

THE WHY & HOW OF

prayer



Written by Travis Mundy & Daniel Leach

9 WEEK STUDY GUIDE

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Introduction

Prayer has been said to be a universal human experience. All religions pray, and even atheists pray in a crisis¹. So, in considering prayer, we are considering something that matters in the lives of all people.

What is prayer? What is the purpose of prayer? How are we meant to pray?

These questions are at the heart of what it means to have faith in God. Many years ago, the American theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote, "Prayer is as natural an expression of faith as breathing is of life." So, let's devote our attention these few weeks to prayer.

These are Bible studies about prayer are based on the life and teaching of Jesus in the gospels. Much more could be said about prayer and explored in all parts of the Bible (As will be done in our sermon series), but here we wanted to narrow the focus and consider prayer in the life and teaching of Jesus. We do this in apprenticeship to Jesus, as we follow in his footsteps and as we take his teaching about prayer seriously. As Calvin said, 'no-one will learn to pray aright whose lips and heart are not schooled by the heavenly Teacher'. So, like the 12 disciples, we invite Jesus to be our instructor and our example, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

The studies have been prepared by me (Daniel) and Travis. Please make sure that each week your group spends significant time in prayer. You might like to rotate study/prayer one week and then prayer/study the next week to ensure prayer isn't just left with what time is left. Week 4 and 9 of the study material are dedicated 'practice' weeks, where the study itself will direct you to pray together. On these weeks you might like to set aside your normal pattern of prayer as a group, or you might like to do both. It's up to your group. Enjoy!

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/14/half-of-non-believers-pray-says-poll>

WEEK 1

Jesus' School of Prayer

By Daniel Leach

Open Discussion, try to let everyone answer (or get everyone to answer!). Read the intro paragraph above. Why do you think everyone prays sometimes?

PUBLICITY

READ MATTHEW 6:5-6

Spend a few moments to observe Jesus' teaching.

What questions does it raise for you? What is Jesus assuming? Is it clear? Is it confusing?

Notice that Jesus *assumes* prayer is a part of the lives of those listening to him. His instruction here is not TO pray, but HOW TO pray. And how NOT to pray.

In Jesus' day, prayers would be led each sabbath by a man standing at the front in the synagogue. It is easy to imagine someone revelling in the attention or trying to display his eloquence and spirituality. On feast days a trumpet would sound, inviting people to pray. So the Pharisee would stop where he was on the street corner and with a self-conscious display of piety pray towards the temple. (Carson, Sermon on the Mount)

What is Jesus' instruction here about what NOT to do in prayer? (v5)

What reward is the result of doing things like the hypocrite pray-ers?

What is his instruction about what TO DO in prayer? (v6)

What reward is the result of doing things like the private pray-ers?

The point here is, 'who is the primary audience of your prayers?'

DISCUSS

Are your public prayers more impressive than your private prayers?

Do you pray in public more than you pray in private? Why do you think that is?

BABBLING

READ MATTHEW 6:7-8

Spend a few moments to observe Jesus' teaching.

What questions does it raise for you? Is it clear? Is it confusing?

Pagan religion believed the gods can be manipulated or appeased through sacrifices, rituals and supplications. We even have recorded pagan incantations from the time of Jesus demonstrating this kind of endless babbling that was used to strong-arm the gods into giving the desired outcome. See also the prophets of Baal in **1 KINGS 18:26-29**.

What is Jesus' instruction here about what NOT to do in prayer? (v7)

DISCUSS

Do you see this kind of babbling occur in other religions still today? (make sure the conversation doesn't become disrespectful to others)
Do you see this kind of babbling occur in your own faith experience?

According to Jesus, why shouldn't we pray in this way? (v8)

DISCUSS

God's knowledge of what we need before we ask him might seem like a disincentive to pray. Why isn't it?

“The problem is any image of prayer that sees it as a mechanism to make things happen. We should not think that through 'good' prayer God can be made to do something for us as if we could wrest favours from him by the sheer volume of our praying.”

TIM CHESTER. BST | *THE MESSAGE OF PRAYER* (P. 189).

DISCUSS

What is the problem with reducing prayer to being a sheer “mechanism to make things happen”?

LORD'S PRAYER

In this section (6:1-18) Jesus refers to God as your "Father" more than 10 times. The hypocrites he makes reference to here don't seem to understand this fundamental way of relating to God as a Father.

DISCUSS

When you address your prayers, how do you normally address them? 'Dear God', 'Dear Jesus', 'Heavenly Father', 'Father God', etc. Do you think this title matters much?

While much attention could be devoted to reading and interpreting the Lord's prayer, for now we will just read it and think about how it communicates the nature of a father/child relationship.

