



A LIFE OF PRAYER

All Saints Bible Studies
Term 3 2019



Introduction

This term in our Sunday services we'll be taking a systematic look at the topic of prayer, inspired particularly by Tim Keller's book on the subject. Unlike other terms, our weekly Bible studies won't closely correlate with the individual Sunday sermons and Bible passages. Instead, our small groups will be examining some *examples* of prayer from the major characters of the Bible, which will complement the sermon series overall but can be timed flexibly. Other group material will be supplied for use in the last few weeks of term.

Sermon Schedule

28 July	What is prayer?
4 Aug	Learning the language of prayer
11 Aug	<i>Break – Compassion Sunday</i>
18 Aug	Awe-filled adoration
25 Aug	True confession
1 Sept	Presenting our requests to God
8 Sept	Praying for God's people
15 Sept	Prayer in utter darkness
22 Sept	Unceasing prayer
29 Sept	The Lord's prayer

Bible Studies

1	Moses' Prayer	Psalm 90
2	Solomon's Prayer	1 Kings 8
3	Nehemiah's Prayer	Nehemiah 1
4	Jesus' Prayer	John 17
5	The disciples' prayer	Acts 4
6	Paul's prayer	Ephesians 1

Study 1: Moses' prayer - Psalm 90

In this series we will be "eavesdropping" on the prayers of some major characters in the Bible. The people praying these prayers were in different situations to us (especially the Old Testament examples), so their prayers are not prescriptive. But whilst allowing for different contexts, it's valuable for us to consider our prayer lives in the light of these ancient believers and see what we can learn about both the God we pray to and the nature of faithful prayer itself.

Psalm 90 is probably the oldest of the psalms, traditionally attributed to "Moses the man of God" (see the subtitle) who lived somewhere around 1500BC. It shows some links with the first few chapters of Genesis.

Read Psalm 90. Then allow a minute of silent reflection. Then have another group member read the psalm again.

1. What knowledge about God does Moses express in his prayer?
2. What knowledge about people does Moses express in his prayer?
3. What does Moses ask for?

4. What feelings does Moses exhibit in his prayer? What's the overall tone?
5. What is Moses *doing* as he prays this prayer? (Think of some words ending in "-ing").
6. How is this prayer different to your prayers? Does it reveal something that's lacking from your prayer life?
7. How is Moses' prayer answered in Jesus?

Have somebody close in prayer, inspired by Psalm 90. Begin by praying verses 1-2 verbatim and then continue in your own words.

Notes and Prayer Points

Study 2: Solomon's Prayer - 1 Kings 8

This prayer comes at the high-point of the Old Testament, around roughly 950BC. God's people are living securely in the promised land, led by a king to whom God had given great wisdom. As God promised his father David (2 Sam 7), Solomon has built a permanent temple to house the ark of the covenant, which was the great symbol of God's presence with and protection of his people. Solomon prays this public prayer at the temple's dedication.

Read 1 Kings 8:22-26

1. One way of categorising prayer is ACTS:
Adoration (of who God is), **Thanksgiving** (for what God's done),
Confession (of sins) **Supplication** (asking).
Which of these types of prayer can you see in this section? What does Solomon start with?
2. On what basis does Solomon make his requests?

Read 1 Kings 8:27-40

3. Solomon realises that the temple can't *contain* God (verse 27).
What function(s) does he expect the temple to have?
4. Solomon repeatedly asks God to hear his people's future prayers and forgive them for their sins. What end goal does he have in mind? (See verse 40)

Read 1 Kings 8:41-43

5. Solomon makes more requests about future prayers directed towards the Lord's temple. What goal does he have in mind here?

Read 1 Kings 8:44-53

6. What truth about humanity does Solomon admit?
7. The previous sections dealt with Israel praying whilst in the promised land, or foreigners coming to the land of Israel to pray. What geographical location is in view in this section?
8. What reason does Solomon give for God to forgive his people when they turn back to him?

Reflect on the prayer as a whole

9. Unlike Solomon, we're not kings, and we probably don't feel that it's our role to pray on behalf of all God's people. But what aspects of Solomon's prayer can inspire us in the way we pray?

Having finished his prayer itself, Solomon pronounces a blessing on God's people. Finish by reading this aloud - **1 Kings 54-61**.

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 3: Nehemiah's Prayer - Nehemiah 1

Because of their persistent unfaithfulness to the Lord, the people of Judah were conquered by the Babylonians and taken into exile from 597BC onwards. But then in 539 BC, the Persian king Cyrus the Great conquered the Babylonians and permitted some exiled Judeans to return home and begin rebuilding. But opposition was high and progress was slow. Nehemiah chapter 1 is set in about 445BC during the reign of a later Persian king, Artaxerxes I. biblechronologytimeline.com/images/persian-empire-chart.jpg

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4

1. What does this reveal about Nehemiah's context?
2. How does Nehemiah respond to the news about his fellow Judeans?

Read Nehemiah 1:5-11

3. One way of categorising prayer is ACTS:
Adoration (of who God is), **Thanksgiving** (for what God's done),
Confession (of sins) **Supplication** (asking).
Which of these types of prayer can you see in this section?
What does Nehemiah start with?

