

# PRAYER: LEARNING FROM JESUS

## PREFACE

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This little booklet is a written version of the *Burning Heart* film series *Prayer: Learning from Jesus* (available free at [burningheart.org/prayer](http://burningheart.org/prayer)). It was consciously and deliberately written for film, and we still think that the content works best when watched – but some people prefer to read, and others like to be able quickly read back over what they've watched, so we've made it available in a written form for those who want it. If that includes you - we hope and pray that you find it helpful, and that it draws you closer to God.

Part of the film series was interviews with various people who have inspired me in prayer. We think they worked really well and add lots to the material, so wanted to include them in this e-book. Interviews don't translate that well into written form though, so please allow for the limitations of reproducing filmed interviews as text!

We have also included the study guides for each film/chapter at the end of the relevant chapters below. The guides were designed to accompany the series and are particularly designed as discussion starters for small groups watching or using the material in their meetings. We wanted to include them here, so that all are materials in this series are available in written form in one place.

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# Chapter 1:

## WHY PRAY?

*(Luke 11)*

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### *Exploring Prayer*

I love prayer. It is one of the great joys and delights of being a Christian.

Prayer can also be hard though, and I also wish I was better at it! I want to pray more and go deeper.

My prayer life has always had a bit of struggle in it, and I'm not one of those people who just found it easy - but it's always been a struggle that's worth it. I hope I never stop growing and learning in prayer.

I've been a pastor and preacher for almost fifteen years and I've come to realise that I think most of us long to be better at prayer - hopefully including you! I'd like to invite you to join me on a journey to explore prayer together.

We're going to take our lead from the disciples, who asked Jesus "Lord teach us to pray."<sup>1</sup> We will look in each chapter at some of the ways he taught and modelled prayer for us. We will also include some interviews from the film series, with people who've inspired *me* in prayer.

The book asks a series of questions:

1. Why pray?
2. What's the point of prayer?
3. Why didn't God answer?

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 11v2

#### 4. How do I do it?

My prayer for you is that you will not only pick up tips and ideas, but also catch a glimpse of some of the glories and possibilities of prayer. I pray that as we look at Jesus' teaching in the gospels, he will meet you and teach and inspire you through his Holy Spirit. You may want to just take a moment to pray, asking God to do that and deepen your prayer life.

*Are you excited about prayer?*

If we're honest, I think one reason why many of us struggle with praying is because we don't *really* want to do it. We don't have anything against prayer – most of us probably think it's a good thing, even something we should do more. The issue is that we're just not that excited about it.

This is why this first question – "*why pray?*" is so important. One of the things I've noticed about the people who inspire me in prayer is that they *are* excited about it. When I see the excitement and the vibrancy in their prayer life it's infectious and I want to pray more too.

It seems that was the case with the disciples too. Luke tells us they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray just as he was finishing up praying himself.<sup>2</sup> I think they saw him pray, and thought: "Wow - that's something I want too!" What then follows is one of two places where Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer, probably the most famous and wonderful teaching on prayer there's ever been.

#### **Interview with Esther Beckley...**

*In the film series, I interviewed people who inspire me in prayer – the first was Esther Beckley. She's one of our Trustees at Burning Heart, and she's got lots of experience in church and ministry – here in the UK, in California, where she grew up in Sierra Leone, and lots of other places.*

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 11v1-2, the other place is Matthew 6 – which we will look at in chapter 4.

*What stands out for me most though is that she's really excited about prayer – and she does lots of it!*

*David – Esther, you seem really excited about prayer – would you say that's true?*

*Esther – Oh my goodness! That's very true! When somebody says, "Esther come on – let's talk about prayer!" you don't have to do anything else, I'll be round! I love to talk about prayer, I love to encourage people about prayer.*

*David - You say you pray every day, how long do you pray for?*

*Esther – I was living in California for a while and we used to have this joke going round that Esther is not available before 11am! That was really true! It wasn't entirely because I prayed until that time, but I do get up really early.*

*I used to be a night person, I would be up until 2 in the morning. When somebody says "it's 11pm", I'd be like – "the night is still young, let's watch a movie until like 2am!"*

*One day I was listening to a podcast, and it kept going on and on about how important it was to wake up early in the morning. So as I drove in my car, I prayed: "I want to be able to wake up early in the morning."*

*The next morning I woke up out of deep sleep, fully awake, at 4:30. First I rolled out of bed and thought: "4:30 what is going on!" And then I remembered my prayer and I was like "I'm up Lord, I'm up!"*

*That began me waking up really early, so I'd wake up at 4:45 every morning. I'll be there sometimes until 9 or 9:30 in the morning, and then I'll come out and my day will just be...pretty brilliant!*

*David – so you're getting up just a bit before 5 and then you're praying until 9:30. That's basically 4 hours of prayer every single day?!*

*Esther – every single day, unless there's a reason not to, like travel. Then it will be shorter.*

*David – I've read about people like you in Christian biographies, but I think you're the first person I've met who prays...4 hours a day – that's amazing!*

*Entry to the Palace...*

Esther really inspires me in my prayer! That's partly because she's just a normal person like you or me, and I realise I don't have to be someone special to be great at prayer. I can just be me.

What Esther has realised, is that what makes prayer extraordinary is not who is praying, but who they're praying to.

One of the most famous buildings in London (and probably the world) is Buckingham Palace. It's the official home of the King. When we were making the film series, we went down to film there. Much as I'd have loved to meet the King though, we knew that that wasn't going to happen! The gates were closed, I don't know the King and I wasn't invited. Normal people don't just walk into Buckingham Palace!

Imagine how you'd feel if you *were* invited to meet the King at Buckingham Palace though! Or imagine if you had the chance to meet someone else famous or inspiring, such as a world leader or film star.

It'd be a big deal for me! The date would go straight in my diary, I'd rearrange anything else I had planned, and I'd probably be boring my friends and family with stories of the big day for years to come.

And yet...

Every day I'm invited to spend time with someone far more amazing than the King - God.

I think one of the main reasons many of us struggle in our prayer lives is because we've never really grasped the glory and greatness of what it means to pray.

When we pray, we talk to God.

Just stop and think for a moment about that – when we pray, we talk to God! He's the creator and ruler of all that exists. He's eternal. He's Almighty. And *He* wants to talk to *you*. Wow!

What is prayer? It's chatting to God, talking to him and spending time with him.

### *It's all about relationship*

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he taught them to pray to God as our *Father*. He started his answer and teaching on prayer "*when you pray, say: Father...* "<sup>3</sup>

Father is the opening word of the Lord's prayer, and in many ways it's the signature phrase and heartbeat of all Jesus' teaching on prayer. Because of Jesus, we can be in a relationship with God where we can call him 'father'.

There is a beautiful intimacy in that word, in Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke). It would've been "Abba." It means father, but without any of the formality of that word in English – you could translate it simply as Daddy. It's a word of relationship, of closeness, of easy access.

Prayer isn't some religious duty or obligation, or a means to end. Prayer is first and foremost relational – chatting with our heavenly father.

### *It is still amazing though!*

Ironically though that intimacy can often blind us to the glory of what's going on. There's nothing childish or small in that word Abba, Father – it's a word without the formality of the English 'Father' but also without the childishness of the English 'Daddy.'

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 11v2

Alongside the intimacy there is a glorious privilege and power that we so easily forget. The one we pray to as Abba is *also* our father *in heaven*, the Almighty, God himself.

That makes prayer the most powerful and awesome thing that you or I will ever do. I may not have access to Buckingham Palace, to meet the King. When it comes to God – *his* Lord and King – the gates of heaven are flung wide for me. I'm welcomed in whenever I want. Wow!

### **Interview with Esther Beckley...**

*David – do you find prayer easy?*

*Esther – yes!*

*David – how?*

*Esther – it's a conversation with God. It's a conversation with a friend.*

For example, when I'm with my girlfriends I talk about everything from fashion to make-up to boys, hair, all sorts of stuff. You just flow – you just have a conversation, and a laugh!

Has God ever tickled you and said something so funny that you find yourself in your prayer time laughing? So, imagine when you're having a really good conversation with friends. Think of the joy of having that conversation, the laughter, the big laugh that comes out of your belly – it's like that!

Prayer doesn't have to be solemn, it doesn't have to be sad, it doesn't have to be like a drag, it can be fun! You know the Bible says he sits on his throne and laughs – why are we crying when he's laughing? We join him and we laugh.

Obviously though, there are a lot of times when I have cried in prayer too. You are pushing, and pushing, and working that muscle, and you keep pushing because he never promised us “easy.”



BUT, he did say that "I will be there with you" and we really need to get it that when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death we are not on our own. God is always with us, he will never abandon us he will never leave us. Keep pushing.

So, just as you talk with your friends, have that conversation with God. Talk about whatever it is you want to talk with your friend. He's holy, but he's also father. He's Dad, he's friend. He says "I no longer call you slaves, I call you friends." He's a friend.

### *Asking for things*

All our prayers are rooted in our relationship with God - but we are then also encouraged to ask for things.

In some ways that shouldn't be a surprise to us. Anyone who has ever seen a small child asking their Daddy for something, will know that relationships and requests can come together very easily!

The rest of the Lord's Prayer is a series of requests. Some of it is focused on the things of God – as we pray "hallowed be your name" and "your kingdom come."

Lots of it is also about us too though. We are told to ask for protection against evil and temptation, to ask for forgiveness, and to ask for the general necessities of life. We can pray for ourselves, asking "give us this day our daily bread."<sup>4</sup>

It is then this theme of asking that Jesus focuses in on in the rest of his teaching on prayer in Luke 11. He tells a short parable about it<sup>5</sup> and then sums it up with the famous words:

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 11v1-6

<sup>5</sup> We will explore the parable more in chapter 3, below.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 11v9-10

Jesus is encouraging us to ask for things in prayer – and telling us that if we do, we can expect to receive them.

