

Why don't we pray?

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Preacher: Debbie Gould

[0 : 00] Well, we all know that prayer is essential and we all equally know that prayer is tough.

Now, I'm not talking this morning about prayers that are the prayers of God bless this person or the prayers of quick, I need, you know, sort of a car park or the prayers of please let it be fine because I have a very important picnic tomorrow.

I'm not talking about those sorts of prayers because I know that we've all prayed those prayers. I'm talking about the prayers that we persist in praying, the prayers that are heartfelt prayers that keep us looking towards God and looking for an answer.

Now, surely it should be easy for each of us to share our hearts with the God of love who wants to hear from his children.

After all, isn't he interested in all things about us? He even knows the number of hairs on our heads. Surely, if we are able to chatter to our friends, some of us, without taking breath, surely we would find it easy to talk to God.

[1 : 27] Surely, if God is the one who we are most devoted to, wouldn't that mean we would turn to him first in times of need, in confusion, in sadness, in disappointment, in joy?

Surely, if we believe that our great God is the God of the impossible, the God who can make the barren fall pregnant, the God who can split the Red Sea for the Israelites to walk across, the God who made it possible for a virgin to give birth, the God who saw our brokenness and made a way for us to be in relationship with him, the God who gave his son to death so that we might live.

Surely, our heart's desire would be to take that gift of prayer seriously, daily, with earnestness and with confidence.

And yet we don't. Is it because we are distracted to know what are the correct words to say in prayer?

So we say nothing. Well, maybe. Many would argue over time that set prayers are the only acceptable prayers to pray.

[3 : 04] And Steve mentioned last week that there are many repetitive prayers that some feel are necessary to pray. Or is it because we don't know how we should be or act when we are praying?

So we say nothing. There have been many who have argued over the years that we should stand with our eyes upward to heaven and pray to this great God.

Others feel that we should bend our heads in reverence. Some might feel that they need to lie prostrate on the floor to show a sense of humility and respect.

Well, it's simply foolishness if we get caught up with the issue of posture or set words to think that prayer then would be effective.

The point is, correct and acceptable prayer isn't about posture or set words. that would wrongly make it that for God to be pleased to hear our prayers and to answer our prayers has something to do with who we are and what we have done or what we have said instead of it being about this great God that we are praying to.

[4 : 27] So why don't we pray? Well, basically, there's a number of reasons. I'm sure you will think of some more.

But I think that we can, but we believe that we can fix things. We can fix most things by ourselves. And so if something is broken, we try to fix it.

And there's a sense of satisfaction when we can fix things. And there may even well be a greater sense of satisfaction if we perceive that others can't fix the things that we can fix.

We generally are self-centred, self-reliant, proud individuals. Of course, some of us might show a little more finesse when sharing our pride, so that isn't seen as the sin that it truly is.

And while others, while others' pride oozes out of them, and it's very easily seen. But proud, we all are to some extent. And it causes us to trust our own capabilities rather than trusting God first.

[5 : 40] We also need to ask ourselves, what do I spend the bulk of my time thinking about when no one is looking? When nothing is forcing us to think about anything in particular?

At these moments, do your thoughts, or do my thoughts, turn toward God? Archbishop William Temple, back in 1942, in a message said, your religion is what you do with your solitude.

That is a really challenging quote. Steve last week mentioned that prayer is shaped by the being to whom we pray.

What we pray is dependent on what we believe we are praying, on what we believe the being we pray to is capable of fulfilling.

And if we do not have a correct picture of who God is and what Jesus has achieved on our behalf, then our prayers will either be totally absent or they will be shallow at best.

[6 : 57] I loved our commitment series that we did at the end of last year. For me to look at our core values gave me a new and fresh revelation of how our core values fit like hand and glove together, especially being a Christ-centered, Bible-saturated church that is devoted to prayer and who love treasuring Jesus together.

How can one truly be devoted to prayer if they do not know the one that they pray to? How do you know the one to pray to?

By being in the word of God is the answer. Becoming a Christ-centered, Bible-saturated follower of Jesus Christ and meeting together for instruction and fellowship in treasuring Jesus together.

You cannot have one without the other if you want to be an effective, have an effective relationship with God. Prayer is essential and knowing Jesus the Saviour is as essential.

So why don't we pray? We need to ask ourselves, do we truly know Jesus and the His gospel deeply?

[8 : 25] Well, I'd encourage you to open up the passage that we've just had read to us in Mark 14 and we'll see if that might teach us something. The passage where we're up to, if we're in the Garden of Gethsemane, it's an olive grove.

