

# Prayer — Our Father

*Mark 1:35–45*

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*“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’ So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ‘See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.’ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.”*

— *Mark 1:35–45*

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We are continuing our study of Mark’s Gospel, following Jesus as King — and this morning the passage lands on something I need to hear as much as anyone else in this room. We are going to talk about prayer.

There is a commercial I have shown before that keeps coming back to me. A man is stranded, cut off, desperate — and the whole time, right there with him, is everything he needs to survive and even be rescued. He simply never opens it. He never uses what was already in his possession.

That image has stayed with me because of what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:8:

*“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”*

Do you know that? Do you actually receive what God has to give you? So often we are exactly like that castaway — the resources of God’s grace sitting right beside us, and we never open them up, never learn to live according to His ways for His purposes. Is God’s grace abounding to you — filling you, strengthening you, encouraging you, supporting you — so that in all things, at all times, with all that you need, you will abound in every good work?

Our passage this morning shows us what it looks like to live in that abounding grace under the hectic pressures of this world. We see it in the example of Jesus himself.

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## **The Moment Before the Rush**

A little background helps us feel the weight of what is happening here. Jesus’ ministry has just taken off. After his baptism, his time in the wilderness, and the calling of his first disciples, there came one enormous day: Jesus teaches in the synagogue, casts out a demon in front of the whole congregation, goes to Peter’s home, and heals his mother-in-law. Then, when the Sabbath ends at sundown, the crowds descend on the house.

Mark tells us: *“The whole town gathered at the door”* (Mark 1:33). Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He drove out many demons. People had seen that he had real power, and the response was extraordinary. He was busy from dawn to dusk — hugely productive, wildly popular, with opportunities pressing in from every direction.

So what does Jesus do?

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### **1. Prayer as the First Priority**

“*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*”

For Jesus, prayer is the first priority. It is the means by which he remains connected to the presence and power of God. It is where his strength comes from. And notice the pattern: the busier Jesus gets, the more he prays. The greater the opportunities pressing in on him, the more time he spends in solitude and quiet. The more the crowds want him, the more he pulls away to be with God.

The word Mark uses for “solitary place” literally means wilderness, desert — a place absolutely apart from anyone else. No distractions. No interruptions. He was alone with God.

That pattern stands in direct contrast to how most of us live. We tend to operate more like Simon Peter and the other disciples, who go looking for Jesus and, when they find him, essentially say, “*Everyone is looking for you!*” — as if to say, come on, Jesus, we have work to do. What are you doing out here?

That is our instinct too, isn’t it? Prayer is fine when life is slow. But when things get busy, when deadlines pile up, when schedules go crazy, prayer is the first thing we drop. And when we do get around to it, it tends to be a last resort — something we reach for when a problem has gotten bad enough — rather than a first priority in daily life.

I want to be clear: we can pray to God at any time, and there is not one single style of prayer. Scripture shows us a whole variety of them. There are whispered prayers in the middle of an urgent moment, brief words offered over a meal or before sleep, prayers that happen while you are driving down the road. These are all part of an ongoing daily conversation with God, and they are worth practicing. But I want to call all of these what they are: busy prayers — prayers on the go, prayers in the moment, prayers when we remember to pray.

The thing about busy prayers is that they draw from a deeper well. If your prayer life feels dry and hollow and is barely happening at all, it may be because you have never gone to that well — the well of simply stopping, resting, and knowing God. The Psalms put it plainly:

“*Be still, and know that I am God.*”

— *Psalms 46:10*

Your whisper prayers, your prayers on the go, must be connected to a deeper life of prayer — a deeper fellowship with God. If Jesus, the Son of God, believed he needed more prayer the busier life got, how much more do you and I need it?

A life that lives in the abundance of God’s grace makes prayer the first priority.

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## **2. Praying in the Wilderness**

What does this deeper prayer actually look like? What does it mean practically to stop, to rest, to be quiet before God?

It means protecting time that is free from distraction. I know that is genuinely hard. It may mean early in the morning before anyone else is awake, or late at night after everyone is in bed. But it also means protecting that time from the distractions we carry in our own pockets — phones, email, social media, television. The point is not legalism about the method; the point is that if you can never find the time to simply be present with God, you are robbing yourself of much of what God has to give you for His good purposes.

