator, that He is judge, that He is completely other than us, that His perfection is so complete that for us in our sinful state to come near Him would be for us to burn up and be consumed.

The whole Old Testament reminds us that there is a necessary distance between a holy God and sinful people. All of Israel's worship, all of their gatherings, were mediated.

[6 : 01] They had priests between them and God because God was so holy that He would destroy them. They had sacrifices to try and appease their mistakes and His holiness.

Isaiah, in chapter 6 of Isaiah, feels that he is ruined when he lays eyes on God because he can see that God is perfect and He is not. And he knows that it would be good and right for God to destroy him simply for having seen the perfection of God.

We need to remember and we need to be reminded that when we come to pray, when we open our mouth to speak to God, we are not just speaking to our Heavenly Father.

We are, but He is still the Holy Creator God. I remember, it's quite a few years ago now, but I remember when President Obama had just become president.

Now, like him or hate him, he had just become one of the most powerful men in the Western world. He suddenly was the commander-in-chief of one of the most significant military forces in the world.

[7 : 04] He had the power to do a whole bunch of harm and a whole bunch of good. But I remember a picture, it was a news story or something, and it wasn't him speaking to camera, it was just footage of him.

And he was chatting to some other politicians, but his daughters came up to him. And at that point, he stopped talking to those politicians and he played with his kids for just a second.

And I remember looking at it thinking, wow, those girls are so lucky. They get free access to the most powerful man in the Western world. They can call him dad, and I'm pretty sure no one else gets away with that.

They get to just run up to him and hug him when he's in the middle of stuff because they have a special relationship with him and they are entitled to his access in a way that no one else is because they are his children.

But that doesn't change who he is. It doesn't change the power that he has. It doesn't change the significance of him being president. It's just that they are in a special relationship with him that means they get to interact with him in a unique manner.

[8 : 06] But he is still the president with his finger on the trigger of nuclear weapons. And it is helpful for us to realize that when we come to pray to our heavenly father, which is a special, privileged relationship where we can run and we can call him dad and we can hug him and we can know that he is willing to listen and eager to listen, that doesn't change who God is.

He is still the God who made us. He is still the God who is perfect in every way. He is still the God who will not let the guilty go unpunished. He is still the God of absolute holiness and inapproachable light.

He is still God. Secondly, in being all about God, verse 10, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Don't underestimate what is said in those two lines. That is a scary prayer to pray. It's a great prayer to pray, but when you say your kingdom come, you are saying Jesus come back and everything that goes with that.

You are inviting Jesus to come back and subdue his enemies and inaugurate his kingdom for those who belong to him. That is an exciting day, but that is a terrifying day for those who do not know the King of Kings.

[9 : 25] That is a scary prayer to pray, but it is a great prayer to pray because Jesus encourages us to. But understand the weight of it. So often we go through the motion of saying the Lord's Prayer in church without maybe realizing the significance of what we say.

When you pray for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven, are you actually prepared for what that will might cost you? When you pray for God's will to be done, are you praying, God, do whatever you want with me, even if that means taking everything away from me like you did Job so that you can be glorified?

Is that a prayer you want answered? Because that's what you're saying when you say your will be done. You're saying, God, whatever you want for your purposes, your way, because you're God and I'm not.

We need to be very aware of what we say when we pray because prayer is all about God's agenda. It's all about who He is. It's all about what He wants to do and we're reminded in those just two lines, your kingdom come, your will be done, that prayer is powerful.

I mean, it seems almost trivial to pray for the little things. We pray for a parking spot. We pray for good weather for our picnic. We pray for all these things and look, they're not bad things.

[10 : 43] They're good things but do you ever think maybe God is sitting up on His throne and thinking, is that all? That's easy. Haven't you got something significant that you want me to do?

The world is mine. I made it. Everything is accountable to me and I'm encouraging you to pray for my kingdom. I'm encouraging you to pray for everything. There is a challenge in this prayer to lift our eyes beyond our immediate.

There's nothing wrong with praying for your sick auntie or uncle or husband or wife or grandson. Those are good prayers but God has a bigger vision for the part that prayer might play in our life.

He wants us to be desperate for His desire. He wants us to see nations that don't know Him yet and come before Him and beg Him to do the miraculous. He wants us to look for the completely unlovable, unsavable, for the Catherine Devonies of the world and He wants us to see His desire that she might come to know forgiveness and salvation and He wants that to fill our prayers.

His kingdom, His will, prayer is always about God. We're encouraged in Ephesians 3 that God can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine and we have the smallest requests.

[11 : 59] We have a catchphrase that we use in our youth ministry team which is ask big and expect bigger. prayer. Let's lift our eyes to what God sees when He looks at the world and what His desire is and know that He can do immeasurably more than even that.

