



ANGLICAN CHURCH OF PAPHOS

## Lent Course 2025 **A Deeper Walk**

### Week 1 PRAYER (Matthew 6:9-15)

11 March 2025 - Revd Paul A. Carr

#### 1: What Is Christian Prayer?

There are many different views of what prayer is and how we should engage with it. But prayer is simply talking to God - in the way you would have a conversation with a family member or a friend. Sometimes we talk, sometimes we listen, and sometimes we just enjoy being in that person's company. And so it is with prayer. Prayer involves what we call The Trinity. We pray **To** the Father (Matt 6:9); **Through** the Son (Eph 2:18); **In** the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26).

Prayer was important in the early church (1 Corinthians 11:1-6; Acts 1:13-14 etc) and should play an essential part in our church life today. Prayer is not some mystical enlightenment that only a chosen few are able to attain. Prayer should be a natural part of being a Christian and is, probably, the most important activity of our lives. Prayer is not the least we can do, but the most we can do.

We can pray about any situation /person/circumstance we choose. Dwight L. Moody: *The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoes.*

#### 2: Why Pray?

Because Jesus prayed! Prayer is not only how Jesus began His day; it was how He began His whole ministry. In his account of Jesus's life, Luke wrote in Chapter 4, "Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness." Jesus went off into the wilderness to fast and pray and confront the evil one. Prayer was how He began His mission on Earth. Two chapters later, in Luke 6:12-16, when Jesus was getting ready to select those who would join Him on this mission, he began by praying.

Now, some of you might be wondering, why does Jesus need to pray if He's God? Good question! Two reasons, firstly, even though Jesus was God in the flesh, to become a human being meant taking on human limitations. The Bible says He knows what it is like to be us, to be in our shoes, and so He became a lot more like us than most of us have ever imagined. Even as God in the flesh, He depended on God the Father and looked to Him for direction. Secondly, Jesus lived a life that would be an example to us of how to be fully human and how we should live.

Joseph Scriven, the writer of the hymn; *What a friend we have in Jesus* wrote this hymn about prayer as a response to a crisis of faith after enduring the agony of his first fiancé dying from TB and his second fiancé drowning on the eve of their wedding day.

The hymn includes the words: *What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.* And so, it is.

**QUESTION** What do you find most challenging about prayer?

Apart from the fact that Jesus prayed, and we follow his example:

***Prayer develops our relationship with God:*** All relationships are based on communication. It's a well-known fact that relationships break down because of a lack of communication. But with good communication, a relationship grows and flourishes. And it's this relationship with God for which we are created. And in this relationship, we find the very meaning and purpose of our lives and prayer keeps our relationship with God fresh, healthy and real! Prayer should never be considered as a one-way phone call like leaving a message on an answering machine. Prayer allows us to hear God – and it's vital that we listen.

***Prayer satisfies our Spiritual hunger:*** Prayer satisfies that spiritual hunger we all have. It quenches our spiritual thirst. It refreshes our soul. You don't ask why a baby is making chuckling noises as they lie in their mother's arms: they just do it. There is something that is spontaneous and natural about prayer for a child of God. Philip Yancey in his book: 'Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference' writes: *The main purpose of prayer is not to make life easier, nor to gain magical powers, but to know God. I need God more than anything I might get from God.*

***Prayer works!*** Prayer not only changes us, it also changes situations. I'm sure many of you can share amazing examples of answers to prayer. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple: *When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't, they don't.*

### **3: Does God Always Answer Prayer?**

I guess the next question is: does God always answer prayer? In a sense, yes, he always hears our prayers. But like a good parent, he doesn't always just say 'Yes', because a loving parent won't say 'Yes' to all the requests of a child. Sometimes God says yes; sometimes he says wait; and sometimes he says no - but these are all answers to prayer, aren't they? Only, no and wait are the answers we don't want to hear!