It's still an olive grove to this day. And even some of the original trees, even though they were chopped down for the Roman siege in 70 AD, after carbon testing of the roots, some of them still date back 2,300 years back.

Now, I have been in this Garden of Gethsemane. It is not huge. It is tranquil and it is conducive to prayer. Now, it's a short time before Jesus is arrested and He'll be taken to His death the following day.

Jesus has celebrated the Passover with His disciples and He has once again told them of His impending death and His resurrection. And He goes with His disciples and He leaves all but three of His disciples at most probably is the entrance to the Garden.

And then He moves on a little forward with three disciples, Peter, James and John, His closest disciples, closest friends, a little further on.

[9 : 54] Look at verse 34 with me. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, He said to them. Stay here and keep watch. He's saying this to the three.

Remarkably, Jesus shows that it is okay to share your deepest burdens with those that you trust. And apart from the Father, who we see He is going to pray earnestly to, Peter, James and John were His closest disciples and friends.

Jesus shares His heart with the three. Jesus knows what is lying ahead of Him. He could have been stoic, shown that even in His complete humanness, He was in control.

He was in control. Not let those close to Him know that He was burdened and struggling. Isn't that what most of us would like to do when we're faced with something tough?

No. Jesus is truly human and He is showing truly human, honest struggles and with good reason, for He knows better and more fully than the disciples of what the next day is going to bring.

[11 : 17] And what does this sorrow do for Jesus? It drives Him to prayer. Then He moves a little way away from them and He shows His dependence on His heavenly Father.

Verse 35, Going a little farther, He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the Lord might pass... The Lord might pass... Sorry.

He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from Him. Abba, Father, He said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me, yet not my will, but your will.

Jesus understands that this cup is no ordinary cup, but it is the wrathful judgment, the awful consequences of God's judgment on sinful humanity.

There's a number of references to the cup of wrath in the Bible. Isaiah 51 says, Awake, awake, rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of His wrath, you who have drained its dregs, the goblet that makes men stagger.

[12 : 40] Revelation 14, a third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath.

He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. Revelation 16, 19, God remembered Babylon the great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath.

This cup is God's wrath that would be poured out on you and me if we were not followers of Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus' perfect death, a perfect life, perfect death in taking the wrath we deserve and His perfect resurrection that we can have confidence in this gospel that saves us.

Without this, we are all lost for all eternity. We see the intimacy with the Father as well as His confidence in His nearness and loving care.

[14 : 01] We see it by the simple address of calling God the Father Abba, which is similar to us saying Daddy. It shows Jesus trusts God completely as His Father and is completely obedient.

His prayer isn't trying to run counter to God's purposes, but explores is there another way here? Can He escape the horrifying cup?

It isn't insubordination, but complete trust that God listens and grants prayer requests that are aligned with God's overall providence.

The answer we know is no. There is no other way. Jesus will in fact die the horrendous death, taking the wrath of God that you and I deserve so that we can live, so that we don't have to take the wrath of God, so that we can have our prayers answered, so that we can be assured of God's love, His mercy, His sovereignty in all things.

If you do not believe in the wrath of God that has been poured out on Jesus on our behalf, then you will not appreciate how valuable you are to God.

[15 : 44] You have no idea of your value if you don't know the wrath of God and believe in it. You see, we can be confident that God will hear and answer our prayers because in the garden, God chose to not answer Jesus' prayer of taking the cup from Him.

It was essential that the wrath of God is taken by someone so that we would be free to have a relationship with God the Father. That someone was Jesus and it was for you and it was for me.

Turn to verse 37 with me and a little further on. We know that Jesus has said to His disciples, stay here a while and keep watch. Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping.

Simon, He said to Peter, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak.

Once more, He went away and He prayed the same thing. When He came back, He again found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to Him.

[17 : 07] Returning the third time, He said to them, are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Rise, let us go. Here comes my betrayer. Three times, Jesus discovers them sleeping after bidding them to keep watch.

Interestingly, you will recall that there was a time when they were in crisis, the disciples, and Jesus was the one sleeping in the back of the boat when there was a storm.

But here, they are the ones sleeping when Jesus is the one in real crisis. And their drowsiness reflects their failure to realise how crucial this moment really is.

But is Jesus stern, judgemental, accusatory? I'm not so sure. Some of the commentators say yes. But there is a sense of understanding from Jesus.

