



A S H
W E D N E S D A Y

An Introduction To Hear Our Prayer

Matthew 6:1-21

18 February 2026 - Revd Paul A. Carr

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Introduction

Ash Wednesday falls 40 Days before Good Friday and commemorates Jesus' forty days in the wilderness when he prepared for his ministry through prayer and fasting. Ash Wednesday also marks the beginning of Lent. Lent, for some, is a time for 'navel gazing' and truthful honesty about the state of their lives. For others, the Season of Lent provides a focus to practice some form of abstinence or to commit to a less indulgent lifestyle. But for the Christian, Lent provides a welcome opportunity to nurture our spiritual lives. Lent, it seems to me, is as good a time as any to start looking a little closer at, and developing, our prayer life.

1: How Do We Pray?

A few years ago, when we were in Texas on holiday, we visited the Kennedy Space Centre in Houston – quite a remarkable place! On the 'tour' of the site a NASA official was explaining to us the complexities of sending human beings to Mars. Someone asked about how the crew would return to Earth. 'That involves a highly complex plan,' the representative said, 'and it begins with the words: "Our Father, who art in heaven".'

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: 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. Hebrew word 'so be it'.

2: Why Do We 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.

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. 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.

Leonard Ravenhill: "Prayer is not an argument with God to persuade him to move things our way, but an exercise by which we are enabled ... to move ourselves his way."

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: 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.

4: Hear Our Prayers

Imagine that your prayer life is a school and the 'Prayer Ofsted Inspectors' have just made a visit. What grade are they going to give you? Perhaps you think you might get an Outstanding. Perhaps you are someone whose prayer life is sorted, intimate, easy and life-giving. But my guess is that it probably isn't.

'Hear Our Prayers' examines the prayer lives of five Old Testament figures. We'll look at how they prayed, how that relates to the prayer life of Jesus and, in doing so, reflect on their approach and apply this to our own prayer lives.

Our first session will focus on Hannah and will be about personal prayer. In session two, in company with Elijah, we will think about how we can pray with greater ambition. Session three will be a bit different as, inspired by Ezekiel, we reflect on what we are actually doing when we pray, and the cosmic dimension of our prayer lives. In session four, Esther will help us to reflect on how we pray communally and as part of the Church before in our final session on Daniel inspires us to be constant in prayer and set for ourselves a rhythm of prayer.

Conclusion

There's a story from the Second World War about some Londoners huddled in an air raid shelter during a bombing raid. The exploding bombs were deafening, terrifying and dangerously close. Someone suggested that it would be a good idea to pray, but none of the adults was willing to take the lead, not really knowing how to express their needs and fears in the form of a prayer.

A young boy came to their rescue by eagerly volunteering. Silence fell in the air raid shelter as everyone bowed their heads and waited for their 'priest of the moment' to take the lead. Drawing himself up to full height he prayed the only prayer he knew: 'For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful.'

Our Lent Course is aimed at those whose prayer life would get a 'Requires Improvement' from the inspection team. It's for those who find prayer a struggle, who don't quite know to begin, or what to say, who feel guilty about prayer or who find themselves wondering what on earth they are doing when they pray. I look forward to seeing to at our Lent Course.

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

Lent Course 2026

Hear Our Prayers

24	February	Hannah	Personal Prayer
3	March	Elijah	Ambitious Prayer
10	March	Ezekiel	Hopeful Prayer
17	March	Esther	Communal Prayer
24	March	Daniel	Constant Prayer

This is a five week course which examines the prayer lives of five Old Testament figures. We'll look at how they prayed, how that relates to the prayer life of Jesus and, in doing so, reflect on their approach and apply this to our own prayer lives.

Tuesday mornings at 11.00 am at Saint Stephen's, Tala

Everyone is welcome to join with us

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