

So this morning we are taking another look at Prayer.

I wasn't planning to break into discussion this morning

After Mike did it last week

However, following some positive feedback

I have been asked to include a short time again

For you to reflect on the video

And consider one or two of the questions in the

'Points to Ponder' section on your sheets

- What is Christian Prayer?
- Why Pray?
- Does God always answer prayer?
- How do we pray?
- When should we pray?

So, before I pick out a couple of these in more detail

Please feel free to simply sit and reflect on them

And/ or chat to your neighbour about the questions

For a few minutes.

The text this morning will be well known to many of you

Coming from Matthew Chapter 6, verses 5 to 13

Matthew 6:5-15

5 '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 others.

Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 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. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they

think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 'This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

10 your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

The video we have just watched
Gives us a really good description of prayer
And it tells much of what we need to know
It is though
Aimed at those who perhaps don't know have a prayer life.

Today I want to build on that
For those of us who do have a prayer life
Regardless of its regularity
And I want to that
By encouraging us all with the mantra from the video

- Keep it simple
- Keep it Honest, and
- Keep it going

The title of the session in Alpha is
“Why and how do I Pray?”
So I will look at the Why and how of prayer

Our reading this morning gives a flavour of the answer to these.

To look at the Why
I'll give three reasons under the headers:

- Receive
- Relationship, and
- Rejoice

Thinking back to the video
There was one young man when asked
“Do you pray, and if so, how often do you pray?”
And he said
“Not really that much,
I have a lot of what I want”

I'm alright Jack
I don't need to pray

Is that the sole purpose of prayer?
To satisfy our wants
To top up our wish list
If our prayers
Are simply a wish list
We are as well getting Alexa to do it
(Other Home Hubs are available).

Prayer is not just a wish list
It's not just for times when we feel low or lacking
It's not for just when we feel like it

It is of course all of these
God wants to help us
He wants us to receive from him
He wants us to take our troubles to him
He wants to be our answer in times of need
To bless us in abundance
And we petition him through prayer

But
Prayer is so much more than us getting
Because, In fact
It's not just for us

It's about relationship
Prayer is a key part of our relationship with God
Through Christ.
It's a key way for God to communicate with us
 Along with his word (the bible)
 And Holy Spirit within us

Last week we were looking at Faith
And we asked
How can we have faith?

Faith is not something that switches on like a light
We don't just decide
With no prior experience
To have faith

Faith is nurtured

From the first moment the seed of possibility is sown in us
It needs watered
It needs tended
Weeded, pruned
How do we do that?
We spend time with God
We find out about him

We can read the word to discover about God
About Jesus' teaching
About the impact that he had on his apostles
We can get the knowledge of who he is
We can be led by Holy Spirit guidance

But with prayer
We can take that beyond knowledge and spirit
To experience
To find out who we are
Or who God wants us to be in Christ

Like any relationship
If it is to grow
Then the communication needs to be two way

If it's all one way
Then pretty soon
We will find that no-one benefits
No-one grows or matures

We need to bring ourselves to God
Our joys, our woes, our confusion
We need stay connected to his
Wisdom, direction and love in our lives

Another reason why we should pray
And keep praying is to rejoice
Because we can pray

And because we can pray
We should!

We can speak directly to our father in heaven

Because of Jesus

Through him

Our direct contact with God has been restored

John 14:6 NIV

6 Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me

Adam and Eve could speak directly to God

But in subsequent generations

Sin prevented that access

And limited it to only the Chief Priests

And even they needed to be in the

Holy of Holies within the temple

To commune with God

Before Jesus,

The way to God for general believers was barred

Due our history of sin

But, Jesus ended that

When he proclaimed

6 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'

He was pointing to his crucifixion

Which took away our sin

And restored

Our connection back to God

This was illustrated by the tearing of the temple curtain

Which separated the Holy of Holies

From the rest of the temple.

This is an important moment

Captured in the gospels of

Matthew, Mark and Luke

Christmas only finds it's way into two out three of them

And we know the importance placed on Christmas

Jesus' sacrifice for our salvation

Included access directly to the Father

Why wouldn't we want to rejoice and make the most of that gift?

