

## **Pray Like This**

1 of 10 in *Pray Like Jesus*

Apr. 16, 2023

Matt. 6:9-15; Lk. 11:1-4

Today we're excited to begin a new sermon series on the Lord's Prayer. But before I introduce the series, let's do a little review of where we've been this year so far.

As many of you will recall, Cornerstone's Ministry Theme for 2023 is:

### **Making space for JOY and FLOURISHING**

- In our lives
- In our church
- In our community
- In the world

Flourishing, or *shalom*, as the Bible calls it, is a major theme in scripture. It's about what happens when people and all aspects of creation exist in a state of *right relationship*. It's about the world as God intends it to be— about *life* as God intends it to be.

Indeed, God is at work in Jesus to ultimately make his creation a place where everyone and everything flourishes together in perfect, interrelated harmony.

As followers of Jesus, we can experience this *shalom* even now, albeit in part. In fact, God calls you and me to be agents of his *shalom* in this world, so that there might be as much flourishing now as possible, even as we await the day of Jesus' return, when he will finally set the whole world right once and for all.

But from the Bible's perspective, *shalom* or flourishing cannot be given adequate expression without also making reference to joy.<sup>1</sup> As New Testament scholar Marianne Meye Thompson explains:

Joy is a disposition... a way of living that hopes for God's final *shalom*, but, anticipating that *shalom* already in the present, also lives with confident hope and gratitude in the present time.<sup>2</sup>

These past few years, the world and to a certain extent this church, not to mention many of you personally — have been living in crisis mode.

---

<sup>1</sup> Justin E. Crisp (ed. Miroslav Volf), *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life*, p. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *Ibid.* p. 38.

In the Old Testament, when God's people were emerging from the crisis of a long and arduous exile in a foreign land, their leaders Ezra and Nehemiah told them:

“Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”<sup>3</sup>

With this in mind, we did a series on biblical joy earlier this year, and learned that joy is profoundly relational. It starts with God, who exists in the joy of the eternal loving relationship between Father, Son and Spirit. As the great Swiss theologian Karl Barth once said:

God's Triune being is radiant, and what it radiates is joy. Its loving interweaving of persons, as in a cosmic dance, radiates beauty.

Through Jesus, God invites you and me into that divine dance, to share the joy of loving relationship with God, and with each other as well. In his book on the subject, Marcus Warner captures the essence of joy with these words:

Joy is the positive energy that comes from sharing a relational connection.<sup>4</sup>

As much as our relationships with each other are essential to our growth in joy, at the end of the day, it is our relational connection with God himself that is the heart of all joy, and more than anything else, it is this joy—the joy of the *Lord*— that is our strength.

“In your presence is fullness of joy,” declares the psalmist to God.<sup>5</sup>

Here, and in other passages, the word “presence” is a translation of the Hebrew word for “face.” So joy is found in a face-to-face relationship with God, as it were, where we delight in him as he delights in us. I love how author Chris Coursey puts it:

The Good News of the Gospel is that we have a God whose face lights up to see us and He beckons us to draw near.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, for the past few decades, a community of Christian neuroscientists have been discovering that relational joy— rooted in a relationship with God where we learn to abide

---

<sup>3</sup> Nehemiah 8:10

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Warner and Jim Wilder, *Rare Leadership in the Workplace: 4 Uncommon Habits that Improve Focus, Engagement, and Productivity*, p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 16:11b (NASB)

<sup>6</sup> Chris M. Coursey, *Transforming Fellowship: 19 Brain Skills that Build Joyful Community*, p. 54.

in his loving presence— is from a brain science perspective the fundamental ingredient in our growth in loving, Christlike character.<sup>7</sup>

After the series we did on biblical joy, we then did a series on the Seven Deadly Sins during Lent. Why? I mean, what does that topic have to do with joy and flourishing? Well, the Seven Deadly Sins are *shalom*-busters and joy-killers, and we need to tackle them head-on if we're going to grow as a community of joy and flourishing. Those sins draw us away from God, and hinder our relational connection with him, thereby cutting us off from the fullness of joy that is found in his presence.

Now, we turn our focus to the subject of prayer, because prayer is the primary means given to us to connect with God relationally, and to experience his joy. This is why, under the umbrella of our joy and flourishing theme, one of Cornerstone's key objectives this year is *Pursuing God's Presence Through Prayer*.

As we grow in prayer, we grow in the joy of the Lord, which is our strength—even and especially during challenging times. Through prayer, we learn to abide with God in whose presence is fullness of joy, and from there we learn to flourish in life and ministry. Indeed, it is largely out of our prayer life that we become agents who bring God's flourishing to the world around us.

As we spend the next two and a half months focusing on our annual objective of *Pursuing God's Presence Through Prayer*, you can expect things like:

- Resources and learning opportunities to help you grow in your prayer life.
- A return of spaces for prayer ministry at the end of some Sunday worship services.
- Special prayer gatherings and events.
- And of course, there will be the sermon series on prayer that we're about to launch into now. It's called ***Pray Like Jesus***.

Throughout the series, we'll be unpacking the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray—the prayer that most Christians have come to know as the Lord's Prayer.

