

easter week prayer

Day One

God knows it already. Why bother?

Mark 11:1-6

Encouragement

This is day one, which means we need to set up some ground rules. Going forward, the remaining five days will be shorter. But we did not want to move too quickly at the start and not give you plenty of guidance and tools to walk through praying for yourself, our church family, and the wider community of people our church interacts with daily outside of our building.

Mark 11:1-6

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" 6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

Imagine you were one of those disciples.

Jesus just sent you on a mission of sorts, which isn't unusual. But what was unusual was the level of detail on what exactly would happen as you went to do what He said.

How do you feel?

Amazed? Overwhelmed? Confused?

Do you begin to ponder the implications of His level of knowledge of what exactly was going to happen?

Do you question who exactly Jesus is and what exactly His purpose in the world is?

Hold on to those feelings and thoughts as we dive into a week of Easter Prayers.

To start, we will address a couple of questions about prayer:

- What is prayer?
- Does prayer actually do anything?
- How do I pray?

What Is Prayer?

Prayer is simply the medium through which we communicate and commune with God. Prayer is both using words to converse with God and being in relational proximity to God.

While we would all say we want to pray more, for most of us, prayer is more about duty than it is about being in relationship with God. We're so busy, it's hard to find time to pray, and when we do pray, it can be boring, hard to focus, or it can feel like talking to yourself, or reading off a wish list to the air.

Prayer, for a lot of us, is like eating our vegetables; we know it's good for our health, but very few of us enjoy it.

So if you have ever struggled to pray, you are not alone. When it comes to prayer, we're all beginners. No one honest ever feels overly confident in their prayer life. Yet, prayer is the portal to life with God; to the life we all crave in the deepest part of our being, even if we don't fully recognize that it is God we crave.

Does Prayer Actually Do Anything?

How many times have you prayed only to have the opposite thing happen? If we are honest, the feeling that prayer does nothing tangible is one of the biggest reasons we struggle with praying.

Reading Mark 11 with prayer in mind, it can feel like Jesus already knows exactly how everything will play out. While this moment doesn't directly teach about prayer, it can raise an honest question: Do our prayers really make any difference?

Thankfully, we can gain clarity on whether or not prayer matters through Jesus' teaching on prayer in Luke 11, where He tells us to pray, "may Your (God the Father) will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Or in other words, may earth become as obedient to what You, God the Father, want, as heaven already is.

Why does he tell the disciples to pray that? Because Jesus believes our prayers really do make a difference in the world. Jesus knows that through prayer, we are partnering with the Spirit to bend reality in the direction of our Father's good intentions for our broken world.

In prayer, we partner with God to drag the future age of the Kingdom of Heaven into the here and now. In prayer, we are wrestling and begging that right now be made as whole as it will be in heaven. Or as Saint Augustine put it, "Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not."

How Do I Pray?

Okay, that sounds inspiring and overwhelming... So how do we actually start praying?

- By using the words of others to guide your prayers
- By using your own words to pray
- By using silence to listen and sit with God

By using the words of others to guide your prayers.

As a child, we first learn to write by tracing letters on a page. The words of others serve a similar purpose in teaching us to pray. Sometimes it's hard to know where to start, we get stuck in a rut, or we simply can't find the words. Using the prayers of Scripture or trusted guides helps give language to what we want to say and forms us over time.

3 Recommended Words of Others

1. The Psalms, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Matthew 6:9-15
 - a. Praying the Bible by Donald Whitney
2. YouVersion Bible app
3. Lectio 365 app

By using your own words to pray.

We should also desire to pray using our own words, to share what is going on in our world: our hearts, souls, minds, and circumstances. We pray with gratitude for what is good, lament for what is broken (both around us and within us), and with petition and intercession, which is asking God to fulfill His promises to overcome evil with good, for ourselves and for others.

By using silence to listen and sit with God.

As our relationship with God grows, we won't just want to speak; we will want to listen. Learning to hear His voice takes time and discernment through wise Jesus-centric counsel and scripture, but it begins with simply being present. Slow down, get quiet, ask the Spirit to speak, and listen. If nothing comes, don't judge yourself or God, just enjoy being in His presence, give thanks for His love, and continue to repeat this regularly.

Prayer Prompts

Words of Others:

- *Psalm 139: 13-14*
 - *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

Gratitude:

- Give thanks to the one true God who knew every mistake and failure you would ever make, but still loves you anyway.

Lament:

- The times in life when the plans of God have been unclear or frustrating.

Petition & Intercession:

- Pray for the faith to trust God and His good plan even when you struggle to understand or disagree with what He's doing.
- Pray for the person you need to invite to Easter.
 - Not sure who that person is? Ask God to bring someone to mind. Wait patiently for His answer. Then ask boldly, even if you don't get an answer until the moment someone is standing in front of you.

Silence:

- Take a few deep breaths and sit with God. Start with just 30 seconds. Then, build slowly over time in the future.

Day Two

The world is broken. God saves us.

