Jesus Prays
Luke 5:12-16; 6:12-13; Matthew 6:9-13

Over the summer we're taking a break from John's gospel and, instead, we're going to look at prayer - and prayer in the lives of some of the great characters in the Bible.

And there's a reason for doing that. You see, whether it's that you're facing conflict in a relationship, or issues with raising your kids, whether it's wondering, 'should I ask that person out?' or 'what am I supposed to do with my life?' Life has this habit of bringing our limitations home to us, doesn't it. And you can face stuff and realise you don't have the ability, the power, to change this situation, or even the wisdom to know what that change should look like.

And there lies a problem. Because you're not here in Switzerland because you've made a habit of admitting you *can't* do stuff and *don't* know stuff, are you? You're here because you're a doer, because you are able and willing to rise to a challenge.

So when you face something that tests you, what's your default response? Probably, for many of us, it's 'I can fix this.' And if I can't, I'll use my contacts, and ask a friend or colleague. And if they can't, there's always ChatGPT. And we work down the list. But how far down that list, or how near do our backs have to be against the wall, before the thought crosses our minds, 'hmm, maybe I should pray about this.' Or if you're not yet a Christian, maybe you never even get there.

And yet, that slowness to pray is in marked contrast to what the Bible has to say to us about prayer. That the God who is all wise, and all powerful, is your ever present help in times of trouble; and he is ready to listen and to act.

And yet, it also tells us he's not a vending machine. He's not a celestial version of Amazon Prime, delivering each item on our wish lists. You see, we can want our circumstances to change, or get an answer to this thing that's bothering us, because we think life, or the life of someone we love, will be better, and happier, if it does change. But the Bible tells us our ultimate happiness is not found in all our circumstances coming right, it's found in God. Not in what God gives us, but in God himself. And so it teaches us that prayer is less us coming to God with our wish-lists, and more us coming to God for God himself and for the joy and peace we find in him.

And so, over the summer, we're going to look at how those who have gone before us have done just.

And we're going to begin with Jesus. And I want you to see three things. Firstly, that Jesus prayed. Secondly, that he teaches us how to pray. And thirdly, he's the one who gives us the boldness to pray.

Jesus Prayed
When I was a kid, there was a children's television program that showed the presenters doing various activities, but some of them they'd preface by saying, 'don't try this at home.' And maybe you've seen those WWJD bracelets, that get you to ask the question, WWJD - What Would Jesus Do? Because obviously, that's what you should do. Except, there are loads of things Jesus did that you should *not* do. Like walking on water - because that is not going to go well, or trying to ascend to heaven on a cloud. Or calling the authorities snakes and vipers to their face, or waiting to pay your taxes until you've caught a fish with the money in its mouth.

But if there are plenty of things that Jesus did that we should not attempt at home, prayer is not one of them.

Because if the one who is wisdom itself prayed; if the one who could open blind eyes and make the lame to walk prayed, might it not be a good idea if we prayed? And just think of the multiple difference scenarios in which he prayed.

Firstly, ***he prayed in joy and sorrow***.
I read an article recently about another one of these tech gurus in California who's trying to reverse the aging process to regain and retain his youth. And this man is in no way overtly religious, but the article said his daily work-out begins with what he calls 'a prayer of gratitude.' And there are worse ways of beginning your day, aren't there.

But in Matthew's gospel, Matthew records a time when Jesus was teaching - and the content was heavy. He's critiquing people for complaining about John the Baptist - that he was too severe, at the same time as accusing him, Jesus, of being too lapse, before he goes on to warn the whole area that if they don't repent judgement was coming.

And yet, immediately following that, Matthew tells us, 'At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children"' (Matt 11:25). You see it's one thing to be grateful when life is sweet and you're sitting in the Californian sun, having made your millions. But here is Jesus, in the midst of personal criticism, and hardness and heaviness, and he's noticing evidences of God's grace. And that brings him joy. And what does he do with that joy? He prays a prayer of gratitude.

You see, one of the dangers of life is that you grow more cynical and jaundiced with age. And you develop an eye, not for where God *is* at work, for evidences of his grace, but for all the places it seems he isn't; for all the things that are wrong. And Jesus is not naive, he sees what's wrong, but he also sees God's grace, and the joy that brings wells up into thankfulness.

But he also prays in grief. When the disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus to tell him John had been beheaded, Matthew tells us, 'Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.' (Matt 14:13). And whenever Jesus withdraws like that, you know what he's doing. And he does it because he knows who can help him shoulder the grief and walk through the loss.

Secondly, ***Jesus prayed in times of decision.***
Luke 6:12: 'In those days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.' Now, what are you like when you've not had enough sleep? Or imagine a toddler who's missed their midday nap. Or a teenager who's over-tired. Or, worse, a teenager whose father tells them they're over-tired! It's not pretty, is it!

