

Thinking about Prayer

MBC Message 22 March 2026 – given by Simon Guillemin



Firstly, let me start by saying that my topic today is not something I feel especially qualified to talk about. Not gleaned from any deep personal experience or knowledge – but more a musing about things that I ponder about. Things that in many respects puzzle me / amaze me / challenge me.

For several months now, Jill and I, as part of our evening prayer time, have been listening to sermons by Max Lucado, pastor of Oak Hills Church, San Antonio, Texas. And, with apologies to Max – much of my talk today has come from what I have learned from his messages.

When the apostles asked Jesus for something, they could have asked for anything. Such as “show us how to heal the sick or raise the dead”, “Show us how to turn water to wine”, or “Show us how to walk on water”. “Make it so we always catch fish like you did on the sea of Galilee”. I don’t know – any number of things. But, no, their request (as recorded in Luke 11: 1) was:



In other words, we do not know how to pray. And to be honest – I can't say I really do either.

They had seen that Jesus prayed – and he could do amazing, miraculous things. So maybe it was this prayer thing that did it. After all, if the Son of God felt the need to pray – even though he was God – then there had to be something special, even really important, in it.

After giving the Sermon on the Mount and feeding thousands, and before walking on the water – Jesus prayed. In fact – by all accounts, Jesus prayed a lot. Why? Wasn't He sort of praying to Himself? Why would Jesus need to communicate with the Father?

I suspect that because God had taken on a human body as Jesus – with all that being human means – there was a degree of separation from the Father that He was not accustomed to. He needed to reconnect – often.

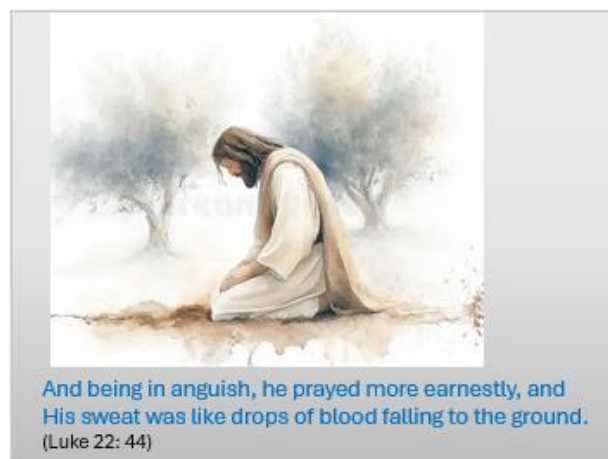
I expect, even for Jesus, just to talk to / commune with His Father was a comfort. Even Jesus, being God yet human, needed to keep His relationship with the Father alive and real. And so, He prayed. He prayed for His mission on Earth, for the people, for Israel, for His disciples (especially the 12) – and about what He knew was to come.

I expect, the one thing Jesus never needed to pray for - was forgiveness.

In the garden – the night He was betrayed – He prayed.

He felt the anguish and sorrow – perhaps even fear – of what was to come.

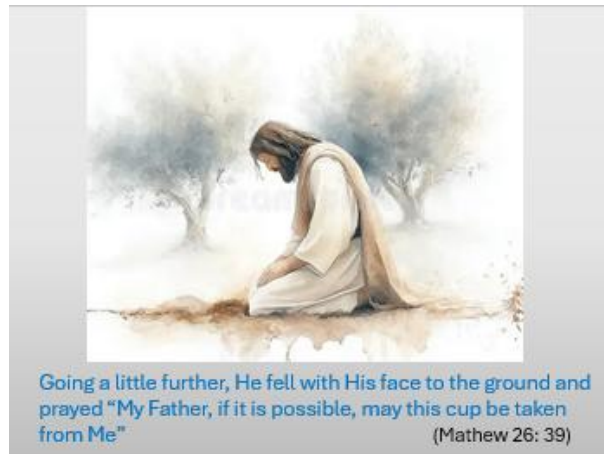
[Luke 22: 44]



“And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”

He felt fear, not of the physical pain – well, maybe that too. But the knowledge that to fulfil His task on Earth, He would have to experience total separation from God, His Father. He would take on all the sins of all of the people who had ever lived and all those who had yet to live. So, He prayed.

[Mathew 26: 39]



“Going a little further, He fell to the ground and prayed ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me.’”

And yet after asking that the “cup” be taken from Him, He yielded to the Father’s will.

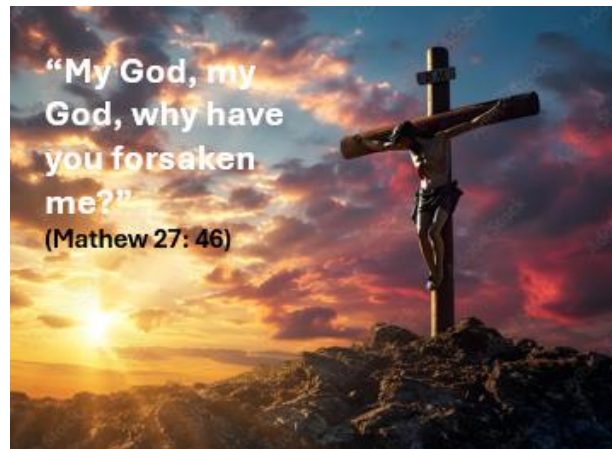
[and still in v 39]



“Yet not My will, but Thy will be done”.

