

9 - WEEK BIBLE  
STUDY ON

*Prayer*

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# Bible Study on *Prayer*

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# Session 1

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## Prayer in the Life of Jesus

1. What are some of the reasons why you, personally, pray?
2. Read **Luke 6:12-16**. Why do you think Jesus spent all night in prayer?
  - Read Proverbs 3:5-8. How do decision making, prayer and humility fit together? Why do you think Proverbs says such an approach to life is 'healing' and 'refreshing'?
  - How can the sovereignty of God help you avoid being paralysed in decision making?
3. Read **Matt 14:22-23** and **John 6:15**. This follows the feeding of the 5000. Why do you think Jesus withdrew by himself to pray?
  - When you are aware that you're being tempted in some way, how can prayer help you resist that temptation?
4. Read **Matt 21:12-13**. Jesus cleanses the temple - almost certainly the court of the Gentiles, which had become little better than a market place. What does this episode tell us about God's desire that people pray?
  - How can materialistic consumerism and legalistic religion (thinking you have to buy/sacrifice your way to God) hinder your own praying, or your confidence in prayer?
5. Read **John 17** - Jesus' great high priestly prayer.  
How could you summarise the motivation of Jesus' prayer in just a few words ? (v1-5, but especially v1)
  - How much does the glory of God feature as a motive in your personal prayers?  

How could this increase?
  - Who does Jesus pray for next (v6-9)?
  - Considering v11-17, what is Jesus specifically praying for them?
  - Who does Jesus pray for next, and what does he pray for them? (V20-23)  

Why do you think Jesus prays for these issues in particular?

How often do you pray for the church, for your Christian brothers and sisters? And what do you pray for them - and how does this compare with the issues Jesus prays for?

How can we become less 'me' focused in prayer?

6. Read **Luke 22:39-46**

What does Jesus pray for in the Garden of Gethsemane?

- Why the agony and earnestness?
- Have you experienced a time when you have struggled in prayer to come to terms with what God is asking you to do?
- How can we echo Jesus' mindset shown in v42 in our own prayer lives?

7. Read the following verses - all prayers of Jesus from the cross:

**Luke 23:34; Luke 23:46; Matt 27:46**

- What do these prayers tell us about the heart of Christ for his enemies (Luke 23:34), what Christ is experiencing and achieving on the cross (Matt 27:46), and where his hope lay (Luke 23:46)?
- Why is forgiving those who have sinned against us a necessary component of our own prayer lives?
- How do the death and resurrection of Christ give us great confidence in prayer?

## *Recap & Reflect*

- What was Jesus' main motivation in prayer?
- What different themes do we see Jesus praying for?
  - \* The Church (fellowship, protection, sanctification)
  - \* Temptation
  - \* Those who aren't yet saved
  - \* Surrender
  - \* Forgiveness
- How will looking at Jesus' prayer-life impact how you pray?

## Session 2

### The Lord's prayer

1. How are our prayers a window onto our hearts? Meaning, how does what we pray about (or don't!), and how we pray about it, tell us about the state of our hearts, about what we love, about what we fear, about our ambitions, etc.?

2. Before we look at the Lord's Prayer itself, look at how Jesus introduces it: read **Matthew 6:5-8**.

- What two things does Jesus highlight as being typical of 'hypocritical' prayer?
- Do you recognise this temptation in your own heart? How does it manifest itself?
- What foundational principles lie behind Jesus' advice that we should pray in secret and don't need to use long words?

3. Read **Matthew 6:9-13**.

What do we learn about God from the first part of this prayer (v9-10)?

- What should our attitude be to the coming of God's kingdom?
- What do we learn about our will and God's will?
  1. God is our Father;
  2. We submit our wills to his;
  3. We long for his kingdom.
- How is/has prayer been teaching you one of these?

4. Considering v11, what is our 'daily bread' and why should we pray for it?

- Do you ask your heavenly Father daily for 'daily bread'? What might a failure to do so imply?

5. Re-read v12. What does it mean to be in debt to God?

- Why do we pray, 'forgive us our debts' rather than 'help us repay our debts'?
- To pray 'forgive us our debts' is obviously quite a general approach to confessing our sins. Why might we also need to get more specific in confession?
- Why, in addition to living a confessing, repentant life, should we live a forgiving one (v12b)? What are some dangers of not doing so?

6. Look at v13. Why is it essential to recognise that we live in a spiritual battle where evil is a daily reality?

- How might asking God to not lead you into temptation, and to name some specific temptations that you can foresee coming your way each day, help you?

7. Doxology

You may be surprised to discover that the section “For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen” isn’t actually a part of the Lord’s prayer in the Bible. Indeed, there is no ground for thinking that Jesus repeated this part of the Doxology, as it is not found in the oldest manuscripts of the gospels. So where does it come from?

Some theologians and scholars assume it was added in as part of Jewish prayer culture.

So should we continue including it? In principle, there’s nothing wrong with adding a doxology, if it is in keeping with the intent of the prayer. The Bible contains many other doxologies, and it puts words on the natural and proper reaction to truly praying the Lord’s prayer - worship and surrender.<sup>1</sup>

## | Recap & Reflect |

- What are two dangerous motives in prayer, what is an obvious way to avoid them?
- What does the Lord’s prayer teach us about God? (Stick to keywords)
- As a group or alone, spend some time stopping on each verse and praying over the different points you’ve discussed. You could also use this method in your own personal prayer life throughout the week.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this question, we suggest listening to the sermon “Lord’s Prayer - For Thine is the Kingdom”, by R. Kent Hughes, which can be found on [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org).

# Session 3

## The Prayers of Paul

### **Ephesians 1:15-21**

1. What is Paul praying for the Ephesians?
2. How does a right understanding of our hope, inheritance, and the greatness of God's power help us to:
  - live a full Christian life?
  - pray as we should?

### **Colossians 1:9-14**

3. Why does Paul pray that they be filled with the knowledge of God's will?
  - o How does this help us understand what the will of God for us is?
  - o Consider one of the things you're praying for at the moment, how might how Paul prays here shape your prayers in that area?
4. In verses 11-14, how does Paul seek to encourage the Colossians in the face of the hardship they're going through?
5. Considering both of the prayers you just looked at, would you say that in these examples Paul's prayers tend to be more result/outcome orientated, or character focused? i.e. Is he praying for specific things to change/happen, or for transformation of their character, or both?
  - o What about your own prayers, for yourself and others - to what do they tend to be orientated?
6. Look at another of Paul's prayers in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-7
  - o List the things Paul is thankful for.
  - o List the things you're thankful for.
  - o Do you tend more to thankfulness or complaining? How can you cultivate an attitude of thankfulness in your prayers?

## **| Recap & Reflect |**

- o Having looked at some of Paul's prayers, what are some themes that would be helpful to integrate into your own prayer life?

- Why does Paul include the message of the Gospel in his prayers? Consider using this as a tool in your own prayer-life.
- In each prayer, Paul talks about thankfulness. Make a personal list of things/people/gospel truths that you are thankful for and would like to focus on more in prayer. You can share these in your group and then finish in prayer.



# Session 4



## Prayer in the Life of Moses

In the time Moses was up Mt Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, the people of Israel abandoned God for a golden calf.

