

Prayer

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[0 : 00] Book of Psalms and Psalm 86. Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

Preserve my life, for I am godly. Save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day.

How do you pray? If you're a Christian, prayer will be a central feature in your life.

I'm not saying it's always like that. There are times when we drift away from prayer. And these times are very dangerous. They are very unhealthy.

Because prayer is when we actively engage with our Savior, with the Lord. There are no times when we're outside of God's presence.

[1 : 22] And yet we know, for a fact, that God has given us the gift of prayer in which to communicate with God and speak to Him and to enjoy His presence.

That doesn't mean that we always feel the same. We have to wrestle with our feelings. And we have to come to prayer, not on the basis of what we feel like, but on the basis of its reality.

That God has given us this gift to be made use of. How do you pray? That's the question I'm asking today.

How do you pray? Many of you will be familiar with some of the acronyms which are used to help us to structure our prayer.

For example, the word ACTS, A-C-T-S, is very often used. I'm sure most of us have heard of this. And it simply spells out to adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication.

[2 : 30] In which we begin by adoring God and praising Him for what He is. And then we confess our sin. We come to Him honestly with what we have done and said and thought.

And we confess the struggles that we have. The temptations that we've given into. And then we give thanks to God for His mercy towards us and everything that He has given to us.

There's no end of what we can give thanks to God for, is there? And then lastly, there's supplication, which means simply what we pray for. The issues that we want to take to the Lord and we want to commit to the Lord.

The issues relating to our family or our health or our job or whatever. God knows everything about us. He knows every single detail in our lives. He knows the things that frustrate us.

And the things that encourage us. And the things that give us joy and sadness. He knows the lows and the highs. And we're able to pray. So there's acts, A-C-T-S, that many people find very helpful.

[3 : 36] Or there's another one called praise, P-R-A-I-S-E. Which spells out to, first of all, praise. In which we, again, adore God for what He is.

And then there's repentance, R. For repentance, once again, when we confess our sin before God. The Bible tells us that if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just.

And will cleanse us and pardon us from all our unrighteousness. And then there's A for ask. Ask and you will receive.

Seek and you will find. Knock on the door will be opened to you, said Jesus. We're given this enormous privilege of coming to meet with God and to ask Him what is on our hearts.

Then we intercede. I is for intercede. And this time we're asking not for ourselves, but we're asking in place of others. We're praying for others. Sometimes we can get so wrapped up with our own issues and our own problems that we fail to see the needs of others.

[4 : 40] And when we think of the needs of others, sometimes we realize that they're greater than our needs. And then there's S for speak. Speak.

Speak. Which means that we go back to God's Word and we read God's Word and we remind ourselves of the great truths that we lay hold on. That give us the encouragement to carry on in our

prayer.

And then E for enjoy. We're to enjoy the presence and being in the company of God. Now these acronyms, these helps, they give us a helpful structure.

That doesn't mean to say that if you don't use them, you're not praying. There is no one set. We're not trying to suggest that prayer is like a combination lock.

You know how you get these doors nowadays, these electronic doors, instead of turning a key and you press a series of numbers and the door opens for you. I'm not trying to say that as long as you conform to this sequence that the door will open and God will hear your prayer.

[5 : 46] That's not the way it works at all. Thank the Lord that God receives us on the basis of Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

We are his children. And that is what gives us the right to pray to the Lord. A pattern is simply a help.

The Lord himself gave a pattern of prayer to his disciples when they came to him and said, Lord, teach us to pray. And he gave them the Lord's prayer. Which was not meant to be the only words they were ever meant to use in prayer.

It was to provide a pattern for them. And once again, you have the idea of the opening words. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

And you're reminded instantly of who it is you're coming to pray to. And you're asking for his kingdom, that his kingdom would come. And that his will will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

[6 : 54] And you're asking him for your daily bread. And you're asking him for forgiveness. As we forgive our debtors, those who have sinned against us. And we're asking him to deliver us from the evil one.

To lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the... That again, once again, is a pattern in prayer that we find helpful. And sometimes the difficulties that we have in prayer are simply this. That we don't go back to the patterns that we have in the Bible. And many of these are found in the Psalms. The Psalms can be enormously helpful.

Not just in that they tell us how the Old Testament people of God prayed. But they're helpful in giving us a pattern for prayer. In which each issue falls into its rightful place.

There is no one size fits all in the Psalms. And there is no one size fits all in prayer. Our circumstances differ. So, what I mean by that is that because you have one pattern in Psalm 86, which we'll look at in a few moments, it doesn't mean to say that every Psalm follows the same pattern.