That can be practical things – he goes on to use an illustration of a child asking their Dad for food. It can also be more intangible things too though, and the section actually finishes with Jesus promising that “*your Father in Heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.*”<sup>7</sup>

Some of the most amazing answers to prayer are found in God's presence and help. That is maybe particularly in those moments when we walk through the darkneses of life, something we will explore more in chapter 3.

Interestingly for me though, that is one of the roots of Esther's passion for prayer – God's presence with her in a particularly difficult time of her life. She prayed and prayed through a long season of racism, victimisation and bullying at work – which is the theme of this next short interview.

### **Interview with Esther Beckley...**

*David – Why do you think you're more excited about prayer than other people?*

*Esther – I think I'm more excited about prayer, because of what happened to me years ago. I've seen God answer my prayer, and the way that God answered my prayer wasn't the way that I was expecting – it was way better! It was far better, it was over the top better.*

*I remember one day just falling on the floor. I just cried out to God, and I said "I'm done – if you don't.... Jesus do not pass me by, if you pass me by I'll die." That was the cry that I had in my Spirit. I cried so much that somebody said I sounded like an animal, I was crying from such a depth of my spirit I didn't sound human, I was crying so deeply and asking God to help me, and I just let go of everything.*

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 11v13

Seeing God meet me and so profoundly move my life and change my life through prayer makes me passionate. It tells me my prayers are powerful. It tells me that God listens. He hears the cries of our hearts. God is not deaf and God is not blind, and God is there. He's present through it all.

### *Power in prayer...*

One of London's most iconic venues is the Royal Albert Hall. We filmed this part of the series at the Hall, and you can see pictures of it below:<sup>8</sup>



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<sup>8</sup> These pictures are taken from Wikipedia, and used under a Creative Commons licence, details in an endnote to this chapter.

We filmed at the Hall to try and bring one of Jesus' best-known miracles to life – the feeding of the 5,000.

The Hall seats just over 5,000 people, which is the number of people Jesus fed miraculously on one extraordinary afternoon. Starting with one small boy's packed lunch of bread and fish, he fed a vast crowd of 5,000 men, probably plus women and children.<sup>9</sup>

But how many really is that? I find it hard to picture, which is where the Royal Albert Hall comes in. When I see and think about the size of the Hall, suddenly this all comes alive. I imagine Jesus walking into a packed Royal Albert Hall and miraculously feeding them all. It's an amazing image!

But can you imagine *you* doing it? Or me? Because that's the sort of thing that Jesus told his disciples *we should* expect. On the night before his death, he said:

*"whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these... I will do whatever you ask in my name."<sup>10</sup>*

It's such a big promise it's almost scary! Jesus told us that we should expect to do the same sorts of miracles that he did – which means healing the sick, calming storms, raising the dead, or feeding thousands. In fact, Jesus actually said "they will do *even greater* things than these... ."

It is so easy to gloss over that, or assume it's not for me. But this is not a promise for some elite group. Jesus' promise was for "*whoever* believes in me." And that means anyone. That means you and me.

All we're told to do is, ask in his name, to pray.<sup>11</sup> Have you ever really grasped how amazing – and powerful – prayer actually is?

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<sup>9</sup> John 6v1-15

<sup>10</sup> John 14v12-13

<sup>11</sup> We'll explore what it means to pray "in Jesus' name" a little more in the next chapter.

One of the reasons I went to speak to Esther, is that she has – and she's seen some amazing answers to prayer as a result!

### **Interview with Esther Beckley...**

*David – Can you tell us some testimonies?*

*Esther* - I can tell you some stories, oh my goodness, I love testimonies! I used to be part of the leadership team of the Bethel healing rooms in Redding California and we saw absolutely thousands of miracles.

A first year BSSM student came and she was crying. Her Auntie Cynthia, who they call Auntie Cindy, was in a home. They had been told she was not going to make it past that day. She'd had MS for 30 years, and she was end stage and they wanted me to skype in to her hospital room. I said "of course!"

There was a family member there and we skyped in to the hospital room. What I saw was Auntie Cindy was lying on a bed, and she was a different colour. She was grey, and she looked still – she wasn't moving. She looked like she was dead. She was already under covers.

Auntie Cindy is lying on this bed, and on the screen, and I thought "Dear Lord – I've got nothing, but God." So, I put my hand on the screen over the picture on the screen and I just began to pray. I just began to call life and healing and health to her body.

The previous day I woke up singing "*I've got a river of life flowing out of me...*", and that came back to me. Nothing had happened, but then suddenly I heard in my head "*I've got a river of life flowing out of me...*"

So, I said "Hey Auntie Cindy - I have a song for you!" She's unresponsive at this point. I sang the song first time and I sang the song second time, and when I sang the song the second time the words came out of my mouth, "Hey Cindy get out of that deathbed and walk!" They literally just came out of my mouth – they were not planned, I didn't know I was going to say it, but it just came out of my mouth.

And the next thing she moved!

A nurse went and put her hand on her head, and her mouth was just wide open! And the niece that was standing right there was shouting: "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh! She moved!"

And I said "Cindy, get up get up get up." I called the nurse (who was now afraid to come and touch her), to come and help her get up. And she stands up - and it's like a baby trying to walk! This woman has been bed-ridden for over 15 years, she doesn't walk! But she takes little steps, and her legs just get stronger, and she walks across to the other side of the room...and I'm watching this! I could hardly see as I was crying so much!

Wow!

*Over to me - and you!*

Prayer no longer seems small or boring or hard when I hear testimonies like that! Instead, it feels exciting and full of possibility.

Of course, there are challenges when not everything we pray about seems to be answered - and we'll look at those in more detail in chapter 3.

I think we need our faith and expectations about prayer to be expanded though. We need a fresh glimpse and vision of what prayer is.

It's easy to just think - well that's Esther, she's great at all this. But actually, this is for you and me too. What makes prayer work is not the person praying, but the person they are praying to.

Esther can't do all that - but God can. If you believe in Jesus, then that God is now *your* Abba, Father. He wants you to chat to him and to ask him for things in prayer. They can be small - like a child running to her Daddy when she's hurt. Or they can be huge, like a woman walking off her deathbed, totally healed of MS.

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### *Prayer...*

I would encourage you to spend some time praying at the end of each chapter. If you want, you can use these words:

Abba, Father, I pray that you would inspire and help me in my prayers. Make me want to pray more. Meet me and help me when I do pray, and answer me when I ask. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Endnote – Photo credits: The external shot is by Fernando Losada Rodriguez and is available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal\\_Albert\\_Hall#/media/File:Royal\\_Albert\\_Hall.001\\_-\\_London.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Albert_Hall#/media/File:Royal_Albert_Hall.001_-_London.JPG) and the external shot is at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Royal\\_Albert\\_Hall,\\_BBC\\_Proms\\_2017.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Royal_Albert_Hall,_BBC_Proms_2017.jpg)

# Episode 1

## GROUP STUDY GUIDE...

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### WELCOME...

In this first session we'll begin to explore *Why we pray* – so often our struggles in prayer come from not grasping the glories and possibilities of prayer, and why it is so amazing.

Start the session by opening in prayer, and maybe worship.

You may want to use the following prayer, or something like it:

*Father, thank you for the amazing privilege of prayer. We pray for our group as we set out on this journey together. Please meet with us and speak to us as we watch the films and use them to help us grow in prayer. May we grow in understanding, grow in excitement, and grow in commitment – and most of all grow closer to you, our heavenly father. Amen.*

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### WATCH... (20 mins)

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### DISCUSS... (25 mins)

- What are you hoping for from this series?
- Do you find it easy to pray to God as 'Father'?
- Has the film changed your understanding and expectations of prayer at all?



- Has anyone in the group got any testimonies of how God has answered your prayers?<sup>12</sup>
  - What do you want to ask God for in prayer?
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## **PRAY...** (15 mins)

- Start by praying for the things you talked about at the end of the discussion

Then break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 and share specific things that each of you would like to pray about in your own life.

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<sup>12</sup> Leaders note: Some of the group may also have experiences of God seeming *not* to answer their prayers, and so this may be a painful topic. Please do flag up that we will grapple with unanswered prayer in Episode 3. For now, affirm the validity of their questions and struggles but encourage them not to give up hope in prayer!

# Chapter 2:

# WHAT'S THE POINT OF PRAYER?

*(John 14-15)*

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*Expectations in Prayer...*

What are you hoping for, or expecting, when you pray?

One reason many of us struggle in our prayer lives is because we've got the answer to this question subtly wrong in our hearts. If we're honest, many of us have quite a functional relationship with prayer.

We can think of prayer as being a bit like a vending machine.<sup>13</sup> We put in prayer, and the results and answers to our prayer are what we hope to get back. Essentially we then see prayer as a way of achieving our own goals and getting what we want.

At first glance that idea is not so different from what we find in the Bible. Jesus' teaching on prayer is actually full of encouragements to 'ask' for things – so that can't be all wrong! Similarly, he does promise results. For instance, in John 14, Jesus promises:

*"I will do whatever you ask in my name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son, you may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."<sup>14</sup>*

That seems pretty categorical – if you want it, ask for it!

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<sup>13</sup> In the film series this opening section was filmed by a vending machine to emphasise the illustration.

<sup>14</sup> John 14v13-14

Yet, Jesus' promises here are subtly but dramatically different from the image of prayer like a vending machine. Crucially, the focus is not on us and what we want – but on God.

It is all wrapped up in the little phrase “in my name.” What does it mean to pray “in Jesus' name”? They are words we often use in our prayers, almost without thinking. Yet they can be explosive. If we let them, they can challenge and change and expand our expectations in prayer.