Read the aftermath of this in **Exodus 32:7-14**.

1. In v7, how does God describe the people of Israel, and how does Moses respond in v11? What point is Moses making?

- Describe the attitude that Moses adopted in prayer. (We will see more of this in Ch 33).
- When you are faced with a situation you don't like, do you speak as bluntly and honestly to God as Moses does here? Why or why not?

2. Look at v10 - what is God suggesting to Moses? In his prayer, how does Moses respond to this suggestion?

- Look at v12 - what is Moses' concern if God carries through with the destruction of the people?

Given this, does Moses care more about his name and fame (a new 'nation of Moses', coming from him!) or God's name?

Do you display a similar concern as Moses for the honour of God's name, and how he is seen by unbelievers, in your prayers?

How might our prayers be hindered by caring more about our name/fame/status than God's?

3. As well as caring deeply for the honour of God's name and how destroying Israel would reflect on God's character, Moses also cares deeply about the people themselves, and intercedes for them. What part does praying for the salvation of others play in your prayers?

- Do we care enough about this, do you think?

4. Look at v13: what does Moses do?

- People talk about 'pleading the promises in prayer', that is, taking what God has promised he will do and putting those promises before him and pleading with him to be faithful to his word, as Moses does here. Do you do this?

Is there a situation you are facing at the moment where you could do this?

Moses' intercession stops God destroying the people (v14). However, in the next section God goes on to say that he will no longer go with the people through the desert, lest he destroy them, but instead send an angel to accompany them.

### **Read Exodus 33:1—3 and 12-16**

5. Once again, how would you describe Moses' attitude to God as he prays?

6. As well as wanting God to go with them, and not just an angel, what does Moses most want God to do for him in v13.

- Do you share Moses' passion to know God and his ways more deeply? Is that something you ask God for?

7. In response, in v14, God promises that he will still go with Israel. So, having secured the salvation of Israel from judgement, and the presence of God to accompany them, Moses makes a further request of God in v18. What is it?

- Do you ever find yourself praying something similar? Do you long to encounter God in greater measure and experience?

8. In v19-23, how does God say he will answer Moses' prayer?

9. Read **Exodus 34:5-8**. What does God do to reveal his glory to Moses?

- How does God describe himself?
- What is Moses' response to this revelation of God's character?

10. Read **John 1:14, 17-18; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3**.

- How are we even more privileged than Moses?

## **| Recap & Reflect |**

Given all the above, how should a deep desire to grow in our knowledge, experience and worship of Christ shape our lives generally and our prayer lives specifically?

# Session 5

## Solomon's Prayer

Read **2 Chronicles 6:12-42**

To begin, we're going to look at the role of posture and place:

1. Look at v12-13

What body postures does Solomon adopt in prayer, and why does body posture matter?

- Consider the common (physical) postures of worship and prayer. How do they impact how you feel / what is their role?

2. Considering v20-21 (or the prayer as a whole!), what 'place' is the main focus, and why?

- How does this change in the New Testament?  
[Consider John 2:18-22; Matt 12:5-8; Eph 2:19-22 ]
- What does the fact that Christ is the true, greater temple mean for our own prayer?  
[Consider Heb 10:19-25]
- With this in mind, what is striking about Solomon's comment in v18 about the limits of space for an infinite God?

3. Now, for the prayer itself. Look at v14-17. How does Solomon begin his prayer?

- How does this compare to the way that the prayer Jesus taught us begins? (Matt 6:9-13)

Why is starting with praise a good way to begin?

How do you tend to begin yours?

4. Look at v18-19. How would you describe Solomon's attitude?

- Why is humility, and an understanding of God's greatness and our weakness, crucial for effective prayer?

5. Considering v22-23, Solomon is praying for justice to be done. What does humanity's widespread desire for justice tell us?

- Is justice something you pray for? If not, should you?

6. Look at v24-31. What's the underlying theme?

- Why do confession and repentance matter for life in general and prayer in particular?

- How do you handle them in your own prayer?

7. Considering v32-33, for whom and what is Solomon praying in this section? What does this reveal?

- How is this fulfilled in the New Testament?
- How does this attitude help explain Jesus' cleansing of the temple? (Mark 11:15-18)

8. Considering v34-35, how does God's presence transcend the locality of the temple? Why is this significant (then and now)?

9. In 2 Chronicles 7:1-3 (also 7:11-22) we have God's response to Solomon's prayer. How does God respond?

- How do the people respond to God's response?

Have you experienced a time when God felt very real and very close?

What expectation should we have of dramatic encounters with God like this?

## *Recap & Reflect*

- What is the importance of posture and place in prayer?
- What is the temple now and who is welcome to enter it?
- What will you take with you from this study for your own prayer-life?

# Session 6

## Prayer in the life of Jehoshaphat

In this session we are going to consider the prayer of Jehoshaphat, but also the theme of leadership which runs throughout this episode in the life of God's people.

Read **2 Chronicles 20:1-30**

1. How would you describe the situation Jehoshaphat and the people face?

- In seemingly hopeless situations, what options are open to us?

Which way do you naturally tilt?

2. What marks Jehoshaphat's response?

- When you feel overwhelmed by a situation, do you have any strategies for moving from fear to faith?

3. What examples of leadership do you see in the passage as a whole?

- What's interesting about this?
- Can you think of other examples in the Bible of diversity of leadership skills or callings working together?
- What are the drawbacks of having a plurality of leaders? What are the positives and safeguards it provides?
- Why does leadership matter? (In good and bad times)
- What are essential elements of good leaders?

4. How would you describe Jehoshaphat's prayer?

- How is it structured?
- Why might this be a good structure for our own prayers in difficult situations?
- Jehoshaphat remembers the covenant. How does the new covenant in Christ form the basis for our own confidence in prayer?

5. Read **Romans 12:17-21**. How does this compare with Jehoshaphat's request in v12?

- Can we legitimately pray for God's judgment to fall on others?

Back in **2 Chronicles 20:15-17**: What are the key elements of God's encouragement to the people through Jahaziel?

- How does this foreshadow the gospel?

## **| Recap & Reflect |**

- Remember Jehoshaphat's response to the hopeless situation: facing reality —> prayer —> faith, and the structure of his prayer. Think of situations in your own life where you can attempt to practice this order. Consider using it as your basis for your prayers at the end of this session.
- What does this passage teach us about leadership? Consider areas of leadership in which you stand - in light of today's passage, are there things you need to change in how you live out your position?

# Session 7

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## The Prayer of Hezekiah

Read **2 Kings 19:8-20**

1. What do you make of Hezekiah? How would you describe him?
2. Look at 19v10-11: what does this tell us about the nature of doubt?
  - Are you aware of how others influence your faith, either by undermining it or strengthening it? Why do they have that kind of influence?
  - Who does God provide to combat the discouragement of the Rabshakeh?
  - Have you been aware of the Lord providing encouragers alongside those who sap your faith?
  - How much do you consider your responsibility to build up the faith of others? Look at Eph 4:12; Heb 10:24-25 - what do these verses teach us?
3. Read v12-13: What part of his challenge is right, and which is wrong?
  - What is a modern day version of this challenge?
  - What's an appropriate response?
4. How does Hezekiah respond? (v14-15)
5. Read v15-19: What's the structure of his prayer?
6. What's the significance of Hezekiah describing God as being enthroned above the cherubim? (v14-15)
  - Compare Heb 10:19-22. How is our experience similar?
7. How does Hezekiah see the scope of God's authority?
8. What is interesting about how Hezekiah describes God in v16? What is it an example of?
  - Why is the incarnation of Christ the ultimate fulfilment of these desires?
9. What's driving his requests in v16? What does he want God to see/hear?
10. Look at v17-18: What is Hezekiah's assessment of the situation?
  - Why is a correct assessment a (necessary) precursor for genuine prayer?