READ MATTHEW 6:9-13

How does the Lord's prayer communicate the nature of a father/child relationship?

DISCUSS

What other observations can you see in the Lord's prayer that enhance the discussion your group has had tonight? How does Jesus' model of addressing God as, "Our Father in Heaven" inform your own way of addressing God in prayer?

In closing, pray the Lord's prayer together. Focus on the primary audience of the shared prayer being God the Father, not the other members of the group. Speak each word with careful intention, not meaningless babble. Consider how you are speaking as a child to your Father in heaven.

WEEK 2

Prayers that Get Answered

Travis Mundy

There are countless books you can purchase that go into great detail about how to get your prayers answered. That if you follow this correct equation or recite this exact wording or you follow these methods or adopt this particular attitude than you'll see your prayers answered and quickly. There's even entire books written about biblical prayers and how if you approach God in the same way, you'll see God respond.

What these books don't tell you is that although there are a lot of prayers in the Bible and lots of instructions of *how* we ought to pray, some prayers get answered, while others don't. Some prayers take years or even centuries to be answered (can you imagine that?). Other prayers are met with firm a "No." But in our hurried Western culture, we desperately want to know what the "magic bullet" is. Some of us may even think that if God doesn't answer our prayers, especially not right away, it's probably not even worth praying at all. So what do we do with the tension of being people who desperately want God to answer our prayers and the lack of immediacy in which those answers arrive? Today we're going to look at two parables Jesus teaches about prayer. We'll explore two people who get their prayers answered and one who doesn't. Then we'll try to extract what we can learn from these teachings about our own prayer life.

READ LUKE 18:1

Not a trick question: what is this parable going to be about?

Immediately before this, Jesus was asked about the arrival of the kingdom of God. People back then were very curious to when God would come and establish His justice and rule for the rest of eternity. Jesus instructs his hearers that that Day no one will see coming; that it will be like a flash of lightning. He then instructs those who have ears to hear to simply be ready – to live everyday like eternity is just around the corner.

How does praying and not giving up fit into the coming of God's kingdom? Why would this be an important habit for followers of Jesus?

READ LUKE 18:2-8

What is happening in this parable? What do we know about widows in the time of Jesus?

We're not given a lot of context here. We don't know the age of this widow. We don't know who here adversary is or what injustice has been done to her. All we can assume is that being a widow, most likely this woman would have had to fight for survival because women (especially those without husbands or male children) had little rights or power or ways to earn money for themselves. Someone has wrong her and she demands justice.

What do you think “justice” means in this context? What does “justice” mean biblically (see **Isaiah 1:17** for a hint)?

Can you explain the tension in the story? How would a woman receive justice from a judge who is unjust? How does the woman go about overcoming this obstacle?

What does verse 5 tell us about the persistence and tenacity of this widow to see her request get answered?

How long did she have to wait before she received an answer?

Why does this judge ultimately grant her request?

In verse 6, Jesus tells his listeners, “**Listen to what the unjust judge says**”. In other words, “**Pay attention**”. He then mentions how God will bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to Him “**day and night**”.

How are God and this unjust judge similar and dissimilar? What is the point of this parable? (See v1)

If the unjust judge is willing to grant the widow’s request, how much more would a just and loving God respond to us? And yet, though we know that truth, how often do YOU pray and fervently and frequently as the widow in this story? How often do you pray but then give up? Why are we like this?

How might you and your prayers become more like the widow and her request?

READ LUKE 18:9-14

Here we encounter a second parable Jesus tells about prayer. It has a different angle than the first parable.

What does verse 9 indicate this parable is about?

There’s an interesting connection between this parable and the last. The word for “justice” in the previous story is the Greek word **ekdikeo** (pronounced “ek-dee-kay-oh). In verse 9, the word translated as “righteous” is a variation of this same root word (**dikaio**s in Greek). What this means is that the widow seeks justice from a higher authority...that God is the one who decides what is just and right and dispenses justice. In this second parable, however, Jesus is calling out people who are “just” in their own eyes, that these individuals think they are the ones who decide and dispense justice. So this parable is the opposite of the previous one: someone who seeks an answer to her prayer (the widow) versus someone who sees himself

as the answer to his own prayer (the Pharisee). Keep this in mind.

What do we know about tax collectors and Pharisees? How were they regarded?

How would you describe the nature of the Pharisee's prayer (in verses 11-12)? What do you notice about the prayer. What is missing? Is it even a prayer?

How would you describe the nature of the tax collector and the nature of his prayer (in verse 13)?

What does it mean that the tax collector went home "justified" (the Greek word used here is that same root word, dikaios) while the Pharisee did not?

Why, do you think, the tax collector's prayer was answered?