### **Interview with Adrian Chatfield...**

*In this second episode of the film series, I interviewed Adrian Chatfield. He was one of my tutors at Theological College and is both a theologian and a man of deep personal prayer. He has experiences in a lifetime of prayer and ministry that range from the Pentecostal to the Monastic. I went to talk to him about prayer, and I came away with a renewed vision of the richness and variety of why we pray.*

*David - Why do you pray?*

*Adrian – This is not in any particular order! I pray because I should, I pray because I must (if I'm honest), I pray sometimes because I want to, and sometimes I pray despite not wanting to.*

*I still remember, my father used to teach (I'm a child of the vicarage) that prayer is praise; it's confession; it's thanksgiving; it's praying for others; it's praying for yourself. So, I pray because I am amazed by God, I pray because I sin, I pray because I'm grateful, I pray because the world has needs, and I pray because I have needs and we have needs.*

*I'm also enough of a theologian to know that if I really believe and live up to the things I say about God when I teach or when I preach, then praying is the primary outworking of that.*

## *Ambassadors in prayer...*

As I've reflected on what it means to pray "in Jesus' name", I've found myself thinking increasingly about the role and status of ambassadors.<sup>15</sup> We filmed this part of the series outside the US embassy in London, as a visual illustration of this idea.

The embassy is the headquarters of the American Ambassador. They are one of the most powerful people in London, with access and influence pretty much everywhere. I realised though that I don't actually know who they are! I don't even know whether they're a man or a woman, black or white, young or old. All I know is that they matter!

What makes the US Ambassador in London important is not who *they* are – their CV, or skills, or brilliance (although I'm sure they are very impressive). Instead, what makes them important is who they serve. They matter because they come "in the name of the President of the United States of America." They have power because *the President* has power.

It's the same with us when we pray "in the name of Jesus." *We* have power because *he* has power. We pray, and we come, in *Jesus* name.

That also subtly changes the point and purpose of our prayer though. The US ambassador doesn't operate according to their own ideas and desires. They are here to implement the President's agenda. If they decide to go off-piste and make up their own policies, or just do what they want, they are not actually operating in the President's name at all.

Again, it is the same with us when we pray "in the name of Jesus." Christian prayer isn't primarily about what *I* want at all. It's about God.

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<sup>15</sup> What follows explores Jesus' teaching in John 14 and 15, but of course the idea of us acting as God's ambassadors is not original to me – Paul got there a few thousand years before me in 2 Corinthians 5v20-21 and Ephesians 6v20. This illustration is slightly different to what he says, focusing on how we are God's ambassadors to the world, rather than prayer – but I think the illustration works and is valid in both contexts.

In the verses quoted above from John 14, Jesus twice promises to do what we ask in his name. Sandwiched between those promises though is the reason why – the point and purpose of our prayers. He says:

*"I will do whatever you ask in my name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son,"<sup>16</sup>*

Prayer isn't supposed to be a way of getting what we want – a spiritual vending machine, or perk of being a Christian. The purpose of prayer is to bring glory to Jesus, and then through Jesus to bring glory to the Father. It is about advancing his agenda, and praying his plans and purposes into being.

### *Obedience in prayer...*

This can actually be quite challenging. At the heart of this all is a willingness to put God's agenda first. That means prioritising his will above our own wants and desires. That means being obedient to him, and praying "your will be done" – even when we don't want to.

Obedience is actually a surprising (and often overlooked) emphasis of these verses. Immediately after Jesus told the disciples "*you may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it.*" He added "*if you love me, keep my commands.*"<sup>17</sup>

That call to obedience is then repeated. It comes 5 times in various different ways in just 31 verses.<sup>18</sup> I can't think of any other short

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<sup>16</sup> John 14v13

<sup>17</sup> John 14v15

<sup>18</sup> They are:

- John 14v15, "*if you love me, keep my commands*"
- John 14v21, "*whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me*";
- John 14v23, "*anyone who loves me will obey my teaching*";
- John 15v10, "*if you keep my commands, you will remain in my love*"
- John 15v14, "*you are my friends if you do what I command.*"

passage of scripture where obedience is mentioned as often – and I don't think that's an accident.

To pray "in Jesus' name" is not self-focused but surrendered. It is the prayer of an ambassador acting on Jesus' authority and account.

### **Interview with Adrian Chatfield...**

*David – what does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?*

*Adrian – I'm having to think about this one! It certainly means to pray in the way that Jesus did, but it is not simply imitative of Jesus.*

It is to pray with the authority and power that Jesus has given to his people, specifically his church – the body of his people together. It's the people of God corporately who have that power and have that authority.

To pray 'in Jesus' name' is to tap into the power and authority and commands of Jesus, to ask that God may fulfil what God desires to fulfil. And sometimes he fulfils those things when we ask.

Asking in his name is also asking in a kingdom way though. Everything that Jesus does is towards the kingdom. Sometimes in his life that meant things not going the way that he would rather that they did. The classic example is Gethsemane, "*Father take this cup from me, but not my will but yours be done*" (Matthew 26v29). It's not a simple "oooh I fancy a new bicycle tomorrow!" It means asking in a way that honours who we are in God. That includes what we are created for, and where we are placed in the kingdom to enable the kingdom to come, not just in our lives but in our community and elsewhere.

### *Relationship and prayer...*

One of the striking things about Jesus' teaching on prayer in John 14 is its context. It is part of what Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before he died. At this point, Jesus' focus is not actually on prayer, but on relationship. It starts with Jesus' famous declaration:

*I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.*<sup>19</sup>

Through Jesus we come into relationship with God - and that is then the context in which we are encouraged to pray "in Jesus' name."

Prayer "in Jesus' name" may be surrendered and obedient - but it is also intimate and relational. The word "love" comes 20 times in just these two chapters.<sup>20</sup>

We're then called to pray, not because God needs our help, but because he looks for our love and relationship. In prayer, we are so much more than simply ambassadors - we are also sons and daughters, loved and cherished by our heavenly Father.

"Father" is the word that Jesus uses again and again in this passage to speak of God. It is also the way (as we've seen before) that he taught us to pray - praying, "*Our Father...*"<sup>21</sup> It points us to one of the most important things about prayer - that prayer is supposed to be relational.

One of the biggest problems with the image of prayer being like a vending machine that we explored earlier is that it's functional not relational. Prayer isn't just about outcomes and answers but also about growing and deepening our relationship with our heavenly father.

So many of the prayers in the Bible aren't actually about asking at all. In the Psalms, for instance, you'll find prayers of thanksgiving, songs of praise, declarations of trust, cries of lament, and many more.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> John 14v6

<sup>20</sup> For those interested in the Greek, 19 of those occurrences are the word *αγαπω* and 1 is the word *φιλεω*

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 6v9

<sup>22</sup> An example of each would be: Thanksgiving - Psalm 136 ; Praise - Psalm 150; Trust - Psalm 23; lament - Psalm 137. There are obviously lots more examples.

Even here, in John 14, where we *are* encouraged to ask, and given extraordinary promises of answered prayer, the focus is actually still on relationship.

We pray because we love God and want to know him better – and he hears and answers because he loves us.

### **Interview with Adrian Chatfield...**

*David – what is prayer?*

*Adrian –* When I'm teaching, I tend to start off with a definition of prayer around conversation with God. Sometimes it's a two-way conversation, sometimes it's more speaking, sometimes it's more listening, sometimes it's more sitting in the presence of God (so there aren't any words), and often it involves other people, so it's a conversation between many.



<sup>23</sup>

I'm often reminded of Rublev's 15 Century icon – the three strangers who visit Abraham, and who are understood in some circles to

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<sup>23</sup> The picture above is from Wikipedia and is in the public domain.



represent the three persons of the Holy Trinity sitting round the table. There's a fourth place at the table, and the reverse perspective invites me in. There's a place of invitation – God invites us to come sit at table, to talk, to share, just to be, to enjoy. Prayer is the enjoyment of God's presence and all that comes out of that.

One of the things that I bang on about quite a lot is that Jesus in John chapter 15 says to his disciples "you are not servants you are my friends" (John 15:15). Prayer is a way of staying connected with the one who is my best friend. I don't want that to sound too 'buddy-buddy' because God is both intimate and immanent, but also transcendent and terrifying. Friendship (I think) allows you to think of the relationship as being dynamic, growing, changing, but also respectful of the dynamic between creature and creator.

### *Fruitfulness in prayer...*

We've explored how prayer "in Jesus' name" is surrendered and relational - but it is also effective.

However flawed our transactional understandings of prayer may be, Jesus did say:

*"you may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."*<sup>24</sup>

He's encouraging us to take the initiative, to ask him for what we want, and to do so expecting him to give it to us. How does that fit with what we've already explored?

In the following chapter Jesus uses a famous and beautiful image that helps us understand, saying:

*"I am the vine; you are the branches"*<sup>25</sup>

The focus of the image is on the idea of fruit and how a branch is completely dependent on the vine for its fruitfulness. Jesus continues:

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<sup>24</sup> John 14v14

<sup>25</sup> John 15v5

*"if you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit – apart from me you can do nothing."*<sup>26</sup>

This is a wonderful image to help us understand our relationship with Jesus more generally, but as he continues Jesus applies it specifically to asking for things in prayer:

*"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*<sup>27</sup>

As we've seen, the end goal in all this is God's glory and purposes being worked out. It turns out that that's not just some vague and impersonal cosmic agenda though. God's vision is a vision that involves *us*. God wants to show his glory through you and me, and the way we live our lives and pray our prayers.

One of the great early church fathers, Irenaeus, once said that *"the glory of God is a person fully alive"*,<sup>28</sup> I love that, and I wonder if he had these verses in mind when he wrote it.

