

01: Talking to God

Intro:

- Our vision at All Saints is to live as disciples of Jesus. We have three goals in this: Living with, like and for Jesus – Discipleship.
- Over the next few years looking at nine core practices of Jesus and the early church.
- We've looked at sabbath and over these next four weeks we are going to be looking at prayer.
- One way of defining prayer is it is: 'All the ways in which we communicate with God – life with God.' (Ruth Haley Barton).
- We're going to be looking at four movements of prayer: Talking to God, Talking with God, Hearing from God and Being with God. This isn't strictly point one to point two, but movements in an ongoing journey with God.
- Today we look at talking to God.

Prayer and Us

- What is *your* relationship with prayer?
- Growing up I thought my prayer life would be a bit like Star Wars. All roads of course always lead back to Star Wars.
- I thought I'd start off like Luke Skywalker in A New Hope – he's just discovering his powers, things are clunky, he needs loads of help from Obi-Wan and Yoda – and then by the end of Return of the Jedi – He's got this – Jedi Master – equivalent – starting out I'm like a prayer Padawan and then I become this prayer master – Dry, boring, hard ebbs and flows.
- Maybe for you, prayer is a regular part of your life, it's as natural to you as breathing. You pray several times a day, you can't get enough of it.
- Or maybe you're here today and a cold sweat is forming because you don't pray, or you've got it in your mind that you don't pray enough.
- Quite honestly, for several of us, to even think about prayer is to stir up guilt or shame.
- Or maybe you've tried praying in the past and things haven't seemed to work, or your prayers didn't appear to be answered. Maybe it's left you disappointed, angry, afraid or numb.
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- Wherever you are today, one thing we need to lead off with here, is that no one ever masters prayer.
- When it comes to prayer - everyone is a perpetual beginner. There is always room for growth of course there is, but we will never get to the end of making mistakes, of things getting dry, or prayer sometimes being boring, or not seeming like it is working. So please have hope. The only way you won't be doing prayer 'right' is to not pray.
- The key will be, as with all the other practices that we look at, to adopt a posture of being open to wherever God wants to lead you, whether you are new to prayer, have been praying for decades or somewhere in between.

All that to say, this is why we believe that looking at how Jesus' prayed and what he says about prayer is the best place to start. Please will you turn with me in your Bible to Luke 11v1.

Luke 11v1

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'

- We have here one of the most important requests anyone could make of Jesus:
- 'Lord, teach us to pray.'
- This is so interesting because the first disciples, or apprentices of Jesus, were not strangers to prayer. They were Jews and all Jews were, as many are today, brought up with prayer all around them. From the morning and evening set prayers they said, to the prayers heard in the synagogue and hearing the psalms and other scriptures read. They would have been saturated in prayer.
- And yet this request of Jesus, 'teach us to pray.'
- Did you pick up that this request happened just after Jesus came back from praying?
- All four biographies, pick up on Jesus' prayer life. Luke alone recounts many different ways Jesus prays, as the spiritual writer, Ron Rolheiser writes,
- *'We see Jesus praying in virtually every kind of situation: he prays when he is joy filled; he prays when he is in agony; he prays with other around him; he prays when he is alone at night, withdrawn from all human contact. He prays high on a mountain, on a sacred place, and he prays on the level plane, where ordinary life happens.'* [Rolheiser, 169]
- So the disciples have been immersed in the prayer life of Jesus and they've seen the fruit of his life, healing, miracles, preaching, teaching, compassion, never losing an argument against religious leaders. There's this sense that this depth of Jesus' character, this power that is displayed is drawn from his life of prayer. This reservoir runs deep within him and frankly, they want that.

Luke 11v2

- Let's unpack what we mean here. We read in **verse 2**:
 - ² He said to them, 'When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name,
- Notice where Jesus goes first: not a list of things, not a confession, not even thanksgiving, but he starts by grounding whatever things they want to say to God, whatever is on their minds, their hopes, experiences, worries, pain. All of that is grounded first of all by reminding them who they are praying to. This is the centre of this teaching today.

Who are you talking to?