Why wasn't the Pharisee's "prayer" answered?

Jesus then adds as a point of emphasis, "Whoever exalts themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

What does this parable have to do with our prayer life? What does humility mean and why does it enhance our prayer life?

The point from these stories is clear. A healthy prayer life that God values is regular, persistent and conducted from a point of great humility. A prayer life that is unhealthy is one that is irregular, lazy and reliant on self rather than God. Although this is not a magic formula (the widow had to wait for potentially years for her request to be granted), Jesus clues us in on what healthy pray looks like. It's derived from relationship, commitment and reliance on God to show up.

Does your prayer life currently look more like the widow's and tax collector's or the Pharisee?

If you'd like to have a healthier prayer life, here are some steps you can take:

Beginner step

Set aside a chunk of time once a week and spend 5 minutes praying. Pray for yourself. Pray for those around you. Pray for things that are happening in the world. Whatever you want to pray for. The point is not what your prayer sounds like or what you're praying about, but simply creating a regular space TO pray during your week.

Intermediate step

Start and end your day with a time of prayer. When you wake up, spend a few minutes giving your day, your schedule, the people you'll encounter to God. This doesn't have to be long (5-10 minutes). Then at the end of the day, before you go to sleep, revisit in prayer the things you presented to God earlier. Ask and examine if God answered any of your prayers or helped you in any way or made things smoother or easier or reminded you of Him. Spend time reflecting on the good things that happened and say thank you. Then repeat the following day.

Advanced step

On top of making regular and daily times of prayer, keep a prayer journal. Write down people, situations, concerns you have and put dates on them. You don't necessarily need to pray through the whole journal every day, but continue to pray for those things regularly. Keep track of how and when God answers those prayers.

WEEK 3

Jesus' Prayer Habits

Daniel Leach

DISCUSS (Encourage everyone to answer)

Who has been a model of prayerfulness that you have looked up to as inspiring? What was their prayer habit? Maybe a person you know or someone you have heard about.

The writer of Hebrews comments about Jesus, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death' (**HEBREWS 5:7**).

Do you think of Jesus as a pray-er? Or even, as a 'Prayer Warrior'?

The term 'Prayer Warrior' may be a bit cheesy, but it's helpfully remember-able.

DISCUSS

Jesus, the son of God, the 2nd member of the trinity, prayed a lot. What does this tell us about prayer?

Today's Bible passages are short and often overlooked, but they paint a picture of Jesus as a man with faithful prayer habits. Read these 5 short passages together, one after the other.

LUKE 5:15-16

"But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."

LUKE 6:12-15

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

LUKE 9:18-22

"Jesus was praying alone when He asked the disciples "Who do the people say I am?"

LUKE 9:28-29

"About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning."

LUKE 22:39-41 (ESV)

"And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed."

Having read these short passages, what observations can your group make about Jesus' prayer life?

Consider particularly:

The place of private prayer/group prayer, Location and time of prayer, occasions that precipitated prayer, etc.

Notice that all these recordings of Jesus' prayer life are from the same gospel account, Luke's gospel. Luke continually draws attention to Jesus' prayer habits and invites his readers to follow Jesus' example.

DISCUSS

Before we give further discussion to prayer habits, what can we glean from Jesus' prayer habits for our own lives?

Following are **4 headings** to help your group to discuss their own prayer habits and how they might grow in 'Prayer Warriors' like Jesus.

Plan to Pray

“The reason we pray so little is that we do not plan to pray. Wise planning will ensure that we devote ourselves to prayer often, even if for brief periods: it is better to pray often with brevity than rarely but at length. But the worst option is simply not to pray—and that will be the controlling pattern unless we plan to pray. If we intend to change our habits, we must start here.”

DON CARSON | PRAYING WITH PAUL.

DISCUSS

What set times of prayer are there in your week? Don't forget to include ALL prayer (at church services, at Community Group, before meals, with your kids, bedtime, Lord's prayer, school prayer, during ministries you serve in, etc.)

DISCUSS

What would help you to have more time of planned prayer?

Some suggestions to get the conversation flowing. It might help to ask the group to share examples they know of each of these suggestions.