Our prayers aren't just about results, or just about relationship – they're about the whole thing. Prayer is vital part of what it means to be in relationship with Jesus, but that in turn will always have results – always bear fruit.

One thing I love about that image of fruit though is that it is a much richer and fuller image than talking about 'results' can suggest. It

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<sup>26</sup> John 15v5

<sup>27</sup> John 15v7-8

<sup>28</sup> Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 4.20.7. The exact quote is "Gloria enim Dei vivens homo" which is literally translated "the glory of God is a living person." The popular expansion of 'living person' to "person fully alive" comes from the context, which is clearly *not* talking about simply being alive, but something more. It seems to me to be a fair and accurate rendering of Irenaeus' meaning, even if fairly loosely translated.

Some readers may be familiar with the more old-fashioned version of the saying as "the glory of God is a *man* fully alive", but either is a valid translation of the Latin. It is also worth saying that there is no definite article ("the") in Latin, so this is less exclusive than it might appear in English – it is not that this is the limit of the glory of God, but part of the glory of God.

points to our dependence on Jesus in prayer, as well as hinting at how these results are often not instant – both things which can jar with the ways and expectations of the world. With fruit, there are seasons and delays, and the branch relies on the vine.

### **Interview with Adrian Chatfield...**

*When I spoke to Adrian, we explored some of the complexities around answered and unanswered prayer (something we will also return to in the next chapter).*

*David – does God answer our prayers?*

*Adrian – the thing that I've often said to people when teaching about prayer, is that it would be so much easier for me if God never answered prayer, or if he always answered it in the way that I think is proper! The truth is that I am in the in-between place.*

*I have seen personally and read and heard many stories of extraordinary answers to prayer. I remember praying with the whole church for someone who had a tumour around the spine, and the person was opened up, and I'm not going to identify the person or the context, and the surgeon told the person afterwards "we knew that we couldn't do anything with that because it was too risky, so we decided to sew you back up, but as we went to, the tumour fell apart in two pieces in my hands, and it's nothing to do with me, but it's probably much more to do with the prayers of the people in your church, and the surgeon wasn't a believer as I remember it. Which is an astonishing story, and I've dined out on it many times*

*We could stay here for a long time, and I could tell you little answers to prayer that are quite extraordinary - what we call co-incidences, God incidences, serendipities or such like. You pray, things happen, and it feels as though there is the most remarkable coming together of circumstances to deliver a consequence that was inconceivable. So yes – how many stories do you want?!*

## *Understanding my part in prayer...and God's*

Part of what I love about what Jesus says in John 15, is that it helps me to understand my part in prayer and God's part. Jesus is very clear that he wants and expects *us* to take the initiative. He tells us to ask for "*whatever you wish*", and he then tells us that "*it will be done for you*."<sup>29</sup>

In other words, God *does* change his cosmic plans and purposes to do what *we* want when we ask for it in prayer – which is pretty mind-blowing!<sup>30</sup> The reason he does so is because when we live fully and totally for Jesus, our wishes and our prayers bring *him* glory.

But – and it's an important "but" - that can *only* happen if we are deeply rooted in him. We need to be surrendered and obedient. As Jesus said, this can only happen if: "*you remain in me and my words remain in you*."<sup>31</sup>

If I'm honest, so often that's not true for me. My prayers can so easily become just my agenda - me praying "in David's name" and not Jesus!

Jesus' challenge and promises in these verses inspire and excite me though. They cast a vision of what prayer *can* be, as we partner with God himself, to pray and bear fruit, and bring about his purposes and glory!

So, what's the point of prayer? Ultimately, the point of prayer is to bring glory to God. But the *way* that that is achieved is by drawing us deeper into relationship with him. Then as we become deeply and wholly rooted in him, allowing *us* to take the initiative and pray prayers that can change the world for God.

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<sup>29</sup> "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." John 14v7

<sup>30</sup> This raises all kinds of philosophical and theological questions, two of which are explored more in the *Extra Essay* at the end of this book.

<sup>31</sup> John 15v7

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*Prayer...*

I would encourage you to spend some time praying into what we've looked at. If you want, you can use these words:

Lord Jesus, thank you for the amazing privilege of prayer. I pray that you would draw me deeper into relationship with you and deeper in my prayer life. Help me to remain in you and your words in me. Help me to pray big and bold prayers in your name, and then answer me when I do, that you may be glorified. Amen.

# Episode 2

## GROUP STUDY GUIDE...

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### WELCOME...

In this second session we will explore how we understand prayer and what the purpose of prayer really is.

Start the session by opening in prayer, and maybe worship.

You may want to use the following prayer, or something like it:

*Father God, please meet with us and speak to us as we watch the films. We pray that you would deepen our understanding of prayer, helping us to grasp your plans and purposes for it. And we pray also that you would inspire and encourage us to pray more and more in line with your will. Amen.*

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### WATCH... (20 mins)

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### DISCUSS... (25 mins)

- What are your expectations when you pray? Has the film challenged or changed them in any way?
- How do you feel about the idea that surrender and obedience are a key part of prayer? Will that change how you pray?
- What does it actually look like for our prayers to be rooted in our relationship with God?

- How can we make sure that we “remain in me (Jesus), and my words remain in you?” (John 15v7)
  - Looking ahead to the next session (if time...) – does what we've discussed today impact how you see unanswered prayer?
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## **PRAY...** (15 mins)

- Ask one of the group to read John 14v6-15v8, while the rest of the group sit, listen and pray (they may want to close their eyes). Leave a time of silence at the end of the reading, for people to continue to pray.
- Spend some time praying as a group for God to help you listen to him and surrender to him in your prayers
- Then break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 and share specific things that each of you would like to pray about in your own life.

# Chapter 3:

## WHY DIDN'T GOD ANSWER?<sup>32</sup>

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*David's testimony...*

We filmed the opening scene for this episode of the film series at a loch near my childhood home in Scotland. It is both one of my favourite places in the world and a place of pain and sadness for me.

The sadness is because it was there that my father died.

No-one quite knows what happened that day, but he was clearing a blockage from the sluice gate of a dam, when something went wrong. He was trapped under the dam and drowned.

I will never forget my Mum's words on the phone, "Daddy's dead." I remember just screaming into the night and sobbing, and I can't really describe to you the pain and darkness I felt - but it was awful.

I was in my twenties at the time, and training to become a pastor. I was actually away on a retreat, and I'd spent the whole afternoon praying. I don't remember specifically what I'd been praying for, but I imagine my family and my Dad were part of the prayer. And I do remember sitting with his body the next day and praying for a miracle, for resurrection.

But it didn't happen.

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<sup>32</sup> All the other films/chapters are focused on a specific passage of Jesus' teaching. This one moves around more though, in part because no specific passage of Jesus' teaching focuses on this, but also because Jesus' own example in various places is so powerful in exploring this question, and I didn't want to narrow the answer down beyond that.



And that's the great struggle for us as Christians who believe in prayer. We believe in a God who loves us, and who can change situations like that, and can do any miracle. Yet so often he seems *not* to answer our prayers. And we wonder Why not?

### *Walking in the darkness...*

In the midst of our suffering so often what we cry is "why?!!" Yet strangely what we long for in that moment is rarely the answer to our question, but something deeper. Anyone who has walked through the darkness knows there are few things *less* helpful than someone trying to explain everything!

One thing I love about the Bible's response to unanswered prayer and suffering, is that it allows us to struggle and question and weep.

I love the Psalms, and particularly the struggling Psalms. There are places where they rail and shake their fists at God, and question: Why? How long? Where are you?, and other bewildered, hurting, or even angry questions.<sup>33</sup>

Sometimes the Psalms can seem almost shocking in their frankness – until you read them next to the darknesses of life, and then they just seem real. They are beautifully and unvarnishedly real.

In that realness and honesty there is a glorious permission. God not only allowed all this to be said, he wanted it in the Bible. He can take it, he doesn't mind it – he wants us to let it all out in our prayers.

These Psalms are there to help us when we struggle in the darkness and rail and don't know.

The greatest example of using the Psalms in our moments of desolation comes on the cross. Jesus cried out with the opening words of Psalm 22:

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<sup>33</sup> If you just read through the book from the start, you will quickly come across examples, such as: Psalm 6 (How long?); Psalm 10 (Why?); and Psalm 13 (Where are you?).

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!"*<sup>34</sup>

The irony is that Jesus knew the answer – he'd taught and prophesied it countless times.<sup>35</sup> Yet here on the cross, as Jesus experiences the fullness of the desolation and darkness of the world, it becomes a wounded and bewildered cry.

As we look on Jesus in that moment, we realise that God's greatest answer to our suffering, and the problems of unanswered prayer, isn't a well-argued treatise - but himself. In that moment he enters into, and validates, and gives meaning to, all the struggles and suffering of his people throughout the ages.

If you're struggling with unanswered prayer, the first thing I want to do is to give you permission to struggle. You don't need to get it together or sort yourself out. It's OK to sit awhile with the Psalmists, and with Jesus, in the darkness, undone, bewildered, and even angry.

Sometimes that can be a shattering moment – like for me when my father died. Sadly, I know many of you will have experienced far worse.

Yet, often our struggles – particularly perhaps with unanswered prayer – can be long and on-going. Sometimes they are like a little stream gently undermining the bank against which it flows. Over the course of years, even small struggles can undermine and erode our faith and hope in prayer.

### **Interview with Pip Goring...**

*In this third episode of the film series, I interviewed Pip Goring. Her story of unanswered prayer is very different from mine - not a moment of tragedy, but a long time of struggling and praying and nothing seeming to happen. That is something most of us can probably relate to!*

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<sup>34</sup> Matthew 27v46 and Psalm 22v1.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Mark 8v31-32.