What would our lives be like if all our prayers were answered! American Country star Garth Brooks in one of his most famous songs 'Unanswered Prayers' includes the line: *Sometimes God greatest gifts are unanswered prayers. Sometimes I think it's just as well that God doesn't!*

**QUESTION** What is your experience of an answer to prayer?

#### 4: How Do We Pray?

In Matthew 6:9-13, when Jesus introduces what we know to be The Lord's Prayer, he doesn't say: 'If you pray' but: 'when you pray.' He assumes that we will. These words of Jesus have become a universal language for prayer. Shall we pray it together:

*Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven, Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours. Now and forever. Amen.*

#### 5: Pray, So That ...!

Many times, our prayers are good but aimless. We ask God to "bless" someone or to "strengthen" someone, but we have no particular end in view. When you add "so that" to your petitions, it forces you to ask yourself, "What do I really want God to do in this person's life?" For example: 'Lord we pray for ??? so that she may know your peace and comfort at this time.' It's interesting how many times the Apostle Paul prayed "so that" in his prayers:

*So that ... you may overflow with hope (Romans 15:13).*

*So that ... you may know him better (Ephesians 1:17).*

*So that ... Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17).*

*So that ... you may be able to discern what is best (Philippians 1:10).*

*So that ... you may have great endurance and patience (Colossians 1:11).*

*So that ... you will be blameless and holy (1 Thessalonians 3:13).*

*So that ... the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you (2 Thess 1:12).*

The "so that" principle is a tonic for a boring prayer life.

**QUESTION** When have you found prayer to be most helpful?

#### 6: Think About How You Pray

*"Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on their knees."* Prayer is the greatest spiritual weapon we possess. Through it we have access to God's mighty power both to defend us from attack and to enable us to overcome the works and influence of the devil (Ephesians 6:10-20).

When you pray, remind yourself that you live in a hostile world and pray accordingly. Pray for strength and protection. Pray for wisdom and discernment in avoiding places and situations where you may be exposed to temptation.

When you pray, ask God to give you wisdom and insight to understand the strategy and tricks of the devil. Pray that you will be clear-minded and not distracted. Ask God to show you your weaknesses and reveal to you how you can deal with them so that your defences will be built up.

When you pray, ask God to give you strength through his Spirit so that not only can you resist the temptations of the devil, but you can wrestle successfully with his forces to bring glory to Jesus.

When you pray, become intercessors on behalf of your brothers and sisters in Jesus.

When you pray, pray for people around you, for your workplace, your home, your town and country. Pray about the world and especially those places where it seems the devil is having a major influence. Finally, pray in faith that God will answer your prayers.

## **7: Rhythm Of Prayer (See Handout)**

I recognise that prayer doesn't always come naturally; there are often times when you have to make a choice whether to pray. Sometimes, prayer can be hard work. Sometimes you have other things on your mind; sometimes you feel a million miles away from God. But getting into a rhythm of prayer can be helpful.

Rhythms define our lives. The habits we adopt and the patterns we repeat form our daily existence, direct our decisions and feed our motivations. The rhythms of life bring normalcy to unforeseen disasters and our highest celebrations. This is true of our physical and emotional lives and also true of our spirituality. We were created for a loving relationship with our Creator that is renewed and strengthened by the rhythm of prayer - which means regular, fixed times of the day.

The Bible teaches us to pray:

***Always:*** The New Testament encourages us to pray always (1 Thessalonians 5:17). You don't have to be in a church to pray. You can pray as you walk down the street, you can pray on your bike, you can pray in the car or taking the dog for a walk or when you're in the garden! To pray continually doesn't mean we must always be mumbling prayers to ourselves, it means to be living in an attitude of prayer. You could say it's about keeping the receiver 'off the hook' and being in regular contact with God so that our prayer is part of one long conversation.

***Alone:*** Go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father (Matthew 6:6).

***With others:*** Jesus said, Matthew 18:19: "... if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." In other words, he says there's a special power when we pray together.

***Regularly:*** I think it's helpful to have set times to pray. I always find that whatever thoughts are on my mind in the morning tend to stay with me all day. And to start the day with prayer is a wonderful way to start the day. Psalm 5:1.

Take time to complete the **Rhythm of Prayer** handout.



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