- * *set times and/or places for prayer*
- * *always pray when you meet with another christian for coffee/meal/etc. (even if brief)*
- * *before/after meals*
- * *reminders on your phone*

Avoiding Mental Drift

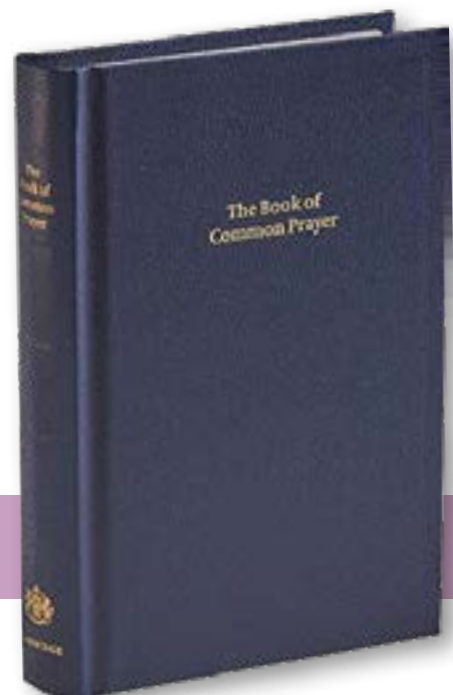
DISCUSS

What practical measures have you seen taken to avoid mental drift whilst praying?

Some suggestions to get the conversation flowing. It might help to ask the group to share examples they know of each of these suggestions.

- vocalising personal prayers
- journalling prayers
- pacing while praying
- pray as you are prompted by a bible passage
- pray with the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* (or similar)

TO PURCHASE A COPY OF *THE ANGLICAN BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* [CLICK HERE >>](#)



Pray Together with Others

DISCUSS

Do you think our highly-individualistic Western culture puts personal prayer on a pedestal above group prayer?

DISCUSS

When have you benefitted from praying with other people? How might you spend more time praying with others?

Some suggestions to get the conversation flowing. It might help to ask the group to share examples they know of each of these suggestions.

- Ask someone to meet weekly/fortnightly/monthly for prayer. If you're young or a young Christian, ask someone more mature. If you're mature or a mature Christian, spare some time to for someone young or young in faith.
- Seize the time you have at Christian gatherings to pray with others.
- If you're married, help your spouse to pray more. what prayers do you share each day or week?
- Join a prayer meeting that happens regularly in person or online. Which ones does your group know about that happen regularly?

Organise your prayers

DISCUSS

What methods have you seen or heard of to organise time in prayer?

Some suggestions to get the conversation flowing. It might help to ask the group to share examples they know of each of these suggestions.

- Keeping prayer notes or a prayer list (physical or digital)
- Reading the weekly church email and the prayer points highlighted there
- Using an App (such as [PrayerMate](#))
- Prayer Guides distributed by para-church organisations ([Open Doors](#), [Operation World](#), [BarnabasFund](#), [Baptist World Aid](#), to name a few)

Hopefully this discussion has helped you to be inspired by Jesus to develop in your prayer habits. Here is a helpful quote from J.I. Packer to finish with to keep this whole conversation in perspective.

“ I start with the truism that each Christian’s prayer life, like every good marriage, has in it common factors about which one can generalize and also uniquenesses which no other Christian’s prayer life will quite match. You are you, and I am I, and we must each find our own way with God, and there is no recipe for prayer that can work for us like a handyman’s do-it-yourself manual or a cookery book, where the claim is that if you follow the instructions you can’t go wrong. Praying is not like carpentry or cookery; it is the active exercise of a personal relationship, a kind of friendship, with the living God and his Son Jesus Christ, and the way it goes is more under divine control than under ours... as in other close relationships, so in prayer: you have to find out by trial and error what is right for you, and you learn to pray by praying. Some of us talk more, others less; some are constantly vocal, others cultivate silence before God as their way of adoration; some slip into glossolalia, others make a point of not slipping into it; yet we may all be praying as God means us to do. The only rules are, stay within biblical guidelines and within those guidelines, as John Chapman puts it, “pray as you can and don’t try to pray as you can’t.” ”

J.I. PACKER | *MY PATH OF PRAYER*

WEEK 4

Practice of Prayer week: Pray until you pray

Daniel Leach

This week your group will not spend time studying prayer in the Bible. Rather your group will spend extended time in prayer together. The point of these studies isn’t for fuller brains, but for more obedience and a deeper intimacy with God. And so we want to give you an opportunity to embody that now.

Pray until you pray

The time of prayer for your group should be focused around this idea named in Don Carson's book, *Praying With Paul*. Here is what he says it means to "pray until you pray"...

“This is a Puritan idea. What they meant is that Christians should pray long enough and honestly enough, at a single session, to get past the feeling of formalism and unreality that attends not a little praying. We are especially prone to such feelings when we pray for only a few minutes, rushing to be done with a mere duty. To enter the spirit of prayer, we must stick to it for a while. If we “pray until we pray,” eventually we come to delight in God’s presence, to rest in his love, to cherish his will. Even in dark or agonized praying, we somehow know we are doing business with God. In short, we discover a little of what Jude means when he exhorts his readers to pray “in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20)... Such advice is not to become an excuse for a new legalism; there are startling examples of very short, rapid prayers in the Bible (e.g., Neh. 2:4). But in the Western world we urgently need this advice, for many of us in our praying are like nasty little boys who ring front doorbells and run away before anyone answers. Pray until you pray.”

