

## Talks – Prayer – myfishbites.com

### In this talk..

We will look at a lot of situations that Jesus spent in prayer or talked about prayer.

The list isn't exhaustive but it will get us thinking about prayer the Jesus way. We may learn things, dispel some myths or be challenged.

There is far more in this talk than simply teaching about prayer. We'll learn and think about many things together as we take this journey. As I've written this, God has spoken so much to me, I pray he does the same to you. You could even use these individually as quiet-times, or as the basis for small group sessions.

### Matthew 4.1-11

This is the story of the devil tempting Jesus. There's loads we can learn from this but let's think about the fact that Jesus used the Word of God to confront the devil. In the context of prayer, we need to use the Bible to pray. We need to learn the Bible, memorise the Bible. When temptation and attack comes, we will be in the place of being able to defend ourselves and the young people under our care. How can you fight a battle without a weapon? Think about it.

### Matthew 6.5-15

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

**1.** First up are the words, 'when you pray.' The point has been made before on this site but we are called to pray. 'When' doesn't mean 'if' you pray. Nuff said.

**2.** I have heard some people in my city say things like, '*you shouldn't pray in public*' and then go on to misuse this passage to justify a certain level of control over prayer. But Jesus doesn't say '*don't pray in public – period*' does he? No. Jesus says don't be like the hypocrites who pray in public because they love to be seen by men. So the key is for us not to pray to get kudos or to impress how 'spiritual' you are. Praying in public is fine and I know of people who offer to pray with people in public across the globe successfully. In Reading and Exeter there are people who stand with a cross and are ready to pray with people if wanted. Even Jesus prayed and thanked God in public and we should exercise sensitivity and wisdom in following Jesus.

**3.** When you pray, go into your room and close the door. If taken out of context with the first sentence or The Bible, we could conclude that we should always pray in rooms. But The Bible doesn't say this. Many times we see Jesus praying in public to heal people,

deliver people. Even on the Cross he was crying out to his father in heaven. I would suggest that Jesus accords a special place to secret prayer – as he does to acts done in secret, ones not designed to puff up chests but to serve. There is also a common sense element that God reminded me of.. When you're at home in your room quietly (or somewhere else quiet), you can hear God more effectively and speak to God more effectively than when there are distractions. Our God is a very awesome but practical God!

4. Don't keep babbling like the pagans. Jesus knows what you need before you pray it so choose words carefully. There are times where we are called to persist in prayer (Luke 18.1-3 and the persistent widow) but we don't need to bang on with long winded prayers saying the same thing over. You'll be bored and so, I'd suggest, would those in heaven listening on! Why waste words when you could use the time praying for or doing something else! Use your time wisely. I've been in old brethren and new charismatic churches where certain people love to bang on for ages. Jesus says don't, he can't get a word in edgewise!

"This, then, is how you should pray: " '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. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Here we have an example of prayer from Jesus. We pray to God the Father in heaven – we recognise that God is holy and over all – we pray for God's Kingdom first – for God's perfect will to be done on earth as in heaven – then we pray for our daily needs – ask forgiveness for sins – and decide to forgive others as God forgave us – pray that you would be led away from temptation and to be delivered from evil.

## Matthew 7.7-8

"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; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Ask God for what you need. He actually wants to hear. Yes, he knows what you need, but he is waiting to give. If you don't ask someone for help, they may not give it. If you ask, they may well say yes. If it's good for you and his Kingdom, so will God.

I have heard some people say we don't need to ask God for anything in prayer but rather pray in faith thanking God for what he is going to do. For example, 'thank you Lord that you have sorted this situation'. They use Matthew 6 as evidence, quoting the section, **'Don't be like them for your father in heaven knows what you need before you ask him..'**

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think this is a faith filled way of praying and a great idea. (If we go to Isaiah 53.4-5 we read that, '..by his wounds we are healed' so this is something Jesus has already achieved for us, as with everything else, through the Cross).

**But** we should continue to ask God for things, as Matthew 7.7-8 makes clear (remember in this Bible section, Jesus is talking to his disciples). In addition, in Matthew 6, what Jesus says is set in context to his comments about people babbling on in prayer like the pagans. Jesus says 'don't be like them' (the babbling or the pagans). So, it is OK to ask, just don't go on and on over and over in prayer.

**Ephesians 6.18** says, 'And pray in the Spirit on **all occasions** with **all kinds of prayers and requests**. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.'

## Matthew 8

Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

We include this as this is one of the many examples of Jesus speaking words of faith and life and seeing situations changed. The point is that prayer has to go with action. You can pray all day and night, and things will change spiritually and physically. But prayer in isolation is an incomplete gospel and message. Listen. Prayer alone won't always calm the waves, heal the sick and raise the dead. No, Jesus acted, he was out in the boat with the disciples, he spoke to the waves. Prayer alone won't always bring people to faith. If you're not taking action then you need to make a change. You can pray away strongholds, prayer walk, but if your prayers aren't accompanied by actions then it's like James 2.14-17:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Start speaking and living life, not just praying it.

