

The Prayer Life of Jesus

One way we can learn to pray effectively is by looking at the prayer life of Jesus. Although the Gospels don't provide a detailed biography of Christ, they do offer captivating glimpses into His prayer life. First, however, it will be helpful to answer a valid question, "Why did Jesus pray?" This is sometimes puzzling for Christians. After all, if Jesus is God, why did Christ need to pray?

In my opinion, there are three reasons why Jesus prayed. First, Jesus prayed as an 'example' to His followers, and this should be our point of reference. Second, the Incarnation consists of both divine and human natures. Therefore, from His human (Jewish) nature, it was perfectly natural for Jesus to pray. Third, the constitution of the Godhead (the Holy Trinity) allows for communication between its three Members. As God the Son, Jesus could pray to God the Father at will. This aside let us now look more closely at the prayer life of Jesus.

Jesus and Prayer

- Jesus prayed 'for' others. In **Matthew 19:13**, we read, "*Then little children were brought to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them.*" The Lord did this despite His disciples having already rebuked those who had brought them. Jesus was adamant that the little children should not be hindered in any way... "*For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these*" (verse 14). In **John 17:9** we read, "*I (Jesus) pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours.*" This underscores the need for intercessory prayer. **1 Timothy 2:1** confirms it, "*First of all, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.*"
- Jesus prayed 'with' others. **Luke 9:28** reads, "*Jesus took Peter, John and James with Him and went up onto a mountain to pray.*" Jesus prayed alone as we'll, but He also knew the value of praying with others. **Acts 1:14** highlights the importance of us praying with one another: "*They all joined together constantly in prayer.*" Praying together is doing what Jesus did! But notice He didn't just pray with any Tom, Dick and Harry - He prayed with those closest to Him! One of the real challenges we have in our contemporary, busy lives is finding time to be together as a family. It is especially difficult to create opportunities to pray together. The most important part of family prayer is perhaps the easiest to overlook - how we lift each other up to the Lord. Even when we are not physically together, as a praying family, we should pray for each other constantly.
- Jesus prayed alone. **Luke 5:16** reads, "*But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*" As much as Jesus understood the value of praying with and for others, He also understood the need to pray alone. **Psalms 46:10** reads, "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" Implying that we don't really get to "know" God until we are in a still quiet place. It's important for us to "be still" before God, but the only way to do this, especially in our hectic existence, is to do so 'alone' with God. This is a place of intimacy, where true relationship can be established with our Heavenly Father.
- Jesus prayed in nature. **Psalms 19:1** reads, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.*" What better place to commune with our Creator than among the wonders of nature?

Luke 6:12 says, *"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray..."* The Lord could have gone to a home, a synagogue, or if He were near Jerusalem, He could have gone to the temple to pray. But there were times when Jesus chose nature! He made the decision to pray out-doors (in the wilderness), which often happened to be close to His present location. We are surrounded by so much that is "man made" that sometimes it's difficult for us to remember that this is not our world, but God's world (**Genesis 1:1, Psalm 24:1**) full of wonders for us to enjoy.

- Jesus prayed regularly. This insight is found in a passage we referred to earlier, **Luke 5:16**: *"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."* The word "often" is not hidden, therefore, it is obvious that Jesus prayed regularly. Throughout the Gospels, whenever we get a glimpse of Jesus's lifestyle, prayer comes up regularly and naturally. It was simply a part of His worldview, integrated into every aspect of Christ's life. Can we say the same about prayer in our lives?
- Jesus' prayers differed. He could pray as a sprinter or a marathon runner. The Lord's Prayer is full of wisdom, but it is easy enough to be memorised and serves as an example of a brief prayer rather than a marathon prayer. However, Jesus also knew how to dedicate long periods of time to prayer. As we read in **Luke 6:12**, Jesus *"spent the night praying to God."* We, too, need to be able to offer short prayers, as well as to dedicate long periods of our lives to prayer.
- Jesus' prayers were heartfelt. Jesus did not pray in a cold, insincere or distant manner, but with heartfelt requests and petitions - demonstrating empathy and a genuine love for God the Father. This is demonstrated clearly in **John 17**, where Jesus prays for Himself, His immediate disciples, as well as for all believers (you and me). *"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world"* - verse 24.
- Jesus prayed based on knowledge. That is, His knowledge of God and His truths. The prayers of Jesus were based on God's revealed truths and, as such, were always in line with God's Word. In **John 4:24** Jesus said, *"God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."* He also said, *"The truth will set you free"* (**John 8:32**), underscoring the importance of truth in the life of Christ and, in turn, our lives. Proper prayer requires us to have a significant and truthful understanding of God and what He has revealed to us through His Word.
- Jesus taught persistence in prayer. *"Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up"* (**Luke 18:1**). The parable Jesus shared is not meant to depict a pestering disciple who harasses God enough to coerce a response, but rather the importance of being persistent in prayer and waiting on God. Persistence is an integral part of the Christian life. Without persistence and patience you cannot act in a mature fashion. And God is looking for people who can take charge of their inheritance in a way that is pleasing to Him.
- Jesus knew that not all His prayers would be answered. For most of us, this is a difficult prayer lesson to learn, but the fact of the matter is that not all our prayers are answered in ways we expect. Even Jesus knew this hard lesson as he cried out to God the Father from Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:36-44**). Three times Jesus

prayed for God to allow an easier path, but Jesus knew, "*Yet not as I will, but as You will*" (26:39).

Unanswered prayer is such a challenge to the Christian life that we will address the matter in more detail tonight. When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, "*Yet not as I will, but as You will,*" He offered a tremendous, but seemingly simple insight into prayer: God is in charge! Therefore, it's pointless praying against His will.

To recap:

1. Jesus prayed 'for' others.
2. Jesus prayed 'with' others.
3. Jesus prayed alone.
4. Jesus prayed in nature.
5. Jesus prayed regularly
6. Jesus' prayers differed.
7. Jesus' prayers were heartfelt.
8. Jesus prayed based on knowledge.
9. Jesus taught persistence in prayer.
10. Jesus knew that not all His prayers would be answered.

If we are to learn from the **prayer life of Jesus** – and there is much to learn – we need to keep this fundamental principle in mind. A disciple asked Jesus, "*Lord, teach us to pray,*" (**Luke 11:1**) and consequently he was taught the Lord's Prayer. Have you ever asked Jesus to teach you how to pray? **Romans 8:26** tells us that when we do not know "what to pray for" the Holy Spirit will assist us... "*For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*" Notice, it says nothing about "how" to pray. Maybe you should do what the disciples did and ask the Lord outright, "Lord teach me HOW to pray as I ought!"

Be rest assured, the One who is pleading your case in the throne room of grace right now (the Lord Jesus Christ) is able to respond to that request. But He doesn't only want to respond; He wants to teach you HOW to pray so that God the Father will answer every prayer.

Lord Jesus, teach us HOW to pray!