

# The Prayer Life of Jesus

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As we've discussed on a number of different occasions, being a Christian is about far more than showing up here at the church building one time a week or three times a week and trying to stay out of trouble the rest of the time. Being a Christian means being a disciple of Jesus. We take Him for our Teacher in all matters pertaining to life and godliness, and in that spiritual realm of activity, we do everything we can to conform our lives to His life.

Needless to say, this is not the easiest goal in the world to pursue. In fact, it's not one we can ever hope to achieve, and our shortcomings fall into two main areas. First, there are times when we know what Jesus did and taught, but we don't succeed in putting our knowledge into practice. Second, though, are the times when we just don't know who Jesus really was. We recognize that some topic is spiritually important, but we don't think to look to Him for guidance.

This is too often true in the area of prayer. We know that we're supposed to pray, but we don't really consider all that the Bible has to say about prayer, and we especially don't consider all that Jesus has to say about prayer. I've been a Christian for about 20 years and a preacher for six of those years, but I've never been involved in a systematic study of the prayers of Jesus. For some strange reason, that's just not an angle that we take very much as we learn about Him.

Despite our neglect, the gospels are filled with useful, relevant information from our Lord about prayer that we can incorporate into our own prayers. There's far too much, in fact, for only one sermon to cover. Let's look this morning, then at what Jesus actually did when He sought out the Father. Let's consider the prayer life of Jesus.

## When Jesus Prayed.

In this study, we need to be sure to take a good long look at when Jesus prayed. We learn from the gospels, for instance, that Jesus prayed **BEFORE MAKING DECISIONS**. Look with me at Luke 6:12-13. At least from a surface perspective, this seems kind of bizarre. After all, Jesus was the smartest, wisest man ever to walk the face of the earth. If anybody could be confident in his ability to make good decisions without divine help, it would be Jesus. And yet, that's not what we see here. When He was faced with this important moment in His ministry, when He was about to choose the men who would be the spearhead of the gospel after He was gone, He made sure to go to God in prayer first. Nor was this some momentary bowing of the head. Instead, He spent all night in prayer to make sure He got it right.

We don't come to the table with anywhere near the decision-making prowess of Jesus, and yet, we often don't pray like Him before we make decisions either. We need God's help more, but we call upon it less. Brethren, that doesn't make a lick of sense. Every time we make a decision that's more important than what kind of cereal we're going to eat in the morning, we need to bring it before the Lord. We need to pray about where we're going to go to college, about whom to marry, about how to raise our kids, about how to run our business. God promises us that if we seek His wisdom, He will give it to us generously and without reproach. With that kind of guarantee, we'd be foolish not to pray constantly.

In darker hours, Jesus also prayed **BEFORE TRIAL**. This is evident from His famous prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, as recorded in Luke 22:41-42. At this point in time, Jesus had no doubt that He was going to die in less than 24 hours. He knew that His death was necessary for the salvation of mankind, and yet the last thing in the world that He wanted to do as a human being was die. At this moment of extreme mental anguish, He didn't wrestle with the burden by Himself. He brought it to the Father, so that even if He couldn't escape, He could be comforted in what must be.

Likewise, friends, in the difficult times of our lives, we must remember to pray. Because we live in a world tainted by sin, suffering and death are inescapable parts of our existence, and we often see those things coming. Whether we are struggling or about to struggle with illness, job loss, or loneliness, there's no good reason for us to struggle with those things alone. God may not take our burden away, but we can be sure that He will help us get through it.

However, Jesus' prayers weren't just limited to the times when He was suffering personally. He also prayed **WHILE DOING GOD'S WORK**. This is reflected in a very interesting way in John 11:41-42. Here, Jesus is in the middle of resurrecting Lazarus. In fact, from the text, it appears that Lazarus may already be breathing again, but hasn't come out of the tomb yet. At this critical moment, Jesus prays in two directions. On the one hand, He looks to the past and gives thanks for what God has already done. On the other hand, though, He looks to the future and prays that this miracle could lead those who see it to believe. Through prayer, He's making sure that God will bless His work.

When we are engaged in working for the Lord, prayer needs to fill that same role in our lives. No matter what we're doing, whether it's teaching a children's class, serving in the worship, or trying to teach our friends and neighbors throughout the week, we need to make sure that prayer is involved in that work. We need to be thankful for all the ways that God has helped us to where we are, but even more than that, we need to keep the goal in mind in our prayers. We need to pray that our work will have the effect of increasing the faith of others in Him. There are lots of things we could be working for, but only that one will have an eternal impact. Let's make sure our prayers reflect that importance.

