

# Prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Have you ever experienced a relationship in your life that has gone sour at some point?

I'm guessing the answer is yes. What happens when a relationship goes really wrong?

There are times, aren't there, where we might be frustrated with people we love? Sometimes we might even fall out with them. But I think that there are four words, aren't there?

Four words that demark the most broken relationships of all. We don't speak anymore. We don't speak anymore.

The most broken relationships of all are those in which there should be sound. But there is nothing but silence.

[ 1 : 09 ] Silence is what our broken relationship with God looks like if it remains on our terms. Joe introduced us a couple of weeks ago as we were beginning this series to the originators of the game of hide and seek, didn't he?

When we saw Adam and Eve, our ancestors in the garden, running from God. They did not want to speak to him. And they certainly did not want him to be speaking to them.

Maybe you're sitting here this morning and your relationship with God has been nothing but silence all of your days. That is a sure sign, isn't it, of a most broken relationship.

But the wonderful news we've been considering over the last few weeks, the wonderful news that Alistair and Elise and Anna have professed their faith in, the wonderful news we are going to celebrate when we commune with God later on at his table, is that while we had been, and maybe you still are, running from God, he calls us back.

He calls us back to himself, not to chastise us, but to offer us forgiveness by giving us his one and only son, Jesus Christ. As Paul says in his letter to the Colossians, once we were alienated from God because of our evil behavior, but now he has reconciled us to him by Christ's death.

[ 2 : 53 ] Our relationship with God was broken, and so it was silent. But no longer. Because of Christ, no longer, and never again will there be silence between us and our Creator.

As we continue our series going through the elements of worship, we are looking this morning at prayer, and prayer at its perhaps most very basic definition is speaking with God.

And prayer is such a glorious thing because it is one of the clearest signs, isn't it, of a relationship made right, restored, where there was once silence.

There are now voices calling back and forth. We hear God's call to come and worship him, and we delight to respond in praise and in prayer.

And hopefully even just framing it that way begins to help us to understand why we pray. If prayer is at its most basic, reconciled people, speaking to God and being gladly heard by him, then the purpose of prayer, isn't it, is not just asking for things, although that might be part of it, and that will be part of it.

[ 4 : 29 ] It's not just telling God what we've done wrong, although that will and should often come into it too. Rather, prayer is living life with God, not only as our Savior, but as our Father, speaking to him about all things, asking him for what we need, repenting of what we've done wrong, yes, but thanking him for what he has given us day to day, begging for his help in our own faith, just telling him all that is on our hearts and minds.

We come to God in prayer, not to get things from God, but to be with God. And words invested in any relationship will deepen the bonds between those involved.

We pray to draw ever closer to God, and we pray because we can trust God with everything. At the beginning of Psalm 25, you just look there at verse 1 if you've still got it open in front of you.

David declares, doesn't he, boldly, in you, Lord my God, in you I put my trust.

And we see as we go through the psalm, he trusts him completely and in everything, and so he takes everything before him. When we want someone to hear us, God listens.

[ 6 : 15 ] When we want someone to help us, God comes to our aid. When we want someone to be with us, God is there. When we want someone to save us, God saves.

There is no better person to turn to, not only to go on our love for, but to trust with everything that is going on in your life.

The object of prayer is not prayer, but God. I remember reading somewhere, I can't remember exactly where it was, but it said if our focus is on prayer itself, it's a bit like looking at the windscreen in your car, rather than looking through the windscreen to where you should actually be going. If we set our sights on our relationship with God, entrusting in him, and loving to live with him, prayer is what naturally follows.

So that is a very little bit on why we pray, but we're going to look this morning also at how we pray. If prayer is something you struggle with as a Christian, let me assure you that you are not alone.

[ 7 : 46 ] Not only am I and many others in this room with you, the disciples of Jesus were asking the very same question.

We read earlier that they come before Jesus and say, Lord, teach us how to pray. We need help with prayer.

And thankfully, Jesus gladly teaches us a pattern for prayer. It is what we commonly know as the Lord's Prayer.

And as with any pattern, there can legitimately be a great deal of variance from it. If you were here on Friday, as we celebrated Alien Stephan's wedding, and you looked at the array of kilts on display, there would have been many similar patterns, wouldn't they?

But they would have all looked quite different. So it is with prayer, right? In order for our prayer to follow Jesus' prayer, Jesus' pattern, it doesn't need to follow a prescribed formula, but it is there to help us, to show us, to guide us, to follow the contours of his prayer.

[ 9 : 08 ] So let's just briefly go through each of the elements of prayer Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. And as we go through, I will hopefully helpfully see how David in Psalm 25 follows the contours Jesus teaches without necessarily copying it word for word.