[8 : 10] This Psalm is composed of praise and adoration to God. In which the issue which the Psalmist wants to pray about, which is that this life was in danger, actually plays a very small part.

Other Psalms, in which the Psalmist wants to bring exactly the same kind of situation in which his life is in danger, the whole of the Psalm virtually is taken up with a problem.

And there are times like that, aren't there? There are times when we're given the presence of mind to be able to see things in the right perspective. And there are other times when we're so overwhelmed with the problem that we want to pray about, that all we can talk about is the problem. Well, God knows that. He knows our weaknesses. He knows the kind of frame of mind that you're in. And he knows how out of balance we can get sometimes in the way in which we think.

And that's why he has given us his word to us, to help us and to guide us. He only wants our good and for our encouragement.

[9 : 32] And I hope that this Psalm will give us some encouragement this evening in the way, in providing for us a pattern, something in which our perspectives are correct in the way that we pray.

Is prayer difficult for you? And I'm sure like me, you would say, well, sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't. Today, I find, some of you here tonight might say, well, today I find prayer easy.

It's straightforward, but I do know of times in my life when I've really struggled to find words. And I've really struggled to know that I am praying to the Lord or to spend time in the Lord.

Others will say the opposite. You'll say, well, I know what you're talking about. There are times in my life when I've spent ages with the Lord, praying for all kinds of different issues.

But tonight, I just find, I can't find the words. And I feel as dry as anything. Let's learn to manage our feelings. Prayer is not a matter of our feelings.

[10 : 40] Prayer is a reality that belongs to every Christian. And it's a reality that is a marvelous privilege because God says it is.

Just think about it. When you are praying, you are coming near to, you are engaging, you are speaking with the Lord of all the universe. It's as awesome as that.

You're speaking to the God who said, let there be light. And there was light. The God who brought everything about into being in Genesis chapter 1.

That's how awesome it is. That's how great the privilege it is. And when we talk about God hearing and listening to our prayer, what we mean is that he is listening to you as if you're the only person in the world.

He has the power to give you that kind of attention. That's the kind of attention that nobody else can give you.

[11 : 39] Not even the greatest ruler in this world can give you that kind of attention. But God can because of his divine power. And so I want to encourage you tonight.

I want to encourage all of us. I know how difficult it is to pray. I know that sometimes we feel awkward in prayer. We feel that God is so great that why should he want to take anything to do with someone like me and the little issues that affect my life.

We feel that God keeps himself away from us. After all, surely he's got more important things to be concerned with. And so that way you're persuaded not to pray.

And that's all the more reason why prayer should be a discipline in the life of every believer. I truly believe that. After all these years as a Christian, if I was going to say one thing to any other Christian, I would say this.

Make sure that prayer is a discipline in your life. Not just when you feel like it. Not just when you've got some singular issue that you feel you need to pray about. but practice the discipline of prayer.

[12 : 56] And then there's the issue sometimes that we find difficulty with. The question, is God listening to my prayer?

Is he really listening? I mean, after all, you've just said that God is the ruler of the universe. He's without beginning and without end. That's what makes him God. He's eternal. He's beyond our understanding.

He's the one who created all the complexities that scientists are still trying to grapple with and wrestle with today. He knows it all. He's created it all. And yet, you're saying, are you honestly saying to me that God somehow or other wants to listen to me as tiny little infinitesimal tiny little being on this world in the middle of the billions of planets and stars and solar systems and I'm just really saying that the God of all the universes want to listen to me.

Sometimes when we think along these lines we conclude, well, of course he's not. Of course he's not. Because God is beyond our imagination and our understanding.

And that's where faith comes in. Faith to believe that it was into this little world that God himself came in the person of Jesus Christ. and gave his life for this little tiny little infinitesimal being which is me.

[14 : 22] He gave himself because he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. Well then, I want us to look at several things about this psalm just very, very briefly in this psalm and particularly by way of the perspective, the pattern that it offers to us.

I want us to look first of all at the fact that David, who wrote the psalm, prays with a covenant perspective. And the first thing, the way he enters into this prayer is by tackling the question that we've just asked.

Is God listening? How can I be sure that God is listening? How can you be sure that when you pray that God is listening?

Well, that's exactly his concern at the beginning of the psalm. Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me. After all, if God is not listening, there's not much point in going any further.

But if God is listening, and this is the logic behind it, and this is the logic behind our prayer as well, if God isn't listening to me for whatever reason, then there's no point going any further.

[15 : 38] I'm wasting my time. But if the God of all the universe is listening, and I mean listening, I don't mean in the way that he listens to everything that goes on in the world as he is able to, because he is God.

I mean that he is particularly focusing his attention on me. Is that what I'm saying? Do I really believe that? That's the issue.

