



Here is the problem. On one hand, we know that prayer is central to the life of faith. People like the great theologian and reformer Martin Luther have said “A Christian without prayer is just as impossible as a living person without a pulse.” On the other hand, at times our experience of praying can seem deeply unsatisfying. Talking to someone we cannot see can feel like we are talking to ourselves and our prayers can seem repetitive and unrewarding. Many Christians – young and old, leaders and pastors – struggle with prayer. Yet it seems to be a subject that is taboo – no one wants to admit it.

So, let me put it out there: I have been a Christian since I was eight years old and have a Masters in Christian Ministry...but I too have struggled at different times with prayer. Really, I am writing this for myself as well as for us as a church.

I am not claiming profound new revelations in this devotional. This journal is not a detailed theology of prayer. I have simply brought together the best insights from a number of resources (referenced at the back) with my own experience over 49 years. It is written to help renew and deepen our personal and corporate prayer life. While it contains theological truths, in the end the goal is not knowledge, but a change in what we DO.

This *Journey Into Prayer* is for all of us: new believers and old. For some there will be new truths; for others, it will reinforce old truths.

It is called a prayer adventure. I hope we will enter into this with a sense of adventure, regardless of where we are at presently. I hope we desire to grow in our personal prayer life and in doing so, grow closer to God. My prayer is that each of us will grow personally and that we as a church will also grow, so that prayer is basic to all we are as a community.

There are devotions for five days of the week, structured around a key topic each

week. Each Sunday there will be a message and small group study to go with it.

The devotions are deliberately short; you can read them in about ten minutes. But I encourage you to take time to reflect deeply and use the note pages to write down any thoughts. Most of all, make sure you take the time to do the action points – and PRAY! If possible, to reinforce the point, re-read the Scripture again before you go to bed at night.

Don't get discouraged if you miss the odd day. Go back and complete it later. Remember, you are in a spiritual battle and the last thing the enemy wants is for you to have a strong prayer life. Changing habits is a slow process. So, don't give up, but press in.



Keith Harrington

Lead Pastor, Central Baptist Church Invercargill

A prayer as you start this journey

God, You know I would like to have a deeper, richer prayer life. You know where I am at right now. I need Your help in this journey. Protect me from anything that would get in the way of my growing over these weeks. I can't do this in my own strength. Use this course in Jesus' name. Amen.

Bibliography



I have used these books extensively to bring this booklet together. I acknowledge the debt I owe to the authors' insights.

28 Days to Powerful Prayer by Dave Earley (2020) Barbour Books

Fresh Pathways in Prayer by Julian Hardyman (2019) 10 Publishing

Too Busy Not To Pray by Bill Hybels (1998) InterVarsity Press.

Journey in Prayer by John Smed (2020) Moody Publishers

Other good books worth reading

Prayer by Philip Yancey (2006) Hodder

- Detailed but very readable and relatable

God on Mute by Pete Greig (2007) Regal Books

- One of the best books on suffering and prayer I have ever read

Red Moon Rising by Pete Greig and Dave Roberts (2003) Kingsway

- An inspiring book on intercessory prayer

Hearing God by Dallas Willard (1999) IVP Books

- A sound and detailed book on hearing God speak

Faith and Doubt by John Ortberg (2008) Zondervan

- While not directly about prayer, it does address the issue of doubt very well, and doubt is often an issue when it comes to prayer

Prayer by Timothy Keller (2014) Hodder and Stoughton

- A more detailed theological approach to prayer

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality by Peter Scazzero (2006) Thomas Nelson

- A great introduction to integrating our emotion and spiritual health

Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quoted is from the NLT Bible.



From Week 3:

- Taking time to slow down and listen to God, writing down what we sense God saying.
- Keeping a prayer journal.
- Identifying our emotions and consciously bringing them into God's presence.
- Taking time to be aware of the Lord's presence.
- Being obedient to God's voice.
- Examining how you are practising Sabbath rest and planning a short retreat.

From Week 4:

- Setting aside regular times to fast and pray.
 - Doing a humility check-up.
 - Finding a prayer partner/planning to join with others in prayer.
 - Being persistent in prayer until God answers.
 - Surrendering the pain of unanswered prayer to God's sovereignty.
3. What is the next step you need to take in your prayer journey?

Week 1

THE PLAN FOR PRAYER



READ

Hebrews 4:14-16

Let's face it: sometimes prayer seems like just one more thing we ought to do. It feels like a duty. (More about this in Week 2.)

When Jesus lived on earth, the temple was the centre of Jewish spiritual life. The temple was divided into six sections. The outer section was the court of the Gentiles where anyone could enter. Next was the court for women, then the court for men (yes, it was sexist), then the temple court, where only the priests could go, then the Holy place where only the on-duty priest could enter, then finally the inner most chamber – the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year. A thick curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple, symbolising that humanity was separated from

God by sin (Isaiah 59:1-2).

When Jesus died, He became the permanent offering for sin. In one of the most dramatic moments of the crucifixion, at the moment of Jesus' death, the curtain in the temple was split from top to bottom (Matthew 27:45-61). The curtain was 10 centimetres thick and 18 metres high. (To give an idea of the size, the SBS Bank building in Invercargill is 23 metres high, so this was a dramatic event.)

The splitting of the curtain clearly shows that access to God was no longer to be limited to one special person once a year. Every child of God has access to God at any time. We don't have to offer a sacrifice for sin, because Jesus has given a once-for-all-time sacrifice. We have an open invitation to come to God at any time, with confidence, knowing that God welcomes us, listens to us and wants to help us.



The purpose of this course was not for us to learn more about prayer; it was to strengthen our **practise** of prayer.

Take five minutes to reflect on these three questions:

1. What has God been saying to you?
2. Which of the following practices have you begun to incorporate into your prayer life that have been helpful?

From Week 1:

- Setting aside a time and space for prayer.
- Memorising some key passages, like Ephesians 3:20, Zephaniah 3:17, the Lord's Prayer, the Jesus Prayer.
- Using the Lord's Prayer as a guide to praying.
- Using a short prayer, like the Jesus Prayer to help centre us doing the day.
- Praying a prayer of surrender when feeling bad about oneself.
- Speaking prayers out loud.

From Week 2:

- Regularly thanking God each day.
- Asking God to show you anything that is not pleasing and asking for forgiveness.
- Being very specific in bringing your daily needs to God.
- Using a simple plan for praying for others.
- Praying prayers of liberation for those who have hurt us.
- Using Scripture as a way to pray.



This is an astounding thought. The God who is almighty and all-powerful welcomes us into this presence as a friend. As we grasp this idea, prayer is no longer a duty or a chore. That God would welcome me into His presence is incredible! Why would He do that? Because He loves us! Does He know what I am really like? Yes!

Somehow, we have to change our thinking around prayer, to see the incredible privilege we have been granted. Maybe this truth has become so commonplace to us that we fail to see how astounding it is. As a poor comparison, it is as if we can walk into the Prime Minister's office any time, day or night. Magnify that idea a million times and you begin to grasp the wonder of prayer.



ACTION POINTS

Reflect on the privilege of prayer. What is hindering you from seeing prayer as an exciting privilege? Where does the hindrance contradict the truth?

Take a few minutes to thank God for the access He has given us through Jesus Christ. Ask Him to change how you feel about prayer.



READ

Romans 8:15-16
Galatians 4:6-7

- God really, really loves you.
- God deeply cares of you.
- God is very near especially when we are hurting (Psalm 34:18).

Prayer isn't meant to be hard or difficult. But this does depend on how we view God...and how we think God views us.

If I have to have a difficult conversation with someone who can be prickly and who has hurt me in the past, then I am naturally nervous. I might well put off having the conversation for as long as possible (because I am a bit of a wimp)! Equally, if the person I need to talk to is very important or in a position of authority, I might be a bit apprehensive.