We firmly believe in our youth ministry that we have the teenagers that God can and will use to transform the earth. Not to transform our church, not to transform our suburb, to transform the earth.

That's what we're asking God to do and we know He can do more. So we're asking big and we're expecting bigger because prayer is about God it's not about me. Prayer is about what He wants it's not about what I want.

Prayer is about what He can do not what I think He can do. God is unlimited in His power and we need to lift our eyes and remember that this gift of prayer is a connection to the supreme being and utilize that incredible gift.

First one was prayer is all about God. Second one, this then is how you should pray. The Lord's Prayer, verse 9 again, this then is how you should pray.

[13 : 08] Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

How should you pray? Regularly. Give us today our daily bread. Just catch that. Today, what I need for today.

It might include bread but that phrase is kind of whatever you need to be alive today and to do what God needs you today, ask today for what you need today which means tomorrow you're going to need to ask tomorrow for what you need tomorrow and the next day you're going to have to ask again.

God is saying prayer is not a one-off God can you just cover me from here on in and I probably won't need to sit down and pray anymore. Now that's a valid prayer and God can quite capably answer that but that's not how prayer works.

Prayer is an opportunity for us to come before God and admit that we need Him. It's not even that in praying we begin to need Him. We need Him. He sustains all things.

[14 : 11] Prayer is His gift to remind us that we need Him. It's His gift for us to be able to talk to Him and just sit down and say God I actually can't do anything without you. I need you for sunshine for the picnic.

I need you for oxygen so I can breathe and be alive. I need you for energy to do my job. I need you to sustain me for anything and everything because all things come from the hand of our Creator.

So if you need anything He is the place that you can get it. So you should go to Him regularly and ask Him. This prayer is so all encompassing.

It includes material things. It includes spiritual things. There in verse 11 to 13 you've got daily bread but then you've also got the forgiveness of debts and debtors. You've got leading away from temptation. What should you be praying for?

Everything. Anything. Pray for that parking spot. Pray for Catherine Devaney. Pray for those struggling with hunger and oppression and suffering. Pray for sickness. Pray for money.

[15 : 09] Pray for health. Pray for the unsaved. Pray for an end to poverty. Confess your sin. Pray for wisdom. Pray for strength when you're struggling. Pray that you can resist temptation. Pray in thankfulness. Pray to praise God.

Pray for everything because when we ask we exalt God. We say God you are the one who gives me everything. You are the one that I need for my life.

I remember when I was younger as a teenager being told asking is great in prayer but don't ask too much. You need to make sure you balance out the asking with the thanks as if God needs to be kind of placated if we're going to ask for things.

There's lots of acronyms for prayer. Things like acts, adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication which no one ever understood so we called it shopping list. And it had to come last.

You had to make sure you'd done your adoration, your confession, your thanksgiving before you gave God your shopping list. And look, I understand the sentiment and it is good for us to praise God and do all those sort of things but asking is what this prayer that Jesus teaches is full of.

[16 : 15] Have a look at it. Your kingdom come. He's saying God, God, please bring your kingdom. That's a request. Your will be done. Give us our bread. Forgive us.

Lead us. Deliver us. It's asking. It's requests. You do praise God. You do adore God when you ask him for things because what you're saying is God, you're the one who provides.

You're the good God who gives. You're the heavenly Father who loves me enough to want to give me good things. Asking is good and right and appropriate and it shows that we are depending on God.

We need Jesus for everything. For breath. For life. And of course for doing God's will. I firmly believe after reflecting on this prayer and reflecting on scripture that fundamentally the beginning of sin is not praying.

Say that again. Fundamentally I believe that the beginning of sin is not praying because the second you choose not to pray you reject God as the one that you need.

[17 : 33] You reject him as the one who sustains you. You reject him as the one who holds all of the earth in his hands. You reject him as the one to whom you are accountable for your whole life and you become self-dependent which is sin.

Prayer could not be more significant. It is a gift from God to us for our sake. He is sovereign. He knows what we're going to ask. This passage even says it.

Don't babble like the pagans. They think they'll be heard because of their many words. Verse 8. Do not be like them for your father knows what you need before you ask. He doesn't give us prayer so that we can remind him of things that are going on.

He dwells in us and he knows us intimately but he gives us prayer so that we might be reminded that we need him. So that we might verbalize that we need him.

So that we might express that we need him. How do you pray? Pray regularly because you need Jesus always.

[18 : 40] Secondly pray with integrity. It's really easy to say things without actually having any meaning or weight behind those words. I remember as a teenager occasionally I would have a romantic relationship that didn't work out the way that I anticipated that it would at the start.

As a teenager for me a long romantic relationship was about three weeks. That's not what I set out to do but that's just the way it panned out. And I remember the conversation that you would have as a relationship would break down.

