

Why Pray?

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[0 : 00] I'm pleased to have a seat and let's in that spirit of surrender, let's come before God, as we'll see in a short while, our Heavenly Father, and let's pray together as we come to His Word.

Oh, our gracious, perfect, and loving Heavenly Father, we come before you this evening and we recognize and we declare that you are in heaven and we are on earth.

And so as we turn to your Word now, Father, would you help us to see something more of your greatness? Oh, Lord, would we be struck just by how awesome you are?

And we ask these things, Lord, in the precious name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, it's great to be together this evening. I hope you are well.

My name is Graham. It's a joy to welcome you as well to church. And you join us in an exciting time. We're continuing on in the series that we started last week, looking at this series subject of why we do the things that we do in church.

[1 : 12] That was a mouthful. Try that one again. Why we do the things that we do in church. And as I reflected on it this week, it struck me as a series that requires us to kind of get reconnected with our inner two-year-old.

Let me explain what I mean by that. Our little girl is Chloe. She's one and a half just now. And her favorite word at the minute is no. So you'll ask her, Chloe, are you going to finish your dinner tonight?

No. You Chloe coming for a bath? No. Chloe, do you want to read the story? No. No. Chloe, are you saying no just because you like saying no? No. And you know what the next word that is coming in six months' time, don't you?

It's the word why. Why, Daddy? Why? Why? Now, I looked this up on the internet. Don't ask me why I looked it up on the internet. But I looked up whattoexpect.com.

Why do toddlers say why? This is what it said. Toddlers are innately and unendingly curious about the world. And they want to better understand the things that they see, the things that they hear, and the things that they do.

[2 : 22] Well, here we are this evening getting in touch with our inner two-year-old. And we're asking the why question. And we're asking the why question because we want to better understand the things that we do as a church.

And so here we are asking the why question of prayer tonight. And I guess we're thinking about it corporately, in a corporate dimension. That is, why as a church body, as a community of believers here, why do we pray?

Because on paper, isn't it, it's such a big part of what we're about as a church community. It's plastered all over our website, if you care to look. It's fundamental to our mission statement.

It's even plastered on the wall, if you look at it there, our vision diagram, if you like, transformation. We'll commit ourselves to prayer, to words, and to fellowship.

So we'll devote ourselves to seeking God in prayer. We pray at our Sunday gatherings. We have a prayer meeting as a church once a month.

[3 : 25] We pray in our small groups. We pray as we meet up to read the Bible together one-on-one. As a church, on paper, we're about prayer.

But I wonder if you're like me, and as you reflect on your commitment to prayer, as you reflect on the fact that prayer is meant to be fundamental to our life as a church, and as you reflect on the question, rather, why do we do prayer?

And so often I find that my attitude to prayer is a bit like doing the recycling. So every morning I leave the house. There's normally an empty toilet roll.

There's an empty carton of juice sitting at the door. And my job really is just to take it out before I go and to put it in the recycling. And Edinburgh Council have got these beautiful red recycling bins. And every morning in the bit of recycling goes into a recycling box. And I'm constantly told it's a good thing. Constantly told it's a good thing. I'm flyer'd all the time by Edinburgh Council telling me that it's a good thing.

[4 : 29] And I love the irony that I take that flyer and I put it straight into recycling. I'm told it's a good thing. I do it because I think it's a good thing. But as I found myself asking myself the other day, as I took out yet another empty yogurt carton, why am I doing this again?

It's become so routine. Why am I doing this again? It's kind of like our prayer lives. It's not individually but also corporately as a church. Scripture is, well we're told it's a good thing. Scripture is full of exhortations. God summoning his people to seek him in prayer, to understand who they are, to understand who he is and to seek him in prayer. Scripture tells us it's a good thing. And so we try our best to carry it out, to devote ourselves to prayer. But how often as we go through the motions, do we neglect to stop and to reflect on why we're doing the thing that we're doing? Well here we are in our short time this evening and looking at this subject of prayer. And really I want us to focus on the why question. Why do we pray? And this evening I want to lead us towards and suggest one answer to that question that has two elements to it.