Even, on the Cross – Jesus prayed:

[Mathew 27: 46].



“God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Jesus knew the anguish of separation from the Father – more so, I suggest, than anyone ever has before or since – for He was used to being totally “One with the Father” And yet, He found it in His heart to pray:

[Luke 23: 34].



“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

So, what can we take from Jesus’ example – and the example He gave His disciples when they asked that great question “Lord, teach us to pray”?

Breaking it down, we see there are several key elements to Our Lord’s Prayer:

First **acknowledgement** of who God is - **honour / praise** – a declaration of faith:

- *“Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name”*

- *“Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done – on Earth as it is in Heaven.”*

This last line mirrors Jesus’ own prayer in the garden - *“Yet not My will, but Thy will be done”*. (Mathew 26: 39)

Then **request**:

- *“Give us this day our daily bread”*
- *“And forgive us our trespasses”*

But then **commitment**:

- *“As we forgive those who trespass against us”*

Then a **plea for protection / redemption**:

- *“Lead us not into temptation – but deliver us from evil”*

And finally – a further **acknowledgement** and **declaration of faith**:

- *“For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.”*

AMEN.

Praise - Request – Commitment – Plea – Declaration of Faith

But notice that the Lord’s Prayer appears to be a communal prayer. To be prayed together with others.

“Our Father”, “Give us”, “Forgive us – as we forgive”, “Lead us”, “Deliver us”.

And yet, most of Jesus’ prayers were private – a one-on-one conversation between Him and His Father.

For me, I don’t know about you, but I find this is the hardest to do. For a start, there’s no hiding. This is just you and me, God. And why should You bother about me, anyway? In the scheme of things, I’m nothing. Less than a grain of sand or an atom when compared with the enormity of the universe that You created.

So how is it that we can come before the throne of the One who made and sustains it all?

Well – for a start, when He made humanity, he made us in His image – that is - Spirit. A living being with a Soul. Uniquely designed for communion with Him. Now that is really amazing – perhaps the greatest mystery of all !!

I admit to often wondering, when God knew, before he made us, how humanity would turn out, why He bothered?

Theologians tell us that it was because God wanted a focus for His love. But, that’s a topic for another time – and for a far greater mind than mine.

There are many examples of prayers in the Old Testament – it’s not a New Testament thing, although it did change after Jesus returned to the Father, and sent the Holy Spirit. Jonah prayed often; Abraham interceded for Sodom; Moses interceded for Israel; David wrote numerous prayers in the Psalms often crying out to God, as in Psalm 13:

*“How long, Lord?
Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?”*

So, for our personal prayer time, several frameworks have been suggested – all built on Jesus’ example:

P.R.A.Y.

Praise – Repent – Ask – Yield.

A.C.T.S.

Adoration – Confession – Thanksgiving – Supplication (bringing your requests and needs, and the needs of others to God)

To quote Max Lucado, another way of understanding what Jesus was trying to tell us about how to pray can be summarised as:

*“God, You are good;
I need You;
They need You;
Thank You.”*

There are other outlines – and all have common elements. But structure is not what’s important. God sees our heart and He knows what we need.

But the true mystery in prayer is about the fact that we can pray – and communicate directly with God – at all. How is it that God, the creator of all things, the sustainer of all life, who is also the Christ (Emmanuel – God with us), and the Holy Spirit (the Comforter), should even hear, let alone listen to us puny, undeserving beings?

The answer I believe is summed up in [Romans 8: 26-27]:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”

So, when we pray, we are (or should be) praying “in the Spirit”, “by the Spirit”, for the things the Spirit guides us to pray for. And, the Spirit knows the will of God, knows what we need, and intercedes on our behalf – guiding us in our prayers – and petitioning the Father for us. Now that is amazing and, for me, truly hard to comprehend.

In Philippians 4: 6-7 we read:

“Do not be anxious for anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

So, perhaps it’s not such a mystery that Jesus – when he taught his disciples how to pray used words like “Our”, “Us”, “We”. If, as scripture teaches us, we pray with, in, and by the Holy Spirit, then maybe it is right to use the plural. We and the Holy Spirit are praying to the Father, through Christ Jesus.