Schedule it. Protect it. Find your wilderness.

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### 3. The Heart of Prayer — Connecting with God the Father

We are not told the content of Jesus' prayer in this passage, but if we look at the prayers we are given throughout the Gospels, we get a clear picture of what Jesus' prayer life actually sounded like. And one feature stands out above everything else: Jesus calls God *Father*. And the word he is using is not the formal word for a patriarch or a superior. It is the intimate word — *Abba*. Daddy.

We see this everywhere. When Jesus marvels at how God works, he says, "*I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth*" (Matthew 11:25). When he teaches the disciples how to pray, he begins: "*Our Father in heaven.*" At the tomb of Lazarus: "*Father, thank you that you have heard me.*" In the garden of Gethsemane: "*Father... your will be done.*" And on the cross, nearly everything Jesus says begins with *Father* — *Father, forgive them; Father, glorify your name; Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*

The heart of Jesus' prayer life was not primarily a list of requests, or a counting of blessings, or a review of the day's agenda. Those things have their place. But the essence, the heart, of prayer is this: the daily orientation of the heart and mind to the fact that God — the cosmic Lord of the universe, the Creator, the Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth — has, through Christ, become your Father. God has come so near to you that through Christ he is Father. That is the essence of prayer.

And God is a Father like no other. Jesus teaches us this directly. No matter how good your earthly father may have been, the heavenly Father is far greater. No matter how absent or broken your earthly father may have been, your heavenly Father is not like that. Consider what Jesus says:

*"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you"* (Matthew 7:7) — God as Father invites you to come to him.

*"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"* (Matthew 7:11) — God as Father knows how to give good things.

And God as Father will never turn you away. He is not like the unjust judge in Luke 18 who must be worn down into action. He welcomes you, because you are family.

We can extend this further. If we, earthly mothers and fathers, take such joy in the happiness of our children — even though we are flawed and sinful — how much more does our Father in heaven take joy in our joy? If we sacrifice and commit ourselves to our children, how much

more is God sacrificing and committed to you? If we look at our sons and daughters and say, “I love you, you make me proud,” how much more does our Father in heaven love you and delight in you?

The purpose of prayer is not to get things from God. The purpose of prayer is to get God himself.

Do you take the time, daily, to live in that reality — to remember, to sit in awe of the fact, that God the Almighty loves you like a father and *is* a father to you? That is my challenge to you this morning. Spend protected time — away, no gadgets, no interruptions — in prayer that simply wants to be with God. Not to get through a list. Not to perform. Just to be with your Father.

And it is in that daily orientation of the heart to God as Father that you will begin to discover the abundance of grace Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 9:8 — so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. So that the things of this world do not enslave you. So that you can handle whatever comes your way. So that your sense of worth is anchored in the love of the Father, and you no longer have to go looking for it in the destructive places this world offers. So that temptation can be resisted. So that you are free — free to live in the freedom and power of Christ.

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## Invitation — Coming to Christ

We are able to live this life connected to God as Father because of what Jesus has done. The closing verses of our passage show us what it looks like to come to him.

“A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.”

This is a picture of what it looks like to come to Jesus. This man comes in total surrender — no demands, no conditions, no bargaining. *If you are willing*. That is the posture. When you come to Jesus with conditions — *I will follow you if you do such-and-such for me* — you are not really following Jesus. You are bargaining with him over something you have decided matters more than he does. But this man comes with nothing in his hands. Lord, I surrender. No conditions. No holding back.

And when you come to Jesus in that surrender, a great exchange takes place. Notice what happens in the text. The leper has been forced to live in the wilderness — outside the community, cast out — because of his disease. He is made clean, and now he can return to life

among people. But Jesus, because of what this man spread abroad, can no longer enter a town openly. He must stay outside in lonely places. The leper goes in; Jesus goes out. An exchange has happened.

That is an image of the cross. When you surrender to Christ — *if you are willing, you can make me clean* — he exchanges places with you. He takes your sin upon himself. He goes to the lonely place, the place of death, so that you do not have to. That is what the cross is.

This morning we have witnessed an act of obedience in baptism. The same question stands before all of us: Will you follow?

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*Let us pray.*