*She moved to the UK from South Africa when she got married aged 21, and she found the change hard. The culture was different, the local church dry and formal, and she prayed and prayed for years and then decades that God would send spiritual renewal on her, on her family and on the land they own and manage.*

*They were prayers she prayed, and prayed, and prayed, not just for years but for decades. For so long God didn't seem to answer those prayers – which is what Pip and I spoke about at this point.*

*This interview works much better on film though – so I haven't included a transcript here.*

*When God doesn't answer...*

God often seems not to answer our prayers, either in a moment, or like for Pip, over years. Frustratingly, so often we have no idea why!

On a big picture level there are answers. The Bible actually gives us lots. For instance, God can be at work to do something better,<sup>36</sup> sin<sup>37</sup> or wrong motives<sup>38</sup> can block us off from God, spiritual attacks can cause delays,<sup>39</sup> or sometimes we can just forget to pray at all!<sup>40</sup> For those wanting to explore these (and more) Biblical answers in more depth, I would recommend the "Good Friday" section of Pete Greig's book *God on Mute*.<sup>41</sup>

In the details though we rarely know why - why wasn't *that* prayer answered? And that confronts us with a choice – what are we going to do about it?

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<sup>36</sup> Ephesians 3v20

<sup>37</sup> Psalm 66v18

<sup>38</sup> James 4v3

<sup>39</sup> Daniel 10v12-13

<sup>40</sup> James 4v2

<sup>41</sup> I would actually recommend the whole book!

### *Choosing to surrender...*

As we saw last time, to pray "in Jesus' name" is not only powerful – it's surrendered. It means asking for *God's* will to be done, even if it isn't my will. And that's hard.

We've touched on how the Psalmists so often struggle with God in their prayers. What we often miss how amazing it is, and how important, that they *do* struggle *with God*. They don't walk away, they don't give up. They take their pain and bewilderment and anger, and they bring it all to God.

Again, perhaps our greatest example of this is Jesus himself, this time in the Garden of Gethsemane. There he wrestles with God in prayer. He tells the disciples:

*"my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death"*<sup>42</sup>

And then he asks, and repeats, and even begs, for God to rescue him from what's about to happen, from the cross:

*"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me."*<sup>43</sup>

It's raw and honest and painful. Unanswered prayer is hard. It rocks us, and challenges us – if Jesus found it hard, we will too.

But in the end, each time Jesus prays that beautiful but hard prayer of surrender:

*"your will be done."*<sup>44</sup>

"Your will be done" – words he also taught *us* to pray in the Lord's Prayer, and which are at the heart of all Christian prayer.

We may never know why God didn't give us the answer we wanted. Yet, always the call is the same – even in our Gethsemane struggles. We are called to somehow pray "I want this... but your will be done."

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<sup>42</sup> Matthew 26v38

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 26v39

<sup>44</sup> Matthew 26v42, see also v39.

Prayer is not power over God, in prayer we surrender to God.

What does that surrender look like for you? It can be small or large – for most of us at various times its both. Can you pray “your will be done”?

*Asking again...*

The great paradox of unanswered prayer is that even as we are called to surrender, we’re also called to carry on praying anyway!

We’ve looked before at Jesus’ teaching in Luke 11, where he gives us the Lord’s Prayer. People often skip over the parable he tells just afterwards though:

*“Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.”<sup>45</sup>*

It’s quite a jarring story, seemingly encouraging us to badger God in our prayers “with shameless audacity.” That is probably why many people skip over it! I think it’s important though, because it encourages us not to give up in our praying.

We’re allowed to struggle, and disagree, and carry on asking – even as we pray “your will be done.” In fact, we’re not only allowed to – we’re told to. Jesus continues with the famous saying:

*“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>45</sup> Luke 11v5-8.

<sup>46</sup> Luke 11v9

It's interesting that in the Greek ask, seek, knock, are all present continuous commands.<sup>47</sup> In other words, they are not one-time actions. Jesus is telling us to ask, and go on asking. To seek, and go on seeking. To knock and go on knocking. This isn't just a call to prayer – it's a call to persistent prayer.

We are called to pray, and pray, and then go on praying some more. When we do that, sometimes over years or even decades, that can be when we see some of the greatest answers to prayer.

### **Interview with Pip Goring...**

*One big reason I wanted to talk to Pip about prayer is because this is her testimony. After years and decades of struggling prayer, God's done something amazing!*

*David – what's changed?*

*Pip – what's changed! (laughs)...*

We were approached by Tim Jupp. He was the pianist for Delirious, and they were disbanding, and wanted to do a celebration for 15,000 people. They wanted a big enough area to have this celebration, which was going to be a one off, so Tim arrived and asked if it would be possible to use our land at Wiston (he'd been introduced to us by a friend). The answer was "yes"!

They had this event for 15,000 people, and it was so successful! It was amazing, the music was incredible, everyone was camping – it was great! And he said can we do this again? So that's been going now for 15 years or so!

*David – and it's the biggest Christian festival in Europe, isn't it – 34,000 people worshipping God?! But that's not all – is it?*

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<sup>47</sup> Technically they are present imperatives, which in Greek are used for continuous actions (as opposed to Aorist imperatives, which we don't have in English, and which are used for 'one time' actions). The actual Greek words are αἰτεῖτε, ζητεῖτε, κρούετε.

*Pip* – No! Absolutely extraordinary...

...it is extraordinary, because I think those prayers before were cleansing for this event, in God's timing.

There's something called David's Tent, which has been extraordinary - a gathering of 7,000 people from around the world, worship leaders, then you and I. It's people who want to partake of really drinking deep of the Lord, of the Holy Spirit. It's focused on worship and the prayer, non-stop for 72 hours.

*David* – and it's not just the festivals, because that church you're part of – that formal traditional, small, difficult church...it's now really come alive as well hasn't it?

*Pip* - Absolutely! I tease James Di Castiglione (the Pastor/Vicar), and I say James you are here because of me, you're the answer to my prayers! It's just been a story of building up and encouraging and increasing, and now the church is so full! (and alive).

*Hope...*

I love testimonies like that!<sup>48</sup> They inspire me to persevere more with my prayers (even if my situation is different!).

Sometimes though, no matter how often or long we pray, the answer we want never happens.

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<sup>48</sup> For those wanting to discover more, do visit *The Big Church Festival* website at [bigchurchfestival.com](http://bigchurchfestival.com), *David's Tent's* website at [davidstent.net](http://davidstent.net), and the local church's website at [chanctonbury.org.uk](http://chanctonbury.org.uk). There is also a third festival, called *Wildfires* ([wildfiresfestival.com](http://wildfiresfestival.com)), and there have also been amazing answers to prayer in the ways in which God has led Pip and her family in managing their land, particularly around their vineyard (one of England's first and best - [wistonestate.com](http://wistonestate.com)).

I can personally testify to some of that too – when I stepped down from leading a church in London, and founded Burning Heart, we moved close by to Pip and her family. We now go to the same church – and it's wonderful!

Over time we sometimes discover reasons why. Many of us will have testimonies of praying for a job, or a relationship, to work out - only to look back later and thank God for *not* answering our prayer!

But often we don't. I will never know why God didn't answer my prayers when my father died. It doesn't make sense to me, it hasn't achieved lots, I wish it hadn't happened - and I think I always will.

Yet actually, my testimony in that moment is not one of despair - but hope. Even though my prayers weren't answered as I wanted, I was aware of God's presence and help. He was holding me, comforting me, and loving me, in the midst of my darkness. God's love and presence with me then was one of the most real and tangible things I've ever known. I was like a small child just held in my Father's arms.

When I've read testimonies of others who've been through far worse than me, that same testimony seems to hold true in the darkest places. I think of Betsie Ten Boom's words, spoken just hours before her death in Ravensbruck concentration camp:

*"there is no pit so deep, that God is not deeper still"*<sup>49</sup>

For me, in my far lesser darkness, as I lay on my bed the night my dad died, I felt God brought three great verses to my mind. I want to finish by sharing them - because what God showed me through them, is the best answer I've ever found to these questions of unanswered prayer and pain.

In some ways they don't answer - why? But I think they do more - they give us a bigger answer, setting our disappointments in the context of an even greater hope. And that helps me trust again, even as I still wonder 'why?'

The first verse was Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus was "*a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.*"<sup>50</sup> I realised that Jesus understood where I

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<sup>49</sup> Betsie Ten-Boom, *The Hiding Place*, chapter 14.

<sup>50</sup> Isaiah 53v3. Some eagle-eyed observers may notice that this translation is slightly different from the most recent version of the NIV, which is the translation we use elsewhere. The reason is that it is from a previous version of the NIV (the 1984



was. It felt in some ways as though no-one else could, but somehow Jesus did. He knew me better than I knew myself, and he knew what it felt like to suffer.

And *he* was with me. The second verse was Jesus' last words in Matthew: "*surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"<sup>51</sup> I knew he was there and would carry me through.

And then I remembered that this was not the end - not the end of my father's story, or even of our story together. In Jesus death is never the end. I remembered the great words of faith of Job (actually I listened to them in the aria from Handel's *Messiah*):

*"I know that my redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.  
And after my skin has been destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I will see God;  
I myself will see him  
with my own eyes —I, and not another."*<sup>52</sup>

I remembered that there is no death or darkness so deep that God's light will not in the end shine through it. Jesus, our redeemer lives, and at the last he *will* stand upon the earth. The powers of hell will not stand against him, and darkness will flee, and death will give up its prisoners, and we shall see him and all will be well...forever.

I don't know why God didn't answer those prayers you prayed or I prayed - but I *do* know that you can trust him.

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translation), and I learned it in that translation. I don't think it makes much difference to the meaning (both are valid), but I chose to use the version I know for this episode.