11. Look at v19: what's his request?

- How much does the glory of God's name/reputation feature in your responses to difficult situations? How can this grow?

12. What's encouraging about v20?

## | Recap & Reflect |

- In what areas are you currently struggling with doubt? How might this prayer help/teach you to deal with that?
- How can you concretely go about encouraging others and pointing them to the truth?
- How does Hezekiah see and describe God?
- What did you find encouraging in studying Hezekiah's prayer?



# Session 8

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## Prayer in the Life of Daniel

1. Read **Daniel 2:17-19**: What does this episode tell us about Daniel?
2. Read **Daniel 6:3-13**: What does this tell us about Daniel's character?
  - Why do character and integrity matter?
  - How can you take steps to grow in virtuous character?
3. What is Daniel's response to the injunction?
  - Is there anything about v10 that's noteworthy or surprising?
  - If not discussed in a previous session, why does body posture matter?
  - Why should we develop a habit of prayer before crises/emergencies hit?
  - How many set times of prayer do you have a day? Could this increase?

Read **Daniel 9:1-19**

4. In v1-2: What prompts Daniel's prayer?
5. In v3-4: what practices does Daniel employ here?
  - Which of these do you practice and why?
6. Considering v4-5, how does Daniel begin his prayer?
  - How and why should praise and confession shape our own spiritual practices?
7. In v6, what is Daniel confessing specifically?
  - How might something similar be true for us?
  - When you read something challenging in God's word, how do you typically respond?
8. In v7-8, what comparison does Daniel make between him/the people of Israel, on the one hand, and God on the other?
  - When people feel shame, what are some typical ways of dealing with it?

- Why is the gospel a better way?

9. In v11-12, what is Daniel referring to when he talks of 'the curse and oath' written in the Law of Moses?

- How is this taken up in the New Testament? (How is Christ the final answer to this?) (See Gal 3:13-14)

What is the implication of Christ becoming a curse for us for our own relationship with God? (And how does that give us confidence in prayer?)

10. In v13: What does Daniel see as their failure in the face of God's judgment?

- How should we respond when 'bad things' happen to us?

How can the truth of God's word give us insight in difficult times in our own lives?

How do you/how can we integrate God's word in our prayer life?

11. Looking at v16-17: What is Daniel's prayer?

- What's surprising about v17? (In addition to the situation of the people/Israel/Jerusalem, what does he care about? Where else have we seen this?)
- What does it mean for God's face to shine upon someone/something? (Look also at Num 6:24-26; Ps 4:6-7; 67:1-2)

V18-19: What is Daniel putting his trust in?

- When you pray, how does where you are putting your trust become evident when you pray (or don't pray!)?

## *Recap & Reflect*

- Think of situations of drama in your own life (past or present). How did you respond? What does that say about where your hope & security lie? How might you apply what you learnt in this session to your own "crisis-response"?
- Consider areas in your life where you tend to avoid God's word or not take it seriously. What are these, and what might be the right path to take?
- What did Daniel ultimately put his trust in, and why?

# Session 9

## Prayer in the Life of Nehemiah

Read **Nehemiah 1:1-2:5** and **4:1-9**

1. What do these passages tell us about the variety and richness of Nehemiah's prayer life?
2. Look at 1:1-4. Where is Nehemiah and why is that significant?
  - Have you ever experienced a change in location negatively impacting your felt relationship with God? Why might this be the case?
  - What prompts his initial prayer?
  - What is the significance of Jerusalem's wall and gates being destroyed?

How might such a condition manifest itself among God's people today?

How much does the condition of God's people both locally and at a distance feature in your prayer life? Should it?
3. Considering v4, is there a place for lamentation in the Christian life? Why/why not?
  - What does fasting add to praying?
4. How is the opening of Nehemiah's prayer in v5-6 similar to others we have looked at before?
  - What does he remind himself/us about God?
  - How does he describe Israel (see also v10)? Why does this matter?
  - What does he tell us about what he's been doing?
5. Considering v6-7, why does confession of sin in prayer matter?
  - Why does it matter that Nehemiah includes himself in this confession? What does it demonstrate?
  - Do you incorporate confession in your prayers? If yes, how do you do it?
6. Look at v8-9 and 11. What's Nehemiah praying for? What's he depending on in doing so? (See Deut 30:1-5)
  - How do you use God's promises?
7. Look at 2:4: what does this tell us about the variety of Nehemiah's prayer life?

- What does the ability to use arrow prayers tell us? [What is the theology behind them?]
- How much do you use them?
- What's the danger in this being the only form of prayer you use?

8. **Read 4:4-5:** This prayer, unlike the other ones, is a written prayer, rather than spoken in context of a speech. Do you write prayers out?

- What advantage might there be in doing so?
- What beliefs/knowledge about God is this prayer built on?
- Why is belief in a God of vengeance a necessity to break cycles of violence?
- Can we pray imprecatory prayers as Christians?

9. **Re-read 4:7-9.** What is v9 an example of?

John Wesley said, 'Pray as if everything depends on God and work as if everything depends on you.' Discuss!

## *Recap & Reflect*

- In the first questions, we saw that Nehemiah prays for God's people and their condition, although they are far away. How might one include this in personal prayers and group prayers?
- You looked at the opening of Nehemiah's prayer in v5-6. What could you praise God for as a means of starting your prayers?
- What forms of prayer do we see in Nehemiah's life?

# *Leader's Notes*

The notes are here to help you lead a group and answer tough questions. The idea isn't to read the "right" answer out after each question, but rather to give you support or the helpful nudge in guiding your discussion in the right direction. Feel free to use them as best suits your group.

# Session 1

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## Prayer in the Life of Jesus

1. What are some of the reasons why you, personally, pray?

2. Read **Luke 6:12-16**. Why do you think Jesus spent all night in prayer?

*[This was immediately preceding his choosing the 12 disciples - it was a critical moment of decision making.]*

- Read Prov 3:5-8. How do decision making, prayer and humility fit together? Why do you think Proverbs says such an approach to life is healing and refreshing?

- How can the sovereignty of God help you avoid being paralysed in decision making?

*[Ultimately, we can trust God in our decision making, and make decisions without becoming paralysed by fear of making the wrong decision, because we know that our lives and decisions are in God's hands and he is working everything for our eternal good. Anything less could leave us paralysed and unable to come to a decision.]*

3. Read **Matt 14:22-23** and **John 6:15**. This follows the feeding of the 5000. Why do you think Jesus withdrew by himself to pray?

*[The crowd want to make him king. This must have been tempting. Jesus refuses to go down that path, and prayer will strengthen that resolve.]*

- When you are aware that you're being tempted in some way, how can prayer help you resist that temptation?