[5 : 43] Why do we give ourselves to prayer? Well we give ourselves to prayer firstly because of who God is. And secondly, why do we give ourselves to prayer? We give ourselves to prayer because of who we are.

And I guess my hope is we look at these things tonight in this short time. That we wouldn't leave here feeling blue. I don't know how many sermons I've heard in prayer that just make me feel awful that I'm not praying.

And I come away thinking, right, that's it. I'm going to do better. I'm getting up at the alarms going on at five o'clock tomorrow morning and I'm going to get up and I'm going to do it and it's going to be three hours in prayer before I go to work in the morning. And then as I hit that alarm snooze for the sixth time, I think to myself, I'm hopeless at this.

And I leave the day and I start the day feeling dejected. Dejected. Well, if that's our feeling as we leave this evening, then I think we've failed and I've failed. Where I want us to be this evening is to spur us on to pray as a church as we think about the grandeur of the God who we come before. And that our heart's cry would be, man, I get to pray. And very closely followed by that, boy, do I need to pray.

[6 : 59] So can I invite you to turn to Matthew chapter 6 and to verse 5? This is where we're going to just camp out this evening just for our short time together.

And Matthew chapter 6, verse 5, what is widely known the world over as the Lord's Prayer? Such familiar words. And we all know the danger of being familiar with something, don't we? The danger of being familiar with something is that so often that turns into neglect. Now, I know this every day of my life because my walk to work in the morning to the office is from that side of Princess Street right up here to the office.

And every morning, I walk past Princess Street. I walk past the mound. I walk past the castle. I walk past St. Giles Cathedral. I walk past the meadows. I walk through the university to get to Bruntsfield. I don't even take it in. And it takes, all it takes is one visitor from outside Edinburgh to come to our flat to hang out with us for a bit. And they say, man, you live here? You get to walk past the castle every day?

[8 : 05] You get to walk through the meadows every day? Boy, I want to live here. And you're thinking to yourself, I haven't even noticed that I walk past those things every day.

It was not like that with the Lord's Prayer. Such familiar words. But I guess my plea as we come to it this evening is that this would become so fresh and that we would put neglect aside, familiarity aside.

We would come to it afresh because there's so much gold to dig for in these verses and so much help for us as we seek to understand that question of why do we pray?

So all that aside, that should have allowed you time to get to Matthew 5, that little story. Here we are, Matthew chapter 6 rather. Jesus teaching his disciples to pray. Now this isn't a sporadic teaching of Jesus.

It's part of a sermon. It's part of a sermon that we call the Sermon on the Mount. And you'll see it in chapter 5 and verse 1 if you flick back a page. Jesus' disciples have come to him on the mountain. [9:08] They've come to him. And Jesus is teaching them what a kingdom life looks like. What life in his kingdom means. And what it means to be a follower of this king.

And as you read it through, you see Jesus touch on these different aspects of life. And he's telling them not to do certain things.

And he's telling them to do certain things. And what he does is he contrasts the way that the world behaves and acts against how people in his kingdom are to behave and act. And what he sees, you read it through, is how polar opposites the way his kingdom followers are to live compared to the world.

How they are to think. How they are to value things. How they are to long after things. Their desires. They're to be completely different to what the world goes after. To follow this king requires you to have a God-centered frame of mind.

Not a man-centered one. And so to solidify his teaching and to get it inside the minds of his disciples, he gives them this model of prayer. And it's really split into two parts.

[10:19] Maybe we could get it on the screen. Firstly, at verses 9 and 10, Jesus is teaching them things about truths, about who God is. And at verses 11, 12, and 13, he's teaching them stuff about who they are.

So I thought it would be beneficial to read verses 9 and 10 firstly out loud together as we think about what Jesus is teaching his disciples about who God is.

So let's read this together. You can take my cue. This then is how you should pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So what has the Lord's Prayer got to teach us about why we pray?