Tonight your group should spend extended time in prayer. Each group will be different in their aspiration, but I recommend at least 40 minutes of designated prayer time before it is wrapped up and you move on to something else. Maybe your group wants to go longer, feel free!

Ideally the prayer time will be shared prayers prayed out-loud and actively listened to by the rest of the group. If there are members of the group who are hesitant to pray out-loud for some reason then you could provide them with a notepad and pen so they could write their prayers down instead of saying them aloud.

It might help your group to name some things for prayer beforehand. Maybe you would like to pray for the different ministries of our church, or you might like to pray about the standing prayer points that are often raised in your group. But keep it simple. the point here is to pray until you pray. Your prayer concerns might also be shaped by the content of the Bible Studies so far this term. I don't want to be overly prescriptive, but it might be good to have some stimulus to help people to begin their prayers.

Otherwise, jump in and enjoy talking to your Heavenly Father!

WEEK 5

The Prayers of Luke 1 & 2

Travis Mundy

Last week, we spent our time praying together. It's vitally important for believers that we don't just know about prayer, but become pray-ers ourselves; people who long for deep intimacy with our Lord that we regularly set aside time to simply be with Him.

Today we're going to look at three different prayers that take place in Luke chapters 1 and 2. These three prayers from three very different people reflect many different aspects to the content of our prayers as well as the character of the one we are praying to. See if you can catch on to any recurring themes and the attitudes of those who come to God seeking His face.

READ LUKE 1:46-55

First, some context. Just before this reading (in **LUKE 1:26-38**), Mary, who is a young girl (most scholars think she was in her mid-teens) receives a visit from a very special guest, the angel Gabriel. Mary is initially "troubled" by this visit and doesn't know what to think. After all, visits from angels in Scripture usually mean great blessing or destruction! Gabriel says a familiar line we see all over the Bible when certain people get angelic visits: don't be afraid (or "fear not"). Gabriel tells Mary that despite her never having slept with a man, she's pregnant...with God's Son. She'll be the mum to the most important person in human history. After Gabriel finishes explaining this to her, Mary simply responds, "May your word to me be fulfilled." No doubts. No questioning. After visiting her cousin Elizabeth (who is also miraculous pregnant with child), Mary sings a prayer.

What is Mary's song/prayer about? What components do you see here?

Who is the central focus on this prayer?

READ 1 SAMUEL 2:1-10

This prayer is written by Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Like Mary, Hannah experiences a miraculous pregnancy. She's barren but seeks out the Lord's favour and God blesses her with a baby. Hannah then composes this prayer.

What do you notice about Hannah's prayer? How is it similar to Mary's? Why do you think there are so many things in common between these two prayers?

Do you ever find yourself praying similar sorts of things to Mary and Hannah? Why or why not?

Some things that are noticeable are these women's attention to praising God, recalling God's promises (especially to the most vulnerable), remembering how God's past actions are indicative of His present or future behaviour, and movement from prayers that focus on self to prayers that focus on the wider community.

How might a prayer with these components look today?

READ LUKE 1:67-75

Here we find another story of God's miraculous gift of life to a couple who were unable to bear children. Zechariah is a high priest and receives a visit from Gabriel who informs him that his wife Elizabeth, like Mary, will bear a very special child – the one who was going to prepare the way for the Messiah. Zechariah, unlike Mary, disbelieves Gabriel and is rendered mute through his wife's pregnancy. After Elizabeth gives birth to their son John, Zechariah's lips are loosened and he prays this prayer.

What themes do you see in Zechariah's prayer?

What in the world is a "horn of salvation"? (see **Psalm 18:1-2**)

Zechariah mentions (in verse 70) that part of this prayer is reflective of the prophets of old. What do you think that means to pray like the prophets?

Zechariah clings to this wear-worn pattern that dates back hundreds of years. We see this formula especially in the Psalm and prophetic books: remembering that God is a God who keeps His promises, that this God lifts up the lowly, that ultimately God is victorious over evil and sin and those that oppress others. When we see God's people in trouble, prophets of old tell God to "remember His promises". In these prayers, there is recognition that God has indeed kept those promises, and the result is praise. This reflects prayer being a two-fold equation: crying to God to be true to His character and remembering and thanking God that He IS true to His character (requesting and praising).

How can we balance both of themes components well in our prayers?