If our earthly fathers were absent, abusive, distant or critical, then we tend to project this onto other authority figures – like God. In such cases, prayer is not easy.

We have to grasp three key things:

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, He told them to say "Our Father (Abba)..." This was the intimate word used by a child to his father in the home. The danger is that we use it too lightly (e.g. "Hey, Dad..."). However, the word also comes with deep respect, emphasised by the next words ("in heaven"). It is unique in both Old Testament and Jewish literature to use 'Abba' in relation to God. We can know the same intimacy that Jesus enjoys with the Father. Romans 8:15-16 is worth meditating on. We are daughters and sons of God and we can enjoy intimate access to Him.

Just as in a healthy relationship, children do not worry about what words to use when speaking to their father; they know they can come at any time and tell him anything.

known how to pray, such as in times of spiritual warfare and when words seem inadequate in praise. Praying in tongues is an act of faith, as you don't know what you are praying (and despite some notable exceptions, it is not a known language). It also strengthens one's inner being.

If you have the gift of tongues, then I encourage you to use it. To not do so seems disrespectful to the giver of the gift, the Holy Spirit. If you do not have the gift of tongues, don't envy those who do or see yourself as somehow less than. Thank God for the gifts you have been given and use them well. If you don't have the gift but would like it, ask the Holy Spirit for it. You might find yourself during a time of worship suddenly speaking out a different language. Thank God for what He has given you. But if after asking you don't receive the gift, realise that the Holy Spirit gives as He wills and that this gift is not for you.



Praying in Tongues

Praying in tongues is a type of prayer that has caused much confusion and hurt within the church. This is because some have claimed that every believer can and should pray in tongues or that praying in tongues is a sign of being filled with the Spirit.

Speaking in tongues is a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10) and the gifts of the Spirit are given by the Spirit as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). However, we can ask the Spirit for a gift (1 Corinthians 14:12). Speaking in tongues is not a sign of maturity; 1 Corinthians 13 makes clear that love is a sign of maturity, not any gift of the Spirit. Conversely, not speaking in tongues does not mean we are not filled with the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). The reality is that when we become Christians, we are filled with the Spirit of God. We might at different times have further experiences of "being filled", but all Christians have the Spirit of God within them.

Paul gives clear instructions about praying in tongues. He says if we pray in tongues at a gathering, we should wait for an interpretation so that others can understand (1 Corinthians 14:13, 27-28). Speaking in tongues builds up the speaker, but not others because they can't understand (1 Corinthians 14:5-6). Paul does not diminish the gift, saying he wishes all believers had it, but thanks God he has this gift (1 Corinthians 14, 5, 18).

I personally have found praying in tongues useful when I have not



ACTION POINTS

Reflect on what lies are getting in the way of you enjoying intimacy with God:

- *I am not good enough*
- *God doesn't really care about me*
- *God is angry and disappointed with me*

Confess the lie that you have believed and ask God to reveal His true heart to you.

Memorise Zephaniah 3:17 (I have changed the tense of the verse to personalise it):

*"For the LORD your God is living among you.
He is a mighty savior.
He takes delight in you with gladness.
With His love, He calms all your fears.
He rejoices over you with joyful songs."*



READ

Exodus 33:11

Prayer is conversing with God. We read of Moses setting up a tent where he would daily go and meet with God. He talked to God and God talked to him, "as one speaks to a friend." There was nothing fancy and complex. God is not impressed with flash words or theatrics. Prayer is opening our heart and mouth and talking as we would with a friend.

Paul told the Thessalonian church to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This seems impossible and dangerous, but Paul was not thinking of us closing our eyes or being on our knees: he was talking of an ongoing conversation with God throughout the day; he was talking of being aware of the presence of God in all we do.

The most famous example of this was Brother Lawrence, a monk who lived in the 16th century. He was a

large, clumsy man, whose key job was washing the pots in the kitchen. He so loved God that he turned the kitchen into his prayer space and helped cultivate the presence of God through continual conversational prayer with God. People began to notice something about him and started seeking him out for advice on spiritual matters.

Prayer is multi-dimensional. God is infinite and we are needy, so prayer has a large number of expressions:

- Declaring praise for who God is (Psalm 100).
- Giving thanks to God. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
- Asking God to meet your needs.
- Asking God to meet the needs of others.
- Praying the prayers of the Scriptures, e.g. the Lord's Prayer.
- Spiritual warfare.
- Confessing sin and asking forgiveness.
- Asking, seeking and knocking.

saying, "I am God and I do not need to explain myself to you." Job responds in humility (Job 42:1-6).

- God's wisdom is greater than ours and there is much we do not understand (Isaiah 55:8-9). Our dog, Scout, cannot understand why I do not take him with me every time I leave in the car. He can't understand why I don't take him for walks three times a day and play with him the rest of the time. I can't explain things to him - and even if I could, he would not understand (what do you mean you have to write a journal on prayer?). Because God is all-wise, God doesn't work to our timetable. He looks at the

eternal picture, but we can only see in very limited capacity.

- God is more concerned about our godliness than our happiness. Let's face it, much of our prayer life revolves around our wellbeing as we perceive it. When God says all things work for good, 'good' means more like Jesus, not 'good' as in 'our happiness'.

I acknowledge that these points don't fully resolve the pain of answered prayer and I don't want to minimise the pain you may be suffering. There is a mystery of unanswered questions that in faith we have to embrace this side of eternity.



ACTION POINTS

Do you have an unanswered prayer that you are holding against God?

Are you feeling bitter, hurt or disillusioned about it? Talk to God about it. Maybe write it on a piece of paper, then make a conscious decision in faith and humility to hand it over to God, acknowledging, like Job did, God's sovereignty.



READ

Hebrews 11 (especially verses 39-40) & 12:1

We all know the pain of unanswered prayer. When we see answers to prayer, it motivates us to pray more; and vice versa. When God does not seem to answer, we wonder about the point of praying at all.

There are three useful questions we can ask:

- Is it me? Week 2's sermon on The Nine Roadblocks to Prayer is a good place to start, to examine if there are actually issues we need to address within ourselves.
- Is it Satan? Sometimes our prayers are delayed by Satan because there is an unseen spiritual battle happening. Daniel 10 gives a clear example of this. At such times, we simply need to persist and enlist the help of others.
- Is it God? Has God said no? It

might be that while we believe God has not answered our prayer, He has actually answered - with a no. Just as we realise that if parents never said no to a request from their child they would not be good parents, so God does not always say yes. This is not the same as God not answering.

Beyond this, there are times when we have prayed in faith, with a clean heart, persistently and in line with God's will and still seen no answer. It's painful (I speak from personal experience). It can cause us to doubt God's character and give up all together. Here are some things to remember when we are in this place of pain:

- God doesn't need to explain Himself to us. He is God (Psalms 135:6, 115:3). God allows Job to suffer terrible loss and does not answer Job's questions. When God does reply to Job, He gives no explanation but instead reminds him of His power displayed in creation (Job 38-42). God is clearly

- Connecting with the father heart of God.
- Replacing worry with peace.
- Claiming the promises of God.
- Crying out to God in humility.
- Being still and listening to God.



ACTION POINTS

Reflect on the list above of what prayer is. Which three could you most closely relate to? Why?

Which one might be an area of growth?

As you work through the material over the next weeks, formulate a plan of how you could grow in this area.

Ask God to show you how you can grow in prayer.



READ

Luke 18:1-8

Sometimes we can think that God is not really interested in our little problems. In fact, in the scheme of things in the world, it can seem selfish to be bothering God about them. Jesus told a story to help us understand how God sees our prayers. Unfortunately, it can be interpreted in the exact opposite way it was intended.

Many see the story as an allegory. God is the judge, who is not really interested in our situation. We are like the widow: powerless and with no connections. If we are desperate enough and badger God long enough, we may wear God out and wring a blessing from a stingy God. Many books promise the “secret” to getting God to listen and answer our prayers.