Was, so often as we noted, there's a clear progression to the Lord's Prayer. There's a deliberate progression to the Lord's Prayer. It starts with who God is before it moves to who we are.

[11:25] So it starts with God and his glory before it moves to man and his need. And that is no accident and that is no coincidence. Because Jesus is teaching his disciples that it's only by understanding rightly who God is that you can understand rightly who you are.

So by teaching them this prayer, what is Jesus teaching his disciples about who God is? Well, A.W. Tozer, a famous theologian from yesteryear, famously said this, and think upon these words.

What first comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

What first comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

So there we are. Take 10 seconds. What is it, as you think of God, as I think of God, what is it that comes to mind? Jesus is teaching his disciples here that they should pray because of who God is. How does he start it? Our Father in heaven. Who is this God? Firstly, see where he is.

[12:47] He is in heaven. He doesn't get tired. He doesn't sleep. He isn't taken by surprise.

He doesn't have a beginning and he doesn't have an end. Rather, he is the all-powerful one. He is the all-knowing one. He is the ever-present one.

He is the creator of all things and he is the sustainer of all things. He is the one who is over all things and he is the one who is above all things. And he is in heaven.

And we come before him in reverence and awe, the response appropriate as we gaze upon his holiness. Now, we were driving up to church this morning.

I was driving the car with the girls in the back. And I very, very quickly went from 30 straight down to 10 miles an hour. Do you know why I did that? Because the sun was so bright.

[13:44] Did anyone else notice that this morning? Out and about, about 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock.

The sun was so bright. And it caused me to slow down because I could not handle the light. Here is a God of blinding holiness.

And he is in heaven. And he is singing the cosmos to do its thing. And we are on earth. He is the creator and we are the creatures.

And as we come face to face with who he is, we soon find ourselves on our knees before him in awe and wonder and majesty because he is the awesome God.

He's the awesome God. And what is his relationship to us? Distant spectator? Nope. Ruthless dictator?

Nope. How is he described as heavenly father? In fact, if you scan your eyes over verses 5 to 15, you'll see that Jesus uses that word father six times.

[14:48] God is a father. God is a perfect father. He is a good father. It's the word Abba. Now, whatever that word, whatever the precise usage of that word in that particular culture, surely the main point that Jesus is making is that the relationship between God and his people is one of intimacy and access.

That he is a God who speaks to his people. He is a God who cares for his people. He is a God who acts for the good of his people. He is a God who has acted to save his people.

And he is a God who knows intimately his people. And he is a God who has sent his spirit to live inside his people. Do you see what Jesus is saying here?

The God in heaven is not cold and he's not distant. He is a gracious and good father. That's the kind of relationship that this God has with his people.

And as we think about that, what an amazing mystery. Is it not? That the almighty God of heaven would look on us?

[16:05] And because of his son, Jesus Christ, as Jesus shed his blood on the cross, making a way for you and I to be made right with this heavenly God, this holy God, this righteous God.

And God, because of Jesus, he adopts us. And he calls us sons and daughters of this holy God. What a mind-boggling joy that the God that we address in prayer is holy and we are unholy, is in heaven and we are on earth.

And yet he is our father. And as we pray through the son, by the spirit, we can call on him as our father, our father in heaven.

Oh, that our Christian lives may never get past the mind-boggling nature of those four words, our father in heaven. And the only response from us is hallowed be your name.

The word hallowed there, the verb, it's the cry of a transformed heart that beats for God's glory and says, God, because you're so great, I want the whole world to know that you are great.

[17:19] I want you to make yourself great in my life, in our lives, in our lands. We want people in our city to see your greatness, God, in our world of darkness, in our world of suffering.

Would you make your name great? And would your kingdom, would it come to this land and would it rule and would it reign? Oh, father, would you come here? Would you save lost men and women in this city to yourself as they hear the news of Jesus Christ, but not just in this city?