So the first element of prayer Jesus teaches us is praying for God's glory. Praying for God's glory. Jesus wants us in our prayer to put God at the top of the priority lists. He comes first.

All that Jesus is doing here is teaching us to keep our prayers grounded in the gospel. If we detach prayer from the gospel, what happens?

Our prayers very quickly, don't they, become self-centered. All about us and our needs. But if our prayers are centered on the gospel, on what God has done for us through Christ, our prayers will change just as our lives have changed.

[ 10 : 31 ] No longer selfishly living for our own glory, but delighting in living for God's glory. That does not mean God's glory has to be the first item in every one of our prayers, but it must be the foundation from which we pray all that we do.

If you still have Psalm 25 in front of you, just look at how David prays in verse 11. He says, For the sake of your name, Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

Even his plea for personal forgiveness is not primarily motivated by what it will save him from, but from the glory it will give to God.

That is the shape Jesus teaches our prayers to have. That is the foundation from which everything else is built on top of. And so it is only natural that next Jesus teaches us to pray for God's kingdom to come.

That is God's rule. We pray that not just for the world, but for our own lives. That he and his word would set the agenda for everything we do.

[ 11 : 57 ] In the first petition, we pray for God to be honored above all else. Here, we are taking the reins of our life and handing them over to God so that he would use them for that very purpose.

It is not my will be done, but your will. That our lives might be lived to his glory. Do you see what is going on there in these first two elements?

It's so easy, isn't it? And I say this absolutely from my own perspective. It is so easy when we pray not following this pattern for our needs, our desires, our comforts to become the priority in prayer.

Jesus doesn't say don't pray those things. But he says don't build on that foundation. Jesus teaches us to orient our prayers God words first of all.

And maybe that is a helpful point in which to touch on, I've said we don't have to follow the exact words of the Lord's prayer, but it is nevertheless a very helpful prayer to pray.

[13:17] It's not a prayer we must pray at the expense of every other prayer. The Psalms, including Psalm 25, aren't they? They are full of Psalms that mix up the order or focus particularly on other elements or bring in other things such as lament and thanksgiving.

Those are all good and legitimate. But this is how Jesus teaches us to pray because this is the framework within which he wants all of our other prayers to be coming.

And so we can and should and sometimes do here as a congregation take the words of the Lord's prayer on our own lips, both to pray for what he has told us to pray for and to teach us through the prayer how to shape every other prayer in our life.

Perhaps most helpfully in teaching us to shape our prayer to God's glory and kingdom first and our needs second. The more we pray the Lord's prayer, the more familiar we are with it.

Every other prayer in our life will start to follow its pattern and that can only be a good thing. So the foundation is laid, praying for God's rule and kingdom and then from that, thirdly, Jesus teaches us to pray for our provision.

[14:47] A key aspect of prayer is always declaring our dependence, utter dependence on God.

That is the focus of this whole second half of the prayer pattern Jesus teaches us and it begins with the most basic dependence of all, the food that sustains us day by day.

There might well be times in life, maybe you've not known them yet, it might come when prayer will make the difference between food on the table and an empty plate.

But often it does not, does it? I bet there are quite a few days that have gone by recently where you have not prayed for foods and foods has still been in abundance in Tesco.

But prayer, right, what Jesus is teaching us here is not to ask for things that otherwise you will not get. He teaches us to pray for bread so that we will know and remember day by day that God is the one who provides all for us.

In His mercy, He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. In His grace, He provides for us whether we ask for it or not.

[16:13] but Jesus teaches us to pray so that we would grow in our loving relationship with God remembering Him as the one who looks after and cares for us each and every day even when we take so much of it for granted.

Pray for your daily bread and give thanks for it when it is before you because it comes from God.

And when we live in glad and total dependence on Him, we will grow evermore in our love for Him because we will appreciate evermore greatly all that He does for His people.

Fourthly, we pray for forgiveness. forgiveness. We need food, don't we, to live the few days of this life? We need forgiveness if we want to enjoy anything more than the few days of this life.

David prays repeatedly through Psalm 25, verse 6 and 7. He says, remember your great mercy.

Remember not my sins. Verse 11, forgive my iniquity. Verse 18, take away all of my sins.

we bring before God all that we have done wrong, repenting of it, but knowing that He who provides food for His people also provides forgiveness.

[17:45] When we pray in Christ's name, we come not hoping that He might forgive us, but knowing that He has forgiven us in His one and only Son, Jesus Christ.

And so again, it is, isn't it? Yes, confessing our needs and dependence on God's goodness and mercy, but in doing so, as we talk with Him, we find out more and more of who He is, delighting in His character as we draw near to Him who gladly forgives and bears the cost that we deserve.

and then fifthly, and finally, we pray for preservation or perseverance.

We have been forgiven, but we do not live in a sinless world, don't we, do we? and we need God's help. We desperately need God's help from sin's lingering attacks.

