

Prayer Life - Personal

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[0 : 00] Would you please in your Bibles just now turn back to Matthew chapter 6 where we've read page 978 in our Bibles.

! Well, let's just pray just for a moment before we study the Word together.

Heavenly Father, we come as always to the Bible with that sense, Lord, of expectation. We want to hear your voice. We want to hear what you are saying to us out of Scripture.

And so we pray that today you would guide our thoughts and our hearts to be fed and nourished from these things. That our faith may grow and deepen. That we may know our Lord and Saviour Jesus better because of what we discover.

That we would live our lives to his glory and to the praise of your name. And so we ask today that these things will be done not through the effort of flesh and blood, but through the work and power of the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 27] So grant us that working in our hearts today. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. There is a wonderful phrase that I discovered. It chimes with maybe some ideas that you'd find in other writers as well like John Piper.

But certainly Derek Kidner writing a commentary on the book of Psalms has this wonderful phrase, The greatest happiness is to be in close agreement with God.

The greatest happiness is to be in close agreement with God. And that's a theme that runs through the psalm that we've read today, Psalm 32. And I think looking together at Psalm 32 is perhaps an illustration of some of the points I'm going to make today.

And some of the teaching that we can draw out of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. I think it gives us an important insight into the prayer life of the Christian.

So I want this week and next Sunday as well, while Calamurto's away, I want to take a little time thinking about our prayer life. Today, this morning, we're going to be thinking about it in terms of our private or personal prayer, our walk with God.

[2 : 50] And next Sunday evening, if we're spared, God willing, we'll think about public prayer. And immediately, as I say public prayer, people think, oh, you mean what happens in the prayer meeting?

No, I mean corporate prayer. Because all Christians everywhere should and do pray with other Christians. It is inconceivable, in fact, that you could be a Christian and never pray with another Christian.

And so we'll think about corporate prayer next Sunday. The key, of course, to both of these is actually the idea of fellowship.

So as we go through our lives, we are, as Christians, we're in fellowship with God and also with one another in the church.

There's a fellowship within the circles of our families. There's your fellowship within the circles that we have of the friendships that we have. And there's your wider fellowship within the congregation.

- [3 : 54] And perhaps even wider still within the church at large in the world. And the key to good fellowship is always to walk in harmony with the person you're walking with.
- It's a proverb, a very simple one, that if two people are in disagreement, they cannot walk together. And that's especially true in our lives spiritually.
- If we're in disagreement with God over something, then we cannot walk together. That's why Derek Kidner's phrase is so apt.
- The greatest happiness is to be in close agreement with God. So the greatest happiness that we can experience in life is to be found when we are walking in agreement with those we share in fellowship with.
- With God in our private lives. With God in our own personal headspace. And with those around us, whether it's in your marriage or your family or even in the life of the church.
- [5 : 05] And so I want this morning to suggest four ways in which your prayer life will deepen that close agreement with God.
- In which you will find the greatest happiness. And I hope these will be helpful to you. Now, as always, I just want to preface this with the three groups that I have in mind.
- I think, as a rule, this is how I preach. I always have three groups in mind when I'm preaching. The first of these is those who have not yet entered in by the narrow gate.
- The Bible speaks about following after God and being saved as entering by the narrow gate. And there are those who have not yet done that here. There are those who are still perhaps seeking.
- They're interested. They want to know what this salvation is. You today might still be looking for someone who can take away your guilt and your shame.
- [6 : 09] Who will offer you a sure hope. Maybe you're seeking salvation. And I want to say to you that today, what I have today, I hope, is for you.
- The relationship that you need to have with Jesus as a Savior is found through prayer. And so if you are not yet already praying to God, and I would suggest that you do so urgently, I hope that what I have today will help you and give you some guides on how you would go about that.
- There's those today here who have entered by the narrow gate and who are on the road to salvation, but have not long been on that road. Perhaps you are new to walking together with God.
- A young Christian. Someone who has not yet taken many steps along that way. And I hope that today, what I have for you will be a blessing to you today to help you and encourage you as you think about how you pray, but more than just how you pray, just how you relate to God entirely.
- Like just what it means to be a Christian living today. And then there are many of you here today who, I suspect probably what I have to say today, you will think this is familiar, well-trodden material.
- [7 : 39] You'll think, I've heard most of this before. And I would urge you today not to switch off. The reason I would say that is because when it comes to our relationships with people, what is often the greatest danger to these relationships is complacency.
- We become familiar with the beat and the rhythm of life. And so perhaps we neglect to spend time conversing deeply with our spouses.
- And that can lead to trouble in your marriage. And it's the same with God. Complacency can set in in our lives. And we can become slow to fellowship with God.
- And weary, perhaps, along the way. And find that it's not God that has shifted, but it's us that have departed from a close walk with Him.