Oh, father, would you do it in the whole world? Do you see the truth for us there? The truth for us there is that knowing God rightly, it fuels worship.

That knowing God rightly, it fuels mission. And knowing God rightly, it fuels prayer. And as we learn about God, as we encounter him, as he speaks to us in his words, and as his spirit transforms us.

And I think there's a real corporate element, dimension to what Jesus is saying here. I mean, he could have quite easily said, pray my father in heaven, but what does he say?

[18:30] Pray our father in heaven. It reminds us, doesn't it, that this is the prayer of God's people corporately, called to seek God together, not just in this church, but with God's people around the world.

Is that an amazing thing, that we join in this prayer with the saints across the globe? Isn't it amazing to think we are part of something so much bigger than this area, this postcode, so much bigger than this city, so much bigger than this nation, so much bigger than this island.

We are part of something, God's amazing plan to rescue a people for himself across the globe. And so Jesus begins this prayer by focusing on the greatness of God.

The disciples, that is where your gaze needs to be. It starts with him, it doesn't start with you. It's an amazing truth, it starts with him, it doesn't start with us. He is the orbit in which we are operating, not the other way around.

Jesus is calling his disciples here to have a God-centered view of life. And once you have your vision of God, your Father, defined and clarified, then you can begin to understand who you are rightly.

[19:47] And here's the second big thing we need to see tonight. Why do we pray? We pray because of who we are. Why don't we read verses 11, 12 and 13 together? This is what Jesus proceeds to tell his disciples to pray.

Let's read this together. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Now, I don't know if you're a fan of The Apprentice.

Apprentice on TV. I can't stand strictly. But I can kind of stomach The Apprentice. So Alex, my wife and I, were watching The Apprentice the other night. And it's that wonderful mixture of being ludicrous and compelling at the same time.

I don't know if you find that. So we're watching The Apprentice. We're getting to know the, I was going to say characters here, but contestants is probably the right word, isn't it? Getting to know the contestants. So after we watch this, I'm straight on the website, BBC, looking at their profiles.

[20 : 53] And each of them have got their own little profile quote of who they are and why they should win The Apprentice. This is Samuel. This is his quote on his profile. My creativity, my passion, my charm, and my likability all roll into one.

And they create the perfect guy. I mean, that is beautiful, isn't it? But it's a snapshot into the life and the mindset of our world.

We live self-sufficient lives. I mean, what do they call New York? The city that never sleeps. And you know the mottos of our age, don't you?

People say, you make your own luck in this world. We talk about self-made men and women. We act like we're immortal. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

That's what we say as well, isn't it? This idea that somehow we have got all the answers to life. What does Jesus do in these verses? What does he teach his disciples about themselves?

[21 : 58] What does he draw their attention to? Unlike the world, he draws their attention to their need. Their need. Very quickly, three aspects of their needs. What do they need?

Firstly, their need of bread. The daily things that they need for life. Those things that originate from God and come from his gracious and good hands.

God is the one who makes the sun rise every morning. He is the one that makes the harvest grow. He is the one who sustains you. He is the one who provides for you. You see, Jesus is teaching them here to have a heart of dependence and thankfulness and humility.

Let me ask us this evening as a corporate church body, do you find yourselves, do we find ourselves humble this evening? Do we find ourselves thinking that we are dependent on God for anything?

It's a big challenge, isn't it? Or have we grown so accustomed to God's daily mercies to us? It's thankfulness, dependence, humility, three great traits of the true disciple.

[23 : 05] This is what Jesus is teaching his disciples here. Secondly, Jesus draws their attention for their need of forgiveness. That they need always to be examining their own hearts, confessing their failures and their sin against the holy gods and recognizing that he is gracious and that he is compassionate, that he is merciful.

And that because of Jesus, it's because Jesus took their sins on him, that they know that because of Jesus, they are cleansed from all unrighteousness.

And do you see how Jesus so tightly knits our relationship with God, with our relationships with others? That knowing that we have been forgiven with outrageous grace should affect how we relate with others and show that same grace to them.