And if we're to function well, we need our sleep. And Jesus knows that. I mean, he made us like that. So why pull an all-nighter?

Verse 13, 'When day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.'

Now, if it was me, I'd probably say 'big day tomorrow, big decisions ahead, better get a good night's sleep.' But Jesus forgoes sleep, and prays.

Why? Because more basic even than our need for sleep is the need that our lives, and the whole direction of our lives, be aligned with our heavenly Father's will, because that's where we, and those we love, will thrive. And Jesus knows that better than anyone.

But does that mean that every time you face a crunch point in your life you should do the spiritual equivalent of a red eye flight, and run on empty? No. But it does mean, as James puts, 'if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all' (James 1:5). And knowing he is sovereign over everything means you can commit your decisions to him and relax. And that can free us from the paralysis of indecision.

Thirdly, ***Jesus prayed when temptation came knocking***
In Luke 5, Jesus heals a man of leprosy, and then Luke writes, 'But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. *But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray*.' (v15-16)

If we were to take a vote on whether being popular was a blessing or a curse, how would you vote? At the very least, it's a temptation, isn't it. In one essay, CS Lewis wrote about what he called The Inner Ring - and how the desire to be *in* the Inner Ring, the in group, has the power to make a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things.

But the same is true for the desire to be, or stay, popular. Because the desire to win people's approval, or keep their 'likes' coming, can make us say and do things we shouldn't, and not say and do things we should.

And Jesus is the man of the moment, he's popular. So what does he do? He withdraws and prays.

Then, in Matthew 14, Jesus feeds 5000 people with five loaves and two fish, and Matthew tells us, '*Immediately* [afterwards] he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, *he went up on the mountain by himself to pray*' (v22-23).

And it's hard to avoid the impression that Jesus is in a hurry to get the disciples away from there and, having done that, for him to get away and pray? And yet, normally, Jesus is not a man to be hurried so what's with the sudden urgency. Well, in John's account, John adds an intriguing detail: 'Perceiving then that *they were about to come and take him by force to make him king*, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.' (John 6:15)

So the crowds have tasted something of Jesus's power, and they like it. And they want to take him and make him king. But that's the temptation of the crown without the cross, the temptation of power, of a pain-free shortcut to glory.

I was once speaking to a young Iranian who'd become a Christian from a muslim background, and I asked him, 'what made you become a Christian?' And he said, 'this episode'. Because he read it and

realised, Mohammed would have taken the crown. He would have let the crowd make him king. But Jesus withdrew, so he really must be the king.

So whether it's the temptation to popularity or power - Jesus withdrew, to pray, and to ground himself in God and his glory.

Fourthly, ***Jesus prayed when danger lay ahead.***
At the Last Supper, when Jesus knew his enemies were closing in, he prays what we call his Great High Priestly Prayer and we'll look at it in detail when we get to it in John's gospel.

But look how John tells us it begins: John 17:1, 'He lifted his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son *that the Son may glorify you*."' So he knows what's coming his way, he knows the whole reason for him coming into the world is reaching its climax, and the shadow of the cross is beginning to fall on him. And in that moment, what's his desire?

You see, when something that matters to you is threatened, like your job, or your reputation, what's uppermost in your mind? Or when people oppose you, or criticise you, and it's you who's feeling threatened, what drives your response? Often it's a desire to be vindicated, isn't it, to be proved right, to come out on top. And if we pray in those moments, we can find ourselves praying for God to do just that - to vindicate us. And that's what Jesus prays for: Father glorify your Son. Except, he doesn't stop there. He prays, 'Father, glorify your son, *that he might glorify you*.' So at the very moment when his circumstances, and this approaching danger might have turned him inwards, Jesus looks upwards, to his Father. Father, glorify me, that I might glorify you.

But he also looks outwards. Because he goes on to pray for the disciples, and for those who would believe through them. So danger is closing in, but Jesus is not self-focused, he is God and others focused. Because if he was praying for those who would come to believe through the disciples, he was praying for you.

Fifthly, ***Jesus prayed in the midst of suffering.***
And that same night, Jesus left the Upper Room, and headed for the Garden of Gethsemane. And when he gets there, what does he do? Luke 22, 'He… knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done"' (v41-42). But then Luke tells us, 'And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground' (v44).

Why the sweat? Why the agony? What's he seeing in that cup that makes him say, "Father, please, take it away"? Well, the Old Testament prophets repeatedly spoke of the cup of the Lord - the cup of his wrath, the cup of his judgment that all who rebel against him must drink. And Jesus is staring into the blood red depths of that cup and he knows the whole reason he's come is to drink that cup. And to drink it so you never have to. And he's overcome by the thought of it.