That David, see how relevant this psalm is? David was the same as us. He knew the kind of struggles that we go through, the questions we ask in prayer. He's going through the same thing,

and he's wrestling with us.

Is God really listening? And that's why he's saying, incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me. He's not just recognizing that God, by way of his power, is able to do all things, and therefore he hears everything.

he's asking God, and this takes faith, real faith, to believe that God is there. You know when you see two people in conversation, or when you're in conversation with somebody, and you're telling the other person something, and the other person is kind of looking all around him, and he's kind of looking at his watch, you know that that person he's not really listening to you at all.

[16:58] I suppose we all do that from time to time. We get distracted when we're in conversation with someone, because something else comes into our mind. But if someone, if you're talking to someone, and that person's going like this, he's kind of bending his head, and kind of, you can tell, can't you?

Very often, by the way a person's looking at you, and by the way they're kind of, we do that, don't we? We kind of bend our head a bit, and we kind of lean forward when we really want to hear what's being said.

And that's what David is asking God to do. That's the kind of hearing that David is asking for. Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me.

And he asks God for several things, and he gives several reasons for why he is asking between verses 1 and 7. Here they are. He's asking, Lord, incline your ear, because I am poor and needy. Then he says, preserve my life because I am godly. Then he says, save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you I cry all day.

[18:14] Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. You see, there's this constant to-ing and fro-ing between what he's asking God to do for him, and the basis on which he is praying to God.

And that basis is what gives him the confidence to believingly know that God is listening and he's going to answer. Because if God is listening, and this is the all-important crux, if God is listening, then I can ask for anything.

Nothing is too great for God. God, the sky's the limit. I can bring to him anything. I can be as honest as I want with him.

I can be as big as I want with him. I can confess anything that I need to confess, anything, what's going on in the deepest recesses of my heart, the greatest shame that takes place in my heart, and so on.

I can ask for anything. There are no limits. To what you can ask God for. And of course, that brings us on to the whole question of answered prayer, and how God answers our prayer.

[19:32] That's too big for tonight. You see the point? If God isn't listening to me, wasting time. If God is listening to me, then how can I treat prayer prayer with contempt?

How can I not give God my time? How can I not bring everything to God? And how can I not, how can I fail to spend time in his presence knowing that the God of all the universe loves me with an extraordinary love and he listens to me?

Now here's the basis on which the psalmist, there are several strands to this. he says, I am poor and needy. I am miserable, he says.

And he goes on in the psalm to explain in verse 14 what it was, what the issue, what the problem was. But you know, being poor and needy is not enough. He then goes on in verse 2 to say, I am godly.

Now there's an arrogant statement, isn't it? I am godly. Could you say to the Lord tonight, Lord, please hear me for I am godly? We would hesitate, wouldn't we?

[20:52] You'd think twice before actually saying that to the Lord, who knows every blemish and who knows every defect and every sin that we've ever committed.

How can you say, I am godly? Well, here's where you have to stop and you have to ask, what does the word mean? It's one of these words that's actually really difficult to translate.

It can mean several things. In the ESV, it's translated godly. In other translations, it's translated faithful. But it's actually rooted in something we saw in the life of David.

Don't you know if you remember? I hope you do. It was a word that came out time and time again. And it was a word that meant God's faithful love, his unique love towards his covenant people Israel.

It was God's particular love that was focused on the children of Israel. His covenant love in which he pledged himself to be their god.

[22 : 04] And it was the word Hezed. Remember it? Of course you do. Hezed. Now, here's the word which is the human side of it.

Hezed is the divine side of it where God reaches out in that extraordinary love towards his people. But this word here is the word that takes it.

accepts God's love. So what David is saying here is that I, by saying I am godly, what he means is I am inside your covenant bond.

I have accepted your love towards me. I've accepted your promises towards me. That's why he goes on later on to say you are my God.

And it's only the person that was inside the covenant that could ever say that. And it's only a Christian in today's world that can say you are my God. There's nothing I can do to deserve to work my way into that kind of favor.

[23 : 10] I can't get there by myself. We're not saved by our works. But we are saved by God's grace through his son Jesus Christ.

So the New Testament way of saying verse two preserve my life for I am godly is saying this, Lord, I am yours through Jesus Christ, my Savior.

I've accepted and on the basis of my sonship in your family, I can come with confidence and bring my prayer to you.

And so he spends the first few words reassuring himself, almost building up an argument by which he persuades himself on the basis of what God has done for him, that he has confidence to enter into God's presence in prayer.

And we have the right to do the same. You see the importance of prayer? Prayer is marvelous.