When we spend time with God
It is a personal act of worship and thanksgiving
And we are rewarded
6 Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

We are blessed with a relationship with God
Blessed with a vision of the wonder of our lives
A vision of his creation
Of all that we are called to do
In his power
And for his glory

So how do we achieve this connection?
How do we get ourselves in the position
To make the most of our opportunities
To engage with the father?

For this I am going to return to the mantra from the video
To illustrate

Keep it Simple
Keep it Honest,
Keep it going

Firstly then
Keep it Simple

Verses 5 and 6 of today's passage give us a starting point
5 '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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.

If we are to make the most
Of our opportunity
We need to be in place where we can concentrate

If we are consciously finding
Places and times when we are

Trying to display our commitment
Deliberately making it visible
To the world
Then that very action
Becomes a distraction
We lose focus on what is right

If we are to truly build our relationship
With the father
Then we need to spend quality time
One on One

Just like any relationship
Particularly in the early days
Quality time together is vital.

I remember I first started going out with Vivien
Our first official date
Wasn't quality time together

An evening at the pictures
To see "Braveheart"
Last into the cinema
So we sat in a row next to a group
Of sixth year girls from Viv's School

"Hi there Miss, Is that your boyfriend?"
Quality time!
And afterwards
Even though we knew the history of the film was seriously flawed
You couldn't help
Hating the English for while!
Not positive getting to know you time

Fortunately we did manage to
Have more intimate dates after that
Where we could spend time
Talking together
Getting to know about each other
Things in common
And things to avoid

The key to how to pray

Is finding that time and place
where you can be you
And where you can allow God to be God
And you can concentrate.

The message version of Matthew 6: verses 6 reads

6 “Here’s what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

So, our second step is
Keep it Honest

If we can be in a place of comfort
Our focus can move from ourselves
To God
And we can be receptive and honest.
The more time we spend in God’s presence
The more we will benefit
From his blessings
And our Faith is boosted

Verses 8 to 13

Taken together known as the Lord’s prayer

8, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 ‘This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

10 your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.”

We recite this prayer often in church
Unfortunately
If we only recite the words
Without understanding the underlying

Reason or meaning of this teaching
Then we risk simply reciting words
Rather than praying

Jesus was teaching the disciples about prayer
He was telling them of the great privilege they now had
To connect to the father.

His prayer covers 3 keys to prayer

Adoration – Acknowledging God for who he is
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
10 your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven

Confession – Recognising our sins and our need for forgiveness
12 ... forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And also our need to Forgive others

And
Supplication – Requests for help in all areas of worry or need
11 Give us today our daily bread.

.....

13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”

In learning about prayer
I was taught that I could add in a
T for Thanksgiving
Into the Acronym to get ACTS

- Adoration
- Confession
- Thanksgiving
- Supplication

Using that order
When we come in prayer
We Give God his place first
We get ourselves in the correct place

Of humility and forgiveness
We recognise what God has done,
And is doing in our lives
So that we can be confident that he will answer
Our requests

I was sharing with my group
At the Prayer Course on Wednesday evening
That I have a challenge
When I have my quiet time at work.
Because so often if find a quiet(ish) place
And settle down
Then within a couple of minutes
Of starting to pray
I tend to start to nod off
I used to feel guilty about that
Then I thought
Actually
If I have managed to Acknowledge God
And I have come into his presence
(and perhaps started on confession)
Then sometimes that adoration is enough
Because
As Jesus says
“for your Father knows what you need before you ask him”

Sometimes it's okay to just rest
And be comforted in his presence

Finally
Keep at it

Jesus often took himself away
To spend time in God's presence
He knew the value of persistence in prayer
He encouraged the disciples to be persistent with their prayers
To keep going

Keeping at it in any relationship
If it's two way
Can only bring benefits

We need to keep practising

The golfer Gary Player
Was credited with a quote
Having just chipped in a bunker shot
3 times in a row
“The more I practice, the luckier I get”

It's the same with our prayers
The more we pray
The more we see and hear God

We have ready and immediate access to God
Through Jesus Christ
Anytime, anywhere we can find
To be quiet with him as our focus
We need only be honest with him
In our Joys, our woes, our worries and concerns

And he will continue to bless our faith in him

Amen