Because this community prayer should lead us to community action. That we seek to love one another, that we seek to encourage one another, that we seek to make every effort to be right with one another, and that we seek to build one another up, that we seek to deal with issues that arise between one another for the glory of God.

You know, let me ask us this evening, is there anything that we need to do to make ourselves right? Right with God and right with others?

[24 : 27] Is there bitterness in your own heart against a fellow brother or sister? Is there unconfessed stuff that's going on in your life that's holding you back from pursuing a walk with God?

What's Jesus teaching them? That they need forgiveness. And thirdly, very quickly, thirdly, they need protection. It's a confession, isn't it, that says, Lord, I know my sinful heart.

I know that I'm prone to wander. I know I drift. There's a reason that in the Bible we refer to as sheep. And so, Father, by your Spirit living in me, would you direct my every step?

Would you capture my every thought? Would you direct my every glance? Would you put into action every action that I do today for your glory? Would you deliver me from evil?

Would you protect me from the onslaught of Satan who would do his utmost to cause me to stumble? I would try and direct my attention, my gaze, away from you. I need you, Heavenly Father. [25 : 28] I need you. We need bread. We need to be right with God and one another. And we need to be protected. Let me ask us this evening, do we even think that we need anything?

Before we came to Brunnsfield five or so years ago, we spent a bit of time, my wife and I, working in a Christian hospital in Malawi. And as a hospital team, we used to have devotionals every morning. And we used to read our Bible together every morning. And then, to my surprise, certainly the first time I ever did this devotional thing, everybody stands and everybody belts out a song. And the song that they used to sing, and they sang it pretty much every day, went like this.

Give me power, Lord Jesus, give me power. Lord Jesus, give me power, every hour to be strong. Oh, give me power.

And this went on about six times. I felt like the CD was on skip. It just kept going back. But I sat there and I thought, this is so strange. This is so strange. And as I reflected on it, the reason I thought it was strange was because of my complacent mindset.

[26 : 41] My comfortable life, my Western thoughts, my affluence had taught me to sing, and this is shameful, I've got the power. Lord Jesus, I've got the power.

I've got the power for every hour to keep me strong. Let me ask you this evening and let me ask me this evening. Do we think we've got the power?

Do we think we've got the answers? Do we think that we can do this on our own? Because we put on nice events and we've got a lovely church website and we have nice Bible studies and we've got lovely coffee.

We can function as a church. My prayer this week has been, O Lord, would you rid us of our complacency? Would you rid us of believing the lie that our busy lives, the fact that we run from here to there, that we do thing after thing, task after task, is an excuse for failing to stop and seeking you in prayer.

Martin Luther, he famously wrote in his diary, I have so much to do today that it leaves me with little option but to spend the first three hours of my day in prayer.

[28 : 02] Heavenly Father, would you convict us that we need you? We need you every hour of every day and we need your power. As we move towards a close this evening, let me just tell you how this has worked out in my life this week.

I think it's only been this week that the news of John and Aileen moving on come Christmas time has actually hit and has really began to sink in and people are coming up to me all the time and you'll probably say it after this as well, but people come up to me all the time.

Graham, asking me and the elders, Graham, what's happening? What's happening? What's happening after Christmas? What's happening? Who's coming? Do you want me to be honest? Don't know. I just don't know. We don't know. But here's the really interesting thing.

Let me tell you, I'm praying a lot more this week than I was last week. A lot more this week than I was last week. Why? Because I am so out of my depth. I've never experienced anything like this before.

I am so out of my depth. And then we come to Wednesday night as a church. We gather to pray and it is the best attended prayer meeting I think I've ever been to in four and a half years here. So well attended.

[29 : 11] Why is it so well attended? Because we know we're out of depth. We don't know what's going to happen. Now two reflections on that. One, that's a great thing.

Let us seek the Lord in this like we've never sought him before. If ever there was a time for us to get together as a people and be united and be purposeful in prayer than it's now.