And so I hope today these will be reminders to you of the basics that we can get right, so that we can discover the greatest happiness is found in a close walk with God.

[8 : 45] First of all, then, we should note that Jesus, when He teaches the disciples to pray, He teaches them firstly about the reputation of God.

When Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, He says, pray like this, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. And just to very briefly unpack the language there, the word hallowed means to make something holy.

You know, we talk about hallowed ground. It's ground, normally talking about a cemetery, in fact. It's talking about ground that's been set apart for a special purpose. The church today is hallowed ground.

Not because there's something intrinsically holy about the church, but because the building has been set apart for the worship of God. It's a place where we want to come to worship God.

And we've created this space for that purpose. So if something's hallowed, it's simply set apart, kept special. And when we talk about God's name being hallowed, what we really mean is not simply the name of Jesus, but the whole reputation that God has.

[10 : 06] So if we were to think about Ali, who's presenting today, and there are a lot of things you could say about Ali's reputation, but a lot of the young people in the church know him by his alter ego of Captain Toothpaste.

That's his reputation, his name. He's got a name for brushing your teeth. And when we think about our God, he has a reputation, a name, a reputation for salvation, for hope, for granting relief to those who are lost and in darkness, for bringing light into the world, for bringing hope into the hopeless darkness of our lives.

And so when Jesus is teaching the disciples to pray, he begins by teaching them to adore God, simply to express adoration for God.

Now, in our generation, certainly, there is a rush, isn't there, to meet our needs. We would tend to want to prioritize our needs. And it's very tempting to think of that as being a unique situation in our generation.

People today are very interested in near instant gratification. If you want something, you just take it. If you want to order something off the internet, you can expect it to be delivered the next day, so long as you order before 12, and so long as the ferry goes.

[11 : 29] But we want things instantly. We want the immediate delivery of that need to be met. But the truth is, actually, in all of human history, the desire to put our wants and our needs first, even in prayer, has always been there.

Because one of the fundamental problems with sinful human hearts is what I would call the idolatry of self. For most people, the idol is not something external that you fall down and worship.

Rather, the idol is often something internal, whether it's our own ego, our own sense of self and worth. But we primarily want to put ourselves at the fore of all things.

And so even in prayer as Christians, we can fall into that very easily. We can make our own reputation, our own glory, our own comfort, our own fame, whatever it might be.

We can make these things, the first things that we rush with, into prayer. And we can almost say, well, God, the most important thing today is not my relationship with you.

[12 : 52] It's not your glory. The most important thing is what I'm getting out of this. My needs been met. But Jesus teaches us to pray firstly for God's reputation.

Indeed, the greatest happiness, if this is truly the case, if the greatest happiness is to be found in close agreement with God, then the greatest happiness is to be found when we align our priorities with God's priorities.

And what does God want? And what is God's desire? Well, we could say today, well, it's to save people.

Yes, but to what end? Why does God save people? Why does God bless and prosper his children? Why does God give us the promise of himself as our everlasting reward?

And it is simply because God is jealous for his own reputation. God being God wants and deserves, ultimately, he's entirely right in longing for this, wants the praise of the nations.

[14 : 16] There is nothing self-indulgent in that if you are the creator and sustainer of all things. If you are indeed the highest, then there is nothing wrong or flawed in God wanting to be glorified.

and the way he is glorified is in showing us his salvation, principally, in rescuing rebels and sinners through the work and person of Jesus Christ, his son.