<sup>51</sup> Matthew 28v20

<sup>52</sup> Job 19v25-27. When speaking to others and teaching, I have usually pointed other people to John 11v25-26, which is more unambiguously about how those who believe in Jesus will know eternal life. I felt that I should share what God brought to my mind in my darkness here though!

For those who don't know the aria from Handel's *Messiah*, it is called *I know that my redeemer liveth*, and a quick google will find it for you!

# Episode 3

## GROUP STUDY GUIDE...

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### WELCOME...

For many of us, one of our greatest struggles in prayer is when it seems as though God hasn't answered our prayer – and we don't know why not. This session explores that theme.

This can often be a painful and difficult subject for many, and it might be helpful to acknowledge and pray about that at the start.

You may want to use this prayer:

*Father, as we explore unanswered prayer, we want to be honest that many of us find this topic hard. We don't understand why you haven't answered prayers we prayed and longed for, and why you sometimes seem to allow us to struggle and suffer. We lift up our disappointments to you now...*

*(leaders - you may want to leave a short space here for people to lift their specific struggles to God)*

*We ask that you would meet us, speak to us, and help us in our struggles as we watch the film. Amen.*

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### WATCH... (20 mins)

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## PRAY...

Rather than jump straight into discussion after the film, we would encourage you to pray and wait on God instead – we haven't set an amount of time to do this, but suggest you take as long as you all need. If you don't have time for anything else in this session, then that's fine!

How you pray is up to you – but here are some suggestions you may find helpful...

- At the end of the film simply pray for the Holy Spirit to meet with you all, and then leave a couple of minutes of silence for people to pray and meet with God.<sup>53</sup>
- Ask the group if there are any particular examples of seemingly unanswered prayer in their lives. Each time someone shares, take some time to pray with and for them.<sup>54</sup>

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## DISCUSS...

- How do you feel about unanswered prayer?
- Did you find anything in the film particularly helpful?
- Did you find anything in the film challenging? In what ways?
- What have you found helpful in seasons of struggle or doubt?

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<sup>53</sup> You could use the words: "Holy Spirit please meet with each of us now, come and minister to us and show us your presence..Come Holy Spirit."

<sup>54</sup> If you are unsure how to pray for them, we would simply encourage you to let the group pray as they want – just say 'we're going to pray for X now...!' and see what happens!

## **PRAY (again!)...**

- Ask the group what prayers they have prayed for a long time, but still not seen answered. Pray for those things to happen!
- Break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 and share specific things that each of you would like to pray about in your own life.

# Chapter 4:

## HOW DO I PRAY?

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*Just do it...*

Nike is one of the most famous and recognisable brands in the world. Alongside its logo, most of us also know its strapline: "Just do it." For them that's obviously about encouraging us all to do more exercise and sport – and, of course, to wear their kit while we do!

Over the years though Nike's tagline has also become my top tip in prayer - just do it.

I've found that when I actually get down to prayer, it's much easier than I think. Praying as Christians isn't actually about techniques, or experience, or 'getting it right', but about relationship - talking to our Father in heaven.

Jesus' most famous teaching on prayer comes in the middle of the so-called 'Sermon on the Mount.' It is one of two places where he taught the Lord's Prayer, and it starts with the words,

*"When you pray..."<sup>55</sup>*

Jesus is assuming that we will... "just do it!"

*Why we pray...*

The most important thing about prayer is doing it in the first place, but thankfully Jesus doesn't leave it there! He continues with lots more teaching and insight about *how* we can go about doing it.

Interestingly, Jesus starts with how *not* to pray –

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<sup>55</sup> Matthew 6v5

*“do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others...”<sup>56</sup>*

Instead, we're told to pray in secret in our rooms, so that we really are focused on God.

The point Jesus is making is not actually primarily about *how* we do it. He's not saying we can only pray in our rooms but *not* on street corner. Instead, his focus is on *why* we pray. The people Jesus is criticising did it to impress others, and that's no good.

Prayer is about me and God – you and God. Don't pray because you feel you have to, or because I told you to, or to impress others. Pray because you have something to say to God.

Jesus' encouragements to us to prioritise prayer aren't actually given as a burden, but as a gift. When we pray, we get so much more out of it than we could possibly imagine.

### **Interview with Pip Goring...**

*I spoke my previous interviewees (Esther, Pip and Adrian) for this episode, about how they pray – and this theme of how much we get out of prayer was a common theme. Here's what Pip said...*

*Pip - my happy happy place and my most peaceful time, is just sitting with Jesus. Just him and me together, having a conversation.*

*He always says, “I'm sitting here waiting for you – just come and sit with me and be with me.” I've been rushing round doing this or that – doing washing, fetching children, all the things that you do. Sometimes putting him at the bottom of the pile and forgetting that if you just sit with Jesus, he'll sort it all out for you.*

*It's not like a big long prayer – dah dah, smells and bells etc. It's every day and simple - like I'm talking to you now. Jesus is sitting there*

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<sup>56</sup> Matthew 6v5

talking to you and we're chatting and having a lovely conversation together.

When I don't do it, I skid in the wrong direction, do an upside-down somersault! I'm not saying that doesn't happen when you do pray – because it can happen even when you pray! I'm saying for me, when I don't do that, at the end of the day you think, oh gosh, I haven't really consciously asked God for permission...

*David* – so it's like life's out of kilter a bit...

*Pip* – yes, yes, exactly.

I think the most important thing for my experience is that Jesus is our friend, that he absolutely loves us, and that he loves us being with him.

*Praying to our Father...*

Pip's prayers are very uncomplicated, and not self-conscious. I think that's because she realises what it means to pray to God as 'Father.' As Jesus continues his teaching on prayer that's where he turns next. He contrasts how we're supposed to pray with the pagans

*"who keep on babbling...for they think they will be heard because of their many words..."<sup>57</sup>*

This is actually an easy mistake to make – thinking that God listens because we pray well. But Jesus tells us not to worry about that, saying:

*"your Father knows what you need before you ask him."<sup>58</sup>*

It's an image I love because it reminds me of my relationship with my daughter. She's 18 months old and just learning words and short sentences. She almost never tells me something I didn't know! But I just love being with her, and talking with her, and she enjoys being

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<sup>57</sup> Matthew 6v7

<sup>58</sup> Matthew 6v8

with me. When she asks me for things, or needs a hug when she cries, I love to do it – not because she asked well, but because I love her.

It's the same with us and God. He wants us to pray, not because we're any good at it, but because he loves us.

### *How we pray...*

Like a father helping his daughter, he actually wants to help us as we pray too. One of Jesus' great promises of the Holy Spirit comes at the end of the other passage where he teaches the Lord's Prayer:

*"your Father in Heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*<sup>59</sup>

The best way to grow in prayer is to ask God for help!

This all means that it's not about performance and there's no one "right" way to pray. In fact, there's a wonderful range and variety of prayers in the Bible. There seem to be as many ways of praying in scripture as there are people. You can walk, sit down, stand up, kneel, or dance. You can write your prayers down, act them out, whisper, shout or sing them, speak normally, or just keep silence. It's all there in the Bible!<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Luke 11v13

<sup>60</sup> Examples of the styles of praying given above are:

- Walking about – 2 Kings 4v33-34
- Sitting down – 2 Samuel 7v18
- Standing up – Luke 18v13
- Kneeling – Ephesians 3v14
- Dancing – 2 Samuel 6v14
- Written prayer - Ephesians 3v16-21
- Acted prayer – 2 Kings 13v18
- Silent prayer – 1 Samuel 1v10-13
- Shout – Matthew 27v46
- Whisper – Isaiah 26v16
- Sing – Psalm 95v1
- Talking normally – John 17v1



## **Interview with Esther Beckley...**

*This theme of there being many different ways to pray was one Esther picked up on when we spoke.*

*Esther - There are lots of different types of prayer. You can do prayer in every way shape or form. I think that sometimes people think that prayer has to be in your room, you close the door and you don't go anywhere. You can go out!*

*Sometimes I go out in the fields with the sheep, and I just walk around and pray – and all the sheep are on at me because I'm praying loudly! Sometimes I feel for my poor neighbours - they must be hearing this woman going 'hallelujah, shondalabasee' etc. loudly! They're very good though!*

*You can pray anywhere. You can pray quietly or you can pray loudly. you can pray anyway you want - but having a conversation with God is the most important part of what prayer is.*

## *Learning from others...*

There's lots of ways of praying! One way we can grow in our prayers is by trying out new ideas and learning from each other. One big reason why I wanted to chat to Pip, Adrian and Esther for this series was so that I could learn from them.

I've grown lots in prayer over the years as I've tried out things I picked up from reading books, or listening to sermons, or just chatting to friends. Some things I try don't work so well for me, and I just leave them there. But others really fly – and I use them all the time. For instance, I love going for walks as I pray, or writing my prayers down, like a letter.

I also love to pray *with* other people – the Bible is full of corporate prayer. It's one of the big things that we see the early church doing in the book of Acts,<sup>61</sup> and it's a great way to grow in prayer.

Praying with others is particularly helpful for growing to prayer if prayer is quite new to you. One of my top tips is to go to your church prayer meeting. They are always full of experienced and passionate pray-ers, and we can all learn so much from them as they pray.

I'd encourage you to explore and try things out in prayer!

### **Interview with Adrian Chatfield...**

*One style of prayer I'm less familiar with is contemplative prayer. I knew it's something that Adrian grew up with – so I asked him a bit about it when we met.*

*Adrian - you don't just dive into silence or contemplation, you walk slowly towards it. If silence is an unfamiliar place, or wordless prayer is a strange idea, don't just sit down for half an hour and hear your stomach gurgling. Find one of the traditions that the church has given us, whether it's *Lectio Divina*, or the Ignatian tradition, or the Jesus prayer or something else, and walk towards it slowly.*

There are a number of ways in which people do that, one of which would be what Benedictines call *Lectio Divina*, divine reading.<sup>62</sup> You read a passage of scripture, you then choose a bit that hits you (I'm not going to explain it in any detail). You then stay with it and chew over that. Out of that you let prayer come, and then at the end of the prayer

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<sup>61</sup> Examples of corporate prayer in Acts include: Acts 1v14, 1v24, 2v42, 4v24-30, 8v15, 12v5+12, 13v1-3, 14v23, 16v25, 20v36, 21v5.