4. Read **Matt 21:12-13**

Jesus cleanses the temple - almost certainly the court of the Gentiles, which had become little better than a market place. What does this episode tell us about God's desire that people pray?

*[Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7, where God talks of Gentiles coming to his house and it being a house of prayer. By occupying the one part of the temple where Gentiles could pray, the money changers and sellers of sacrifices were hindering their ability to pray. There was an expectation in Judaism that when Messiah came he would cleanse the temple of foreigners. But when Jesus came he did the opposite - he cleansed the temple for foreigners - that they might be able to pray. It is God's desire that all nations come to him in prayer.]*

- How can materialistic consumerism and legalistic religion (thinking you have to buy/sacrifice your way to God) hinder your own praying, or your confidence in prayer?

*[If our lives are consumed with stuff, or if we think the answer to our problems is getting more stuff, we won't pray, or if we do our prayers will be weak. If we think we have to earn our way to God (as those selling sacrifices in the courtyard did) then we will have little confidence in prayer: have I done enough for God to accept me and hear my prayer?]*

5. Read **John 17** - Jesus' great high priestly prayer.

How could you summarise the motivation of Jesus' prayer in just a few words? (v1-5, but especially v1)

*[The glory of God]*

- How much does the glory of God feature as a motive in your prayer?

How could this increase?

*[We are often caught up with our own glory - our desire for a reputation, or to have people think well of us, or that job that 'I really want'. And these things can occupy our prayer lives. Instead, by thinking deeply about God's glory, meditating on it, and having his greatness fill our minds and hearts (for example, by singing about it) how we see glory can be refocused. With time, God's glory can take prime position in our hearts. But also, as we examine our motives in prayer, we can consider 'why am I asking for this? Is it for a reason lesser than God's glory?' The motives may be good, but asking this can help us consider how to pray for this need with a desire that God be glorified through his answering of it.]*

- Who does Jesus pray for next (v6-9)?

*[For the disciples and the early, new born church]*

- Considering v11-17, what is Jesus specifically praying for them?

*[Perseverance and communion with the Father; unity; joy; protection from the Devil's evil devices, sanctification through the Word]*

- Who does Jesus pray for next, and what does he pray for them? (V20-23)

*[Those who will come to faith through the early church and apostles - including you and me. That they might experience unity & fellowship with Christ, the Father and the Church.]*

Why do you think Jesus prays for these issues in particular?

How often do you pray for the church, for your Christian brothers and sisters?

What do you pray for them? - and how does this compare with the issues Jesus prays for?

How can we become less 'me' focused in prayer?

## 6. Read **Luke 22:39-46**

What does Jesus pray for in the Garden of Gethsemane?

- Why the agony and earnestness?
- Have you experienced a time when you have struggled in prayer to come to terms with what God is asking you to do?
- How can we echo Jesus' mindset shown in v42 in our own prayer lives?

## 7. Read the following verses - all prayers of Jesus from the cross:

**Luke 23:34; Luke 23:46; Matt 27:46**

- What do these prayers tell us about the heart of Christ for his enemies (Luke 23:34), what Christ is experiencing and achieving on the cross (Matt 27:46), and where his hope lay (Luke 23:46)?

- Why is forgiving those who have sinned against us a necessary component of our own prayer lives?
- How do the death and resurrection of Christ give us great confidence in prayer?  
*[He was forsaken and abandoned so that we would never be; he was cast off so that we might be brought near. This is why he came, died and was raised again. Our ability to draw near to God lies at the very heart of the atonement - this is what Christ died to secure.]*

## | Recap & Reflect |

- What was Jesus' main motivation in prayer?
- What different themes do we see Jesus praying for?
  - \* The Church (fellowship, protection, sanctification)
  - \* Temptation
  - \* Those who aren't yet saved
  - \* Surrender
  - \* Forgiveness
- How will looking at Jesus' prayer-life impact how you pray?



## Session 2

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### The Lord's prayer

1. How are our prayers a window onto our hearts? Meaning, how does what we pray about (or don't!), and how we pray about it, tell us about the state of our hearts, about what we love, about what we fear, about our ambitions, etc.?

2. Before we look at the Lord's Prayer itself, look at how Jesus introduces it: **read Matthew 6:5-8.**

- What two things does Jesus highlight as being typical of 'hypocritical' prayer?  
*[v5: praying to impress people; v7: praying to impress God]*
- Do you recognise this temptation in your own heart? How does it manifest itself?
- What foundational principles lie behind Jesus' advice that we should pray in secret and don't need to use long words?  
*[God's omnipresence: God sees and hears us just as well when we are hidden away as when we are in public. The implication is that he also sees the hidden motives in our hearts - motives that influence how and why we pray. God's omniscience: our Father already knows what we need before we ask, so we don't need to 'get our words right' or try and impress him, or others, by how we pray for something.]*

#### **Read Matthew 6:9-13.**

3. What do we learn about God from the first part of this prayer (v9-10)?

*[He is our Father; he is in heaven and so sees all things; his name is to be hallowed above everything else; he has a kingdom and it can come; he has a will that is done in heaven and can be done on earth.]*

- What should our attitude be to the coming of God's kingdom?  
*[It is something we should want, desire, be praying for it to come. Prayer teaches us to long for its coming]*
- What do we learn about our will and God's will?  
*[We must submit our wills to God's. Prayer is one means by which we do this.]*
- Considering the above, which of these means most to you at the moment, and why?
  1. God is our Father;
  2. We submit our wills to his;
  3. We long for his kingdom.
- How is/has prayer been teaching you one of these?

4. Considering v11, what is our 'daily bread' and why should we pray for it?

*[Jesus almost certainly means our needs for physical sustenance. In his day it would literally have been bread. For us it means the physical, material provision that enables us to live and meet our needs. Praying for daily provision reminds us that all good gifts come from God, that we are not self-sufficient but rather depend on him for everything. Such an attitude promotes gratitude!]*

- Do you ask your heavenly Father daily for 'daily bread'? What might a failure to do so imply?

*[A failure to ask God for our daily provision implies that we don't really think such provision is dependent on him. We might, subconsciously, think of ourselves as being self-sufficient, or that God is in some way separated from the stuff of our daily lives.]*

#### 5. Re-read v12. What does it mean to be in debt to God?

*[As God's creatures we owe him the duty of our whole hearted, loving worship. We fail to give this to him - both by things we don't do that we should do, and things we do do that we shouldn't. Like a financial debtor who fails to pay what we owe, or takes what he should not, we are in debt to God.]*

- Why do we pray, 'forgive us our debts' rather than 'help us repay our debts'?

*[The first acknowledges nothing we can do can repay God the debt of our sins. It recognises that we need the grace and mercy that can only be found in Christ who paid our debt for us. The second is a religion of works - it thinks it can do what can never be done. And because it is itself a further outworking of our human pride that says we can save ourselves, it puts us even further into debt!]*

- To pray 'forgive us our debts' is obviously quite a general approach to confessing our sins. Why might we also need to get more specific in confession?