[18 : 19] His comment that the spirit is willing but the body is weak sounds more like a comment that he understands. But he's firm and he alone knows what lies ahead.

Jesus has prepared himself in prayer for what is ahead of him. He has cried out to God to change the plan if possible but once he knows that he will be delivered into the hands of the enemy, he freely has accepted God's will for himself and through prayer has steeled himself for what lies ahead and he goes in obedience.

By contrast, the disciples have squandered the opportunity for prayer by sleeping. Consequently, they fold under the pressure.

we see this in six very sad verses in verse 50. Just after Jesus is arrested and we read, then everyone deserted him and fled.

So how often do we squander the opportunity to pray? Do we come to God and acknowledge God for his majesty and his awe and we hallow him as Steve preached last week?

[19 : 54] Do we ask God to examine our hearts as the psalmist prays in Psalm 139? He says, search me, O God, know my heart, test me, know my anxious thoughts, see if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

How often do you pray that prayer? How often do you pray and repent of your sins? How often do I do that?

How often do we hand all of our concerns over to the Lord, the things that are making us anxious? Tim Keller has a sermon online and he refers to on prayer and he refers to Eugene Peterson and his thoughts on prayer.

Eugene Peterson says that prayer needs to have a rhythm, a spiritual discipline, if you want a different word. prayer.

Peterson says that Psalm 4 is an evening prayer and Psalm 5 is a morning prayer. It's worth either listening to Tim Keller's sermon online or maybe buying his new book on prayer if you want to actually understand this more.

[21 : 22] But simply put in brief, from Psalm 4 the psalmist speaks, God speaks, the psalmist speaks. So the psalmist says, answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God, give me relief from my distress, be merciful to me and hear my prayer.

Then God speaks, in your anger do not sin, when you are on your beds search your hearts and be silent. Then the psalmist speaks again, let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord, you have filled my heart with greater joy than when the grain and the new wine abound.

I will lie down and sleep in peace for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. Meaning, hand every anxious thought over to God at night and sleep well.

It's about praying to put your soul at rest by giving over to God. Peterson says that if you're still anxious, you haven't trusted God fully with all your concerns or you haven't truly handed them all over to God and you need to continue praying.

God but the idea is that you hand at night those things that are making you anxious over to the Lord so that you can rest.

[23 : 00] Different with Psalm 5, in the morning, you are awake and you're ready to tackle all that the Lord gives you in the new day and you do it in prayer.

Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing, listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice.

In the morning, I lay my requests before you and I wait in expectation. This is the time to cry out to God, acknowledging who he is and trusting him with all those prayers for his world and his creation.

Note there's a sense of expectation that God is going to act. So you look for the answers and you give God thanks when you see them.

If you don't see them, you continue to cry out to God and you keep looking because it is a very active thing that we are doing.

[24 : 08] This has been tremendously helpful to me, to understand that prayer is a gift gift, but that so is rest. And God has given us both.

To hand over my concerns and my worries at night time when I am tired, I'm not at my best, but I am needing rest, that is a great discipline.

To then actively pray in the morning when I am fresh and I'm focused, it works for me. And I encourage you to try it yourself because it very well may work for you.

Now we started by acknowledging that prayer is essential, but it's also tough. We've seen in the garden that Jesus prayed for the cup to be taken from him, but that it wasn't and he still surrendered to God's will.

and we know that because of that prayer of Jesus was not answered in the way that he may have wanted, because of his death and his resurrection, we now can be confident that God answers our prayers.

[25 : 27] For Jesus made it possible for us to be in a relationship with the Father. How privileged we are and how often we all forget this.

Let me leave you with three points that come from a sermon that Jonathan Edwards when he was 18 years of age gave that might help us with our prayers.

It certainly helps with living the Christian life as well, but if we focus it on the prayers for this morning. First thing, our bad things will always turn out for good.

Romans 8 28. Our good things can never be taken away from us. Psalm 4. Things like the light of his countenance, the insurance of grace, forgiveness, heaven, love, adoption, none of them can be taken away from us despite whatever is going on in our day-to-day living.

And the third thing, the best is yet to come. 1 Corinthians 2.9, no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

[26 : 54] Our bad things will turn out for good, our good things will never be taken away and the best is yet to come.

Let's pray. O great and glorious God, we are in awe of you and your unfailing love for sinners such as ourselves.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts that you hear us and delight in us. Thank you that Jesus' cry for the cup of your wrath to be taken was answered with no.

Transform us into your servants who long to be in your presence for all eternity. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.