And so, God's greatest priority is, in fact, for his own reputation. And so, of course, there are many things that God has promised. There are many things that we can claim and lay hold of in prayer.

There are many things that we can ask God for. But above all of them and first and foremost in all of them, there needs to be a desire that our own hearts will be aligned to magnify God himself.

That we will adore him. And so, in our prayer life, that needs to be the case. You see it in Psalm 32 where we've read that the center of the Psalm, in verse 7, there's these wonderful words that David uses.

[15 : 31] He says, you are my hiding place. The place of ultimate safety and security. Last Sunday evening, in fact, if you want a great sermon on this, go and find it on YouTube, Kenny I preaching last Sunday night.

It's kind of a great example of this. Of the security that David found in the Lord in times of distress. Psalm 32, it's in that same vein. of that great security that is to be found.

David then, he goes on and he says, you are the one who preserves me in time of trouble. You know, the great troubles that afflict the child of God in the world, there are many. The New Testament kind of itemizes them almost quite helpfully in this way.

It says, we face enemies in the world and the flesh and the devil. So the world around us that are going to be people who despise the Christian faith, who despise us for following Jesus, they despise us for Jesus' own sake.

And it wears us down. And it's distressing and it's troubling to experience that and the hatred that comes our way.

[16 : 43] And David says, you are my preserver in times of trouble. when the world despises me, you're the one who preserves me. And the way he adores the Lord for this, he says it's the same internally.

Psalm 32, it's really interesting. The enemies, the greatest enemies that David actually faces, he feels, are not actually outside and external, but that his own heart and the sinful desires that rise up there and that want to overtake our lives and want to blot out and push out our fellowship with God.

And these things God preserves us from. How many of us can say that, in fact, as we think about our lives, that God has preserved us not from external threats, maybe he has, but more so, in fact, from the reckless things that we would do ourselves.

And from the ways in which he has brought us through troubled waters and preserved us from that chaos. And also, he says, you have taken me, and there's this wonderful expression that he uses, you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

When I read that phrase in Psalm 32, actually, I always think about old kind of cowboy and Indian westerns or old war movies. You know, when the good guys, you know, defeat the enemy, whether it's the Germans coming and they're beaten back in the fight in a World War II movie, or whether it's the Indians that have come and the cowboys have beaten them back and the sheriff and all the rest and they're beaten back.

[18 : 22] And as they're running away, you know, the good guys are there shouting for joy because of the deliverance that they've experienced. There's a real cry of happiness that comes from being victorious and sharing in victory.

And David says, you surround me with these kind of shouts. What David's actually doing there is he's talking about the character, I think, of a triune God.

Because when we think about it, we can see the Father operating in his love towards us as the ultimate safety and shelter and hiding place for his people. God the Father is our solace.

He is the one that we run to. It's his love that we shelter in. That's where we find our comfort and our joy. We're talking about God the Son and the grace by which he delivers us through his victory at the cross, offering himself as one who will take away our sin.

He is the one who preserves us in times of trouble, the one who delivers us from the evil one who would attack us. Or we think about the Holy Spirit who unites us to God and to one another and who literally today in this church has surrounded you with shouts of deliverance.

[19 : 40] And that's one of the most important things really about corporate praise. That's why we sing together. We don't just participate in watching someone sing in worship. We participate.

And often it's because the people around us, there's probably people there sitting who need to hear the praise of God's people. And the Holy Spirit has brought us here today to participate in that.

And so when we pray, let us pray as people who know God is jealous for his own glory. And let's remember that our greatest happiness lies in being close in agreement with that.

In aligning our prayers prayers with God's desire for his own glory. Now what does that practically look like? Just very briefly. I think simply it is that this.

I would urge you to spend time sitting alone reflecting in adoration on God's character and expressing that in his presence.

[20 : 48] It's a challenging discipline. It's something that I find in fact when it comes we'll think about this next week God willing but when it comes to corporate prayer this is something that I find often is lacking because we don't maybe do enough of it in our private prayer life.

It's just taking the time to express adoration for God in his presence. The second thing I'm seeing the time so we'll rattle through the other points.