Actually, Jesus’ story is a parable, one

with a puzzling aspect that makes us think. This parable is a study in contrasts.

We are not like the widow. We are not abandoned with no connection to the judge. We are God’s sons and daughters. We are part of the family of God and can freely and with confidence come into God’s presence.

God is not like the judge. While the judge was unjust, uncaring and selfish, God IS just, good and loving.

Matthew 7:9-11 makes this clear. Just as we get pleasure in giving gifts to our children, flawed though we are, how much more does God like to bless His children when we ask?

We must never doubt God’s willingness to respond to our prayers. Sure, He will not give us everything we ask for, just as parents don’t give children everything they want (if they do, they are not good parents). But God loves when we boldly and

intense pressure from the authorities and key leaders were arrested and threatened. The response was a time of united prayer, asking not for protection but for boldness and supernatural power. God answered their “other-centred” prayers by shaking the building they were in, refilling them with the Spirit and renewing their boldness to preach.

Note: Matthew 18:19-20 talks of two or three believers agreeing together and God granting the request. These verses should be seen within their context of church discipline and not some formula for seeing God answer prayer. The reality is, many believers over the years have sincerely agreed in prayer together and yet have not seen their prayers answered as they expected.



ACTION POINTS

There are a number of ways we can pray in unity.

- *Use the monthly church prayer guide to pray with others about the same thing.*
- *Join a regular prayer meeting - or start your own.*
- *Find a person or people to prayer with regularly: create a prayer pairing or a prayer triplet.*



READ

John 17:20-24

Praying individually is important, but praying with others in unity is also incredibly powerful. There is mystery in how this 'works', but here are some encouragements:

- God blesses unity (Psalms 133, 1, 3).
- There is exponential power in partnership. Moses talked of five people chasing 100 (1:20), but 100 chasing 10,000 (1:100) and one person chasing 1,000 (1:1,000) but two chasing 10,000 (1:5000). In both examples, partnership increased the result five-fold. Charles Spurgeon said of these verses: "There is accumulated power in united intercession." He then added, "God, grant to each of us a praying partner."
- Unity was the main prayer

request Jesus made for the disciples just before He died.

- When we pray with others, we build each other up in encouragement and faith. Moses needed others to stand with him in prayer to win victory (Exodus 17:10-12).

Praying in unity is when:

- The request is united, i.e. agrees with the Word of God.
- Each person has a sense of agreement from the Holy Spirit.
- There is sense of compulsion to bring the request to God.

We see two examples of united prayer from the early church that saw powerful results. The first was after Jesus' ascension and before Pentecost. We read they were "constantly united in prayer" and the result was the coming of the Spirit, the birth of the church and 3,000 coming to faith. Later on, as the church was growing, Christians came under

unashamedly bring our requests to Him. He is so willing to respond.



ACTION POINTS

Reflect on why at times you don't bring matters to God. What puts you off? Is there a false perception of God that needs to be corrected?

Are you hanging on to bitterness or disillusionment from unanswered prayer?

Ask God to show you something of His generous heart and attitude.



READ

Matthew 8:23-27

If you could ask God for one miracle in your life, knowing He would grant your request, what would it be? To heal your marriage? To bring home a child who has strayed from faith? To heal your body? To change something about your work? To straighten your finances?

Sometimes we bring a need to God, but deep down we doubt God can really make a difference to the situation we face. The reason no one asks you to fix the economy is that you have no power to fix it, so there is no point in asking you. Maybe we don't ask God about our most pressing issues because we don't believe God has the power to do anything about them. This might be embarrassing to admit, but it is a good place to start.

The biographies of Jesus emphasise God's power. We see His power over

nature when He calms the storm. We read of His power over sickness when He heals. We see His power over the demonic realm when He casts out demons. We see His power over death when raising the dead. In the Old Testament, we read of God working through evil kings and leaders. We see Him arranging circumstances for His purposes – Joseph is a classic example. The key verse in the whole saga is when Joseph says to His brothers, "What you meant for evil, God worked for good" (Genesis 50:20). And while He never overrides human autonomy, God can change people's hearts. He changes Peter from a broken man after his denial to a powerful church leader. He changes a hateful Saul into the apostle, Paul. He takes a doubting Thomas and turns him into a man willing to die for this faith.

God is able to do immeasurably more that we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). "And God has not changed. Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The LORD is the

neighbour wanting bread encourages audacious persistence (Week 1, Day 3). Jesus warned that many would lose faith when His kingdom returned and give up on prayer as they looked at what was happening in the world. Persistent prayer is a sign of faith.

Jesus clearly tells us to be persistent in prayer – to ask knock and seek. Why? Some say that persistence reveals our true heart motive. A child asks a parent for many things each

day, but often the next day their request is completely different. The fact is, when I really want something, I persist. Others say that persistent prayer changes us by helping us see the world and life through God's eyes. When I persistently pray, God begins to change my heart, so that my desires begin to align with God's. Like Paul, we may pray for healing and receive humility. Like Peter, we may pray about food and get a lesson in racism. Prayer changes us.



ACTION POINTS

Reflect on prayers you have given up praying and why you gave up. Is there something on your heart today that God is encouraging you to keep on asking for, seeking and knocking?



READ

1 Kings 18:41-48
Matthew 7:7

Of all the days in this journal, I have wrestled with this one the most. There is a mystery in this that is hard to explain.

Why do we need to be persistent in prayer if God is so willing for us to pray and is so able to respond? Praying over and over about the same thing feels like badgering God – and it gets boring. Didn't Jesus say we don't need to keep praying the same thing over and over because He knows what we need before we ask? (The answer is yes. © See Matthew 6:7-8.)

We hear stories of people like George Muller, who prayed for years for the same thing until he saw God answer. But we don't hear the stories of people who have prayed for years and seen no answers within their lifetime. Millions of Christians in far-

flung lands have cried out for justice and seen no relief.

We read in the Bible examples of stubbornness in prayer. The Gentile woman pushed against Jesus' reluctance and her faith was rewarded (Matthew 15:26-27). When praying for rain, Elijah had to persist seven times until he saw rain come (1 Kings 18:41-46). Daniel had to keep praying to push through the resistance in the heavenly realms (Daniel 11). Abraham persisted in his intercession for Sodom, yet was ultimately not successful (Genesis 18:16-33). Jacob wrestled with God (Genesis 32:22-32). Paul prayed for healing three times (2 Corinthians 12:8).

Jesus told the story of the judge and the widow in order to (in His own words) "encourage us to keep on praying and that we should not give up." We explored this story in Week 1, Day 5, understanding it to be a parable of contrast. The parable of the man being woken by the

everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary" (Isaiah 40:28). The God we read of in the Bible "is the same today, yesterday and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

God invites us into His presence as our Father, wanting us to share our concerns and needs. He is able to help us because all of the power of heaven and earth is His. And He is listening intently, wanting to hear our voice.



ACTION POINTS

What causes you to doubt or question God's ability to respond to the prayers you bring to Him? Is your view of God too small?

Memorise Ephesians 3:20:

"By His mighty power at work in us, He is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. God is able to do immeasurably more that we can ask or imagine."

Confess your lack of faith to God and ask Him to give you a fresh confidence in Him (James 1:6).



How We Pray

There are Biblical examples both of prayer out loud and silent prayer. God hears both, because He sees our heart. However, I personally feel there are significant advantages when we are on our own to pray out loud; there is a power in speaking out our prayers. It stops our mind from wandering and it clarifies our thoughts. Speaking out our thoughts and feelings to God is emotionally healthy. If we are used to only praying silently, this might take a little getting used to. But I encourage to you speak out your prayers.

Praying out loud in private will also help us when we are in a group prayer meeting. If we have only ever prayed silently, we will find it awkward to pray in a group setting. Not praying out loud is often based on a fear that somehow our words are not good enough.