*[We can pray generally about our sins without ever really facing them, or repenting of them specifically. We must pray generally and adopt a confessing, repentant lifestyle, but we must also do the hard work of facing up to our specific sins and seek to turn from them.]*

- Why, in addition to living a confessing, repentant life, should we live a forgiving one (v12b)? What are some dangers of not doing so?

*[Jesus links our forgiveness with our willingness to forgive others (see also v14-15). We cannot hope to be forgiven by God if we are refusing to forgive others. Also, unforgiveness robs us of the life of joy God would have us live. For our own good, we must forgive and not allow bitterness to take root.]*

#### 6. Look at v13. Why is it essential to recognise that we live in a spiritual battle where evil is a daily reality?

*[People who live in a holiday resort and those who live on a battlefield have very different expectations and lifestyles. The world is a spiritual battlefield, if we live thinking it is a holiday resort we will be in grave danger!]*

- How might asking God to not lead you into temptation, and to name some specific temptations that you can foresee coming your way each day, help you?

#### 7. Doxology

You may be surprised to discover that the section "For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen" isn't actually a part of the Lord's prayer in the Bible. Indeed, there is no ground for thinking that Jesus repeated this part of the Doxology, as it is not found in the oldest manuscripts of the gospels. So where does it come from?

Some theologians and scholars assume it was added in as part of Jewish prayer culture.

So should we continue including it? In principle, there's nothing wrong with adding a doxology, if it is in keeping with the intent of the prayer. The Bible contains many other doxologies, and it puts words on the natural and proper reaction to truly praying the Lord's prayer - worship and surrender.

## | Recap & Reflect |

- What are two dangerous motives in prayer, what is an obvious way to avoid them?  
[impressing others, impressing God - meeting God "in the secret place"]
- What does the Lord's prayer teach us about God? (Stick to keywords)
- As a group or alone, spend some time stopping on each verse and praying over the different points you've discussed. You could also use this method in your own personal prayer life throughout the week.

# Session 3

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## The Prayers of Paul

### Ephesians 1:15-21

1. What is Paul praying for the Ephesians?
2. How does a right understanding of our hope, inheritance, and the greatness of God's power help us to:
  - live a full Christian life?
  - pray as we should?

### Colossians 1:9-14

3. Why does Paul pray that they be filled with the knowledge of God's will?  
[v. 10]
  - o How does this help us understand what the will of God for us is?  
*[He prays this so that they may walk worthy of their calling as Christians, living lives pleasing to God, bearing fruit in good works, growing in their knowledge of God. This is God's will for all of us who are Christians.]*
  - o Consider one of the things you're praying for at the moment, how might how Paul prays here shape your prayers in that area?
4. In verses 11-14, how does Paul seek to encourage the Colossians in the face of the hardship they're going through?  
*[He reminds them of the Gospel! He includes this in his prayer, knowing that this is what will give them hope and strength: the promised deliverance, inheritance, redemption, and forgiveness of sins.]*
5. Considering both of the prayers you just looked at, would you say that in these examples Paul's prayers tend to be more result/outcome orientated, or character focused? i.e. Is he praying for specific things to change/happen, or for transformation of their character, or both?
  - o What about your own prayers, for yourself and others - to what do they tend to be orientated?
6. Look at another of Paul's prayers in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-7
  - o List the things Paul is thankful for.
  - o List the things you're thankful for.
  - o Do you tend more to thankfulness or complaining? How can you cultivate an attitude of thankfulness in your prayers?

## | Recap & Reflect |

- Having looked at some of Paul's prayers, what are some themes that would be helpful to integrate into your own prayer life?
- Why does Paul include the message of the Gospel in his prayers? Consider using this as a tool in your own prayer-life.
- In each prayer, Paul talks about his thankfulness. Make a personal list of things/people/gospel truths that you are thankful for and would like to focus on more in prayer. You can share these in your group and then finish in prayer.

## Session 4

### Prayer in the Life of Moses

In the time Moses was up Mt Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, the people of Israel abandoned God for a golden calf.

Read the aftermath of this in **Exodus 32:7-14**

1. In v7, how does God describe the people of Israel, and how does Moses respond in v11? What point is Moses making?

*[God describes them as Moses' people - who Moses rescued. It is as if God is distancing himself from them. In response Moses calls them God's people and reminds God that it was he, the Lord, who had rescued them. He is reminding God of his responsibility to his people.]*

- Describe the attitude that Moses adopted in prayer. (We will see more of this in Ch 33).  
*[He is bold. To describe him as confrontational or getting in God's face or challenging God would not be out of place.]*
- When you are faced with a situation you don't like, do you speak as bluntly and honestly to God as Moses does here? Why or why not?

2. Look at v10 - what is God suggesting to Moses? In his prayer, how does Moses respond to this suggestion?

*[God's suggestion is that he builds a new nation out of Moses; Moses will become the new 'Abraham.' Moses responds by imploring God to do otherwise; he reminds God of his promises to Abraham and the other patriarchs.]*

- Look at v12 - what is Moses' concern if God carries through with the destruction of the people?  
*[Moses is concerned for how this will reflect on God's character and reputation, what pagans will say about God if he does this.]*

Given this, does Moses care more about his name and fame (a new 'nation of Moses', coming from him!) or God's name?

Do you display a similar concern as Moses for the honour of God's name, and how he is seen by unbelievers, in your prayers?

How might our prayers be hindered by caring more about our name/fame/status than God's?

3. As well as caring deeply for the honour of God's name and how destroying Israel would reflect on God's character, Moses also cares deeply about the people themselves, and intercedes for them. What part does praying for the salvation of others play in your prayers?

- Do we care enough about this, do you think?

4. Look at v13: what does Moses do?

*[He pleads God's previous promises.]*

- People talk about 'pleading the promises in prayer', that is, taking what God has promised he will do and putting those promises before him and pleading with him to be faithful to his word, as Moses does here. Do you do this?

Is there a situation you are facing at the moment where you could do this?

Moses' intercession stops God destroying the people (v14). However, in the next section God goes on to say that he will no longer go with the people through the desert, lest he destroy them, but instead send an angel to accompany them.

Read **Exodus 33:1—3** and **12-16**

5. Once again, how would you describe Moses' attitude to God as he prays?

6. As well as wanting God to go with them, and not just an angel, what does Moses most want God to do for him in v13.

*[Moses wants to know God and his ways, that he might live in his favour.]*

- Do you share Moses' passion to know God and his ways more deeply? Is that something you ask God for?

7. In response, in v14, God promises that he will still go with Israel. So, having secured the salvation of Israel from judgement, and the presence of God to accompany them, Moses makes a further request of God in v18. What is it?

*[He wants to see God's glory.]*

- Do you ever find yourself praying something similar? Do you long to encounter God in greater measure and experience?

8. In v19-23, how does God say he will answer Moses' prayer?

9. Read Exodus 34:5-8. What does God do to reveal his glory to Moses?

*[He proclaims his Name before him. His name expresses his character, and his character displays his glory.]*

- How does God describe himself?
- What is Moses' response to this revelation of God's character?

10. Read **John 1:14, 17-18; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3.**

How are we even more privileged than Moses?

*[We get to 'see' the glory of God in Christ. He is the greatest manifestation of God's glory, the full expression of his character in human form.]*

## | Recap & Reflect |

Given all the above, how should a deep desire to grow in our knowledge, experience and worship of Christ shape our lives generally and our prayer lives specifically?