Secondly, he prays not just with a covenant perspective, but he prays with a global perspective.

[24 : 26] Verse eight. There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. And then in verse nine, all the nations you have made shall come and worship before you and shall glorify your name, for you are great and do wondrous things.

You alone are God. You notice how he shifts. You notice how that once he has assured himself by declaring to the Lord the basis on which he has come into God's presence, he can pray for anything.

He can pray with a global perspective. He can pray for the world. You know why? Because he's actually in the throne room of the universe.

And that's where we are when we're praying to God. Wherever that might be. It might be in your bedroom. It might be in the kitchen. It might be in your car. It might be walking down the beach.

Wherever it is, you're actually in the throne room of the universe.

You are speaking to the God of the universe with whom nothing is impossible. Do you realize the power at your fingertips? Well, that's maybe overstating the case.

[25 : 45] The power at God's fingertips. And you are in the presence of that power. You're right there. Sometimes I think that in prayer, at least I'm speaking for myself, I'm confessing myself, that very often my prayers are too small.

When I pray for all the safe things, don't we pray for all the safe things? Lord, bless me. Lord, keep me. Lord, guide me.

That's the kind of language we often use. At least it is the kind of language I often use. These are very safe, aren't they? We're ticking all the right boxes.

We're using the right language. We don't really know what we mean by that. Bless me. Sounds good. Sounds promising.

But is it not just a way of saying, Lord, I'm a bit scared of asking for too much. I'm a bit hesitant to ask for really great things.

[26 : 54] Well, the reason we should ask for really great things is because we're asking a really great God. And a God who really loves to listen to our prayer.

prayer. Don't let your sinfulness be an obstacle that prevents you from pouring your heart to the Lord.

Bring your sinfulness to him. Confess it to him. And know that God is receiving you because of who you are in Jesus Christ with a new determination to.

And we'll see this in a few moments. Time to time is going on. But sometimes, sometimes, can I challenge each one of us to be courageous in prayer?

To ask for what we really want to happen. I pray for the world. Look at what he says here. Look at what he says. Have you ever read this? We sing it quite often. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord.

[27 : 57] Now that is a really big prayer. In fact, it's more than that. It's a prophecy. It's a promise. These are words that have actually been put into the mouth of the psalmist.

But when you look at them, they're breathtaking, aren't they? What this means is that a day will come. Of course, there's an argument over whether that day will be in this life or the next life.

I would contend that perhaps it is in this life as a result of the gospel being preached. But there, that's another story. But look at what it says. All the nations.

Can you believe? Can you close your eyes and picture the scene where all the nations, not just tiny wee churches here and there, but all the nations being struck by the truth of God and Jesus Christ and shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

Let me ask you this question. Is God able to do that? Yes, he is. Is he able to save you? Yes, he is. If he's able to save you, he's able to save two of you and three of you and ten of you and twenty of you.

[29 : 14] And sometimes I feel that because we are in such a minority and because we're made to feel so marginalized in the kind of world that we live in, that we've actually believed some of the unbelief that we're surrounded with.

And we've lost confidence in the God who's able to change things in a moment in time. So the psalmist, David, he wants big things from God.

So I would love to think that we would all pray for big things, impossible things, things that we dare not pray for right now because we're too scared.

Well, don't be too scared because God is the God of the impossible. He prays also with an obedient perspective and that's in verse 11.

He goes on, he's looked at the world and he said what he wants for the Lord and for the Lord's glory. And then in verse 11, he's back to himself and he's asking, teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.

[30 : 21] Unite my heart to fear your name. Because when after he has been reminded of how great God is and how merciful God is, he saw over, well, overwhelmed by the grace of God and the privilege of the relationship that he has, he wants to obey God.

He wants to live his life in the light of God's command. And so do we. There isn't a Christian that has tasted God's love that doesn't want to obey him in that love.

And that's our prayer tonight, that God will teach us his way and that's so that we may walk in his truth tomorrow or even tonight when we go home and when we go away from here and when we go into work tomorrow or wherever you're going tomorrow, wherever you plan to go, teach me, Lord, your way.

I want to walk in your truth. I want my relationships with other people to be according to your truth. I want my character, my behavior, my speech, my conversation.

I want it to be like Jesus. That's what this means. I want it to be like Jesus. I want to radiate the truth of God in my lifestyle.

[31 : 40] And it begins with wanting to do it. It begins with being so filled with the knowledge of the reality of God and so filled, overwhelmed by the love of God for you and the truth of God that you want to live in that truth.

He prays with a thankful perspective. No surprise there. After all that he's seen so far, he wants to thank God in verse 12 for everyone, for everything that God has done.