Some people find it easier to write down their prayers. This can be really useful as well, as it focuses our thoughts. It also reminds us of what we have prayed: we can look back and record how God has answered. You don't need anything fancy: just get yourself a notebook or journal, write down your prayers or what you have prayed about, then the date. Every week or so, look back at what you have prayed and write down any answers you have seen. This is a great way to build faith.



ACTION POINTS

Our heart attitude can attract God or repel Him. Here is a 16-point checklist to examine your heart for self-centredness and pride. Circle those for which your answer is "Yes", then talk to God about these and ask God for forgiveness where needed. Do you:

- *Think primarily of yourself when making decisions?*
- *Feel as if you should get your own way?*
- *Focus on others' mistakes? Think first about your rights?*
- *Desire to be served?*
- *Feel wounded if you are not recognised?*
- *Get defensive when criticised?*
- *Work to maintain your image or reputation?*
- *Struggle to say "I'm sorry"?*
- *Justify yourself when you make mistakes or sin?*
- *Regret your sin only when caught out?*
- *Quickly blame others?*
- *Expect others to make the first step towards reconciliation?*
- *Compare yourself with others/feel you are competing with others?*
- *Live as if you are self-sufficient?*
- *Disobey God when what He wants goes against what you want?*



READ

Philippians 3:2-11

Our heart attitude is critical when it comes to prayer. The story in Week 2, Day 4 of the Pharisee and the tax collector clearly illustrates this (Luke 18:9-14). One came with arrogance and one with humility. It was the humble man whose prayers were received by God. The Jesus Prayer, based on this encounter, is a prayer of humility.

The Old Testament story of Saul shows this well. Saul was a shy man whom God chose to lead (1 Samuel 9:21, 10:22). However, Saul forgot that it was God who had anointed him and brought him success. Under pressure, he took the role of the High priest, then rather than admit his sin, tried to justify it (1 Samuel 13:8-14). When God gave him a great victory over the Amalekites, he built a statue in his own honour (1 Samuel: 15:1-

12). In the end, God grieved that Saul had become arrogant and removed his anointing. Note what Samuel said: "Arrogance is like the evil of idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:23). Why? Because when we are arrogant we are worshiping ourselves rather than God.

Humility is clearly linked to prayer, renewal and victory throughout the Bible (Psalm 9:12; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 149:4; Proverbs 3:34; 1 Peter 5:5; James 4:6; Isaiah 57:15; Revelation 3:16-17). Jesus is obviously the perfect example of this, as Paul reminds the Philippians in 2:1-8: "Our attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though He was God, He did not demand and cling to His rights as God. He made Himself nothing; He took the humble position of a slave..."

We can pray standing, lying, sitting or walking. Again, we can find examples of all of these in Scripture. It is worth noting though that our body language can reflect something of our heart. We know this when we are talking to others, e.g. if a person's arms are crossed as they are talking, they might well be defensive. Maybe the informality of our culture has influenced our prayer life as well, leading to a casualness in how we relate to God that is not good. Opening our hands reflects an openness of heart. Kneeling reveals a respect. Raising our hands is a sign of worship. Lying prostrate shows total surrender. Think about what your posture reveals about your attitude towards God.



- The early church fasted before a key decision (Acts 13:2-3).

Fasting can be done as a whole church or individually. Jesus made the point that it is not done so that others can see how 'spiritual' you are. Isaiah told the Israelites their fasting did not somehow compensate for their exploitation of the poor.

Jesus does promise that when we fast with the right heart, not promoting the fact that we are doing this, God will reward us. Many years ago, I fasted for a number of days as I interceded for a group of people. At the end of what I found to be a very difficult exercise, I was weak (and very

grumpy)! I had no great revelations and didn't feel particularly close to God, so felt discouraged. However, over the next few years, all of the people I had prayed for came to faith.

Note: It is unwise to try to fast for a long period to start with. Start with shorter fasts – maybe just one meal or for one day. (We should never fast from water.) There may be medical reasons why we cannot fast from food, but we could fast from media or TV and devote that time to prayer. The early church sometimes fasted with bread and water and gave the money they saved to the poor.



ACTION POINT

How could you build a simple food or technology fast into your normal routine?



READ

Matthew 6:16-18

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "When you pray..." this is what to do and "When you give to the poor..." this is what you should do. That is, He assumes this is what His followers will do. He also says "When you fast...", assuming it was a normal practise. Giving to the poor and prayer are considered essential Christian practices, but fasting has fallen by the wayside in recent decades. The first century Christians consistently practised fasting.

Fasting means to "not eat" or "to deny oneself". In the Bible it normally refers to food, but can apply to other things. It is always connected to seeking God in prayer.

The danger of fasting is that we somehow see it as a way to earn God's favour. Fasting is not blackmailing God; it is preparing ourselves for

God's answer.

So, why fast? Aside from Jesus' expectation that we would, fasting:

1. Gives us time to pray.
2. Demonstrates the depth of your desire and faith. God loves it when we seek Him in earnest and with faith.
3. Is connected with breakthrough. For example:

- Moses fasted before he received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28).
- The Israelites fasted before a great victory (2 Chronicles 20:2-3).
- Daniel fasted as he sought guidance (Daniel 9:21-22).
- Nehemiah fasted before the rebuild of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:4).
- Jesus fasted before He entered ministry (Luke 4:2).

Week 2

PRAYER BLOCKERS



READ

Matthew 6:5-13

Here are five practical things to consider if you don't know where to start when it comes to getting your prayer life back on track or maybe starting for the first time.

1. The less you pray, the harder it can be.

This is the same for lots of activities. The less I play tennis, the harder it is to pick it up again. But equally, the more I play, the easier it gets. And it is no different with prayer. Knowing this doesn't change anything, but it is important to realise.

2. You will not pray unless you plan to pray.

While everyone is different regarding how planned and scheduled they are, all of us - regardless of personality - set aside time for things that are important. Although we can (and should) pray spontaneously at any

time of the day, we need also to set aside regular time each day, making it as much a habit as brushing our teeth or eating our tea.

Set aside a time and space that is conducive to prayer. The space might be a particular chair, a room, a walk or a special place in the park. (Just don't steal my space!) The time will be what works with your schedule. Take care not to choose a time when you are really tired or likely to be distracted.

3. Be realistic.

If you are unfit, it is unwise to suddenly launch into a 30-minute run. The likely result is that you will collapse after 10 minutes and give up altogether. It is much the same with prayer. Aim for five minutes a day to start with and slowly build up the time you set aside.

4. Be honest.

Tell God about your struggle to pray and how you would like things to be different.

Week 5

PRAYER BOOSTERS

[illegible]

This is an ancient insight and may sound weird. The idea is that although you might feel half-hearted, awkward

or disengaged in your attempts to pray, you should still pray. Any prayer we pray is evidence of God supernaturally at work in your life.

[illegible]

Honestly tell God about where you are at with prayer at the moment. Ask Him to help you.

This week, begin each day by praying the Lord's Prayer slowly, thinking about each phrase. (Over the page is an example of how I might pray the Lord's Prayer. Each phrase becomes a prompt.)

Decide where and when you are going to pray.



Our Father

*Thank You, Lord, that I am Your child and
that You are a good Father.*

In heaven

*God, You are greater than I can ever imagine.
You are the God of the universe.*

May Your name be honoured

I praise You for Your greatness. I worship You, God.

**May Your kingdom come, may Your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven**

*God, I long to see more people come to faith in this city. Give me
opportunity to share about You and the courage to do it.*

Give us today our daily bread

*Today Lord, I need Your patience with _____ as I meet with
them. God, help me find a nice present for _____.*

Forgive us our sins

Forgive me for not trusting You and worrying about our finances

As we forgive others who have sinned against us

God, I choose to forgive _____ for the hurtful words.