# Session 5

## Solomon's Prayer

Read **2 Chronicles 6:12-42**

To begin, we're going to look at the role of posture and place:

1. Look at v12-13

What body postures does Solomon adopt in prayer, and why does body posture matter?

*[We are not brains on sticks. We are embodied beings. What we do with our bodies matters. Physical posture generally reveals what the person is truly thinking or feeling deep down. Solomon's physical posture reveals his spiritual posture - he is humbling himself before God.]*

*Also, what we do repeatedly with our bodies grows habits and thus, over time, influences the way we think and respond and changes the person we are.]*

- Consider the common (physical) postures of worship and prayer. How do they impact how you feel / what is their role?

*[Consider sitting, standing, kneeling, raising your hands, putting your hands together, leaving your eyes open or closing them, clapping, even dancing.]*

2. Considering v20-21 (or the prayer as a whole!), what 'place' is the main focus, and why?

*[The temple becomes the focal point, the place where heaven and earth meet/intersect.]*

- How does this change in the New Testament?

*[Consider John 2:18-22; Matt 12:5-8; Eph 2:19-22 ]*

*[Christ replaces the temple, the One greater than the temple. He is the One where heaven and earth meet; and in him we are being built as a dwelling place of God.]*

- What does the fact that Christ is the true, greater temple mean for our own prayer?  
*[Consider Heb 10:19-25]*

- With this in mind, what is striking about Solomon's comment in v18 about the limits of space for an infinite God?

*[Nothing can contain God and yet, in the incarnation, the Son of God takes on a human body: God narrows himself down to become one like us.]*

3. Now, for the prayer itself. Look at v14-17. How does Solomon begin his prayer?

*[v14-15 Worshipping God for his character - steadfast love, faithfulness, power]*

- How does this compare to the way that the prayer Jesus taught us begins? (Matt 6:9-13)

Why is starting with praise a good way to begin?

How do you tend to begin yours?

4. Look at v18-19. How would you describe Solomon's attitude?

*[Solomon is in awe of God's majesty and infinity. This humbles him.]*

- Why is humility, and an understanding of God's greatness and our weakness, crucial for effective prayer?

5. Considering v22-23, Solomon is praying for justice to be done. What does humanity's widespread desire for justice tell us?

*[We all want justice to be done - for the guilty to be punished. Therefore, we know there are such things as moral absolutes, and we want there to be a righting of wrongs. This desire only makes sense in a cosmos where there is a Supreme Judge.]*

- Is justice something you pray for? If not, should you?

6. Look at v24-31. What's the underlying theme?

- Why do confession and repentance matter for life in general and prayer in particular?
- How do you handle them in your own prayer?

7. Considering v32-33, for whom and what is Solomon praying in this section? What does this reveal?

*[An openness to and a desire that all nations might experience the mercy of the God of Israel.]*

- How is this fulfilled in the New Testament?  
*[The gospel goes to the Gentiles who become full members of God's people. Coming to the temple was 'come and see' mission; the NT mission is 'go and tell'. Compare Romans 10:11-13]*
- How does this attitude help explain Jesus' cleansing of the temple? (Mark 11:15-18)  
*[Jesus cleansed the court of the Gentiles; at least in part this was clear hindrances to Gentile access to God. He wants the nations to come.]*

8. Considering v34-35, how does God's presence transcend the locality of the temple? Why is this significant (then and now)?

*[God hears the prayers of his people even when not prayed in the temple. He is not merely a territorial God - restricted to either geographic Israel or the 'Christian West'. He is God of the whole earth, and all can and must cry out to him wherever they are.]*

9. In **2 Chron 7:1-3** (also 7:11-22) we have God's response to Solomon's prayer. How does God respond?

- How do the people respond to God's response?

Have you experienced a time when God felt very real and very close?

What expectation should we have of dramatic encounters with God like this?

## **I Recap & Reflect**

- What is the importance of posture and place in prayer?

- What is the temple now and who is welcome to enter it?
- What will you take with you from this study for your own prayer-life?

# Session 6

## Prayer in the life of Jehoshaphat

In this session we are going to consider the prayer of Jehoshaphat, but also the theme of leadership which runs throughout this episode in the life of God's people.

Read **2 Chron 20:1-30**

1. How would you describe the situation Jehoshaphat and the people face?

*[humanly hopeless]*

- In seemingly hopeless situations, what options are open to us?  
*[Head in the sand/denial, anxiety/fear, despair, resignation/give up, fight/nothing to lose mentality, trust]*

Which way do you naturally tilt?

2. What marks Jehoshaphat's response?

*[Reality - he sees it for being as bad as it is, and puts it to God in that way. His fear is clear, but closely followed by prayer. His fear does not descend into despair but rises in faith.]*

- When you feel overwhelmed by a situation, do you have any strategies for moving from fear to faith?

3. What examples of leadership do you see in the passage as a whole?

*[v3-4 Jehoshaphat gathers the people to prayer; v14-15 Jahaziel - a Levite - is open to the Spirit, to be his mouthpiece, and as a result encourages the people; v18 Jehoshaphat sets the example of response and worship; v19 the Levites worship; v20 Jehoshaphat urges faith; v21 he also seems to take advice - v21; he organises the people.]*

- What's interesting about this?  
*[It's not just one person;- there's a plurality of leaders; it's dynamic - open to the Spirit and to each other; the king sets the tone and is the example in faith and worship.]*
- Can you think of other examples in the Bible of diversity of leadership skills or callings working together?  
*[The Trinity - unity in diversity; Moses and the 70 elders; Prophet/priest/king in Israel; David and his counsellors; Apostles - plural, not just one; apostles and deacons; Paul and Barnabas; Paul and his team; plurality of elders in local churches.]*
- What are the drawbacks of having a plurality of leaders? What are the positives and safeguards it provides?
- Why does leadership matter? (In good and bad times)
- What are essential elements of good leaders?  
*[Character/virtue; humility/service; vision; care; faith/belief]*

#### 4. How would you describe Jehoshaphat's prayer?

- How is it structured?

*[He first reminds God of his covenant relationship with Israel: he uses his covenant name and calls him 'God of our fathers';*

*He establishes God's greatness and omnipotence;*

*He reminds God of their history and the gift of the land - of his previous actions;*

*He reminds God of the promises concerning the temple - prayer of Solomon;*

*He appeals to justice - v10-11;*

*He makes it clear where their trust lies - v12]*

- Why might this be a good structure for our own prayers in difficult situations?
- Jehoshaphat remembers the covenant, how does the new covenant in Christ form the basis for our own confidence in prayer?

#### 5. Read **Romans 12:17-21**. How does this compare with Jehoshaphat's request in v12?

*[Jehoshaphat is asking God to exercise judgement and vengeance against the enemies. Paul says rather than take our own vengeance we should leave it to God. It is only knowing that God is a God of vengeance that can break the cycle of violence or 'getting our own back'.]*

- Can we legitimately pray for God's judgment to fall on others?

*[We can certainly pray for God's justice to be done. As we do, we must be open to learning what is driving our desire for justice - is it love for God, justice, truth, others and the one who has hurt us, or is it an undue love for our reputation, or comfort, or political position?]*

Back in **2 Chronicles 20:15-17**: What are the key elements of God's encouragement to the people through Jahaziel?