And it's amazing the words that you would say in order to try and prevent tears on the other side of the conversation when in reality it's not exactly what you were thinking. Phrases like I'm just not ready for a relationship right now.

It's not you it's me. Now when I say I'm not ready for a relationship what I mean is until I find somebody who I actually like I'm not ready for a relationship right now.

And when I say it's not you it's me I mean it's you who makes me annoyed. So you can actually say the words but there's no integrity behind them.

[19 : 52] You don't mean it. It's like the kid who says sorry when they get caught waits for you to leave and starts doing exactly the same thing. It matters that we pray with integrity.

That what we are saying with our words reflects the posture of our heart. In verse 12 we are encouraged to pray forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

If we are going to approach God requesting and embracing and rejoicing in his grace and forgiveness to us we are challenged here that to ask for something that we are not willing to offer is inconsistent.

Prayer is not a vending machine for us simply to gain things. Prayer is a means of us growing closer to God and part of that is our heart being shaped to reflect him as well.

It's not that us forgiving others earns our forgiveness from God in prayer. It's not like if you have failed to forgive someone and you come and pray and ask God for forgiveness he will say no. But there is this sense that as we are forgiven by God we begin to lose the ability to not show forgiveness.

[21 : 02] Suddenly we realise we are completely unworthy selfish sinful despicable human beings who God loves anyway and it gets really hard to look down on other people. We need to pray with integrity as we come to God and request his goodness we need to reflect on our own lives parts of our lives that may not line up with what it means to follow Jesus.

We need to be willing to confess honestly and openly where we've fallen short and we need to cry out for God's guidance willing to pay the cost when he guides us maybe where we didn't want to go.

When you ask for God's will to be done do you say those words with integrity ready to follow wherever he might when you ask him to use your life as he pleases do you mean it and if not confess it acknowledge that you are failing in that and ask that God would shape your heart so you can pray those words confidently lastly on integrity we need to pray out of our hearts let me read verse 5 to 8 again when you pray do not be like the hypocrites for they love to pray standing prayer is not an exercise in showing off prayer is not an exercise in practicing your communication skills prayer is an exercise in trust in

Jesus it is an active expression of faith God already knows your words before you open your mouth so don't fluff about tell him what you want I was challenged recently that often we try and do the holy version of prayer dear God I have a sick grandmother so if it's your will make it better if not help me to be okay with that now that's not a wrong prayer but what do I really want I want my grandmother to be better I want that sickness to be fixed God knows that's what I want it's not like that extra half sentence has tricked God into thinking I'm holier than I really am be honest day ooh be honest to trust him anyway to trust in his goodness and rejoice in the fact that

I already prayed that he is God and I am not and I need to trust that his will is been done and not mine pray honestly from your heart let the way we pray in public whether it's leading at the front whether it's in small groups whether it's in our bible studies be an overflow of the way we cry out to god regularly and honestly in our own day-to-day devotions and finally how do you pray pray intimately prayer is no longer our phone line to a distant god off in heaven somewhere we're reminded in ephesians that those of us who were far have been brought near by the blood of jesus because jesus has died and jesus has risen and he sits on the throne now we are told in the new testament that we sit in the heavenlies that we are sitting in the throne room of god right now and we have free access to our heavenly father so you can cry out daddy you can cry out father you can pray direct jesus our brother jesus god the son pleads on our behalf and so we pray confident that our loving heavenly father answers we pray thankful even before he answers because we know from romans 8 that he's always working for our good so we can have an honest regular and intimate relationship with the god of heaven we need jesus for everything especially for our prayer prayer is a gift in which god gives us free access to our holy god even with him it's not a right it's a gift it's a gracious invitation from our heavenly father prayer is an expression of faith prayer is praise prayer is dependence on god prayer is love for god and it's love for one another prayer is a gift in which god gives us free access to himself and so we must pray we need to let's do that now father god we want to acknowledge that so often we misuse good things that you give us so often we waste opportunities but lord we ask that you would change us that you would shape our hearts to recognize that we need you to make us people who rejoice in the fact that we need to fall on our knees and cry out to you for even the most minuscule task in our lives because everything that we have comes from you we want to thank and praise you for jesus who has died on the cross and risen so that we have clear and free access to you in heaven god i pray that we would be people who come before you regularly and with integrity and desperately and intimately and cry out to you to have your way in our lives who plead with you that you would bring your kingdom on the earth that your will would be done lord give us eyes to see what it is that you are doing that we might rejoice thankfully give us confidence to bring our anxieties and our burdens to you knowing that you're here and you promise to answer father when we open our mouths to speak to you may we grasp the gravity of what it is to speak with the creator may we grasp the love that you have shown us that we call you father and friend father thank you for this gift

[28 : 03] thank you for all that you give us and all that you do please glorify yourself in us amen