DISCUSS

How can we, like Mary and Zechariah, emulate the prayers of those who have gone before us...particularly those who have faced similar situations as us? How can re-using and re-newing those prayers enhance our prayer life?

WEEK 6

The Lord's Prayer

Travis Mundy

READ LUKE 11:1-4

In Luke's version of the story of Jesus, he gives us an abbreviated version of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray. There was a similar prayer in Judaism that may have existed in the time of Jesus called the **Kaddish**. It reads as such:

“Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen. May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity. Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honoured, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen. He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.”

These prayers (both **Lord's Prayer** for Christians and **Kaddish** for Jews) were recited daily. The reason: **to align our hearts with God's**. And to accomplish this, we need to draw our attention to Him daily.

When you hear/read the **Lord's Prayer**, what thoughts/memories bubble up? (is this a prayer you pray...if so, how often? Has it become rote and meaningless? Does it hold a special place for you?)

As we examine the Lord's prayer, it's often helpful to look at each part and ask why Jesus wanted us to focus on each word.

So what's the importance/meaning of (Our) Father? Why is this the way we should look at God as we pray?

What do you think “hallowed by Your Name” means?

Hint: the word for “hallowed” literally means “to make holy; to set apart”.

Why should we pray this part of the prayer? Why is God's Name important?

What does “Your Kingdom come” mean? Imagine what this would look like if this happened today. What would change? What would it mean in your life?

“Give us each day our daily bread” – this is the first of our requests in this prayer (give, forgive, lead us).

In a world of excess where we often desire WAY more than simply bread, what does asking for “daily bread” look like? What does this tell us about all the other things we ask for?

Matthew’s version of this prayer asks God to “forgive our debts”. Luke uses the word “sin” in place of “debt”.

Do you think this means the same thing? In a world with much less accountability and way more freedom to do whatever we want without judgement (“You do you”), why is it important to ask forgiveness of our sins? Do we even believe we have sin anymore?

Why do you think Jesus added the line “for we also forgive everyone who sins against us”? Do we actually do this? Why is God’s forgiveness to us linked with our forgiveness to others (see **Matthew 18:21-35** for details).

Why would God “lead us into temptation”? Is this something God does? Why do we need God’s help to stay away from temptation? Is temptation actually all that bad?

In his book about prayer titled *Bread For The Wilderness, Wine For the Journey*, author John Killinger says this about the **Lord’s Prayer**:

“There is something about prayer, about letting the mind be still and waiting upon God, that sensitizes us to the world around us – to the glory of sunsets and the beauty of tears. ...As Isaiah in the Temple (6:1-7) became aware of the need for a spokesperson for God, and said, “Here I am, send me,” [when you pray the Lord’s Prayer] you find yourself ready to help with the kingdom. ...You want to redesign the world in such a way that people are made to suffer less. You want the hungry to be fed and the infirm to walk. You want the blind to see and the deaf to hear. You want parents to love their children and children to grow up happy and morally committed to the right things. You yourself become committed to the kingdom that human beings have always dreamed of.”

Do you think this quote is accurate? How can regularly praying this prayer help us know God more and find ourselves more aligned with His Kingdom purposes?

Close your time together slowly praying the **Lord’s Prayer** out loud as a group.

WEEK 7

The High Priestly Prayer of John 17

Travis Mundy

In John 17, we encounter Jesus and the disciples in the Upper Room. This is the final night Jesus has with his disciples. He washes their feet (**JOHN 13**) and gives them hope in the form of a Helper (the Spirit) who will continue to be with them and guide them after His departure. Jesus tells them that this life of following him won't be easy, but to take heart, because he has overcome the world (**JOHN 16:33**). Before he moves out to Gethsemane, Jesus takes this moment to pray. This prayer is called the *High Priestly Prayer*.

JOHN 17:1-5

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”

How does this prayer begin?

Why is Jesus so focused on “glory”? What does that term mean and why is it so important to the story?

According to Jesus, what is “eternal life”? What does it mean to “know” God and the one whom God has sent?

READ JOHN 17:6-19

How does Jesus pray for those under his care?

What themes stand out in this section?

How can Jesus pray for “joy” (v. 13) while simultaneously recognizing that these followers are still stuck in a world that hates them (vv. 14-15)? How can those two things work together?

Four things Jesus prays for: **joy, protection, sanctification and sending.**

If these are the main things Jesus prays for about his followers, do they match the prayers we pray for ourselves (as his followers)? Or do our prayers focus on other things?

What does it mean to be “sanctified”? Is this a prayer you pray for yourself and your church community?

READ JOHN 17:20-26

Why is unity so important to Jesus?

Is it possible to experience and continue to pray for unity when there are so many denominations and expressions of faith? Did Jesus waste his breath or is unity still a thing that is possible and therefore pray-able?