So when the weight of our sin, and the suffering he will endure for it, is bearing down on him, what does he do? He gets down on his knees, 'Father, not my will but yours be done,' and he's ready to drink the cup to its dregs.

And then, as they crucify him, he prays, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). You see, if feeling threatened can make us self-absorbed, how about suffering? And

especially suffering caused by others. It offers us a toxic cocktail of resentment and bitterness. But that is a cup Christ will not drink. Instead he prays for their forgiveness.

Sixthly, **Jesus prayed in the darkness.**
Matthew 27:45-46, 'Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani" that is, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"'

And so as he is hanging on the cross and the darkness engulfs him, he's enduring the God-forsakenness that was ours to experience. And in the midst of that lostness and abandonment, what do you hear him doing? He's praying. And as he dies, he calls out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46).

And we can never fully comprehend what he went through on the cross, but we can know that, as all our godlessness was poured upon him, his heart was always, ever, pointed toward God.

So, as you survey his life and death, the Writer to the Hebrews is not exaggerating when he says, 'In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.' (Heb 5:7).

So, what would you say is your first response when life brings home to you your limitations? What's your response to joy or grief, to crunch decisions or temptation, to danger or suffering or darkness? And however high up or low down the list of your responses prayer is, wouldn't you like to learn to pray from Christ himself?

Well, he says you can.

He Taught Us to Pray
And in Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus says, 'Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day 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 evil."'

Now when he says, 'pray then like this', he isn't just giving us a model prayer. He's giving us *a way* to pray, a structure to build all your prayers around. And it begins, 'Our Father.' So Jesus is telling you, come to God as your Father, know you are his beloved child. And like any loving father, he doesn't need carefully crafted words, or impressive oratory from you; what he wants is you, speaking as you.

And as you do, you begin by praying what Jesus prayed: that above everything else your desire is that God would be glorified - 'Father, hallowed be your name. And you're asking him to re-orient your desires around his glory and not your own. And in praying 'your kingdom come' you're acknowledging the pull that popularity and power, that desire to be king, have on you. But instead of giving in to those temptations, you're praying, Father, I want you to be king; I want your reign to extend in my life and in the lives of those I'm praying for.

And then, just like Jesus prayed in the Garden, we pray - “your will be done.” And you’re asking, Father, I want my will in this situation I’m praying for, or the will of this person I’m praying for, to come into line with yours. I want to want what you want.

Then we pray ‘Give us today our daily bread.’ Father, I’m bringing these needs before you, these needs for provision. And I’m trusting you to provide.

But Jesus knew our greatest need is sin or, at least forgiveness for our sin. And for those done against us. So we come humbly, repentantly, confessing, ‘What have I said or thought or done that I should not have?’ But we also come forgiving: asking, 'Am I holding anything against anyone?’ Because if at the cross, Jesus refused the toxic cocktail of bitterness and unforgiveness, so should we. And when you know the debt he has forgiven you, you can forgive.

But in closing out this prayer, Jesus wants you to remember, you’re in a battle. ‘Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.’ Because from the moment you open your eyes in the morning, you face a world fraught with temptation - and not just of popularity or power, but the temptation to lie, or to covet, to forget others and to focus on yourself, and to look to anything other than God for your ultimate happiness and joy. So brings those temptations to your Father, Jesus says, and know there is help to be had.

So, Jesus prayed, and he teaches us to pray. But what can can give you the boldness to pray, the confidence that when you pray, you’ll be heard?

He Prays For You

In Romans chapter 8, Paul tells us that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ. But before he says that, he says this: ‘Christ Jesus is the one who died - more than that, who was raised - *who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*’ (v34). So, it’s not that Jesus prayed for his people on earth, but now he’s in heaven with better things to do! As the writer to the Hebrews says, ‘He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, *since he always lives to make intercession for them*’ (Heb 7:25).

Just let that sink in. Jesus lives to intercede - to pray - for you.

And that’s why you can pray, and pray with boldness and confidence. As Hebrews 4:16 puts it, Christ is your high priest, so ‘Let us then *with confidence* draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.’

Why can you pray? Because Jesus is praying for you. Why can you confess your sin when you stumble and fall? Because Jesus is praying for you. Why can you forgive when others sin against you? Because Jesus is praying for you. Why can you glorify God, or look out for others, when you’d rather look out for number one? Because Jesus is praying for you. Why can you stand firm in the midst of spiritual danger? Because Jesus is praying for you. And why can you draw near to God when darkness or death is drawing near to you? Because Jesus is praying for you.

Jesus prayed, and we can pray, because he ever lives to pray for us.