## Matthew 9.38

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

This is an example used many times but when you watch a Premier League football game, you have around 30,000 people roaring on the 22 players on the pitch. Even Jesus recognised there are few workers out there, serving Jesus in the fields of mission (may be on your doorstep or 1000s miles away). He told his disciples to pray to ask God to send workers out into the harvest field. As we've said, prayer goes hand in hand with action. But we see here how prayer can engender action.

I also believe that in the place of quiet prayer before God, the Holy Spirit will inspire us. It may be that we're inspired to do things, it may be that by hearing from God, we are then able to speak words of life into other people's situations to inspire them. What is God saying to you through this?

## Matthew 14.19

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.

This is the story of Jesus feeding the 5000+. In Matthew 15.36 we read that Jesus did the same thing when feeding 4000. The pattern is that Jesus takes what is offered, presents it as an offering to God above, he then thanks God and then apportions the food. The miraculous comes through the increase in food – 12 baskets were gathered up after by the disciples. But in all occasions we need to be thankful for the food that God brings. We don't need to say a verbal prayer every time we eat but I try as much as possible to tell God how thankful I am for what he provides.

Let's also think about the significance of the 12 baskets gathered up. The disciples and the people were hungry. There was only 5 loaves and 2 fish available. This was all that was available and this was all given. The result was a great increase. When you give God all you have, he will bring great growth and do way more than you can possibly imagine (Ephesians 3.20). Here is clear evidence of that. But I think there's a message here. When Jesus prayed, and the disciples had no doubt helped out distributing the food, there were 12 baskets left – and 12 disciples. When God calls you to something, he gives what you need and continues to provide for you after. The 12 baskets were full. God won't call you to something he won't provide for. Are you tired out, maybe you're doing something God hasn't called you to do. Take time out to pray and ask, wait to hear from God.

## Matthew 14.22-23

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

This is one of the few recorded occasions when Jesus went off alone to pray. Ever need time out to hear from God? Ever feel guilty about stepping out of the mix and taking time out? Don't be, it may be just what you need. Jesus spent some time praying and being alone with God. We know this because in verse 25 we read that, 'During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.' If the disciples were doing say 1 hour shifts, this means Jesus was praying for 3-4 hours at least. So there is evidence for periods of time praying, worshipping, reading the Bible, chilling with God.

## Matthew 17.1-4

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

Another day with Jesus, another exciting adventure. This isn't strictly about prayer but we learn a little bit more about the nature of Jesus, of God and of hearing from God.

## Mathew 17.19-20

This comes on the back of the disciples being unable to drive out a demon that Jesus subsequently ordered out of a boy.

Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.

This is another story of how prayer must be evidenced by faith. It is another tale reminding us that prayer must not only be accompanied by actions, but also by a life and words of faith. The Christian life is a mix of different elements, just as hip hop is a combination of 4 elements. With only one element the symphony cannot play. When all elements play together, the sound is the life-changing message of Jesus. How do we get faith? Well, Romans 10.17 tells us that faith comes by hearing (The Word). We also learn is that faith comes through taking action and trying. If you do something and God comes through, your faith is built, just as an ickle toddler learns to walk step by step.

## Matthew 18.1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!' "And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Jesus taught that we should:

1. Always pray
2. Never give up

This can be broken down further. Firstly, we find a widow pleading for justice. A widow (who we know God has a special heart for), pleading (that means humbling themselves in their passion) for justice (God hears the prayers of a righteous man, especially when pleading for justice). This isn't the only kinds of ways and things we pray about. But it's an interesting note.

If we look at the passage we find that God will bring about justice for his chosen ones (his followers). That means you. God will bring you justice, he will. It's a guarantee. Secondly, we find that this can mean crying out to God (that's deep, passionate crying, tears, groaning, desperation) both day and night. Are you really crying out to God? Are you praying day and night? This isn't a hard and fast rule and pretending won't make any difference. This is about your heart, how much you want something, how much it burns within you.

What does God promise? God will see you get justice and quickly. But you have to have faith and believe.

## Matthew 18.10-14

"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones (children). For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

This is one of my favourite Bible passages. Through prayer and actions, the church has spent so many years reaching itself, it's absurd. This passage is another challenge to us that through prayer and action we must reach out. You see, when the sheep was lost, the shepherd didn't call up his buddies and organise a prayer meeting to pray the sheep back in. No, he went out to find the sheep, no doubt despite cost and uncertainty. But what do we read? That God in heaven is delighted when a wandering sheep is found and returned to the 'pen'. As youth workers we must note that the Word says, 'In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.' Notice the emphasis on the words 'little ones'. I think we can validly include teenagers in this.

It is an encouragement that in prayer, by meeting up, by staying in contact with students that walk away from God, that God can and wants to bring them back. We don't know what the shepherd went through to find his sheep, or how long it took. We all know that some teens walk a long and hard road before returning to God. Some of us have been there too. But we know that God has a party with the angels when someone comes to – or back to their faith.

Keep praying and keep on.