Variations of this prayer are recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus is teaching about prayer in his Sermon on the Mount, and he says:

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,  
    may your name be kept holy.  
May your Kingdom come soon.  
May your will be done on earth,  
    as it is in heaven.  
Give us today the food we need,  
    and forgive us our sins,  
    as we have forgiven those who sin against us.  
And don't let us yield to temptation,  
    but rescue us from the evil one.<sup>8</sup>

If you jump over to Luke chapter 11, it says:

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Jesus said, "This is how you should pray:

"Father, may your name be kept holy.  
    May your Kingdom come soon.  
Give us each day the food we need,  
    and forgive us our sins,  
    as we forgive those who sin against us.  
And don't let us yield to temptation."<sup>9</sup>

The Lord's Prayer is essentially a concise summary of God's desire, will and agenda for you, for me, for the church, and for the world. It's the kind of praying that God delights to hear and answer.

Next Sunday we're going to start into the Lord's Prayer itself, but today, as an introduction to this series, I'd like to highlight one key insight with The Lord's Prayer in mind. And that insight is:

**If Jesus needed to pray, SO DO WE!**

---

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 6:9-13 (NLT)

<sup>9</sup> Luke 11:1-4 (NLT)

Luke chapter 11 begins with Jesus praying in a certain place, likely with his disciples. Because when he's done, one of them approaches him and says, "Lord, teach *us* to pray."<sup>10</sup> Bible scholars point out that this is one of the only places in the gospels where the disciples make such a specific request for Jesus to teach them something.

There was something about Jesus' prayer life that stood out to them, something that captured their attention and made them want to learn to pray like Jesus. There was something that made them think, "Oh man, if I could learn how to pray like *Jesus—that* would be incredible."

The twelve disciples saw and heard Jesus praying every day. Throughout the gospels, we find Jesus at prayer again and again. We read in Luke that:

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.<sup>11</sup>

Do you?

Jesus of course prayed at defining moments in his life, like at his baptism, and in the Garden of Gethsemane just before he went to the cross.<sup>12</sup> Can you be found in prayer during the defining moments of your life?

Jesus prayed before he made big decisions. For example, he prayed the entire night before choosing who his closest disciples would be.<sup>13</sup> Do you pray before making big decisions?

Jesus prayed both before and after he engaged in ministry. For example, Matthew 14 says that Jesus went to a remote area to be alone—in other words, to pray.<sup>14</sup> But then this huge crowd tracks him down, and he has compassion on them. Jesus miraculously feeds 5000 people that day, and heals the sick among them.

But when the crowd finally goes home that evening, what does Jesus do? Matthew tells us that he "went up into the hills by himself to pray."<sup>15</sup> Prayer was both the *before and after* of Jesus' ministry.

Is prayer is the before and after of your own ministry endeavours?

---

<sup>10</sup> Darrell Bock, *Luke: NIV Application Commentary*, p. 314.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 5:16 (NLT)

<sup>12</sup> Luke 3:21, 22:41

<sup>13</sup> Luke 6:12-16

<sup>14</sup> See Matthew 14:13

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 14:23

So the disciples see Jesus at prayer, and they eagerly ask, “We want to learn to pray like you pray, Jesus. Teach us, Lord.”

And at this point, someone might think, “Well *of course* Jesus knew how to pray. I mean, he’s the Son of God and all— the second Person of the divine Trinity!”

Well, yes, he is. But you have to remember, when Jesus was here on earth, he set aside his divine prerogatives, and lived among us as a full human being. The Bible says in Hebrews he was “just as we are, yet without sin.”<sup>16</sup>

And so, as we read about Jesus in the gospels, we’re seeing a picture what it looks like to live a fully human life that’s utterly free from personal sin. We’re seeing a picture of human life as God has always intended it to be. And in Jesus, we see that to be a full human being who’s utterly free from sin— is to *pray*.

Because by God’s design, you and I are called in continuous and absolute dependence on God, like Jesus did.

By God’s design, you and I are called to live unbroken and intimate conversation with God, like Jesus did.

By God’s design, you and I are called to walk in obedient responsiveness to God, like Jesus did. When the Father said go, Jesus went. When the Father said stay, Jesus stayed. When the Father said lay down your life and I’ll raise it back up again, Jesus laid it down.

All of these things are encompassed in and made possible by a prayer-filled life. Which was exactly the kind of life Jesus lived.

Therefore, if Jesus, the only sinless human being, needed to pray in order to fulfill his God-given mission, then who are you and I—sinful as we can be— to say:

*Yeah, but I’m just not that interested in prayer. I mean, it’s not really a priority for me. If things get desperate I might give God a 911 call now and then, but otherwise, I’m good. This thing called life—I got this.*

---

<sup>16</sup> Hebrews 4:15 (NIV)

Of course we would never say or even think such things—at least not in so many words. But our prayer lives—or lack thereof—betray the fact that many of us have this very attitude.

You see, as much as I fail we pray, I fail to acknowledge just how desperately I need God. But if Jesus, the only sinless human being, needed to pray, then guess what? So do I. So do you. We all do.