<sup>62</sup> I love Adrian's whistlestop explanation of *Lectio Divina*, but as he says he didn't have time to go into detail. For those wanting to explore further, there are thankfully lots of places to turn. *24-7 Prayer* have produced a *Lectio 365* app, and their founder Pete Greig has also made a film series about it the *Lectio 365 course*. There is also a great guided podcast that uses many of the techniques of contemplative and scriptural prayer – *Pray as You Go*. See the recommended resources section for more details of both.

you stay in a place of contemplation. That is a place of wordless acceptance that God is here, and I am here, and there is nothing more that we need to say. Having spoken to God, I'll just sit with you for a while, as it's a wonderful place to be.

Another way is the orthodox tradition of the "Jesus Prayer." It starts with the repetition of "Lord Jesus Christ Son of the Living God, mercy on me a sinner." That's prayed over and over and over again, often corporately. That is then taken into the heart and prayed in the heart, but silently, with the words are still going round in your heart. Then it's almost as if it goes on saying itself and you don't have to say it anymore. You know yourself held by God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when the words have run out.

When we are with God, God in-dwells us. It isn't an emptiness or an absence.<sup>63</sup> All of the Christian mystics give us various different images which are not about emptiness at all, they are about, leaving behind stuff and junk and busyness so that you can focus on the one thing that is needful. So you don't go to zero, you go to one. Teresa of Avila in her autobiography, speaks of prayer being like water.<sup>64</sup> There are different ways that water can be achieved. It can be achieved with hard work, through mechanics and pulling it up from a well. And then she goes all the way through to rain which just falls. But it's always about water - which is the life, the presence, the indwelling of God. It's about more, not less.

*When should we pray?*

One question people always ask is "when should I pray?"

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<sup>63</sup> This of course is the big difference between Christian contemplation and non-Christian forms of meditation (such as in Buddhism). The two may *appear* outwardly similar but are actually fundamentally and hugely different - the Buddhist seeks emptiness, the Christian seeks fullness in God.

<sup>64</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Book of her Life*, 11.10

One answer is “all the time” – Paul tells us to “pray continually”, which is a high bar!!<sup>65</sup>

In Matthew 6 though, Jesus talks about setting aside time to just pray:

*“go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father.”*<sup>66</sup>

He's not saying you can only pray in your bedroom or that you can't pray with other people - as we've seen. But he is telling us to spend some time, presumably each day, on our own in prayer. That was certainly Jesus' own practice.<sup>67</sup>

I've found in my life that my personal prayer and time with God each day (reading the Bible as well) is the bedrock of my relationship with God.

It can be any time - but even though I am emphatically *not* a “morning person,” I've found that the morning is the best time for it. There's something about starting the day off with God.

As a Pastor I used to be quite shy about all this. My church was in the City of London, which is London's financial district. It's a world of long hours, hard work, and no time. I wanted to encourage prayer, but also to show grace for people in the midst of busy lives.

I came to realise though that we are the ones who miss out from not praying. God will *always* show grace to us, even if we don't pray – but when we don't pray, we cut ourselves off from experiencing God's presence, peace and help. And that's the one thing we need more than anything else – maybe especially when we're busy.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5v17

<sup>66</sup> Matthew 6v6

<sup>67</sup> Some examples of Jesus praying alone are Luke 5v16, Matthew 14v23, Mark 1v35, Luke 6v12, 9v18.

<sup>68</sup> This reminds me of a famous saying attributed to Martin Luther that “I have so much to do that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer.” Having researched it more, I have disappointingly come to the conclusion that he probably didn't say those exact words – but that they are very much in line with his words and practice elsewhere. There is a fuller analysis here:

I know you're probably busy, and carving out time for prayer is hard - but it is vital and you will never regret it.

### *Praying all the time?*

At this point, people often say to me – but can't I just pray all the time? The Bible does have lots of examples of what my mum used to call “arrow prayers” - little prayers prayed in the midst of ordinary life.<sup>69</sup> Nothing is too small for God, and nothing is beyond God - so we can pray in everything.

Yet somehow our little and continual prayers are built on the times we spend alone with God. Jesus did and commanded both.<sup>70</sup>

### **Interview with Adrian Chatfield...**

*Adrian put all this beautifully when we talked...*

*Adrian* - I really like beginning of the day with prayer, that's the thing that then makes everything else become in some extended way prayer in the course of the day.

All of life is lived in the presence of God, whether or not we acknowledge God's presence. Everywhere is face to face with God, so far as God is concerned, and so in every place I can turn towards to God. I can do that formally in the morning, using a Psalm, using the scriptures. I can do it in an activity, either by inviting God into the mix (I'm thinking of baking bread here!) or by attending to God in the activity that I'm doing, or by means of association. So, if I'm kneading

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<https://beggarsallreformation.blogspot.com/2009/07/luther-i-have-so-much-to-do-that-i.html>

<sup>69</sup> A classic example would be Nehemiah 2v4-5.

<sup>70</sup> This whole passage in Matthew 6 is a good example of Jesus' teaching about the importance of setting aside time to prayer, and some examples of him doing so are given in a footnote on the previous page.

An example of Jesus praying an "arrow prayer" would be John 11v41-42, while Luke 21v36 is an example of him teaching us to pray all the time.

and I can be aware of the presence of God, and I might be talking to God, and then the physicality of can also be a way of being prayerful. So, everything is not prayer, but everything can have a prayerful dimension to it.

*What we pray for...*

The final part of this passage is the Lord's Prayer. Its focus is not on the practicalities and techniques of prayer, but its content. *What should we pray for?*

In some ways, the answer is "anything." If God is our Father, there's nothing we can't say to him.

Yet Jesus clearly *did* want to guide and steer what we pray about too. The Lord's Prayer is like a map or guidebook helping us find our way around in prayer.

The simplest way to use it is just to pray the prayer itself – using the actual words Jesus gave us. That can be shared prayer in a church or group, or an easy way to pray on our own.

We needn't stop there though, and the Lord's Prayer can also be a wonderful launchpad for more prayer. We can use each line to guide and inspire us to pray more along the same lines.

The Great Reformer, Martin Luther, used to do this in his prayers - and it's something Esther also recommended.<sup>71</sup>

### **Interview with Esther Beckley ...**

*Esther* - Invite the Holy Spirit when you pray, and say 'Lord I don't know how to pray'

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<sup>71</sup> This is the main focus of the first half of Martin Luther's classic work on prayer, *A Simple Way to Pray*.

Then use the Lord's Prayer - it's so simple! Open your Bible, turn to the Lord's Prayer and every verse is a prayer point:

"Our Father who art in Heaven" – you can pray something like "my Father in heaven, I bless you, I thank you for my day, I give you glory, thank you for my life for my family". That's the first prayer point.

"Hallowed be your name" – praise his name, I praise your name!

"your kingdom come, your will be done" – "Lord I pray for your kingdom to come and your will be done on this earth, Lord I ask that you bless me, that you give me the tools to use what I know that I have. Encourage me to change this world for your glory."

"Give us this day our daily bread" - you pray for yourself, "Lord give me what I need for today". He says, 'Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?'<sup>72</sup> We are his children, the ones that he loves, made in his likeness! So we can pray "Lord I ask that you provide for me everything, because it tells us not to worry." So that's what you pray for yourself, you pray for provision.

It continues, and you break it all down, by prayer point. You just take it one at a time, there's no rush. You pray whatever comes into your heart, and then you begin to develop your prayer life. You'll begin to find that you've just spent half an hour praying the Lord's Prayer – out of nothing! It covers everything!

### *The Holy Spirit in Prayer...*

Both Esther and Luther highlight how the Holy Spirit so often speaks to us when we pray in this way. Luther calls it the "*The Holy Spirit preaching*" and encourages us to "*make room for such thoughts*" where "*one word is better than a thousand.*"<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Matthew 6v26.

<sup>73</sup> Martin Luther "*A Simple Way to Pray*", at the end of the section on the Lord's Prayer. The full quote is:

It's easy to leave no space in our prayers for God to speak to us. Yet, however we pray, it's always worth keeping listening for the whispers of God.

Using Biblical prayers (like the Lord's Prayer, or a Psalm, or one of Paul's prayers) can be one way we can do that.<sup>74</sup> It helps us to be open to what God is saying to us.

### *Types of prayer...*

A final way we can use the Lord's Prayer is to show us some of the main themes and types of prayer more generally.

The prayer starts with worship, declaring who God is, and praying for his name to be glorified - "*Our Father in Heaven, hallowed by your name.*"

It then moves onto intercession - asking for things. It starts with the things of God, and for his plans and purposes to be worked out - "*your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

The prayer then turns to our own wants and needs - "*give us today our daily bread.*"

We then come to confession, which is recognising our failings, repenting of them, and asking God for forgiveness - "*forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*"

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*"make room for such thoughts...under these conditions the Holy Spirit is preaching, and in his sermon one word is better than a thousand in our prayer. I have learned much more from this kind of listening than I could have from much reading and reflection."*

<sup>74</sup> The technique that Esther describes above can be used with any prayer or passage of scripture - as Luther goes on to demonstrate in the second half of *A Simple Way to Pray.*"



The prayer then returns to intercession at the end, this time in spiritual warfare, with a request for protection against evil and temptation - "*and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*"<sup>75</sup>

These themes are prayer themes we find everywhere in the Bible - worship, Intercession, and Confession.