For me the hardest part of prayer is to first listen to the prompting of the Spirit, guiding as to who or what to pray for. To hear that “still small voice”. Even harder is the waiting for prayer to be answered. Especially given all the promises we find in the Bible. Jesus promised:

[John 14: 13-14]

“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

And again:

[John 16: 23-24]

“Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now, you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”

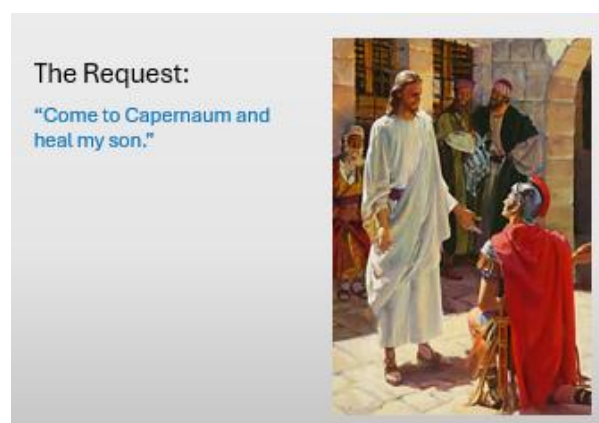
Then again:

[Mathew 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; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

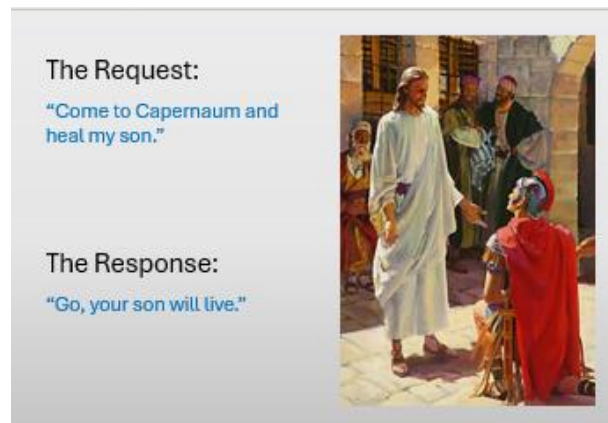
But it’s not always like that, is it? In fact, it’s seldom instant or even quick. Very often we either have to wait, and keep waiting, or the answer is different to what we think we needed. And sometimes it’s as if we never get an answer. And that really tests our faith.

Remember the story in John 4 about the royal official who walked almost 40 kms from Capernaum to Cana and begged Jesus to:



“come to Capernaum and heal my son” who was gravely ill.

Jesus did not answer the man’s prayer in the way he asked but rather sent him on his way saying:



"Go, your son will live."

Now, I don't know about you, but I'd struggle with that as an answer? It would have taken a lot of faith to walk back 40 kms (at least a two-day journey) not knowing whether his son was really still alive. Just trusting the word of a man – admittedly a well-known teacher. Remember, at that time, Jesus was not known as a healer or miracle-worker. Up till then He had only turned water to wine at a wedding feast in Cana.

As John tells us in [John 4: 54], the healing of the man's son (which happened at exactly the time Jesus said *"Go, your son will live."*) was only *"the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee."*

But God does answer prayer – and sometimes even before we ask.

Several years ago, Jill and I were travelling in the South Island. We'd hired an SUV and decided to take the high-country route between Cromwell & Queenstown via the Nevis Valley. This is an unsealed track with several fords. Most are shallow. We approached one that appeared shallow but it turned out to be deeply rutted and our wheels dropped into the ruts. A bow-wave came over the bonnet and the engine died (never to go again). It was getting late and after some time contemplating our predicament – Jill prayed a silent "God help us".

Shortly afterwards we heard an approaching vehicle. A ute with two farmers returning to Winton from Gore. They had never travelled that route before and "on the spur of the moment" – over an hour before we even entered the ford – decided to "give it a go."

So, you see, God answered our prayer even before we asked !! Even before we were in trouble.

So, how should we pray?

Again, Jesus admonished His disciples and us, before giving what we now know as the Lord's Prayer, by saying:

[Mathew 6: 5-8]

“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. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to 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.”

That is not to say we should not pray together – as we do and should. But rather:

1. Know that the power of prayer is not in its eloquence or words.
2. The power of prayer is not with the one who prays, but rather the power of prayer is in the One who hears our prayers.
3. The power of prayer is not in repetition (like Hindus chanting mantras) – although there are times we do need to persevere in asking and believing that God will meet our needs
4. Neither is prayer in religious observance. We do not need to pray at fixed times every day (as do Muslims) – as if God only tunes in at set times.
5. Above all, we need to remember that Jesus taught us to turn to our “Abba, Father” (like saying “Dad” or “Papa”) – like children, to have a conversation and build a relationship, built on faith and trust, and gratitude.
6. It is the Holy Spirit who guides us in our prayer, knows what we need and what is the will of the Father, and intercedes on our behalf.

Praying brings us closer to God – not God closer to us. In so doing, because we pray – guided by the Spirit – we also become more aligned with the will of God the more we pray.

So, I return to Philippians 4: 6-7

“Do not be anxious for anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Prayer really is the great mystery, that only has power if we allow the Spirit to guide us in how to pray and what to pray for.

And then let go and let God.

Easier said than done, I suggest.

Lord God, heavenly Father, as we come before you and bring the prayers of our hearts, grant that we might first hear your voice – that still, small, soundless voice that we feel in our hearts or hear in our minds. Guide us Jesus, by the Spirit, what to pray for. Hear our prayers, Oh Lord, and answer. Lord – teach us to pray.



Amen.