As a general rule, a person can survive without food for about 40 days, without water for 4 days, but without oxygen, only 4 minutes. Prayer is the oxygen of our spiritual life, just like it was for Jesus.

Is it possible that God is revealing to you this morning that spiritually speaking, you've more or less been living an "oxygen-deprived" life? Is God urgently calling you to renew your commitment to pray? As Bible scholar Darrel Bock writes:

If Jesus took the time and effort to teach us how to pray and urged us to do so... then our calling is to make time for it.<sup>17</sup>

"Where do I even start?" you may be wondering. Well, it's our prayer that this sermon series on the Lord's Prayer will be a big help to you in that regard.

Because when the disciples asked the prayer master, Jesus, to teach them to pray, he entrusted to them the very framework that had profoundly shaped his own prayers.

The 6 short petitions in the Lord's Prayer reveal what matters most to God. In a mere 57 words in the original Greek, Jesus concisely sums up what God's desire, will and agenda are for you, for me, and for the world. New Testament scholar N.T. Wright says that in giving us this prayer, Jesus is showing us "the kind of praying the Father loves to hear and loves to answer... In the Lord's Prayer Jesus reveals what makes God's heart tick."<sup>18</sup>

The centre, the very heart of the Lord's Prayer, is the petition, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Essentially, by giving us this prayer, Jesus is teaching you and me to pray for the coming of the full reign of God over the earth. The prayer helps us to express and to grow the longing of our hearts for the will of God to happen both in our lives and throughout the whole earth, just as it does in heaven.

---

<sup>17</sup> Bock, *Luke: NIV Application Commentary*, p. 313.

<sup>18</sup> Darrell Johnson, *57 Words that Change the World: A Journey through the Lord's Prayer*, Kindle version, loc. 145.

To pray for God's kingdom to come is to pray that all creation would know the fullness of God's healing and restoration in Christ. To pray for God's kingdom to come is to pray for God's joy and flourishing to fill not only you and me, not only the church, but the entire world. As the apostle Paul says in Romans 14:

For the kingdom of God is... a matter of... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

The kingdom of God is about *peace*—another biblical word for *shalom* or flourishing—and the kingdom is also about joy, because joy and flourishing always go together. So among other things, that's what we're praying for when we pray the Lord's Prayer. Can you see how well this series fits with our joy and flourishing theme this year?

So here's a question: What would happen if we invested ourselves in really understanding the Lord's Prayer? And what if we learn to let the framework of the Lord's Prayer begin to guide and shape our own praying? I would be bold enough to say that it just might revolutionize your prayer life and your relationship with God.

If Jesus needed to pray, SO DO WE. And to help us pray, Jesus gives us a powerful framework to inform and shape our praying called the Lord's Prayer. To quote N.T. Wright once again:

Here is the framework Jesus knew we would need. Here is your heavenly Father waiting and longing for you to use it day by day as you grow in your knowledge, love, and service of him. What is stopping you from making it your own?<sup>20</sup>

So would you decide now to not miss a week in this series? Even if you can't be here in person on a given week, you can always catch any service online.

Earlier I had said that we want to put some good resources in your hands to help you grow in the practice of prayer. For starters, we're going to make a prayer guide based on the Lord's Prayer available to everyone, starting today. We have both online and printed versions available. <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Lords-Prayer-Guide.pdf>

If you're here in-person, you can pick up a printed version today at the Welcome Desk in the lobby after service.

---

<sup>19</sup> Romans 14:17 (NIV)

<sup>20</sup> N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, p. 60.



This guide offers a 7-day cycle of reflections and prayer points based on the traditional wording of each clause of the Lord's Prayer.

It is recommend that you repeat the 7-day prayer cycle several times. This will allow the themes of the Lord's Prayer to "sink in" for you, and become more a part of your ongoing prayer life.

Simply read the reflection for each day. (You're encouraged to look up any scripture references, too.) Then, pray through the prayer points in your own words, as the Lord leads.

There are also one or two suggested worship songs for each day's theme that you can readily find online and incorporate into your prayer time if you like. Praying like this might feel a bit different at first, but that's okay. Remember, these are the key themes Jesus calls us to pray about—the concerns that are closest to God's heart.

As well, starting May 11, I will be offering a semester group on Thursday nights called *The Prayer Practice*. My small group recently went through it together, and I liked it so much I wanted to give folks in the wider congregation the chance to go through it as well.

*The Prayer Practice* is a 4-session semester group which offers you the opportunity to pursue a deeper life of prayer. The class features:

- Short teaching videos
- Spaces for group discussion
- In-class prayer exercises
- A companion guide with weekly prayer exercises to try at home
- Additional resources to further enhance your understanding and practice of prayer

The goal of the class isn't to "get good" at prayer, but to create new daily rhythms and ways of being that open us to God's presence and peace in more profound ways.

Signs-ups for *The Prayer Practice* will be available starting next Sunday. Today I'm just giving you an early heads-up about the class so you can be watching for your opportunity to sign up. It will take place here at Cornerstone on four consecutive Thursday evenings starting May 11.