*[Fear not; this is God's battle; act; stand firm; see God's salvation.]*

- How does this foreshadow the gospel?

*[We do not save ourselves, and never can, but God can and does. Our response, like here, is trust and worship.]*

## **| Recap & Reflect |**

- Remember Jehoshaphat's response to the hopeless situation: facing reality —> prayer —> faith, and the structure of his prayer. Think of situations in your own life where you can attempt to practice this order. Consider using it as your basis for your prayers at the end of this session.
- What does this passage teach us about leadership? Consider areas of leadership in which you stand - in light of today's passage, are there things you need to change in how you live out your position?

# Session 7

## The Prayer of Hezekiah

Read **2 Kings 19:8-20**

1. What do you make of Hezekiah? How would you describe him?

2. Look at 19v10-11: what does this tell us about the nature of doubt?

*[It's an undermining of trust; others can be a source of it; the confusing of issues can increase doubt - the fact that other lands have fallen does not mean God cannot be trusted, or - taking a contemporary example, the fact that religious leaders sin, for example, does not mean the gospel is false.]*

- Are you aware of how others influence your faith, either by undermining it or strengthening it? Why do they have that kind of influence?
- Who does God provide to combat the discouragement of the Rabshakeh?  
*[The prophet Isaiah, speaking truth and encouragement]*
- Have you been aware of the Lord providing encouragers alongside those who sap your faith?
- How much do you consider your responsibility to build up the faith of others? Look at Eph 4:12; Heb 10:24-25 - what do these verses teach us?  
*[We are responsible for encouraging and building up others in the faith, both in church, and in friendships]*

3. Read v12-13: What part of his challenge is right, and which is wrong?

*[The gods of the other nations have indeed failed to protect 'their' people; but that does not mean the God of Israel is like those gods or will fail to protect His people.]*

- What is a modern day version of this challenge?  
*[The Rabshakeh is saying that Israel's God is just one more god who will also fall to the king of Assyria. Modern day atheists, like Richard Dawkins, argue that the Christian God is just one more God - the last remaining one from the pantheon of gods people have worshipped over the years, and he too must fall to the god of science/reason.]*
- What's an appropriate response?

4. How does Hezekiah respond? (v14-15)

5. Read v15-19: What's the structure of his prayer?

*[v15 Worship - declaring who God is;*

*V16 Petition for God to pay attention - to listen and to see;*

*V17-18 Facing reality - the menace is real;*

*V19 - petition for salvation to prove who is the true God]*

6. What's the significance of Hezekiah describing God as being enthroned above the cherubim? (V14-15)

*[Hezekiah is in the temple; in the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant, with the Cherubim standing over it; it is God's throne room; and this God is the real & ultimate king, not the king of Assyria; and his footstool - the ark - is the mercy seat - the place where God's people can find mercy.]*

- Compare Heb 10:19-22. How is our experience similar?

7. How does Hezekiah see the scope of God's authority?

*[Though he calls him the God of Israel, he knows he alone is God over all and creator of all. He is not simply a territorial god.]*

8. What is interesting about how Hezekiah describes God v16? What is it an example of?

*[It is an example of anthropomorphism. He talks as if God had body parts. But God is spirit and has no body in this sense. It's a way of us conceptualising God's ability and willingness to see our need and hear our prayer - and to know he does so.]*

- Why is the incarnation of Christ the ultimate fulfilment of these desires?

*[God really does take on a human body and thus has totally identified himself with us.]*

9. What's driving his requests in v16? What does he want God to see/hear?

*[The enemy's mocking of God. It is clear that his major concern is God's honour.]*

10. Look at v17-18: What is Hezekiah's assessment of the situation?

- Why is a correct assessment a (necessary) precursor for genuine prayer?

11. Look at v19: what's his request?

*[Salvation and the honouring of God]*

- How much does the glory of God's name/reputation feature in your responses to difficult situations? How can this grow?

12. What's encouraging about v20?

## **| Recap & Reflect |**

- In what areas are you currently struggling with doubt? How might this prayer help/teach you to deal with that?
- How can you concretely go about encouraging others and pointing them to the truth?
- How does Hezekiah see and describe God?
- What did you find encouraging in studying Hezekiah's prayer?

# Session 8

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## Prayer in the Life of Daniel

1. Read **Daniel 2:17-19**: What does this episode tell us about Daniel?

*[He has friends, friends he can pray with; he understands the sovereignty of God; he understands he needs mercy - not entitlement; he responds with thanksgiving]*

2. Read **Daniel 6:3-13**: What does this tell us about Daniel's character?

*[They cannot lay anything on him. He is exemplary even in the eyes of unbelievers.]*

- Why do character and integrity matter?
- How can you take steps to grow in virtuous character?

3. What is Daniel's response to the injunction?

- Is there anything about v10 that's noteworthy or surprising?  
*[Three times a day - this is his habit; he kneels; he gives thanks]*
- If not discussed in a previous session, why does body posture matter?
- Why should we develop a habit of prayer before crises/emergencies hit?
- How many set times of prayer do you have a day? Could this increase?

Read **Daniel 9:1-19**

4. In v1-2: What prompts Daniel's prayer?

*[His understanding of Jeremiah's prophecy]*

5. In v3-4: what practices does Daniel employ here?

- Which of these do you practice and why?

6. Considering v4-5, how does Daniel begin his prayer?

*[Praise and confession]*

- How and why should praise and confession shape our own spiritual practices?

7. In v6, what is Daniel confessing specifically?

*[Failing to listen and take seriously the word of the Lord through the prophets]*

- How might something similar be true for us?

*[This same failure to listen and take God's word seriously may express itself in different ways in our lives and culture, be it for example through how we interpret the Bible or*



consider as truth, or the importance or lack thereof that we put on good & grounded teaching.]

- When you read something challenging in God's word, how do you typically respond?

8. In v7-8, what comparison does Daniel make between him/the people of Israel on the one hand, and God on the other?

*[To them belongs shame and sin, but to God belongs righteousness.]*

- When people feel shame, what are some typical ways of dealing with it?  
*[People may bury it; well-meaning friends may say there is nothing to be ashamed of; people may try and numb it - though over-eating, drinking etc; or they may even flaunt it and try and make shame something to be proud of- as in Pride parades.]*
- Why is the gospel a better way?

9. In v11-12, what is Daniel referring to when he talks of 'the curse and oath' written in the Law of Moses?

*[Written into the Law were curses: this is what will happen if you fail to obey the law. They culminated in exile and the expulsion of the people from the land, see Deut 28:15ff.]*

- How is this taken up in the NT? (How is Christ the final answer to this?) (See Gal 3:13-14)  
*[Christ became a curse for us - he is exiled/forsaken/cast out by the Father in our place.]*

What is the implication of Christ becoming a curse for us in our own relationship with God? (And how does that give us confidence in prayer?)