And lead me not into temptation

God, keep my mind pure in thought.

But deliver me from evil

Protect my family from every scheme of the enemy.

For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.

Amen.

simple as getting someone to mind the kids while we take a long walk along the beach, allowing God's creation and beauty to renew us. It can be as simple as listening to a worship CD while the baby naps. For a longer retreat, it helps to have a structure to guide us. Here is one you could use for a half day retreat:

8-9am Find a place to go where you will not be interrupted. Turn off your phone (or even better, don't take it... the universe will not implode if you are not contactable for a few hours). Take a leisurely walk, allowing creation to centre your heart towards God.

9-10am Take some time to journal your thoughts and feelings, then sit in silence and listen to what God might want to say to you. Write down any thoughts.

10-11am Read the Word slowly and meditate on it. Write down anything you sense God is saying.

11am-12pm Spend some time reflecting and praying.

For those who are goal-orientated (me!), extroverted or active, this will not be easy. It will feel unproductive, especially if you didn't particularly hear God say anything profound or experience God in some way. The key is not to enter a retreat time with any expectation, but to simply learn to be. Don't give up if you find your first retreat hard.



READ

James 4:7-10
Psalms 139:7-10

We often struggle to pray because God feels distant or absent. We know intellectually that God is everywhere. From Week 1 we know that we are invited to come into the presence of God. Psalm 78:28 says how good it is to be near God, yet often that is not how we feel. But we are also encouraged to draw near to God, so this is an action that we can take (James 4:8).

While we know God is everywhere, our perception of His presence can vary hugely. It is really hard to describe because it is so personal. Often, we are put off by others' descriptions, because they don't match our own. (I have done this for years as I have read of others' experiences.) While hard to put into words, it is a conscious inner movement of faith towards God - who has never gone away - but we

have forgotten. I read something by John Ortberg that I personally found really helpful: "The presence of God is but one thought away." That is, I can consciously think and remind myself of the truth; God is right here, right now. I don't need to "feel" anything, but I can use my mind and imagination to consciously be aware of His presence.

Imagine walking into a room that is darker than it is outside and sitting down. Your eyes take a few minutes to adjust. As they do, you suddenly realise that someone is sitting quite close to you. You are a bit shocked, but then you see that they are smiling at you with love.

When we are aware of God with us, we feel differently. We might become aware of sin we need to confess. We might realise there are things we need to do. We become aware of His love. We feel secure.

We might find certain places help us be aware of God more, e.g. the



ACTION POINTS

Write your own list of 10 areas of your life that you need surrender to God or use the areas suggested in the dev. Which of these areas is a real struggle to truly hand over to God at the moment?

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Say a prayer of surrender:

Father in heaven, I hand over to you these areas of my life. You know I struggle to hand _____ over to you. But today I pray that your will, not mine, be done in this area. I release it to you. You know what is best. I trust you to achieve what will glorify you. Amen.



READ

Matthew 26:36-46

We looked on Week 2, Day 2 at a type of prayer of surrender when we are not feeling good about ourselves. I want to come back to prayers of surrender, as they are so important.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus struggled to surrender His will to the Father's. Jesus was fully human and facing intense physical pain, rejection by God, abandonment by His friends and the entire awfulness of the sinfulness of humanity tearing about His body, spirit and soul. Faced with this unspeakable agony, He surrendered to God's plan. But it was an intense struggle to get to that point. It was so intense that Luke says He sweated blood. Jesus' prayer of surrender was overwhelmingly difficult, but it led to our salvation.

A prayer of surrender is:

- Choosing God's will over our own.
- Doing what God wants, even when we don't want to.
- Accepting that God's ways are better than our ways, even if we don't fully understand them.
- Letting go of something that is close to us and trusting it to God.

We will never be able to hear God truly speak to us until we are willing to surrender our lives to Him. Surrendering is giving to God ALL of our life: our family, our ministry, our work, our body, our sexuality, our finances, the material possessions we have, our time, our talents, our future. For all of us there are some areas where the struggle to surrender is harder than others – places we have walled off and said, "This is mine."

The prayer of surrender is an ongoing prayer that we continually have to wrestle with.

beach, the park, a starlit sky. Maybe worship songs help. However, busyness and distractions like social media are hindrances, so there are things we need to do to draw into God's presence.

There are times of prayer in the spiritual desert, or the "dark night of the soul", as the ancients called it. This is normal, but often a shock for

newer Christians, who often initially experience a heightened awareness of God. David, Jesus and Elijah (to name but a few) experienced this dry wilderness where God seemed absent. This is where we pray in faith, not based on what we feel, but choosing to pray regardless of our feelings. Hebrews 11:6 says that God rewards those who sincerely come in faith to seek Him.



ACTION POINTS

Find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted. Take some time to consciously draw near to God or simply realise His presence close to you. Write down anything you sense God might say to you as you do this. Do you sense God's invitation to do this more often?

Keep using the Lord's Prayer this week to help you pray.



READ

Hebrews 10:19-22
Romans 8:1

Here is an imagined conversation with a friend:

How're things going?

I just feel really grumpy with everyone today. I just can't stand anyone. I know I'm meant to love the world, but it isn't happening.

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Have you tried talking to God about it?

He's the last person I want to talk to!

Why is that?

Because I feel so horrible about myself.

And?

Well, I don't want Him to see me like this.

Is that logical? If He's God, He can see you already.

True...but I can't see Him seeing me. If I start praying about how I feel, I'll just be more aware of it and feel worse.

Have you tried a prayer of self-surrender?

A what?

Well, Romans 12: 1 says we should offer our bodies as a living sacrifice and Romans 6:13 talks about giving our whole body as an instrument to do what is right.

That's the problem. I don't have anything to offer. I feel stink about myself.

Well, none of us really understand what's happening inside ourselves. We don't really like to look, so we try to cover it over.

You mean like a defence mechanism.

Exactly. So we find something to distract ourselves.

Like TV or food?

Yep. Or porn or social media...

Ouch. That's getting a bit close to home.

We often end up coming to God as a last resort, when we find all the other things don't work too well. In fact, they make us feel worse about ourselves.

How do I do this prayer of surrender?

the world and those around us.

However we hear God speak, the critical thing is that we are obedient. I know many times I have sensed God speak and failed to act on it. Many people have known God speak through a sermon and yet failed to take any action and by the next day,

it is lost. How often are the words of Scripture lost before we even close our Bible? The only difference between the man who built his house on the rocks and the one who built it on the sand was that one was obedient to the Word of God and one was not. They both heard the Word; it was their response that differed.



ACTION POINTS

Over the last few days, has God been speaking to you about something that you need to act on?

Ask God to show you if there is anything He has spoken to you about in the past that you didn't respond to. Confess your disobedience and if you are able, act on it now.



READ

Matthew 7:24-29
John 14:23-26

What do we do if we sense God is speaking to us? Yesterday we learned about testing what we sense we are hearing. This is particularly important for major decisions and actions that will have significant impacts.

But often God's promptings regard smaller actions. It might be to give someone a call or to send an encouraging text. The thoughts can often appear to be "random" and easy to dismiss. They don't come with special lights flashing, but instead appear ordinary. It is only when we are living with an attentive spirit that we can begin to learn that maybe these are God thoughts. I have made a commitment over the years to try to act on these random promptings. Sometimes I have fallen on my face as it were and there seems little evidence on the surface that is was

God at work. But more times than I can count, when I have acted on the prompting, it becomes obvious that God was at work. I call someone out of the blue and find they are really struggling. I stop and talk to a stranger and discover they need someone to help them. I help someone and find I am an answer to their prayers. I feel lead to pray for someone and then discover days later they were facing a crisis. You could say these were just coincidences, but when we have followed a prompting, this seems unlikely.