Mark 11:7-11

7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

10 "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

You're a farmer in a rural town, but you've traveled to the capital, to Jerusalem, to celebrate Passover. You try to do this every year because Passover memorializes God rescuing your people from slavery and points to a greater rescue to come by a figure known as the Messiah, the anointed one. The messiah is supposed to be a prophet even greater than Moses, a priest even greater than Aaron, and a king even greater than David.

Suddenly, people are running past shouting and carrying palm branches that they clearly just broke off trees. They begin to throw the branches on the road as a great crowd surrounding a man on a donkey surges forward.

As they get closer, you begin to understand what they are shouting. "Hosanna ... in the name of the Lord... Kingdom of our father David... Hosanna!"

You question the shouts. Hosanna? (God, save us now?) Why would they be shouting...

This can't be... But it's Passover week... When better for God to send... HIM. THE Anointed One. THE Messiah. THE Christ.

Before you realize it, you're running with the crowd to grab branches and shouting.
Because everything in you knows this world is not as The Lord God created it.
Because everything in you longs for what you know deep in your soul, the world should be.
Because everything in you despairs, knowing you cannot make the world right.
Because everything in you aches for salvation that only God can give.

Hosanna - God, save us now.

Perhaps this Jesus could really be THE One.

Hosanna - God, save us now.

Oh God... please... let Him be THE One.

Hosanna - God, save us now.

Oh God... please... save ME!

Prayer Prompts

Silence:

- Slow down for a moment and breathe deeply.
 - Don't rush past here, because here is where you meet with God in ways no words can ever describe.
 - As your mind begins to swirl with thoughts and gets distracted, lay them aside and come back to Jesus. Don't feel shame. This is natural. Oftentimes, repeating a word or phrase like "Father," "Lord Jesus," or "Come Holy Spirit" can help focus you back.
- Now, pause, breathe, and be still.

Gratitude:

- If you've surrendered your life to Jesus, spend time giving thanks for His salvation.

Lament:

- Express honestly the ways waiting for Jesus' return to complete His healing of our broken world has caused pain to your loved ones.

Petition & Intercession:

- Ask for the healing of the pain your loved ones have experienced.
- Ask God to help you lay down how you strive to save yourself and instead trust His salvation.

Words of Others:

- *Psalm 34:17-22*
 - *The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time. For the Lord protects the bones of the righteous; not one of them is broken! Calamity will surely destroy the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be punished. But the Lord will redeem those who serve him. No one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.*

Day Three

God Questions. Compellingly Answered.

Mark 12:28-33; 41-44

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." ...

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

It's been hours, but it's only felt like moments. There doesn't seem to be an end in sight. You don't really want it to end. Ever.

For hours now, all the religious leaders, the scripture scholars, have been asking Jesus, the one who might be THE ONE, question after question about God.

Though many of the scholars come in seeming haughty, and many leave with an air of frustration, embarrassment, or confusion, some hang around with thoughtful curiosity on their faces.

Yet, that's not really what you're focused on. You are focused on the clear, compelling, and compassionate way Jesus answers their questions.

For the first time, you feel like you really understand who God is and what He wants from you. You realize it isn't so much about going through the rituals and memorizing the words of scripture that have been passed down for generations, but it is about letting your heart, soul, mind, and strength be reshaped by the purpose and meaning of the rituals and scriptures.

At one point, Jesus even references the most central of all scriptures, the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ...to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength... He talks about it in a way that makes you want to actually live that way, in a way that doesn't make you feel shame for not always succeeding.

Then he points to a widow who had annoyed you when she pushed through you and others in the crowd to get to the money box to give her offering.

He uses her as a real-life example that helps you finally understand that living as the Shema calls you to live isn't always about big, lofty spiritual moments, but is more focused on living God's way, living through faith in God's goodness, in the most mundane of actions.

Prayer Prompts

Words of Others:

- *Deuteronomy 6:4-9*
 - *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

Gratitude:

- Give thanks for the people who helped you understand who Jesus is and why you should surrender your life to Him.

Lament:

- Cry out to God for those in your life who have heard the good news of Jesus, but have gone the other way.

Silence:

- Sit quietly with God and allow Him to bring peace through His presence.
 - Remember, you may want to rush through this because of the thoughts that crowd your mind while you try to sit silently. Over time, as you continue to come to a place of silence with God, that will lessen.
 - Right now, though, it's likely because you rarely have moments of silence and your brain is trying to process things that have been suppressed by the noise.
 - Don't run from this. Lean in and let God work.
- Now, pause, breathe, and be still.

Petition & Intercession:

- Pray that God will lead those you lamented about to Him.
- Pray that you will be aware, willing, and prepared to speak about Jesus when the opportunity comes up.

Day Four

Wrestling with God in a Garden. Again.

Mark 14: 32-50

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

41 Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. 46 The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

48 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled.

After the week's frenzy of activities, you're tired. Jesus has asked you and the others to stay awake, but you desperately want to rest.

You try to hold your eyelids open by thinking about what happened as you celebrated the passover meal.

Jesus washed feet as if He were a servant. It felt like He was trying to show you that you are not too good, important, and never too busy to care for the lowly and needy.