1. Father in Heaven

- One of the biggest obstacles for many of us in our prayer life is our view of God. Peter Grieg in his book writes:
- 'After more than twenty-five years in pastoral ministry, twenty of them teaching on prayer, I have come to the conclusion that most people's biggest problem with prayer is God. They envisage him scowling, perpetually disapproving, invariably disappointed and need to be placated or persuaded in prayer [Peter Grieg, *How to Pray*, 53]

- That is exactly the kind of picture that I had of God for decades. I heard about God's love, I read about it, I even preached on it. But in my heart of hearts, I actually believed that God's main posture towards me was of irritation and disappointment.
- There will be some of you here who struggle with this today. And, if we're to be real about this, which we need to be. That word, 'Father' actually doesn't help you. It may make things worse because of your own fatherhood wounds.
- Our relationship with our own Fathers, whether they were good, or not, or whether they were absent for whatever reason can colour our understanding of God as Father.
- It's only in the last five years that I have been on a journey with breakthrough with this, but I want to give you hope that it is entirely possible for the true, the biblical reality of God as Father to transform yours and my false understandings. Transformation and healing is possible in this.
- All that to say at this point, one of the ways we can start, for some of us, long journey with this is to immerse ourselves in the kind of Father that God is and allow that to shape us. We don't need to go much further at this point than verse 11 of this passage. Skip down with me. Jesus says,

¹¹ 'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

- Considering all that we have implied with fatherhood wounds, notice the contrast here. Jesus is saying a good earthly father will try and do their best to provide for their kids when their kids ask them for things ... How much more will our Father in heaven, who is perfect, completely trustworthy, completely faithful, good, kind, how much more will he give! And what is he giving here in this case? His own personal presence, his own self to always be with us.
- A number of chapters later, Jesus gives us the ultimate picture of the kind of Father that God is in one of his stories: The son who spends his inheritance on wild parties and women and is left with nothing, only to attempt to come back to grovel at his Father's feet, but finds that his Father has been looking for him, scanning the horizon day and night and at the first sign of him, runs to his Son, brings him back into the family and throws a party for him. If nothing else this week – I invite you to read that story in **Luke 15** and do what many people have done over hundreds of years – put yourself in the place of the Son in the story.
- If you follow Jesus – you are a child (before anything else, before anything else you've done, said or thought, beyond any other identity that you may have). You are a chosen, loved, free, precious, child of God.

So when you pray say, 'Father.'

Secondly, this Father is Hallowed.

- That's an archaic word isn't it? Basically to hallow something or someone is to say that it is holy, or set apart. The closest word we probably have is honoured.
- God is our Father in heaven and he's also to be honoured – He is holy, powerful, Creator of the universe, one day will judge all things and people. Does God need to be reminded of this? No! But we do!
- You see, in reality, we are also being formed by all sorts of things that aren't God. The pull on our lives to hallow or centre around things that promise the world, whether that's the latest iphone, car. Whether that's the pull to centre around sex as play for grown-ups or the fixation to be a success. These things become the centre of our world, but of course in reality we then become the centre of our universe. It's about me.

- The problem though is it's never enough, I'm never enough, they're never enough. To hallow those things often leads to hollowness.
- And so by honouring, hallowing God firstly when we talk to him in prayer, we are reminded of his bigness, his worth, his power and we're reminded of our smallness and the smallness of all these other things which we can't deliver. And that's a good thing! Because it starts to order everything else as we pray.

Luke 11v3

- The next line, 'your kingdom come' expands on this – God your reign, your rule, your way of seeing things, the hope you bring, the justice that can punch holes in the darkness. I, we want that. All hopes, dreams, expectation of a restored life a restored world, of freedom for people only comes about when your power is exercised so let it breakthrough in my life and the life of the world.

A Start or Refresher for praying this prayer.

- So, this week. I would like to invite you into an experiment. What would it look like for you to use the Lord's prayer as the template for your talking to God this week? And some of you are going to need to fight for this this week. We will all make time for the things we want to do. But we will also get pulled in all directions. There is an Enemy who doesn't want you to grow closer to your heavenly Father, and he will do his very best to undermine your desires.
- Set a time on your alarm on phone or device.
- Write it in to your diary
- Tell your spouse, friend, family member what you intend to do.
- Write post-it note reminders
- First day back into exercise is always the worst. But it will get more natural.
- For those who want to go deeper – Your Father wants to go deeper with you this week. Do you believe that? If so, there is every reason to experiment this week with

1. Pray the Lord's prayer line by line.

- You could simply pray the pray line by line, slowly – pausing on each line and seeing what else comes up, or allowing yourself to stick with a line that jumps out at you and sets off sparks. I have found that putting alarms on my phone with the line 'Our Father' etc can be helpful.

2. You could pray one line a day.

- E.g. Monday could be a simple focus on 'Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.' Asking God for his help to reveal himself to you as the 'running Father' in the parable of Jesus. Asking him to heal your understanding of him as Father, or speaking out a simple prayer of praise like, Father you are amazing. Or Father be honoured in my life, my family's life, my school's life etc.