If the prompt is Biblical, towards servanthood and nothing serious will happen if I am wrong (other than maybe some personal embarrassment or social awkwardness), then I try to follow it. The challenge is to be living in such a way that my ear is attuned to the Spirit and then to be willing to stop what I am doing and be obedient to take action. However, it also makes life an exciting adventure of co-operating with God in His plans for

Well, find a quiet space with no distractions - and turn your phone off. Say something like, "God, I bring all of myself to you. It's not pretty." Look within yourself at all the things you're ashamed of or worried about or disappointed in. Tell Him about those things and what you would like to be instead.

That sounds scary.

Yeah, it is, but remember the cross. Jesus died to make you right with God. Tell God you need His help because you can't change by yourself and you're sick of hiding. Bring all the stuff to the cross and see it nailed there and dealt with. Then think of the arms of the father towards the prodigal son, embracing the son just as He was.

I think I can do that.

And now give yourself wholly to Him. You aren't just going for a quick fix so you can feel better and get on with

life again.

How'd you know I was thinking that? *Because that's what we all do. Bringing everything to God means bringing the good stuff, which needs purged of pride, and the bad stuff, which needs forgiveness. It's about bringing our dreams and plans to Him. It's about total surrender to Him.*

I can feel myself resisting.

That's normal. It's messy and never complete. But we should do what we are able to now. Tell God about the bit that is resisting as well.

This is an imaginary dialogue, but it's typical of what goes on inside of us. Our sense of failure pushes us away from coming to God. But Christ wants us to draw near so He can lift us up and show us the work of the cross and His deep love for us.



ACTION POINTS

Reflect on where you see yourself in this dialogue.

Pray your own prayer of surrender.



READ

Luke 18:9-14

On Day 1 of this week I suggested using the Lord's prayer as a starting point. Another practical suggestion that comes from centuries of Christians grappling with prayer is to pray a short prayer, even a single sentence more than once. An example of this is the "Jesus Prayer" It is based on the prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18:13 :

Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of the Living God
Have mercy on me, a sinner.

The idea is that you memorise this by praying it over and over again throughout the day. It then seeps into our subconscious and comes to mind at all kinds of times, particular when we don't how to pray, i.e. when we are sick, tired or really stressed. Often in praying this prayer it leads us to further prayer.

People find that different parts are helpful at different times. It expresses our need for forgiveness when we have sinned. It reminds us that Jesus is Lord and the living God when I am moving towards being self-sufficient. It keeps our pride in check when we feel we are better than we are.

Some books on this prayer make the Jesus Prayer out to be some magical formula, or use it as some kind of mantra to create peace. Both approaches are wrong. Matthew 6:7 warns us of thinking mindless repetition increases the likelihood of the prayer being answered. And of course we are not to limit our prayer life to one prayer. But many have found it a really useful tool when it comes to prayer and a good way to get started. *(See the insert on praying the Scriptures for more ideas when we don't know what to say.)*

We can use other sentences in the same way:

While God does stretch and expand us, He doesn't normally lead us in ways that seem contrary to who God made us to be. If you don't like children much, why would you think God is leading you to kids' ministry? If you are not very musical, why would you think God is leading you to the church music team? God's leadings are normally consistent with who God made you to be.

Gods promptings usually involve servanthood

Very rarely will the enemy encourage us to humble ourselves and serve others. If the leading is toward wealth, comfort and ease, be very careful. God lead Jesus to a cross,

not a crown.

Some cautions - We should be very careful if the prompting:

- Involves a very sudden life-changing decision.
- Involves us going into debt.
- Leads to breaking of close relationships.
- Causes unease in mature Christian friends.

It might still be of God, but we should proceed with great caution if these red flags are raised.

Listening to God is an exciting adventure.



ACTION POINTS

Reflect on times past when you have felt a bit of a nudge or had a sudden thought and acted on it. How did it work out? What can you learn from that experience? Ask God for a sensitivity to His whispers.

Keep practising listening.



READ

1 John 4:1

Matthew 24:5, 11, 24

The obvious question people ask about God speaking to us is how we can discern what is true and of God and what is not. If we think God is speaking to us, there are three possible sources: God, a deceiving spirit or ourselves. The Bible tells us that people will follow deceiving spirits (1 Timothy 4:1) and that Satan masquerades as an angel of light. Adam and Eve followed a leading to eat of the forbidden fruit and caused chaos. King David followed a prompting and it led to adultery and murder.

The reality is that our minds are a battlefield for spiritual warfare. While God wants to speak to us, the enemy wants to sow negative thoughts and our own sinful heart wants to justify our behaviour.

In 1 John 4:1 we are encouraged to

“test the spirits” to see if they are from God. So how do we discern whether we are hearing the voice of God? Here are three really helpful tests we can apply:

God promptings are always consistent with His Word

While this might seem obvious, we are often prone to justify our actions as being from God. It is never right to lie, be unfaithful to our spouse or gossip, no matter what complex spin we put on it. People often claim that God has led them to a different partner, one who truly makes them happy, and that they made a mistake with who they married... conveniently ignoring the clear testimony of Scripture (Proverbs 5:18-20; Malachi 2:13-16). If the prompting goes against the Word, it is clearly not from God.

God promptings normally align with who we are

God has created us and given us different skills, gifts and personalities. God’s leading doesn’t normally contradict who God made us to be.

His love endures forever.

Repeated 25 times in Psalm 136.

Holy holy Holy, is the Lord Almighty,
the whole earth is full of His glory.
Isaiah 6:3



ACTION POINT

Choose a short prayer (the Jesus Prayer or any another micro-prayer), memorise it (or put it on a card or your phone) and pray it often during the day.



Romans 8:22-28

"Youth is a blunder, manhood a struggle, old age a regret," is a well-known quote from Disraeli. While we might laugh at this dismal view of life, we know it contains a profound truth: life can be tough. It can seem that life contains glimpses of eternity - of profound beauty, love and pleasure - but is interspersed with struggle and pain. We continue to struggle with sin in our own lives. Other people's sin causes us profound pain. We see sickness and decay, war and injustice.

Romans 8 picks this up: there is a groan within us and within creation for something more and better. This verse says that the Holy Spirit takes our groans and intercedes for us. Groaning is a type of prayer. About a third of the Psalms are laments – groaning at the present reality (see Psalms 22, 44, 86 as examples).

Groaning is not grumbling. The quote from Disraeli is a grumble, because it expresses no hope. Groaning is bringing our present pain - or the pain of others or of the world - to God as the one who is sovereign over all.

When the only prayers you can manage are groans, these are beautiful to God. They are authentic heart cries that God honours. They don't need to be long or complex. God not only hears our groans; He also understands them.

Groaning when we see pain or injustice can lead to intercession - crying out to God for relief and justice. If we don't groan at the pain in the world, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to work deep within us so that we might feel the heart of God. One thing to remember though: we cannot expect total resolution of the pains of the world before the return of Christ. In fact, often God uses pain and adversity to bring people to Himself. The book of Isaiah is

[illegible]



Keep practising listening, as per the instructions from yesterday. Don't worry if it seems strange or hard or if nothing happens.

Today, take a few moments to reflect on the last 24 hours. Think about what happened and ask yourself if God was trying to speak to you in some way through creation, a person, circumstances, etc.

[illegible]

plan. We can also pray that God use the pain for His glory.

[illegible]

Read one of the lament Psalms listed on page 28.

Use your own pain - or the pain of someone around you or from the world - to cry out to God.



Emotional Health + Prayer

The Psalms are the prayer book of the Bible. They express the writers' deepest emotions. Yet often we don't bring our deepest feelings to God. Sometimes it is because we are not even that aware of them. (Some readers may think this is weird, while other readers can identify more keenly with this.)