Again, by bringing it before Him in prayer, temptation is not something God places in our path to test our spiritual strength.

[19:03] It is something the devil places before us to try and get us to stumble, and we will stumble, and we do stumble when we try and face that in our own strength, don't we?

But God delights to help us. Come to me, He says.

Pray that I will help you, and I will help you. The last few verses of Psalm 25 are full of David's petitions that the Lord would sustain, provide, and preserve him in a whole host of circumstances.

all from a position of understanding. He cannot, he cannot do it without God's help.

And trusting God to provide that help as only he can. We don't pray when we don't think we need God's help.

[ 20 : 13 ] But we need Him in everything at all times. That is why and how Jesus longs to teach His disciples to pray.

Saying, come before Him. Come before Him for His glory and for your needs in that order. prayer. And Psalm 25 is a really helpful psalm to have alongside the Lord's Prayer because it shows us, doesn't it, how David prays all of these elements.

The contours are all there. But the order and emphasis is slightly different at points because of his particular circumstances.

So too with our prayer. It can and should follow this pattern but exactly what that will look like will vary from day to day.

And it varies very slightly too in our own worship service. Hopefully by now we have at least a rough idea of why we pray.

[ 21 : 25 ] We have a rough idea of how Jesus teaches us to pray. and I've seen faithful saints adapt that pattern to their present circumstances. And having done all that we can now come eventually to our own worship services and look at the prayers that we pray and see that same pattern those same contours throughout.

So let us just take a moment now to think about what we do Sunday by Sunday as we pray together. And we do this is a good point to say we do pray together.

Every time we pray someone up the front will be myself or Joe or one of the other elders will lead us in prayer. But leading is the key word there.

The person up the front is not praying for you. The person up the front is not doing their own little prayer so that you can offer your prayer at the same time. We are being led as we pray together as a church family.

Joining with whoever is leading and praying that same prayer alongside them. Praying for us as a church so that we are led as we are led by an individual we pray together.

[ 22 : 47 ] It is an act of corporate worship. We are all to partake of it and invited in. In that act of corporate worship we do typically don't we?

It is kind of strange doing this today because it is very not typical but we typically have four prayers during the course of the service. And hopefully by now you are starting to see how they shape into the same pattern that Jesus has taught us.

So each service we have been thinking haven't we that we are called to worship first of all we respond in sung praise. And then we pray for his glory in response.

Having heard the call to praise the glorious gods we respond by praying for just that. We pray for his glory in response to being reminded of his worthiness.

But then naturally that moves on doesn't it? As we consider God's worthiness to become aware of our own unworthiness. And so naturally we move on in that prayer to confessing how unworthy we are to come into the presence of this holy God.

[ 24 : 10 ] And so the prayer of adoration at the beginning of the service is both praying for God's glory and praying for our forgiveness because we know that in order to come and worship in the presence of a holy God forgiveness is what we need.

We then hear God's words don't we? We hear the reading of his word and further singing of his praise and through them we are reminded that having pled for forgiveness forgiveness that is exactly what we are offered and guaranteed in Jesus Christ.

And so in responding to the grace of God we now come before him in prayer once more no longer needing to ask for forgiveness but instead having now been forgiven and redeemed coming as children before their father coming with the needs of our church the needs of the wider church and the needs of the world around us.

God delights to hear the petitions of his children and we pray once more before the sermon we pray for God to teach us as we sit under his words we've prayed for God's glory we've prayed for our forgiveness we've prayed for our provision and our protection and preservation and now we pray for God's kingdom to come that is what David prays in Psalm 25 show me your ways Lord teach me your paths asking for God's will to be made known to us that we might live for his glory and then our final prayer which is not the benediction more to come on that later is having heard God's words we pray that his spirit would embed those joyful truths in us and that it would be made manifest in our

lives as we go back into the world praying that

God's kingdom would be made known in the lives we live in response to his word for his glory hopefully that is just a very brief overview but you can even see in that why we pray what we do in the service and why we pray what we do when we do and how the Lord's prayer is still providing the framework within which our prayers are structured but let us not forget why we do so in the first place no one no one prayed as much or as fervently as Jesus Christ because prayer is not just about getting what we want it is not just about confessing our sin it is about spending time speaking to our father whom we love I don't know what relationship is closest in your life but I can almost guarantee it is also the one in which there is the most talking so God would long for it to be with us it is why

[ 27 : 37 ] Paul says pray without ceasing do not stop communing with your father in heaven and so we pray and we pray in our worship services because we delight to be with our God we delight to come before us before him we delight to speak with him just as he has spoken to us we don't have to pray we get to pray and through it draw ever nearer to him who alone is worthy of our worship let us pray now before we come to the Lord's table together please continue thanks to