The final things Jesus prays for are for believers to experience the love of God and to see God’s glory and to ultimately find their eternal home with him.

How do these things reflect similar themes in the Lord’s Prayer?

What can be said about this prayer is that it is focused and intentional. It’s a prayer with a mission. It’s not simply about asking for earthly things, but for God’s glory to go out, for his people to be sent out and for his love to be lived out. Jesus prays as someone whose sole focus is on God and God’s kingdom.

What can we learn from a prayer like this?

PSALM 37:4 says, *“Take delight in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart.”* Many Christians misunderstand this to be a magic formula where if I do what God wants, He’ll give me all the things I want. But that’s not how prayer works. As we delight in God, our desires become more like His desires. We begin praying like He would, for things He wants, for His glory to be revealed. As we pray more and experience intimacy with God, we begin praying like Jesus, still praying for everyday things, but ultimately desiring the things God wants: for others to know Him, experience His kingdom and for His glory to be made known.

The key is to pray often and regularly. Then our prayer life becomes vibrant and we actually know and feel God’s presence. We look more like Him and less like people who randomly throw out wishes like someone rubbing a lamp and hoping for the magical genie to do their bidding.

How can you pray more like Jesus?

WEEK 8

Jesus' Gethsemane Prayer

Daniel Leach

DISCUSS

Is it right to pray for what YOU want, or should you just pray for what God's wants (HIS will)?

Today we look at Jesus' prayer on the night before he was taken to be crucified, often called *The Gethsemane Prayer*. In this episode we get to see the most personal and difficult moment of Jesus' life as he falls down before his Father in prayer. There is much to be learnt about prayer from this episode.

Keep in mind that Jesus knows that he will face death in the following 24 hours, he has been predicting it for months prior to this night. His disciples should also be aware that his crucifixion is coming, Jesus has told them numerous times.

READ MARK 14:32-42 & LUKE 22:39-46

Spend a few moments to observing the episode as it is recorded by the two gospel writers. What do you notice that is distinctive to Mark's account? What's distinctive to Luke? What details did you notice on the reading? What questions does it raise for you?

Is Jesus' prayer for what HE wants? Or for what GOD wants? (MARK 14:36, LUKE 22:42)

Praying for What You Want

Consider this quote from Paul Miller's book, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World...*

“When Jesus prays at Gethsemane “take this cup from me,” he is being real; Christians rush to “not my will, but yours be done” without first expressing their hearts (LUKE 22:42, NIV). They submit so quickly that they disappear. Overspiritualizing prayer suppresses our natural desire that our house not be burning. When we stop being ourselves with God, we are no longer in real conversation with God... Jesus wants us to be without pretense when we come to him in prayer. Instead, we often try to be something we aren't... Sometimes we try so hard to be good that we aren't real. The result is functional deism, where we are separated from God. The real you doesn't encounter the real God.”

DISCUSS

Do you let 'the real you' encounter God in prayer? Or do you hold something of your own desires back?

DISCUSS

What excess might this lead to if we only focus on the first half of Jesus' Gethsemane prayer?

Praying for God's Will to be Done

The second half of Jesus' Gethsemane prayer is for God's will to be done. Paul Miller writes, "Jesus is real about his feelings, but they don't control him, nor does he try to control God with them. He doesn't use his ability to communicate with his Father as a means of doing his own will. He submits to the story that his Father is weaving in his life." (Page 116).

Submitting to the story that God is weaving requires us to trust God.

DISCUSS

How can we find the strength to pray for God's will to be done?

This prayer can be one of the hardest prayers to pray as Christians.

What do you make of the fact that Jesus pray's this same prayer 3 times?

DISCUSS

Jesus' rebuke of the disciples is about their weakness in prayer. Do you see yourself in the disciples? How so?

DISCUSS

How can we move from being weak in prayer like the disciples to being persistent and faithful in prayer like Jesus?

Take a look at the image below. Discuss it with your group. Does this image help you to balance personal desires with God's will in prayer?



In closing, ask for God's help to grow in trust.