Then, He did a blessing over everyone at the meal that felt more weighty and significant than any you've ever heard. You aren't certain what He meant about eating His body and drinking His blood.

That was weird.

But you know it was important.

You drift off.

Jesus comes and wakes you. And the others. He doesn't seem angry as much as he seems like He's been dragging a boulder up a hill. Exhausted. Stressed.

As you fight, slipping in and out of sleep again, you notice Him on the ground, crying out. You cannot hear his words, but you can see his demeanor. It oddly reminds you of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as they choose to defy God.

As you jerk awake again, you think of Cain, just outside the Garden of Eden, unable to enter in, being warned that sin was crouching before him, wanting to devour him, but that he could choose to flee from it. He didn't.

Once more, you manage to open your eyes, and you think of Jacob, the one who had deceived and cheated so many, wrestling with God. You suspect it looked a lot like what Jesus is doing. But somehow different too. Perhaps because Jesus doesn't seem to be trying to win, instead He seems to be trying to lose to God, so that He can fully submit to the Father.

The next thing you know, Jesus is waking you up again. This time, He doesn't seem exhausted or stressed. He seems unburdened and at peace.

Somehow, you suspect this was different than all those past times. Maybe this time, the choice was made to trust God the Father. Maybe this time, instead of brokenness and sin, healing and freedom are coming.

Prayer Prompts

Words of Others:

- Psalm 13
 - How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.

Silence:

- Take all the worries, stress, and distractions of your life and imagine placing them in God's hands.
- Now, pause, breathe, and be still.

Lament:

- Let the ache of past failures lead you to a place of repentance.

Gratitude:

- From your prayer of repentance, thank Jesus for His grace and forgiveness. Believe that His forgiveness really does apply to you. Trust that because of His grace and your willing repentance, your past no longer defines you.

Petition & Intercession:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to create a longing in you to spend consistent time with God through prayer, scripture, rest, and community.
- Pray that the person you are inviting to join you for Easter will show up and experience a life change through Jesus.

Day Five

Crucified. It Is Finished.

Mark 15:17-39

17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews.

27 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. [28] 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!"

31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Just like that, it was over.

How could it be over?

You think back to that moment in the garden. From behind a tree, you watched as they arrested Jesus and took Him away. You saw Peter follow after them at a distance.

You wanted to follow too... but you didn't. You tried to get your feet to move, but they wouldn't.

For your whole life, you've been told to live in fear of the Roman soldiers and toe the line anytime they are around. You've been told that if you didn't, you'll wake up to find yourself dead.

Somehow, though, you thought Jesus was above that. That they would never be able to reach Him because He was THE Messiah. You were certain that He was God's chosen one, the one who would finally set you and all of His people free. Everyone seemed to be thinking it.

Wasn't it just a week ago that you and everyone else were running to lay palm branches before Him?

Had you just gotten caught up in the moment?

It seems that way...

no...

NO.

This couldn't have just been a fleeting moment.

There was something different about this. This wasn't the first time you'd seen a crucifixion. The Romans did that often to criminals in public spaces to instill fear of not obeying them.

This was different. It was as if all of creation was crying out. The sky turned as black as a moonless stormy night. The very Earth felt like it was going to break open. You even heard that something happened at the Temple.

No.

This wasn't just a compelling teaching being killed.

God is doing something.

You aren't sure what. You aren't really sure what to do next.

But you know that God isn't done.

This isn't over.

Prayer Prompts

Words of Others:

The cry of Jesus on the cross was the opening line of Psalm 22. In Jewish culture and literature, referencing a notable line from a passage of scripture was meant to invoke the entire passage.

So as we reflect on the crucifixion today, it feels appropriate to prayerfully read Psalm 22, the last words of Jesus before He died.

Before you begin reading, take a slow, deep breath, and make room for the Holy Spirit to move in you.

Psalm 22

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? 2 My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.

3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises. 4 In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. 5 To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. 7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. 8 "He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

9 Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast. 10 From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.

11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

12 Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. 13 Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me. 14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. 15 My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.

16 Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. 17 All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. 18 They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

19 But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. 20 Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. 21 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

22 I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. 23 You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! 24 For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

25 From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows. 26 The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him— may your hearts live forever!

27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, 28 for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive. 30 Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. 31 They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

Amen. God, let it be so!

Day Six

Sitting alone. You aren't alone.

Mark 15:40-47

40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

You sit with the ache.

You pray.

You hurt in ways words cannot describe.

You trust the One True God.

You cling to the hope you felt as Jesus spoke to you.

You feel lost and uncertain.

You find some peace in knowing that several of the women who followed and cared for Jesus were there when He was placed in a tomb, though you cannot say why.

You know there is nothing you can do.

You sense the world is holding its breath.

You wait.

Prayer Prompts

Silence

- Slow down for a moment and breathe deeply.
 - Set a timer for at least 3 minutes. Then set down your phone/timer and wait quietly with God. Allow Him to settle your mind and bring you peace.

Sunday is coming.