The Lord's Prayer isn't exhaustive though, and there are other types of prayer we find elsewhere. The biggest is probably Thanksgiving, which is also a vital part of our prayer lives.<sup>76</sup>

That gives us four main categories as a basis for all our prayers:

- Worship
- Intercession
- Confession
- Thanksgiving...

Or simply, "Wow!", "Help!", "Sorry!" and "Thank you!"<sup>77</sup>

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*Prayer....*

I would encourage you once again to spend some time praying into what we've looked at. If you want, you can use these words:

Father God. Thank you for the wonderful privilege of prayer and all the ways you have taught us how to do it. I pray that you would come

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<sup>75</sup> Most of us also add a final line - "*for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, Amen.*" Most scholars agree that this final line isn't in the earliest versions of the gospels, and so wasn't part of Jesus' original prayer. It is a great prayer though, and very much in line with what the rest of the Lord's Prayer and Bible says - so do please continue to use it! I always love how the English reformers resolved the issue of whether to use it or not in the *Book of Common Prayer* - it gets prayed twice during Holy Communion, once with the final line and once without.

<sup>76</sup> An example would be Philippians 4v6

<sup>77</sup> I am grateful to Tim Keller for this abbreviation, in his book *Prayer*, p67.

by your Holy Spirit and meet with me now, and help me to pray. Come Holy Spirit. Amen

# Episode 4

## GROUP STUDY GUIDE...

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### WELCOME...

In this final session we will explore some of the practicalities of prayer, asking How? When? and What for?, and sharing some top tips.

Start the session by opening in prayer, and maybe worship.

You may want to use the following prayer, or something like it:

*Father God, please meet with us and speak to us as we watch and discuss this final film. We pray we would all pick up new and helpful ways of praying, and learn more about how we pray. Most of all, we pray that we what we look at today would help each of us to grow in our personal prayer. Amen.*

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### WATCH... (20 mins)

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### DISCUSS... (25 mins)

- What do you find hardest about praying? Was there anything in the film that you think might help?
- What difference does it make that we are told to pray to God as "Father"?
- What are your top tips in prayer? What do you find most helpful?
- What type of prayer (worship, intercession, confession, thanksgiving) do you find easiest? What do you find hardest?

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## **PRAY...** (15 mins)

- David talked about how God helps us in our prayers – ask one of the group to pray out loud that God would help all of you in your prayers. Then leave some silence for people to pray in their hearts for their own prayer lives.
- David also talked about how much we can learn from praying with other people – take some time to do that now! You may want to just have a time of open prayer, or to share some prayer points first.
- Pray through the Lord's Prayer together – start by praying the actual words all together, and then pray through the prayer line by line.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>The leader might want to lead this time of prayer by speaking out each line, and then leaving space for others to pray in response to it, before moving on to the next line.

# EXTRA ESSAY 1

*Why are Matthew and Luke's versions of the Lord's Prayer different?*

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Many people will be aware that there are subtle differences between the versions of the Lord's Prayer that we find in Matthew's gospel and Luke's gospel. That raises the questions: "why are they different?" and "does it matter?" To illustrate the issue, it is probably worth placing the two versions side by side:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our  
debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.

Father,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come.  
  
Give us each day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
for we also forgive everyone who  
sins against us.  
And lead us not into temptation.

When they are placed side by side like this, it is immediately obvious that some elements of Matthew's version are missing from Luke's. Similarly, Matthew talks about 'debts' and Luke 'sins.'

The latter difference can probably be explained by the fact that both authors are writing in Greek, whereas Jesus would actually have been speaking Aramaic. The other differences seem more problematic though – what is going on?

The simplest explanation is that Jesus probably taught the Lord's Prayer twice. Those who have watched the film series may already have picked up that that is what I think happened. That is certainly what is suggested by the context of the prayer in the gospels themselves - Matthew and Luke place the prayer in slightly different settings.

The idea that Jesus might have taught the same material twice probably shouldn't surprise us. After all, he was an itinerant preacher - and itinerant preachers are famous for re-using material!<sup>79</sup>

It is probably worth highlighting that this is also the simplest (and probably best) explanation for a number of other differences between the gospel accounts.

Many scholars devote vast amounts of time to uncovering the pre-history of sayings, or trying to work out whether Matthew's version of a saying is more original than Luke's or vice versa, etc. etc. I have always been sceptical about the possibilities of such study and analysis generally. When it comes to analysing the words of an itinerant preacher (like Jesus), that scepticism becomes downright disbelief - it just fails to adequately account for the nature of an itinerant ministry. I could recount lots of examples of times when I have heard preachers preach the same sermon (often with subtle variations) in different contexts - indeed, I have done it myself!

*A final line...*

Most of us also add a final line to the prayer - "*for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, Amen.*" However, this final line is almost certainly *not* in the earliest versions of the gospels, and so wasn't part of Jesus' original prayer. It is a great prayer though, and very much in line with what the rest of the Lord's Prayer and Bible says - so do please continue to use it!

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<sup>79</sup> I am grateful to Don Carson's excellent commentary, *Matthew* in the *Expositors Bible Commentary* series, which first highlighted this for me (in section 2 of the introduction).

I always love how the English reformers resolved the issue of whether to use it or not in the Book of Common Prayer – it gets prayed twice during Holy Communion, once with the final line and once without.

## **EXTRA ESSAY 2**

### *Two philosophical questions about answered prayer*

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When we speak of God 'answering' our prayers, or 'changing his mind' as a result of them, that raises all kinds of philosophical questions. Most people watching the films or reading this e-book won't be too concerned by them – but for those who are, this is a brief introduction to how we might think about them.

*If God knows everything, and his plans are perfect, how can he change his mind because of my prayers?*

I don't think we can ever claim to know the full answer to this question – but I do think part of the answer can be to suggest that the question assumes too small a view of God and too small a view of the place of prayer. It forgets that God knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46v10) and has always known what I would pray in a particular moment. Therefore, his plans and purposes have always included knowledge of my prayer, and any ways in which he freely and graciously chooses to allow it to be influenced by my prayer. Perhaps 'change' is therefore the wrong word to use – but there aren't many alternatives that make sense to us, and there is good Biblical precedent for doing so (e.g. Exodus 32v14).

I would also suggest that part of the 'problem' in such a situation lies with the limitations of our knowledge and understanding! God uses human language to describe himself, so that we can understand and be in relationship with him. We should never forget though that he is infinite in his greatness and goodness. That means that he is far far far beyond our ability to understand – so we should not be surprised when something about God, or his actions, is beyond our capacity to explain or understand.



*If something is good, why doesn't God do it anyway, without me praying?  
And if not, why would he do it just because I prayed?*

Again, I don't think we can ever claim to know the full answer to this question. In this case though, a simple response is to suggest that God 'changes his mind' because our prayers do actually change whether a particular outcome is good or not.

An analogy would be the relationship between a parent and a child. In most situations giving a child a sweet or chocolate may not be the best thing to do – certainly, always doing so would not be in the child's best interests! However, often parents will 'change their mind' in response to a request from their child – in this case, the reason is that the child asked, and that is a perfectly good and valid reason for the parent to change their mind.

*A final thought...*

Both questions above also point to some reasons why God may sometimes choose *not* to answer our prayers – something we will explore more in the next chapter. If God *did* always do everything we ask for in prayer, the result would likely be disaster! We would move away from the good and loving providence of God to a world which is governed by the caprices of whatever any one of us wanted to pray for – which is not an appealing (or logically possible) prospect.

# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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Putting together a list of recommended resources on prayer is like trying to condense the ocean into a jam-jar – there's so much to draw on! However, I have found the following helpful...

## Books

- ◇ *Prayer* by Tim Keller
- ◇ *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* by Tim Keller
- ◇ *How to Pray* by Pete Greig
- ◇ *God on Mute* by Pete Greig
- ◇ *Be Still* by Brian Heasley
- ◇ *The Happy Intercessor* by Beni Johnson
- ◇ *A Simple Way to Pray* by Martin Luther
- ◇ *Practising the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence

## Films

- ◇ *The Prayer Courses* with Pete Greig, [prayercourse.org](http://prayercourse.org)
  - ◇ *The Prayer Course*
  - ◇ *The Prayer Course II: Unanswered Prayer*
- ◇ *Be Still* with Brian Heasley, available at [24-7Prayer](http://24-7Prayer)

## Apps

- ◇ [Inner Room](#) by 24-7 Prayer
- ◇ [Lectio 365](#) by 24-7 Prayer
- ◇ The [YouVersion](#) Bible App

# TWO FINAL QUESTIONS...

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We hope and pray that this series has been a blessing to you, and that it has drawn you closer to God and deepened your relationship with him. If it has, we want to ask you and your group two final questions:

- would you consider giving towards the costs of future series?
- can you please pray for us?

## GIVE...

[BurningHeart.org/give](https://BurningHeart.org/give)

All our materials are available free of charge, so that money is not a barrier to anyone engaging with God through them – but that also means that we are reliant on donations for our funding.

If you would like to give towards our ministry, we would be grateful for any amount – whether 5 pence or £5million! The Bible is very clear that what matters in our giving is how generous we are with what we have, and not how much we give in absolute terms (see Mark 12v41-44). We will not know how generous you are actually being – but God will!

We would also encourage you to prioritise your own church when planning your giving. Please don't stop your giving to them to give to us!

# **PRAY...**

We believe in prayer! As James tells us, "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." (James 5v16). Please can you pray for us and for our ministry? Pray that God would use our resources to speak to people and meet with them. Pray that God would inspire us as we look to make more resources. And pray that God would provide all that we need to resource what he has called us to do.