10. In v13: What does Daniel see as their failure in the face of God's judgment?

*[They have not repented or turned to God in prayer - they have not learnt from the judgment.]*

- How should we respond when 'bad things' happen to us?  
*['Bad things' are not God's judgement on us - Christ has taken that; but they may be loving discipline, or they may be pruning us, or teaching us. In such times we should be open to what God is trying to teach us and examine ourselves, rather than simply resent them.]*

How can the truth of God's word give us insight in difficult times in our own lives?  
*[This is not just about the situation itself but rather about our wrong desires/idols in our heart or wrong motivations or pride - and God's word can identify these.]*

How do you/how can we integrate God's word in our prayer life?  
*[Meditating on God's word and allowing the Spirit to speak to us from it, and then responding in prayer/using what he is showing us in prayer; taking a specific scripture and praying it back to God.]*

11. Looking at v16-17: What is Daniel's prayer?

- What's surprising about v17? (In addition to the situation of the people/Israel/Jerusalem, what does he care about? Where else have we seen this?)

*[God's name; Moses showed a similar concern]*

- What does it mean for God's face to shine upon someone/something? (Look also at Num 6:24-26; Ps 4:6-7; 67:1-2)  
*[To receive the "smile" of God's grace, i.e that His goodness, grace and benevolence is turned towards someone and shone upon them. It is a sign of his approval and therefore of the person's acceptance.]*

12. V18-19: What is Daniel putting his trust in?

- When you pray, how does where you are putting your trust become evident when you pray (or don't pray!)?

## **| Recap & Reflect |**

- Think of situations of drama in your own life (past or present). How did you respond? What does that say about where your hope & security lie? How might you apply what you learnt in this session to your own "crisis-response"?
- Consider areas in your life where you tend to avoid God's word or not take it seriously. What are these, and what might be the right path to take?
- What did Daniel ultimately put his trust in, and why?

# Session 9

## Prayer in the Life of Nehemiah

Read **Nehemiah 1:1-2:5** and **4:1-9**

1. What do these passages tell us about the variety and richness of Nehemiah's prayer life?

2. Look at 1:1-4. Where is Nehemiah and why is that significant?

*[He is in Susa, the winter capital of the Medo-persian empire. He is far away from Jerusalem. Yet, he can call out to God in prayer there.]*

- Have you ever experienced a change in location negatively impacting your felt relationship with God? Why might this be the case?

*[When we move home/church we can sometimes discover that much of our relationship with God was built around other people or circumstances. This is not necessarily wrong, but it can mean moving can be confusing - 'has God abandoned me right when I needed him?!' Such times are opportunities to delve deeper in our relationship to God, discovering Him in new ways.]*

- What prompts his initial prayer?

- What is the significance of Jerusalem's wall and gates being destroyed?

*[This left the city unprotected and at risk.]*

How might such a condition manifest itself among God's people today? What leaves a church unprotected or at risk nowadays?

*[Unbiblical teaching? Self-serving or abusive leadership? Lack of prayerfulness? A failure of members to ground themselves in God's word and see life, the world, and everything the way he does?]*

How much does the condition of God's people both locally and at a distance feature in your prayer life? Should it?

3. Considering v4, is there a place for lamentation in the Christian life? Why/why not?

- What does fasting add to praying?

*[In the words of John Piper, fasting says, 'this much do I need you, O God.' It gives us more time to pray; it shows us how bound to physical things, like food, we are, and how much more we should hunger for God; it may reveal sinful habits of behaviour that otherwise we might not notice - such as irritability or greed. It adds earnestness to our praying.]*

4. How is the opening of Nehemiah's prayer in v5-6 similar to others we have looked at before?

*[He begins -as many other prayers in the Bible do - by praising God for his greatness and his covenant promises]*

- What does he remind himself/us about God?

- How does he describe Israel (see also v10)? Why does this matter?

*[They are the servants of God; this means God is their master, their Lord, their king - who is responsible for their welfare.]*

- What v6 tell us about how he's responded to the situation?  
*[He has been praying day and night.]*

5. Considering v6-7, why does confession of sin in prayer matter?

*[It puts us in the right place and reminds us of our status (see 1 John 1:9), and serves to humble us (see James 4:6).]*

- Why does it matter that Nehemiah includes himself in this confession? What does it demonstrate?
- Do you incorporate confession in your prayers? If yes, how do you do it?  
*[There are a number of ways of doing this: you can pray more general prayers of confession or be specific over those specific sins you are confessing. We commit sins one by one, so we do well to confess them one by one. We can also use set prayers of confession from liturgical traditions, or use God's word and his law - for example the 10 commandments, or the commands to love God and neighbour to highlight where we have failed.]*

6. Look at v8-9 and 11. What's Nehemiah praying for? What's he depending on in doing so? (See Deut 30:1-5)

*[He's praying for God to be merciful and gracious to him personally as he goes to the king - that God would give him success and favour with the king, and that he would be merciful to his people more generally. He's also praying that God would remember his promise made to Moses in the Deuteronomy 30 passage. And that's what he's depending on - that if God's people repent and call out to him, even though they be scattered abroad, God has said he will hear their prayer. And Nehemiah is saying, God please do that now, and keep your promise to hear and act.]*

- How do you use God's promises?

7. Look at 2:4: what does this tell us about the variety of Nehemiah's prayer life?

*[He fires up an arrow prayer. His prayer life invades his day in a good way!]*

- What does the ability to use arrow prayers tell us? [What is the theology behind them?]  
*[You have 24hr access to God and he is omnipresent - there is nowhere and no time you cannot pray.]*
- How much do you use them?
- What's the danger in this being the only form of prayer you use?

8. Read **4:4-5**: This prayer, unlike the other ones, is a written prayer, rather than spoken in context of a speech. Do you write prayers out?

- What advantage might there be in doing so?
- What beliefs/knowledge about God is this prayer built on?  
*[It's built on the fact that God hears prayer - even when written out! It's built on the fact that God is a God of justice, who punishes the wicked, that he is a defender of his people who may have no other*

*defence - so a defender of the weak; and it's built on the fact that God is a God of anger/wrath - who does indeed punish the guilty.]*

Why is belief in a God of vengeance a necessity to break cycles of violence?

*[see Romans 12:19 - we can leave God to judge and avenge, and trust that He will be Just.*

*This means we needn't take it into our own hand, and can pursue our call to love our enemies.]*

Can we pray imprecatory prayers as Christians?

*[We can pray anything! However, that does not mean God responds to every prayer in the way we want! We are called to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. At the cross Christ prayed for the forgiveness of those crucifying him. We should seek to grow in Christ-likeness and love]*

9. Read **4:7-9**. What is v9 an example of?

*[They pray but they also act; they do not pray and then sit back; but neither do they only work in their own strength.]*

John Wesley said, 'pray as if everything depends on God and work as if everything depends on you.' Discuss!

## **| Recap & Reflect |**

- o In the first questions, we saw that Nehemiah prays for God's people and their condition, although they are far away. How might one include this in personal prayers and group prayers?
- o You looked at the opening of Nehemiah's prayer in v5-6. What could you praise God for as a means of starting your prayers?
- o What forms of prayer do we see in Nehemiah's life?
  - \* *[Prayer for Christian brothers and sisters*
  - \* *Confession*
  - \* *Prayer day and night*
  - \* *Prayer and fasting*
  - \* *"Arrow" prayers / SOS prayers*
  - \* *Written prayers*
  - \* *Prayer and action ]*