Finally, we see Jesus praying **AFTER WORKING**. This is something He does commonly throughout the gospels, but we see a relevant example of this in Mark 6:45-46. This comes on the heels of the feeding of the five thousand, so Jesus has just worked one of the most spectacular miracles of His ministry. However, He reacts to this achievement in a noteworthy way. He doesn't unwind by going off and having a big party with His disciples. He doesn't shuffle over to the recliner and watch TV for the next three hours. Instead, He climbs the mountain to pray.

This spiritual recharge time is something we need to make a part of our lives. As human beings, we're not made to go 100 percent all the time. We need stress release. We need down time. When we're in that situation, though, when we come home from work and we're wiped out, how often do we find our relaxation in prayer? To my own sorrow, I have to admit that I personally don't think that way much at all. And yet, what better way can there be to relax? Prayer gives us the opportunity to spend some time quietly and at rest, it allows us to process through the events of the day, and best of all, we can cast our cares upon the One who can actually do something about them! The next time, then, that we're worn out and needing a break, let's take a few minutes to find comfort with our God in prayer.

### **Why Jesus Prayed.**

Of course, Jesus didn't go through all of this praying just because He was supposed to. There were reasons why He prayed, and we should be praying for those reasons too. First, Jesus used His prayers **TO TEACH OTHERS**. This is quite obvious in Luke 11:1-2. When His disciples came to Him wanting to know how to pray, He didn't just give them a lecture on prayer. Instead, He prayed with them, so that they could model their prayers on His example.

Today, there are many different situations where our prayers can serve a similar purpose. This is particularly relevant in a family setting. It's easy for us to recognize that God needs to hear our prayers, but how often do we think that our children need to hear those prayers too? When we pray together with them, we're not just communicating our wishes to the Father, we're teaching them about how they can pray too, and about the faith that we ourselves have. Over time, those thousands of prayers will combine into a powerful force that will help lead them to the Lord.

We should also pray **TO BLESS OTHERS**. Jesus' willingness to do this is chronicled in the short story of Matthew 19:13-15. Unlike many of the stories from the time of Christ, this one has a very modern ring to it. It's almost like the apostles are the secretaries for some high government official or CEO. They think that their Teacher's time is too valuable to be spent praying for and blessing these random children. Jesus disagrees. In His eyes, even those as socially insignificant as a bunch of little kids are still precious, and He's willing to give them the blessing their parents seek.

Today, we need to be equally generous with our prayers. I'm afraid that too many Christians go through life locked in their own sanctimonious little worlds, not really very concerned about the needs and the sufferings and the sorrows of people outside the church. Brethren, that's not who Jesus was, and if that's what we're like, we're not really His disciples. We need to be compassionate toward others, and the most important thing our compassion can do is provoke us to pray. Whenever we see someone in need, our first response should be to pray for them. In fact, as we have opportunity, we should even look to pray with them. That kind of active, generous prayer can accomplish two critical goals. We can get the help of the Almighty on their side, and we can show them the blessings of a child of God.

Nor should our prayers be limited to those we like. As we see from the example of Jesus, we should pray **FOR ENEMIES**. Look at what He does in Luke 23:33-34. At this point in time, His enemies have just finished crucifying Him. Blood is still welling up around the nails through His hands and feet. And yet, the compassion and the mercy in the heart of our Lord is so great that He's seeking forgiveness for the ones who have just begun the process that will kill Him.

Friends, if Jesus can look for God's blessing on those who have done such a terrible injury to Him, surely we can pray for our enemies too. This doesn't come easily. Sometimes, we want our prayers to look more like the imprecatory Psalms, where we're asking God to blast somebody. However, that's not the pattern we're given to follow. No matter what someone else has done to us, we must still love them and pray for them, because that's what our Master did.

Finally, Jesus prayed **FOR THE GLORY OF GOD**. Once again, this happened on numerous occasions, but we see one example in John 12:27-28. We can think of this as a pre-Gethsemane prayer. It's hard to tell exactly when He prayed this, but it can't have been long before His arrest and crucifixion. At this point in time, He's more resigned than anguished, but He's clearly not looking forward to the near future. Nonetheless, what's important to Him is not His own rescue, His own salvation. What He cares about is that God be glorified, if necessary, even through His pain.

When we learn to pray for this and mean it, it won't be so much a transformation for our prayer lives as for our spiritual lives in general. In our prayers, most of us spend a lot of time asking for things that we want. I certainly do. There's nothing wrong with that. However, we must learn that at the end of the day, it doesn't matter that we get what we want. All the earthly blessings we might enjoy are fleeting anyway. What matters is that in our lives, God is glorified. That's what we're here to do. We're here to glorify God. If we do that, our lives are a success. If we don't do that, our lives are a failure. Once we understand that God's glory is most important, it will also become most important in our prayers. If God's glory means that we suffer like Jesus, so be it. It's still the goal we must be praying to reach.