4. What does Nehemiah want from God?

5. What do you notice about the way Nehemiah brings his requests to the Lord? How does he position himself before God?

6. What would it look like for us, as New Testament believers, to follow Nehemiah's example as we pray? Is there an aspect of this prayer which is usually missing from your prayer life?

7. Historic Anglican worship has usually included a "collect" - a short "prayer of the day" which follows a particular structure. Here is an example:

Eternal God and Father,
by whose power we are created
and by whose love we are redeemed:
guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,
so that we may give ourselves to your service,
and live this week in love to one another and to you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

How does this Christian prayer model some of the principles we've learned from Nehemiah?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 4: Jesus' Prayer - John 17

John chapters 13-17 portray Jesus' final night with his disciples before his crucifixion, and his extended teaching (the "farewell discourse"). In chapter 17 we hear Jesus praying for his disciples before he is arrested, tried and crucified. The context is summed up by Jesus in 16:28 - "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father". It's a dense passage filled with references to the broader themes of John's gospel, which we won't have time to explore all of in this study.

Introduction

1. Can you think of a time when a friend had prayed for you before you faced a challenging situation? How did it make you feel to know that they had prayed for you in advance?

Read John 17:1-5

2. What is Jesus' overall agenda as he prays?

Read John 17:6-19

3. How does Jesus describe his disciples?
4. What circumstances does Jesus predict for his disciples?
5. What does Jesus ask God to do for his disciples?

Read John 17:20-26

6. What does Jesus pray for those who come to believe in him later?

7. What end result is Jesus seeking? (See v23)

8. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus has prayed for you, as you encounter the challenges of the Christian life?

9. Clearly some of Jesus' prayer is specific to his position as Son of God and Great High Priest. But how can his prayer be an example for us in praying for other Christians, especially those in difficult circumstances?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 5: The Apostles' Prayer - Acts 4

Not long after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, his disciples were declaring the good news of the risen Christ and performing miraculous healings in Jesus' name (see Acts 3:6-7). This provoked opposition from the Jewish authorities (Acts 4:2) who imprison Peter and John and put them on trial.

Read Acts 4:18-23

1. If you were one of Peter and John's friends, how would you have responded to the news they brought?

Read Acts 4:23-31

The disciples "raised their voices together in prayer". It's unlikely that the words that follow were written down for them to say together, and unlikely that the Holy Spirit caused them to say words together in unison. More likely, various people led the group in prayer, and the words recorded here are a summary of the prayers that they all said "amen" to.

2. Why would the disciples tell God about his creation of the world? Doesn't he already know that?
3. Verses 25b-26 are a quote from Psalm 2. Why do you think this scripture has come to the disciples' minds?

4. God already knows what Psalm 2 says. Why quote it to him?

5. What can we learn here about using scripture as **we** pray?

6. Why do the disciples urge God to "consider their threats" (v29)? What do they mean by this? Doesn't God already know about the situation?

7. In this difficult and tense time, what do the disciples ask God to give them? How does this compare with what you would ask for when under pressure as a Christian?

8. Can you think of a relationship between the request in v29 and the request in v30?

9. What is one thing you can take away from this passage to put into practice in your prayer life?

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 6: Paul's Prayer - Ephesians 1

Introduction

1. Can you think of a time when somebody told you they were praying for you? Did they tell you *what* they were praying? If so, what difference did this make?

As Paul the apostle opens his letter to the Christian believers in Ephesus, he tells them how he has been praying for them. His words here are not quite a prayer per se, but a prayer-report. Because his prayer-report begins with "for this reason" (v15), we should look briefly at what has come before.

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

2. According to Paul in this section, what things has God done for the Ephesian believers (and all Christians)? List the main points you can see.

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

3. How does Paul describe his thanksgiving for the Ephesians?
4. Paul prays for both "means" and "ends": He asks for X *so that* Y would then happen. What are the means and ends in verses 18-19?

5. Do you think the requests in verse 18 and 19 are separate, or are they different ways of saying the same thing?

6. What does Paul want the Ephesians to *know*? List the things he mentions.

7. Why does Paul spend so much time at the end of the prayer recounting what God has done for Jesus?

8. Sometimes we want to pray for other Christians but aren't sure what specific things to ask for. In your own words, what does this passage show us that we can pray for all Christians, any time?

9. To finish, write a prayer for All Saints based on Ephesians 1:15-23. Aim to ask for the things Paul mentions, but with words that address God directly.