The second thing is confession. God Jesus teaching us to pray teaches us to pray forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors. And there's an awful lot that we could say here but it comes back to the primary relationship that we have with God just now in this world.

We relate to God just now in this world as men and women who have offended a holy God who have affronted him with our sin. We haven't lived as we should we haven't done what we should we haven't said the things we should we haven't gone to the places we should we haven't devoted ourselves as we ought to to a holy God perhaps because we don't adore him enough.

We miss him. we fall short of the standard that he has set and the great challenge for us is to recognize that and to come to God to deal with it.

[22 : 30] To come to God and to acknowledge our sin so that we will be continually fit for his presence.

I was trying to think of a way of illustrating this and what actually you know my love of movies particularly science fiction I was thinking about Star Trek and sometimes you see the Enterprise it's caught in the grip of an enormous force maybe it's a black hole or something but the ship just can't escape and Kirk's there on the bridge and he's saying Scotty you've got to get us out of here you've got to give us everything we've got and Scotty will come up with some completely harebrained ingenious plan and he'll say something like I'll eject the warp core and it'll blow up and so Scotty ejects the warp core and it blows up behind the ship and the ship's set free in an instant it just like it it hurtles away from the danger and that's what confession is like in the life of the Christian it's that we have to eject that that sin we have to acknowledge that sin instead of clinging on to it instead of clinging on to the crazy idea that our sin isn't a big deal it needs to get jettisoned out the back and in the great grace of

God and in the love that he shows us and in the wonder of the cross and the magnificence of what Jesus has done that guilt is taken by Christ and it's replaced with his righteousness and we are set free and we can blast off into God's service and that today is why confession remains so important in the life of the Christian we need to keep continually divesting ourselves of all of the stuff that clings to us and slows us down we need to lay it all before the cross of Christ and discover that we can be set free and liberated and allowed to go on so there's adoration there's confession there's also thanksgiving and thanksgiving in this way of thinking about our life and prayer you almost think it's strange because it's not explicitly there in the

Lord's prayer you work through the Lord's prayer you can read through it you don't really find many expressions of thankfulness and that's a good and important question for us to maybe ask why isn't it explicit I think one of the reasons is because Jesus is teaching throughout the New Testament throughout the Gospels there's a theme emerges and the theme is there at the beginning of the Lord's prayer our Father in heaven the relationship of God's people of Christians to God the Father is that of children coming to a Father I think it's really important to understand how thankfulness works in that context and to see that in the context of a relationship with God as Father how does thankfulness work in your family does it work on the basis that as children you would be very diligent always to say thanks is that how thankfulness really works

I think about my family there's times where the kids do there's times where they don't we really wish when they're out we really wish that they would always say thanks to people who give them something so there's a place for saying thank you it's really important but actually the real thankfulness that children have I think for their parents for their for the provision that's made for them in their homes it really gets expressed in the boldness in which they come they appreciate the provision that's been made for them they rely willingly joyfully on their parents breakfast is going to be there for them dinner is going to be there for them lifts are going to be there for them when they want to see their pals and it's not that they come with it's not that they come with a greediness about that but it's rather that they don't come to parents who are going to be begrudging in what they do they joyfully ask and

[27 : 20] I think that's why when Paul talks about prayer with thanksgiving it's that sense of asking boldly for things and asking for big things of God because we have that boldness to come to him because we are so thankful for how he has always answered us that we learn that God is a worthy loving parent the perfect example of what a parent would be and so therefore we can come to him with that sense of boldness and you see it in Psalm 32 where David talks there about the blessing of the one whose transgression is forgiven the great happiness happiness that that person has because his life is so closely aligned to God's priorities sin is dealt with the glory of God is advanced and David what he's really saying that is he's discovered that God in his great provision is someone that he can rest on and joyfully trust in and therefore thankfulness becomes just an automatic overflow in the continual expression of his life and so when we want to think about our prayer life that's where thankfulness has to come into it isn't it that we're continually expressing our thanks to God directly yes but that actually more so our prayer life and our dependence on God is informed by that experience of his faithfulness that God has always been there for us that God has always secured us that God has always made it safe for us has always made it possible for us to go forward even when we are surrounded by distress where grief comes in like a flood he's still there and he still gives himself as our highest reward until we come to him continually with thankfulness which ultimately feeds into all of our requests the S in this word is supplication so we have adoration confession thanksgiving supplication