I will glorify your name forever. And he prays with a new confidence in God's love. Have you ever stopped to think of the enormity of God's love for you as a Christian?

That's what Paul prays for. And the reason he prays for that is because it's very often difficult for us to accept the enormity of God's love.

This is what he says in Ephesians chapter 3. That's why I read it. I, he prays so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength.

[32 : 46] Now listen to this. May have strength to comprehend. This is, Paul is praying this prayer for the Ephesian believers. It's in God's word. It's a prayer for us.

It's God's will for us. This is what God wants for you tonight. That we may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, the length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now he says, now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than we ask or think. What God wants for us extends beyond what we ask or even think.

how we deny ourselves what God wants us to have because of our own unbelief, because of the weakness of our faith, because of our own limited capacity to understand or to grasp his love for us. If you're a Christian tonight, I want you to go out that door filled with all the fullness of God. God wants you to have.

[34 : 16] No half measures. He has given himself to you in full measure. He has done everything that was possible for your salvation.

He continues to do everything. He has not withheld one single gift from you. Now how can we not give our all to him?

Everything. You can't be mediocre about the gospel. It demands my life, my soul, my all. How can we not be 100% for Christ after what he has done for us?

So that by the time you get to verse 14 in the psalm, and I'm conscious of the time, by the time you get, I'm going to close with this, by the time you get to 14, which is actually the issue he wants to pray about, it's almost like a by the way, isn't it?

This is what I find so marvelous about this psalm. That he's so filled with God, and he's so consumed with his relationship with God, that actually the danger that he's in, and what is it?

[35 : 36] Verse 14, Oh God, insolent men have risen up against me. A band of ruthless men seek my life, and they do not set you before them. Here's a group of men who are actually wanting to kill David.

That is not a by the way. That is a crisis. At any moment, they could strike. They might be behind the next rock. He doesn't know where they are. His life is in danger.

You would think that he would be losing sleep. You would think that this would be on his mind all the time, and yet, when he gets to it, by the time he does get to it, it's only one sentence. Lord, insolent men have risen.

And that's because, it's because simply this. If you know that the solution to the problem is in your hand, and the solution to the problem is greater than the problem itself, and the problem disappears.

Doesn't it? I'm not saying that the problem was taken away. We don't know what happened. But here is David, and he's able to take this enormous problem, and he's able to just leave it with the Lord.

[36 : 55] He just throws it at the feet of the Lord. Only to go back in verse 15, to talking about the Lord again.

Because for him, God is so great, and his love for him is so great, and his covenant commitment for him is so great, that the problem is sorted.

It's sorted. Do you believe that tonight? Maybe there's somebody here tonight, and you're in a similar situation.

I hope nobody's trying to kill you, but a situation that weighs really heavily on your mind, that you can't find a solution for, you seem out of control about, that you don't know what to do about, you don't know what decision to make, it's been weighing so heavily upon you, it's got under your skin, you're losing sleep over it.

Have you gone through the pattern of this prayer? Have you come to the Lord, and have you seen your life in the right perspective, from God's perspective, the God who rules, and the God who reigns, and the God who is able and willing to do in you, and for you, more than you can ask, or even think.

[38 : 29] That's the God we worship tonight, and that's the God who will not leave you, as soon as you walk out that door, he'll work it through to you, he'll work it through with you, for his own glory, and for your good, for the good of his people.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your assurance to us, Lord, that you know the things that surround us, even the crises, even what we feel that we've lost control of.

Our Father in heaven, you are greater than our highest prayer. We ask, Lord, that you will give us the faith to believe, that if God is for us, who can be against us, and that with God, nothing is impossible.

So we pray for big things. We pray, Lord, for the glory of your kingdom. We pray for our forgiveness for where we have gone wrong.

We pray, Lord, for our, for a renewal of our love for you as a consequence of your love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[39 : 45] We're going to sing in closing in Psalm 57. It's the Sing Psalms version. It's verse 7 down to the end of the psalm. And it's on page 75 of Sing Psalms.

And it's Psalm 57. My heart is steadfast, Lord. With music I will sing. Awake my soul, wake harp and lyre, my song the dawn will bring. Verse 7 to verse 11, the last four verses of the psalm.

And we're going to stand to sing. Amen. My heart is steadfast, Lord.

With music I will sing. Awake my soul, wake harp and lyre, my song the dawn will bring.

Among the nations, Lord, to you I will give praise.

[40 : 59] Among the peoples of the earth, my songs of you I raise.

Great is your steadfast love, ■ host on the song shallen, Thank you.

This way your conscience be. And now may the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest on and abide with each one of us, both now and always.

Amen. Thank you.