

Sermon – Realign Your Life: Prayer
Sunday January 10, 2021

We're beginning the New Year with a new series.

And I'm wondering, how many of you would love for God to build your faith and strengthen your prayer life this year? If that's you, type Yes in the chat.

When it comes to prayer, maybe you *know* a lot.

- You know that prayer is simply talking to God.
- You know that prayer is extremely power.
- You know that many things won't happen unless you pray.

But the problem is, maybe you *know* a lot about prayer, but you just don't *feel* like you're very good at praying.

- Maybe you only pray before meals or when something bad happens.
- Maybe you only pray for things you want for yourself. Like, Lord, help me get that job, help me find a spouse, help the Raptors win a game.
- Maybe you feel like your prayers are really dull and monotonous, like you're not sure what you should be praying so you just go through the motions.

How do you grow in prayer when you don't feel very good at praying?

Many of you might feel inadequate and intimidated when you're around people who are *really* good at praying. I know I do.

Do you know what I'm talking about? Like when someone prays these beautiful and eloquent prayers.

- They pray with so much authority you can feel the Holy Spirit moving.
- They pray with so much power it seems like their prayers are always answered.
- They pray with so much passion that the people around them are constantly saying *Yes, God and Amen!* Do you know someone like that?

Maybe you're wondering, How come I don't get that many Amens when I pray? How come I don't get miraculous answers to my prayers? How come I don't experience God like that?

I know I've felt this way many times before. If you can relate, type Me Too in the chat.

So is prayer something you can actually learn? Is it something you can get better at? Can you really have a personal and intimate relationship with God?

The answer is a resounding Yes!

We're in a new series called *Realign Your Life: Practices That Transform You*.

We often think the key to spiritual transformation is to try harder.

- So you try to be more loving when something insults you.
- You try to be more patient when your kids forget their chores.

- You try to be less anxious when your loved one gets sick.

But is the key to spiritual transformation really just trying harder?

Not according to the Bible.

Pastor John Ortberg says that “Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder but of training wisely.”

It’s like running a marathon. You can’t just get up and run a marathon simply by trying. But you can run a marathon if you train for it.

That’s where biblical practices come in. Biblical practices, or spiritual disciplines as they’re often called, open us up to the flow of God’s grace so that you can experience his love and transforming power. So that you can live with more joy, purpose and love.

In this series, we’ll be exploring six biblical practices that will help you train to live in line with God’s purpose. So that you can start the New Year with fresh faith and a fresh focus on God’s priorities for your life.

Today we’re going to look at the practice of prayer.

Christian author Richard Foster says:

“Of all the spiritual disciplines, prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father... Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us.”

This is good news for you if you want to grow in your prayer life but don’t feel like you’re very good at it. Because it turns out, that prayer like every discipline can be learned.

That’s what the disciples experienced. They grew up praying all their lives and thought they knew how to pray. But when they saw Jesus pray, they realized how much they had to learn.

So one day they come up to Jesus and say, Lord teach us to pray.

What Jesus then teaches them is known as the Lord’s Prayer. It’s a great model prayer that shows us God’s heart and his agenda for the world and for our lives.

It’s a powerful prayer.

Pastor Tim Keller says that the Lord’s Prayer is “the key to unlock all the riches of prayer... [and] everything we need is within it.”

Prayer is one of our core values. Did you know that at Cornerstone, we have a team of over 70 prayer warriors who pray regularly for us? Each week, our **Prayer Ministry Team** prays for the church, its ministries and for all the requests that are submitted.

As someone who prays for these requests as well as someone who is prayed for, I can say that God does amazing things when we pray!

Can we take a moment now to appreciate our Prayer Team? Would you type into the chat, *Thank you Prayer Team!*

Maybe you have something you would like prayer for.

Maybe you're part of our Cornerstone community and would like to Join our Prayer Team.

Simply go to our Prayer page at cornerstonechurch.ca/prayer and you'll find everything you need.

Now, in the time that's left, we're going to walk through the Lord's Prayer together verse-by-verse. Are you ready?

The Lord's Prayer begins like this, **Our Father in heaven (Matthew 6:9)**.

Bible scholar N.T. Wright says that these opening words set the whole context for the entire prayer.

Just think about how someone addresses you. **The way someone addresses you reflects the intimacy you have with them.**

- If someone addresses you as *Sir* or *Mam*, first of all, I hate to tell you this, but you're probably of a certain age... and it also means that they're probably not that close to you. This is more of an impersonal relationship.
- If someone addresses you by your nickname, they're probably a close friend. Someone who knows you well.
- But if someone addresses you with a pet name, like Sweetheart or Honey, you probably have a very intimate relationship with them.