I hinted at it at the beginning it's a very familiar structure those of you who have been Christians a long time have heard and used the acts way of thinking about prayer but we come to God with all of our requests whether they are big things or small things it's illustrated in the Lord's prayer with the expressions give us this day our daily bread on the face of it that's such a simple prayer isn't it give us bread for today but you know when you burrow into it and you start to see what does daily bread actually involve it's not just that there's an entire food chain behind that that has to deliver for you it's that there's an entire emotional chain behind that that has to be there and supportive of you as well it's not enough simply to have bread you need to have love and affection and family and care around you so Lord give us this day that give us this day the means to have the bread so it's a prayer for employment and the structures for employment to be in place they're vast it needs society to be at peace for society to function for trade to operate all of these things have to be in place for us to have jobs there has to be someone levying taxes to pay for you as a teacher or as a fireman or whatever else it might be

I mean the prayer give us this day our daily bread is not a small thing at all it's an enormous vast prayer for daily provision to be made in our lives and for God to bless us and to keep us and then on the other end of the scale you almost think well they deliver us from evil and you're thinking well evil that's such a little thing but it's not the words in the prayer are actually used to speak of delivering us from the evil one from Satan himself the great enemy of the church who is going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour that's the battlefield that we are in the conflict that we are involved in as Christians it is a conflict against cosmic powers far beyond the things that we see in this world and be no doubt Satan that great evil one is out to get you that's why the Christian armor in Ephesians 6 ends with a point of prayer that having done all we will stand and pray and so today as we think about this and as we wonder how is it that we can experience the greatest happiness let us remember it is to be found in close agreement with God in praying according to

God's will and the things that God has willed for us to pray the things that God has shown us the things that he teaches us to pray for they are these four things adoration of him of his character they are confession of our sins there is a spirit of thanksgiving that has to underline all of this and then a coming with an expectation for the greatest and most profound of help in our lives and that is not I want to finish by saying this that is not merely a formula for how you pray that's not merely a formula for the sort of things that you would go through as a checklist and say well my prayer tonight when I go to bed I want to pray in adoration of God I want to confess my sins I want to give thanks for all of his goodness to me today and I want to ask him for his help and everything that lies ahead of me tomorrow I mean that's fine but actually that same template in a way is a pattern for Christian living it's a pattern for what characterizes the whole of your

Christian life day by day and that if you seek to walk in close harmony with God and to know his friendship and his fellowship then these are the things that you would prioritize and make much of let's pray to him just now heavenly father you are good and we rejoice in that love that you have towards your people we rejoice today that you are a god who wants to save sinners you are a god today who wants to bring us as the finished article of that salvation to be a worthy bride of christ in the new heavens and the new earth and so all that you are doing is designed towards growing our character and shaping us and so we pray today that we would learn to adore you for who you are that we would come speedily to confess our sin that we wouldn't hide these things from you that we would discover the liberty that belongs to people who walk closely with their god and may we know therefore the greatest happiness the greatest blessing in our lives in knowing you and following after you help us in this we pray and we ask it all in jesus name amen we are going to sing in conclusion in the scottish psalter the second half of the blue book psalm 116 singing at the beginning this is page 395 and we're going to sing four stanzas verses one to six in conclusion today i love the lord because my voice and prayers heeded here while i live will call on him who bowed to me his ear the great truth of the bible that god who sits in heaven has bowed down his ear to hear what his people are saying on earth and he hears us and he answers us and he is full of grace in what he does so let's stand and sing to his praise these verses from one to five one to six or to god's praise i love the lord because my voice and prayers heeded here i i i!

[36 : 02] i will fall on him who will to me!

is near! of death the hearts and sorrows did about me come thus right the things of heaven to ward on me cry my soul, O Lord, I do thee hungry pray.

O merciful and righteous is, yea, gracious is our Lord.

O sister me, I was brought to, he did me help her for.

Now the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with each one of you now and always. Amen. Amen.