Because we don't know. We don't know. But what a tremendous comfort that we come to pray to one who knows the end from the beginning. Who knows all things.

Who is not taken surprise by anything. And we can come before him and we can pray to him and call him father. And to see signs that we are doing that as a church can I just say is a massive encouragement.

Let's keep going for that at every opportunity. A second reflection. If my feeling way out my depth this week has stirred me to pray and it stirred us to pray then what does that reveal about my heart attitude two weeks ago?

[30 : 19] What does it say? That I didn't pray. It tells me that I felt very much in my depth. I can do these things.

I've got it covered. I know what I'm doing. Yeah I'll get to pray if I ever get to it but we've kind of got it sussed. Like Lord it's nice that I know you're there but I'm kind of doing alright here. And as I thought about that this week as I thought about it I thought about my complacency the reason that I was doing that is because I lost sight of who God is and I lost sight of who I am.

Well brothers and sisters as we come to a close this evening let us be those who pray. Let us be a people who devote ourselves to prayer because we know who our God is and let's be a people who devote ourselves to prayer because we know who we are.

And as we close let me just read you some words from this wonderful book I've been reading over the past few days. It's called Sounds from Heaven. I don't know if anybody here has read it but it's a collection of stories and testimonies about the great revival that happened up in Lewis up in the Highlands of Scotland in the 1950s.

This mighty work of God where many men and women gave their lives to Jesus Christ. Let me just read to you how this Christian community in this island this tiny island of Scotland is described.

[31 : 45] This is a testimony from the time. This is how this community is described. It was a community at prayer said Margaret MacLeod. What a statement. Others agreed with me the Christians were praying.

In 1949 everyone who was truly longing for God was seeking the Lord for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Christians were praying. Prayer was spontaneous.

As people visited each other in their homes they would pray and then they would continue on until they felt they had got through to God. A huge volume of prayer ascended from Christian folk all over the Barvis area for revival.

The place was soaked in prayer. It became a way of life to seek the Lord for his mercy. And then let me read to you the author as he reflects on all these things and he looks at his current generation which I guess is almost our generation what he sees as he reflects on these things.

The testimonies glow with an indescribable warmth and the reality of their experience is there for all to see. The gospel is so clear.

[33 : 00] God manifest among his people is a thrilling reality and the power of the Holy Spirit in the midst convicting, constraining, converting, confirming, comforting causes the reader to bend before God in awe and adoration in love and consecration in wonder and amazement.

One senses the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit. But when we review our own lack of burden, our dim understanding of God's mighty working, oh we can but cry to God to engulf us with flood tides of divine refreshing and bring reviving streams to all of us sweeping sinners into the kingdom. So let us read, ponder, reflect and humble ourselves, pray and seek God's face and turn from our wicked ways and surely he will hear from heaven, forgive our sin and heal our poor land.

Oh that our community here at Brunnsfield would be described as a community that was soaked in prayer. That we would be a people who know who our God is and that we would be a people who know who we are.

So I thought it would be only right tonight and fitting and a great way to respond to this to have an open time of prayer as we respond to the Lord's Prayer.

[34 : 30] Johnny, can we have it back on the screen? And really the Lord's Prayer splits into five, well there's five words if you want to remember it like this. There's Father, there's hallowed, there's forgive, there's give and there's lead.

So five words. So what I'd love us to do is we pray corporately tonight as we respond to the Lord's Prayer. Maybe if five people want to lead us in praying for those five things. Father, hallowed, forgive, give and lead.

Why don't we just stand up if you want to pray and just belt it out and we'll do this together. But this is a community prayer this evening and once we've finished I'll close and we'll stand to sing our final song. Let's pray together.

Father, so we thank you Heavenly Father that we can call you Father. What an amazing mystery. Oh, by your grace we ask that you would fill each of us here, Father, you would fill us as a church community with a fresh passion to see your name hallowed in our land and in our lives.

[35 : 39] Oh Father, would you make yourself great and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.