The way you address someone reflects the intimacy you have with them.

Jesus could have told us to address God in any number of different ways. He could have said, Our Creator, Our Master or Our King.

But instead, he says, Our Father. This was revolutionary. No one had ever addressed God like this before. It was way too personal and intimate. The word Jesus uses for "father" is the Aramaic word *Abba*. It's like calling God, Papa or Daddy.

My oldest daughter Abigail's name actually comes from a related Hebrew word that means *a father's joy*. She's 13 now – I still can't believe it! But when she was younger, we had a bedtime routine. After washing up, reading and praying together, I would snuggle up next to her in her bed and we would just talk.

She'd tell me about her day. The things that made her happy. The things that made her sad. She would just pour out her heart to me. And it was one of the best parts of my day.

This is how Jesus invites you to come to God in prayer. To snuggle up to him with child-like faith. To pour out your heart. To know that you are safely held and loved.

Jesus goes on to say Our Father *in heaven*. Where is heaven? We often think heaven is a place far away. And this makes us feel like God is very distant.

But the Greek word for heaven actually refers to the air all around us.

In other words, Jesus isn't saying that God is somewhere far away. Jesus is saying that God is all around you. He's closer than the air you breathe.

I like how Dallas Willard paraphrases this: Dear Father always near us.

Then we get to the first petition, **hallowed be your name, (v. 9)**.

The word *hallowed* is an old-fashioned word that we don't use anymore.

It means to set something apart and make it holy. But isn't God's name already holy? So why do we pray to make it holy?

When we pray this prayer, we're praying that we would *treat* God's name as holy.

Pastor Tim Keller says we're praying:

- That faith in God would spread throughout the world.
- That as Christians, we would honour Him by living holy lives.
- And that through our witness, more and more people would honour God and call on his name.

Hallowed be your name.

Then we pray, **your kingdom come, (v. 10).**

What comes to mind when you think of a kingdom? Maybe you think of a kingdom like Gondor in Middle Earth, or Wakanda in the MCU, or Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

The word kingdom is used 162 times in the New Testament. But whenever it's used, it never refers to a nation or a place. It refers to God's rule. That's why it can be helpful to translate "the kingdom of God" to "the rule of God."

This was the good news Jesus preached. That the kingdom of God was here. God's rule and reign had come in the person of Jesus.

Praying *your kingdom come* has two dimensions.

First, there's a personal dimension. You're asking God to rule over every part of your life. Your thoughts and feelings, your work and relationships.

Rejecting God's rule is why there's sin. It's the cause of all the problems in the world.

That's why in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)

Praying *your kingdom come*, also has an outward and future dimension. We're praying for our broken world and for Jesus to return to set things right.

Theologian Martin Luther says that to pray "your kingdom come" is to "yearn for that future life of justice and peace and to ask that God's future kingdom may be the end and consummation of the kingdom he has begun in us."

Then we pray, **your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (v. 10).**

In 2002, I faced one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. I had been working as a Chartered Accountant for five years. But I sensed God leading me to give up this career to become a pastor.

Deep down, I knew that God wanted me to do this. But it forced me to wrestle with the question, Do I really trust God? Do I trust that he is good? Do I trust him to provide?

Praying *Your will be done* is a prayer of trust. It's saying to God, I submit to you, I trust you.

- Even though it's hard for me.
- Even though it's not what I wanted.
- Even though I don't understand.

Jesus struggled with this too. He agonized in the Garden over how he would bear the sins of the whole world. And even though he prays to avoid this, he also surrenders himself to God.

"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39)

These first three petitions focus on God. Because once we're grounded in God's character, purpose and will, we can pray in a more effective and God-honouring way.

So the next petition is, **Give us today our daily bread. (v. 11)**. This petition is about our needs.

Daily bread isn't just about your food or paycheque. Daily bread represents *all* of your needs - your physical, emotional and relational needs.

Every day after spending time with God, I start my day with my daily planner. I review my calendar and my to do list and then I ask God, Give me what I need for today.

Give me wisdom for today, strength for today, love for today, answers for today.

How often do I pray this? Every day. Why? **Because God's provision comes one day at a time.**

You see, your problem and mine is that we worry. We think about all the things we need. We think about all the things we don't have. That's why we get anxious.