As Christians, we are particularly averse to the feelings of fear, sadness, shame, anger, hurt and pain. We tend to think these feelings are bad and somehow show a lack of faith and trust in God. We pray and quote Scripture to get rid of them. This is dangerous and denies our humanity. When we minimise or deny our emotions, it impairs our ability to love God, others and ourselves.

As someone who is often not very emotionally aware, I sometimes use a list like the one on the next page to do a feelings inventory during my time with God. This helps me name more accurately what is happening internally.

Once I have identified some of the emotions I am experiencing or have experienced in the last 24 hours, I bring them into the presence of God. By this I mean that I lift, for example, my anger to God, but do so in an awareness of how loved I am by God. I do not deny the feeling or ask God to take it away; instead, I bring it into the light. If I

is disciplining you over something. This could be true, but equally you could have just randomly caught a virus, but the enemy is trying to bring you into condemnation. The danger with circumstances is that often we look to them to confirm what we want to hear, rather than what God wants us to hear, e.g. I need a new car and happen to run into a friend who is selling their very nice car. I believe this is God's provision (ignoring the fact that it is more than I wanted to spend and will lead me to be very financially stretched). I don't seek out other advice that might show this car to be particularly unreliable. So we need to be careful with circumstances that can be God's leading, but also can just be the stuff of life (Genesis 24; Esther 4:14; Ruth 2:3).

The peace of God. Philippians 4:6-7 talks of bringing our requests to God and Him giving us a "peace beyond understanding". Often this peace is God's confirmation of a difficult decision and helps us know that we

are on the right track. Equally, if there is a disquiet in our spirit (and while it could just be anxiety) it can also be God showing us something is not right. We should listen to that disquiet and learn to recognise it from general worry.

Dreams. There are plenty of examples in the Bible of God of Him speaking through dreams, although many of these are more visions than typical dreams. It is worth considering if God is speaking through dreams we can remember (Genesis 28:12 and 37:5; 1 Kings 3:5-15).

Books, movies, music, art.

Sometimes God can reveal profound truths about ourselves or humanity through creative mediums. Many creative works contain profound illustrations of grace or triumph of good over evil that speak powerfully to our hearts in a way words by themselves can't. The arts often manage to bypass our mind and speak to our emotions.



READ
John 10:1-5

The ways in which God can speak to us are unlimited. Here are some of the most common.

The Word of God. This is a primary way God speaks to us. However, if we are not reading it, then it is hard to hear. This does not mean that every time we read the Word, God speaks. Sometimes what we read will be very relevant to our circumstances at that moment. These are great moments, when it seems as if God has been reading our minds and knows exactly what is going on. However, this does not happen all the time; often when we read the Word, God is imparting truth and knowledge to us in a more general way. At a later time, He might bring back to mind something we have previously read (2 Timothy 3:16).

The promptings of the Spirit.
God speaks to us by His Spirit into

our mind (eg. Acts 16:6, the gift of prophesy, word of knowledge).

Other people. This could be through a friend, co-worker, spouse... regardless of whether they are a Christian or not. It could be through a writer of a book, a prophetic word, a wise counsellor or a sermon. God often speaks through people. Sometimes we fail to see this because the person seems so normal or even so flawed. We see their faults and fail to hear God speaking a truth we need to hear through them (Exodus 18:13-27).

Creation. God's handiwork speaks powerfully of Himself. Often in and through creation God can speak to us, reminding us of His sovereignty, creativity and magnificence (Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1).

Circumstances. Sometimes God can speak through our circumstances. This needs to be treated carefully, as we can jump to the wrong conclusions as well, e.g. you get sick and believe God

am feeling frustration, I lift that up - but in the awareness of the power of God who is in control of everything. Sometimes the emotion fades as I become aware of God afresh. Other times, God speaks a word of comfort. Sometimes He whispers a question or brings a word of correction. Sometimes God allows something deep from my past to be exposed in order that it be healed.

If we are to grow in prayer, we need to grow in self-awareness. Otherwise, all we bring to God is a false self.

Enjoyment	Sadness	Fear	Anger	Disgust
Happiness	Lonely	Worried	Annoyed	Dislike
Love	Heartbroken	Doubtful	Frustrated	Revulsion
Relief	Gloomy	Nervous	Peeved	Loathing
Contentment	Disappointment	Terrified	Hurt	Disapproving
Amusement	Hopeless	Panicked	Bitter	Offended
Joy	Grieved	Horried	Infuriated	Horried
Pride	Unhappy	Desperate	Irritated	Uncomfortable
Excitement	Lost	Confused	Mad	Nauseated
Peace	Troubled	Stressed	Cheated	Disturbed
Satisfaction	Resigned		Vengeful	Withdrawal
Compassion	Miserable		Insulted	Aversion



moved us or caused a reaction in us is worth pondering. What might God be saying through this?

away, so we can literally stop for 2 minutes, acknowledge His presence and listen.

During the day, we can set our phone to beep and use it as a reminder just to stop and become aware of God afresh in the midst of the busyness. Remember, God is but one thought

I believe God is wanting to speak to us far more than we typically realise. But we have to want to hear and be willing to be obedient when God does speak.



ACTION POINTS

This week is about listening to God, so instead of prayers of request, each day this week set aside 10 minutes of silence. Stop and pray Samuel's prayer: 'Yes Lord, your servant is listening' (1 Samuel 3:9).

Write down whatever comes to mind. If nothing comes to mind, just sit a little longer, then thank God for His grace and tell Him you are open to hearing during the day to anything He wants to say.



READ

1 Kings 19:1-12

Psalms 37:7, 46:6

On Sunday I spoke about the fact that God speaks to us. Surprisingly, some books on prayer (including some in the biography I have given) give little attention to listening to God and hearing His voice. This then makes prayer a one-way conversation, which is not really a true conversation at all. It also leads to prayer being boring.

The key discipline to hearing God speak is being able to slow down. This means creating space for silence and solitude. Despite all of our time-saving devices, we often live life at a frantic pace. We have every moment planned out, trying to cram everything in. Any space we do have, we fill with noise: music, social media, TV, YouTube...

To be able to hear from God involves

slowing down our activity meter. My experience, and that of others, suggests that it probably takes 5-10 minutes of silence before we reach that point where our minds are not racing with what we need to be doing next.

We see Jesus modelling this when we read of Him withdrawing from the crowds and heading into the hills to be quiet and pray (Mark 1:35, 6:46). Walking in nature is one way to slow ourselves down. Another is to journal, putting our worries and thoughts on paper. When we have slowed ourselves down, we can ask God to speak to us. You might not hear God say anything – that is OK. But equally, you could be surprised at what God wants to say to you.

Another way of listening to God is to reflect on the past 24 hours. What happened? Who did you interact with and how did you respond? Such reflection can help us see where God was at work and what He might be wanting to say to us. Anything that

Week 3

TYPES OF PRAYER



READ

Luke 17:11-19

Prayers of thanksgiving are one of the most common types of prayer in the Bible. Believers have long expressed their gratitude for what God has done for them. Just like the one leper who came back to thank Jesus, these prayers set a powerful example to us.

Thanksgiving should become a regular part of your prayer adventure. As the psalmist says, enter into His gates with thanksgiving (Psalm 100:4); that is, we are to approach God with an attitude of thankfulness. When we give thanks, we are humbly acknowledging all we have is from God and our dependence on Him. Giving thanks is the cure for our tendency towards grumbling, negativity and self-sufficiency. Prayers of thanksgiving are one of the most powerful types of prayer you can pray.

Thanksgiving needs to become a habit that we form. My own experience says this does not necessarily come naturally. So often, God has graciously helped me or answered my prayers, but while I am grateful, like the nine lepers, I don't take the step the other leper did - to turn back and express thanks to God.