WEEK 9

Praying Through Scripture

Travis Mundy

As we finish our series on Prayer, it's important not to just know what prayer is, but to actually put it into practice. The goal of this study series is to become people who experience deeper intimacy with God, so it is important we don't just talk about how to do that, but to actually do it! We've gone through plenty of examples of prayers through this study. They are all very helpful models of what prayer can look like for us. One of the most common ways to pray for God's people over the last several thousand years is by praying using Scripture itself. For over a millennium, the family of God have read, reflected on, meditated over and saturated themselves in the Scriptures, using them as both a guide to praying and as an expression of their own feelings and thoughts. We are going to end our time together practicing praying through Scripture together through an ancient discipline called "Lectio Divina." Lectio Divina simply means "Sacred Reading." It's a practice that doesn't simply read Scripture, but lets it sink down into your soul. Here's how to do it:

1. Introduction.

Christians believe that the Bible is the living Word of God. For this Word to speak to us, though, we must read and reflect on it. We must hear what the Lord is saying to us through the particular Scripture reading. Meditation uses the mind and the heart to help us hear the word of the Lord. It engages the faculties of thinking and imagination (our minds), the love we have for God (our hearts), and the resolutions we make to live better Christian lives (our “hands and feet”). The prayer applies each of his or her senses to the reading, using imagination to “hear” the words and sounds of the scene, to “see” the sights, to “smell” the smells, to “taste” the food, dust, and drink, and to “feel” textures, dirt, skin, etc.

2. Select a Scripture passage.

Choose a Scripture passage that is conducive to meditation.

EXAMPLES:

The Young Jesus (LUKE 2:41-50)
Temptation in the Desert (MATTHEW 4:1-11)
Calling of the First Disciples (LUKE 5:1-11)
Calming of the Storm (MARK 4:35-41)
The Woman in Simon’s House (LUKE 7:36-50)
Jesus Instructs the Disciples (MARK 6:7-13)
The Sermon on the Mount (MATTHEW 5-7)
Miracle of Cana (JOHN 2:1-12)
“Who Do People Say I Am?” (MATTHEW 16:13-17)
Curing of the Blind Man of Jericho (LUKE 18:35-43)
The Miracle of the Loaves (JOHN 6:1-13)
Woman Caught in Adultery (JOHN 8:1-11)
Jesus and Zacchaeus (LUKE 19:1-10)
The Woman at the Well (JOHN 4:5-42)
The Man Born Blind (JOHN 9:1-41)
Raising of Lazarus (JOHN 11:1-44)
The Rich Young Man (MATTHEW 19:16-22)
Driving Out the Money Changers (MARK 11:15-17)
Washing the Apostles’ Feet (JOHN 13:1-20)
The Mount of Olives (LUKE 22:39-46)
The Crucifixion (LUKE 23:33-49)
The Disciples on the Way to Emmaus (LUKE 24:13-35)

3. Get comfortable.

Take a few minutes to help everyone settle down in the place of prayer. Encourage them to sit in a relaxed position, eyes closed. Ask them to breathe deeply and slowly; to be aware of the sounds around them; to quiet themselves and be still. You might want to play some quiet instrumental music to set a prayerful environment.

4. Pray to the Holy Spirit.

Remind the group that they are in God's presence. Ask them to be cognizant of the attributes of God – His love, compassion, mercy and peace. As they slowly inhale and exhale, ask the Holy Spirit to help them pray and to hear what the Lord is saying to them.

5. Read the Scripture passage slowly & meditatively out loud.

Once you've read it aloud once, pause and then read through it again a second time.

6. Meditate on the Scripture passage. Observe.

Ask everyone to step into the story and become a part of it. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples traveling with Jesus. What is happening? What kind of day is it? Who is with Jesus? What is Jesus doing? What does he say? What is the crowd or individual saying or doing? Depending on the passage or story selected, ask everyone to imagine themselves as the person who encounters Jesus. Why do you approach Jesus? What does Jesus say or do to you? What happens to you? What are your feelings? What do you do after your encounter with Jesus? etc. Invite them to write their observations in a journal or on paper. Reflect. Invite everyone to reflect on the meaning of the passage or story. What does this story mean? What is Jesus saying to us? What is his challenge to us? What is the Gospel author stressing in this story? What strikes you as the main point? etc. Invite them to write their reflections in a journal or on paper. Listen. Invite everyone to apply the story or passage to their lives. What word is being spoken to you in this Bible passage? Are you willing to listen to Jesus' answer? Prayerfully ask, "What, Lord, are you saying to me in this reading?" Invite them to write their response to the question in a journal or on paper.

7. Application.

Now invite everyone to resolve to do something about the insights they have gained. Ask one another: how did God speak to you? Now that I have meditated on these words, what am I to do/

be? How can I respond practically (with mind, heart and hands) to this passage? Whatever the resolution, ask them to thank the Lord for the moments He spent with them and for any insights they received. Invite them to write their resolution in a journal or on paper.

8. Reflect together on the experience.

Was this a good experience? Did you feel closer to God as you prayed this way? What can you do to nurture more times of intimacy with God?

Lastly, it's always beneficial to end with a challenge.

What did you learn through this series? What was new or challenging? How will this enhance your prayer life? What patterns or steps do you need to take to become more regular and intentional in your prayer life?