But Jesus taught us not to worry about tomorrow. Why? Because you have a Heavenly Father who loves you and knows what you need. He'll take care of you and provide for you.

He gives a powerful image of this in the Old Testament. The Israelites had just escaped from Egypt. But they had no food to eat. So what does God do? He provides manna for them in the desert. How often does he do this? Every day. Why? Because God's provision comes one day at a time.

Give us today our daily bread.

Then we pray, **forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (v. 12)**. This petition is about our relationships.

There are two versions of the Lord's Prayer, one's in the book of Matthew, the other's in the book of Luke. Luke says "forgive us our sins" but Matthew says, "forgive us our debts." Maybe it's my accounting background, but I find that so interesting.

Why does he do that? He does that to show that where there's a broken relationship, there's a debt. Something's been taken, something is owing.

Jesus tells the story of a servant who owed a king \$5 million dollars. It was a massive debt he could never repay. So the king orders him and his family to be sold into slavery, which was a common practice in that day. But the servant begs for mercy. And the king agrees and cancels the entire debt.

The servant then bumps into a man who owes him \$5. The man begs for mercy but the servant refuses. Instead he chokes him and throws him into prison.

Now the king finds out about this and calls his servant back. He asks him, Why didn't you show the same mercy I showed you? Then he throws the servant into prison until the original debt is repaid.

The point of this story isn't that God only forgives you when you forgive others. The point is that forgiving others is *evidence* that you've been forgiven. Because when you realize how large your debt is, how you could never hope to repay it. You're so grateful that God has forgiven you this huge debt and you're eager to forgive others their much smaller debt against you.

Pastor Tim Keller says that this story links our relationship with God to our relationship with others.

"If we have not seen our sin and sought radical forgiveness from God, we will be unable to forgive and to seek the good of those who have wronged us. So unresolved bitterness is a sign that we are not right with God. It also means that if we are holding a grudge, we should see the hypocrisy of seeking forgiveness from God for sins of our own."

Broken relationships are toxic. That's why we need to pray, God to forgive our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Then we pray, **Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (v. 13)**. This petition is about our spiritual battle.

I don't know about you, but this Christmas season has been full of temptation. For me, it's come in the form of baked goods that people have dropped off. Cookies, chocolate and pastries! Having these treats in our house has been a huge temptation!

Maybe you're also tempted by sweets like cookies, or maybe you're tempted by savoury things like chips. Maybe you're tempted by other things like gossip, shopping, comparing yourself with others on social media, cheating at school or in your business, inappropriate websites or relationships.

Now when you pray *lead us not into temptation*, you're not praying, Don't let me be tempted. Because the word for temptation can be used to mean temptation or testing. And we all know that life is a test. God uses circumstances to test us. They can either refine us or cause us to fall.

That's why Jesus warns us to keep watch over our lives.

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)

If you obey your desires and rely on your willpower you will fall. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

But it's God that keeps you from sin.

The Bible says, God is able to keep you from stumbling and present you before his glorious presence without fault. (Jude 24)

We need God's help. We need God to deliver us from the evil one. Jesus reminds us that we're in a spiritual battle. We have an Enemy who's out to destroy us. And he operates by deception.

- He'll lie and tell you that God can't be trusted.
- He'll make you focus only on the negative.
- He'll show up when you're most vulnerable and convince you to take matters into your own hands.

But Jesus has given us spiritual resources to fight this battle. Paul tell us to put on the armour of God and pray in the Spirit on all occasions.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Finally, the Lord's prayer ends with these words, **For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

We begin the Lord's Prayer with God. Then we pray for our needs. And now we come back to God. Back to his kingdom, back to his power, back to his glory and we remember that he is sufficient.

Pastor John Ortberg says that this is a way of saying "God, you are large and in charge."

Type that in the chat, "You are large and in charge."

So that's the prayer, now here's the challenge.

Pray the Lord's Prayer every day this week. Pray it slowly one verse a day. Add in your own thoughts and prayers.

Now to help you with this, we've created an amazing resource! It's called The Lord's Prayer Guide and it's designed to help you pray this prayer. Each day, you'll read the reflection for that day and pray through the prayer points that are provided. There are also suggested worship songs that you can listen to online and build into your prayer time.

This resource will make Praying the Lord's Prayer daily a rich experience that will build your faith and grow you in your prayer life. You can get this free resource on our Prayer page - cornerstonechurch.ca/prayer

So to close this message, it seems fitting to pray the Lord's Prayer together. So are you all ready? Here we go.

'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.
And 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 yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen