

**Series: Quest**  
**Topic: Divine Dialogue**

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Last year we had some praise and prayer evenings where we came together to worship God, and bring before Him our needs and desires as a Church. On one of these evenings I encouraged everyone present to pray together, out loud, through the various prayer points. It was wonderful as voices all around this auditorium were lifted up in prayer, but as I began to pray I sensed the Holy Spirit saying to me “shush, Judy be quiet. I want you to be silent and just rest in my presence. I want you to soak in my love for you. I want to talk to you” And that’s just what I did. I sat in silence and I experienced the close presence of Jesus and his power to restore me.” What is this practice we call prayer? All too often it is us doing lots of talking, when in truth God intends it to be a time of divine dialogue. Not just talking, but sitting in quietness and listening to our God, who loves us and desires to speak to us.

In the book of John we find a wonderful passage that speaks of this deep, intimate relationship with Jesus. Let’s read from John 15 *“Jesus said; I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener...Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me...If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted. When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.”*

This picture of attachment to Jesus as a branch attached to a vine, is an amazing description of the interior spiritual life of intimacy with God. Our quest to grow as disciples is one where our lives are completely dependent on Christ. We are to remain, to abide in Christ. Discipleship, or following Jesus, is not just a matter of acknowledging who Jesus is, it is having Jesus spiritually connected to our inner lives. One avenue of this inner journey of encountering Jesus is divine dialogue, our life of prayer. This is prayer that is inspired by the very presence of Jesus, it is in harmony with

His will and it brings us into agreement with Jesus’ mission in the world: to seek and save the lost, and to bring about his Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

In preparation for speaking to you today I spent time researching the question “Why do we pray?” I found the answer in God’s Word which tells us that *“prayer gives God glory” John 14:13*, and through prayer *“we can know God’s wisdom” James 1:5*. *“Prayer defeats Satan” Matthew 18:18-20*, and through prayer *“our faith is increased.” Prayer “brings results” James 5:16 and Matthew 6:10* and finally, but by no means least, we pray because *“Jesus prayed” Mark 1:35*.

Jesus’ spirituality was visible. He exhibited a spiritual life of worship, prayer, devotion and love that left an indelible mark on all his followers. When we study the life of Jesus we find many different examples of Jesus in prayer. Jesus went regularly to the synagogue so I’m sure he would have joined in with the formal, more liturgical prayers within that setting. When the disciples asked for advice on how to pray he taught them the “Our Father” prayer, and then there is the long prayer in John 17 where Jesus prays for himself, for his disciples and for all future believers. In this prayer Jesus expresses God’s deep desire for relationship. Relationship within the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit and also relationship with us, His followers. Within the very personhood of God is a desire for community, and a yearning for conversation. Jesus himself lives in constant conversation with his Father, where words are the medium of their shared life together. This means as we are invited into life with the Father and Son, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, this is not a static experience but a dynamic relationship, a conversation where talking and listening develop our intimacy with Jesus. But the surprising fact is not just that we want to talk to Jesus, but that

**Jesus longs to hear from us and wants to speak to us.**

One of the common objections I hear concerning prayer goes something like this: “Why pray? If God already knows everything, and everything happens according to his will. What possible difference can our prayers make? Surely any prayer of ours is in vain?” It is a paradox really, but somehow our prayers do make a difference to God and to the world. The Bible tells of prophets and apostles praying for physical healings and even for the resuscitation of dead bodies and their prayers were answered. Sarah, Rebekah, Hannah and Elizabeth all prayed against their infertility and Daniel prayed for protection as he entered the den of lions. And their prayers were also answered. They prayed and they got results and in the New Testament we are told to

*“ask and it will be given to you” Matthew 7:7*

*“the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well... the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” James 5:15*

*“you do not have because you do not ask” James 4:2*

C.S. Lewis answers the question of whether our prayers make any difference with this statement: “Why wash your hands? If God intends them to be clean, they’ll come clean without you washing them. Why eat? Why do anything? God could have arranged things so that our bodies nourished themselves miraculously, without food or that knowledge would enter our brains without study. God, however, chose a different style of governing the world, a partnership which relies on human agency and choice.” Lewis sums up the drama of human history as one in which “the scene and the general outline of the story is fixed by the author, by God, but certain details are left for the actors to improvise. It may be a mystery why God should have allowed us to cause real events at all; but it is no more strange that He should allow us to cause them by praying than by any other method. Prayer is a designated instrument of God’s power, as real and as ‘natural’ as any other power God may use.”

Do I believe our prayers make a difference? Absolutely. That belief comes from years of seeing prayers answered, years of seeing situations and people change following times of prayer.

I treasure times where I sit alone with God, just talking and listening to Him but I also value the times I spend praying with others. For many years I belonged to a group called “Mums in Touch.” This is an international organization that started in the United States 25 years ago, and is very active in New Zealand. It comprises of small groups of Mothers who gather each week to pray for their children and their children’s schools. The meeting is divided into four sections of prayer: praise, confession, thanksgiving and intercession (or asking prayer.)

In the praise section we would choose one attribute of God’s character to pray through each week. God is supreme, holy, faithful, loving, merciful, just, wise and the Creator. We prayed using scriptures based on one particular attribute of God chosen for that day. As we spent time praising God, we found our focus would lift from our busy, and often challenging lives to our amazing God and His awesome presence. Did those prayers make a difference? Without a doubt, but one of the most astounding differences was in us. Our faith, and our ability to trust God, increased as we meditated on the depth and breadth of who He is.

The time of confession was often silent, where individually we would ask the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts, and bring to mind the areas not pleasing to God. Sin not only keeps us from an active, fruitful prayer life but also hinders our communion with Jesus, but God promises us *“if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” 1 John 1:9.*

God is waiting for each of us to come to Him with humble, repentant hearts, so that we can experience the fullness of His forgiveness and His love. We can know the victory that is ours through the blood of Jesus as we confess our sins and are transformed into His likeness.

Thanksgiving was a time of expressing our gratitude and joy for all God has done, and is doing, in our lives. Jesus expressed the importance of having a thankful heart in the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17 and

Paul told us in his first letter to the Thessalonians to *“be joyful always, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* Thanksgiving crowds out depression, cynacism, fear, self-pity and self-debasement. As we thank God we realise how closely He is involved in our lives and we begin to see situations from a different perspective-from God’s perspective. We see the fingerprints of God on our lives.

Finally came the time of intercession or praying on the behalf of our children and their schools. As intercessors we stand in the gap and pray with authority and confidence in the name of Jesus, and in the power of His victory achieved on the cross. Once again we would pray using scripture verses, praying back the very words of God, but placing our child’s name within the scripture. Here are some examples using fictitious names.

*“Lord, protect Graham from the evil one” John 17:15* or

*“Loving Father, I ask that you would open Mary’s eyes and turn him from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that Mary might receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith” Acts 26:18* or

*“Heavenly Father, may Joshua be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer and share with Your people who are in need” Romans 12:12.*

We would also pray through specific circumstances in our children’s lives which needed God’s intervention or special touch. Week after week we kept a record of our prayers and it was amazing to look back and thank God for answered prayers, as we acknowledged change in our children and also in their schools. In prayer we came face to face with our living God who is *“able to do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine.” Ephesians 3:20.*

Can I encourage you to pray with others, even if it is just one other person... a prayer partner who will journey with you in this place of divine dialogue. Can I also encourage you to pray using verses straight out of the Bible, because these carry the full weight and power of God’s Word. God says in *Isaiah 55:11* *“my word...will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”* And in *Hebrews 4:12* it tells us *“The Word of the Lord is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword.”* Use this sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, as you talk to Him. Then watch with anticipation and amazement to see what will happen as God moves in power, wisdom and love.

I find these four steps of prayer are also useful in my individual time with God. Not that I always follow this pattern but there are times when I do. Earlier this year I was having a time of intercession for my family when I felt a strong prompting to pray for my husband, Nick. I asked the Holy Spirit *“how should I pray for Nick?”* and a scripture from the book of Job came to mind. It talks of a hedge of protection around Job and his household. So I prayed *“Lord, please put a hedge of protection around Nick today and guard him from the schemes of the evil one.”* This is not a scripture I normally use but the Holy Spirit had brought it to mind so I decided it was right for whatever was happening in Nick’s world that day. Later that night Nick told me of a near-miss car accident that day. As he was driving home from work a truck came through a red light and Nick had to take urgent evasive action. It was what he said next that astounded me. He said *“Judy, I didn’t see the truck until it nearly hit me. It came up on the other side of the road, on the inside lane and was hidden from my view and yet somehow I reacted quickly enough to avoid the calamity.”*

**Does prayer make a difference. You be the judge!!**

Jack Hayford, a Pastor and writer of worship songs, summarizes prayer in this way. “It is a partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God, toward the realization of His redemptive purpose on earth.”

I want to acknowledge here that there may be times when prayer seems difficult or dry. When it seems that God is not listening or not answering our prayers. Philip Yancey talks of this in his book ‘*Prayer, does it make a difference.*’ He says “all relationships involve an act of will, and I persevere through difficult times in prayer despite my feelings at the moment. . .sometimes I come to God out of sheer determination of will, which may seem inauthentic. When I do so, however, I need not put on a mask. God already knows the state of my soul, but I am bearing witness to my love for God by praying even when I don’t feel like it. I express my underlying faith in God simply by showing up.”

In my own life when I experience times when I find it hard to pray I sometimes turn to the book of psalms, a ready-made prayer book that has prayers for every mood. It has prayers of praise, of thanksgiving but also of lament. Lament prayers that express frustration, disappointment, anger and sadness in honest and often very raw language. I use these prayers as my prayers, personalising them for y situation. God is not afraid of our honesty and our emotions. I believe He desires that we come in our weakness, we come with our pain, we come with our anger or doubt and we seek to release these burdens to Him and find rest for our souls. Another suggestion is to pray the “Our Father” prayer from Matthew chapter 6. This is an all encompassing prayer recommended by Jesus. When we pray using words others have written we can still pray with passion, from our hearts and enter a conversation with God.

I want to finish where we began in the book of John where we are called to remain in Christ and He will remain in us. This is the divine dialogue that happens as we sit with Jesus in silent surrender. It is a place of listening and a place of receiving. Listening is an art, especially in our

noisy, busy world but it is an essential part of our conversation with God. **Jesus longs to hear from us but He also wants to speak to us.** He often speaks quietly. He might bring to mind memories of a past event bringing new insight or revelation about that circumstance. He might bring to mind phrases from the Bible which are especially meaningful at this time in our lives. He might speak a personal word that will encourage us or bring greater clarity to a situation. He might even speak a word of correction or conviction about an area of our lives that needs to change. As we sit and receive we can experience the love, the mercy, and the wisdom and guidance that comes in the empowering presence of Jesus.

Some might call this “wasting time with God” and indeed time spent in silent prayer may well seem a waste to someone who has other priorities than a relationship with Jesus. But for someone who loves Jesus, however, there is no more productive or necessary act. Jesus tells us to “remain in Him and He will remain in us”

Divine dialogue is not some optional extra in our journey as followers of Jesus, but an essential practice of ever developing intimacy.