So to help with this, create a list of 100 reasons to give thanks. While that might seem daunting, you can divide it into sections:

Material blessings: your home, food, car, etc

Spiritual blessings: that you are child of God, that you have a future, etc

People who are blessings: friends, family, spouse, etc (maybe your pastor...☺)

Physical blessings: your holiday, the gift of sight, etc

Times in the past when God has

Week 4

HEARING GOD SPEAK





READ

Psalm 51

A second type of prayer is that of confession. At times we will be painfully aware of our sin, but often we are blind. It is good to pray as David did: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life" (Psalm 139:23-24). This can be scary to pray, because often we would prefer to look the other way.

There are a number of Scriptures we can use to test our hearts as well. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart as you use one of these:

1. The Ten Commandments

Slowly reflect on each. (Exodus 20)

2. The Great Commandment

Am I loving God with all my mind, soul, heart and strength?

Am I loving others as I love myself?

3. The Spirit filled life

How is my life reflecting each of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)

The idea of using these tests is not to leave us crushed with guilt and depression; it is to lead us to a deeper place with God.

When we are aware of areas of sin, we are led to confession. The word confess means "to say the same thing". We are not to minimise it as a mistake or an error of judgement, but call it what it is – sin, which is lethal to us and painful to God. The promise in 1 John 1:9 is that when we confess, God forgives and cleanses us. We will remain trapped in sin until we bring it into the light. Only as we do this and confess it can God begin to bring change to us.

We must also accept the forgiveness that God offers us. Here it is worth reflecting on Scriptures like Psalm 103:11-12, Isaiah 1:18 and Micah

But not the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly.

God, some of my friends are ignoring you. Draw them to you by your Spirit, so they might not be condemned but know your salvation.

For the LORD watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

God, watch over my path today. Order my day. Guide me with that difficult meeting.

The prayers of Paul in the New Testament are also great places to help us with prayer. Ephesians 1:15-23 and 3:14-21, Philippians 1:9-11 and Colossians 1:13-14 are all really good to use. The Ephesians 3 prayer is one of my favourites.



Using the Scripture to Help Us Pray

There are a number of different ways we can use Scripture to help us in prayer.

One is to take a psalm and make it our own. Take for example Psalm 1. Under each verse I have written a prayer in response to the verse. Your prayer could be very different, but each verse is prompting me to prayer.

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.

God, help me follow your ways today and not listen to the distortions of truth that are all around me. I really need your wisdom about that decision I need to make today.

But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on its day and night.

Lord, I need your help to really hunger for your word. It seems dry at the moment. Thank you for those times in the past when I have heard you speak through it.

They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.

God, may I be fruitful today. Help me reflect your love. Show me how I can be a good ambassador for you today in all I do and say.

7:19. If we are struggling to know the reality of God's forgiveness after we have confessed, we might need someone to help us by confessing to them and letting them speak God's forgiveness over us.



ACTION POINTS

Build confession into your daily prayer time. Just as we each day take a shower, so each day cleanse your heart by confessing anything you know that is not pleasing to Him.

Set aside a special time to use one of the Scriptures suggested above to do a 'spring clean' or deep cleanse. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart in light of these verses. Confess your sin and accept His forgiveness. Ask God to show you any specific actions you need to take to be more like Him.



READ

Luke 11:1-13

The second half of the Lord's Prayer is focused on asking for our needs. There are three parts to it: daily bread is what we practically need that day; forgiveness is for where we have sinned; and 'lead us not into temptation' is recognition that we are in a spiritual battle.

Jesus then tells a parable of a friend who wakes another at midnight asking for bread. Eventually his shameless audacity results in him being given what he asked. Jesus then goes on to tell us to ask, knock and seek. God gives good gifts to His children; just as earthly parents do.

We often fail to ask God for practical needs, either because we think God is not interested in the practical, everyday things of life or because we have a sense of our own self-sufficiency. God loves when His

children ask Him to meet their needs because it reveals a dependence on Him. God is interested in our problems with work, parenting, finances, relationships - every need that we have. We have this tendency to think that God is only interested in the big things or things we perceive as spiritual, rather than the little things and the everyday practical needs we have.

Asking for God to "not let us yield to temptation" is to recognise that the enemy wants to tempt us so that our lives would be destroyed. We need God to strengthen our will and protect us from the schemes of the enemy. How often do we fail because we think we can handle things on our own? We try to rely on our own resources rather than asking for God's help when tempted. Paul says that in every temptation, God will provide a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13).



ACTION POINTS

Ask the Lord, who do I need to forgive? As names come to mind, do not argue or evaluate – just write the names down. Then start at the top of the list and begin to offer the prayer of liberation:

Father, I was hurt by _____

Because he/she did _____

And it made me feel _____
(be specific about the impact)

By the grace of God, I choose to forgive

_____ today.

To cancel the debt and to free him/her from their offences. Amen.

You might have to keep praying this over a number of days. Then, when you are able, start praying a blessing over their lives:

God, I ask that You would pour out Your richest blessings over _____

Bless their family, bless their marriage, bless their walk with You, bless them in their inner being that they would know the depths of your love. Bless them with Your richest blessings. Amen.



Read Luke 23:24
Luke 6:27-28
Matthew 6:14-15

A prayer of liberation sets us free from bondage to another person and their actions. When we feel bitter, angry and resentful, we are tortured

Doing something good for the person and praying blessing over them are the next steps. Many years ago, I was deeply betrayed by someone I counted as a friend. After working through the process of forgiveness, I used to pray a blessing over their family every time I drove past their house. I still do it to this day when I am in that city.

[illegible]

Start being very specific in your prayers for the day.

- *What specifically do you need today?*
- *What fruit of the Spirit do you need?*
- *What practical needs do you have?*
- *What problems do you need a solution for?*



READ

1 Timothy 2:1

Praying for others has been described by Dick Eastman as love on its knees. We know that Jesus is right now interceding for us, which is hugely encouraging. He is also our example to follow as the “great high priest”.

A key part of our calling is to intercede for others. We are called a kingdom of priests and as such, we bring the needs of others to the Father. The fact is, we are probably Christians now because of the faithful prayers of someone else.

The Bible is full of stories of effective prayer on the behalf of others (Genesis 18:20-33; Exodus 32:9-14; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Acts 9:36-41; Acts 12:5-17).

Many people find it helps to have a plan in praying for others regularly.

Here is one example:

Sunday : Family

Monday : My place of work

Tuesday : Those I know who are not yet Christians

Wednesday : The city in which I live

Thursday : Those in government

Friday : Friends and neighbours

Saturday : My church, pastor and the coming Sunday service

In reading Paul’s prayers for others, a number of things strike us. One is that he is always giving thanks for the those he is praying for, even though some of them were causing him a lot of frustration.

The second thing to note is that his prayers primarily focused on their spiritual well-being:

- Live in harmony with others (Romans 15:5-6).
- Be filled with joy, peace and spiritual energy (Romans 15:13).

- Know God personally (Ephesians 1:17).
- Know what God is calling them to do and be (Ephesians 1:18).
- Be inwardly strengthened with the Spirit’s power (Ephesians 3:16).
- Open their hearts fully to Christ (Ephesians 3:17).
- Have a realisation of Christ’s incredible love for them (Ephesians 3:18).
- Have abundant and discerning love (Philippians 1:9).
- Prioritise what matters (Philippians 1:10).
- Display the fruit of righteousness (Philippians 1:11).
- Choose to live worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:10).
- Be fruitful in good works (Colossians 1:10).
- Have spiritual strength and endurance (Colossians 1:11).
- Explode in love (1 Thessalonians 3:12).
- Be holy inside and out (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Paul had an expectation that people could and would grow more Christ-like and that their spiritual maturity would increase.



ACTION POINTS

Develop your own intercessory prayer plan. Use the ‘How to Pray’ cards to help you start praying for others.

Thank God for each person you pray for. Pick one of Paul’s prayers for each of those close to you for whom you are praying. Pray it consistently for them for a month. Pray expectantly that God will work in their lives.