



A Life of Prayer

For Jesus, to live was to pray. His life was shaped by prayer and rooted in prayer to an extraordinary degree. Whether alone, with a trusted few, or with many, prayer was not only a priority for Jesus, but a way of life. And it was sustained by his desire to connect and grow in intimacy and communion with the Father.

As Jesus gathers a group of disciples and invites them to live the life of the kingdom of God, he also teaches them to pray. Jesus invites them into a deeply personal relationship with God, encouraging them to call upon God as children call upon a loving parent — *Abba, Father* — trusting that they belong to God, that God is with them, and that God wants for them what is good and life giving.

We too can learn to recognize that God is with us. We just need to be still enough, attentive enough, present and open. This is where the prayer-filled life leads us. To follow Jesus — to be his disciple — is to live a life of prayer.

One of the most important lessons about prayer that we learn from Jesus is that there is a rhythm of prayer which can be woven into the fabric of our own lives. If we want to grow in prayer, we'll need to develop rhythms of prayer, like Jesus.

In this lesson we'll look at three habits/forms of prayer in Jesus' life and consider how we can imitate them in our lives today. Those habits say something important about Jesus, and our habits will say something important about us. To follow Jesus—to be his disciples—is to live a life of prayer.

The Prayer-Filled Life of Jesus

It's no surprise that as we read through Luke, we see constant reference to prayer in the life of Jesus ... and then in the lives of his disciples in Acts. Prayer is a constant theme in Luke-Acts, and throughout **the Gospel of Luke**, the critical moments of Jesus' ministry are punctuated by prayer:

- ◆ **Jesus prays at his baptism (3:21, an element of the account only found in Luke).**
- ◆ **Jesus withdraws from the crowds to pray (5:16; 9:28; 11:1).** Luke offers insight into a disciplined routine of Jesus, noting the regularity of Jesus' prayer life.
- ◆ **Jesus prays all night before calling his other disciples (6:12).** Similar to Luke 3:21, Jesus is praying before major turning points in his life. The choosing of his disciples is clearly such a moment, since Jesus "prays through the night to God" before making his choice.
- ◆ **Jesus prays before Peter's confession (9:18).** This is another occasion when Jesus prays before a significant development. Luke is the only author to introduce this story with Jesus praying. Luke omits Peter's objection to Jesus' suffering contained in other accounts, perhaps to emphasize the sayings on discipleship. Some suggest that Luke's positive portrayal of the disciples shows that Jesus' prayer had been answered.
- ◆ **Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to a mountain to pray, and he is praying at the moment of his transfiguration (9:28-29).**
- ◆ **Jesus teaches the disciples to pray (11:1-4).** He tells the **parable of the friend at midnight** and calls the disciples "ask, seek, knock" (11:5-13).
- ◆ **Jesus prays for Peter's faith (22:32).** Luke is the only writer to include Jesus praying a prayer of petition for Peter. Jesus' prayer is that his faith not "run out."
- ◆ **Jesus prays in Gethsemane (22:41-45).** One significant alteration in Luke's version is that Jesus tells the disciples to pray, rather than to wait while he goes to pray (Mark 14:32; Matt 26:37). Luke shows Jesus as one who brings his mind and will into line with that of the Father.
- ◆ **Jesus prays on the cross (23:34, 46).** He asks his Father to forgive his executioners. He promises paradise to the repentant criminal. And having done these things, he entrusts his spirit to his Father in prayer.

It's natural to see Jesus turn to prayer in these critical moments of his ministry, because prayer was already part of the daily rhythm of his life. He was known by those around him for his habit of withdrawing into solitude to seek the Father. He had a select few with whom he prayed—and prayed for. He also prayed in larger groups and engaged in public prayer and rituals of prayer (as in the temple). Whether he was alone, or with a few trusted friends, or gathered with many, Jesus sought to dwell in the presence of his loving Father.

Imitating Jesus' Example: Prayer in Acts

- 1:14** Disciples wait, pray before Pentecost
- 1:24** Disciples pray before choosing a replacement for Judas
- 2:42** Church devoted to prayer
- 4:23-31** Church prays for boldness
- 6:4-6** Apostles must be devoted to prayer, so they appoint seven deacons
- 8:15** Peter & John pray for Spirit in Samaria
- 10:2** Cornelius prays constantly
- 10:9** Peter prays before going to Cornelius
- 12:5-13** Church prays for Peter in prison
- 13:3** Antioch church prays before sending Paul and Barnabas
- 16:25** Paul and Silas pray in prison

Jesus Prayed Alone¹

Jesus frequently sought out silent places to seek God, especially when the press of the crowd seemed to threaten to drown out the voice of the Father to which he was ever attentive.

At the beginning of his ministry, after a night spent healing crowds of people, Jesus sought a place to be alone with God: “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” (Mark 1:35).



Throughout his ministry Luke says “he often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16). This pattern would repeat itself frequently over the coming years.

- “He went up a mountainside by himself to pray” (Matt 14:23).
- “After leaving [the crowd], he went up on a mountainside to pray” (Mark 6:46).
- “Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God” (Luke 6:12).

In this space Jesus experienced something that strengthened and energized him. He found renewal in deserted places. He went there when he felt pressed by the crowds, when he felt “busy.” He went there when he had to make a decision, like choosing his apostles. He went there when he felt overwhelmed, like in Gethsemane.

Sometimes we simply need to be alone. Even with his disciples, Jesus would separate himself from them. Sometimes it’s important to be alone even when close friends are available. Jesus was comfortable with himself and could be alone. His “alone time” was not loneliness, but solitude.

Some people are lonely and uncomfortable with themselves when they are alone. Some people are too busy to be alone — and even when they are alone they’re easily distracted by the busy-ness of life. Some people don’t want to be alone (certainly not silent) because they’re afraid to face their true selves and consequently they need the distractions.

Being alone, however, is more than just being with oneself. Being alone is not loneliness when we find companionship with God in those times. It’s not withdrawal in the sense of isolation but the pursuit of God through communion (prayer) for the sake of renewal or recreation.

When we are too busy to commune with God, then life has distracted us from our true essence. When we are too uncomfortable with ourselves, then we have not faced the truth about ourselves in God’s presence. When we are lonely when alone, then we have not embraced the joy of solitude with God.

Jesus pursued God in that solitude. Some of Jesus’ vigils would be early morning, some would be all night. Sometimes something (or someone) is more important than sleep. Sometimes prayer was more important than sleep. Has it ever been for you? It was for Jesus. Jesus found time for solitude. His discipleship began in the desert alone with God. His solitude — his companionship with God — fueled his ministry; it energized his other relationships. If he was disciplined by solitude and apprenticed through solitude, perhaps we should too.

¹ A portion of our lesson commentary this week comes from a series of articles written by John Mark Hicks and Chris Webb, in which they examine Jesus’ life of prayer. This section comes from Hick’s article, “Shaped in Solitude” ([Link to article](#)).

Jesus Prayed With A Close Few²

Jesus had an inner circle within the twelve with whom he regularly prayed. For example, ascending the Mount of Transfiguration to pray, he took Peter, James and John with him (Luke 9:28). Jesus took those same three with him deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray (Luke 22:41). He also prayed specifically for Peter, that his faith would not “run out” (Luke 22:32).

Jesus had an inner circle with whom he prayed, and we need the same. We each need those two or three or four people with whom we pray, who hold us accountable, to whom we confess our sins, etc. We need the habit of regularly praying with the same few who know us and we know them—a circle of trust, intimacy, and caring.

These are the few who help us trust that God is with us, always, even though we are not always aware of God’s presence. We all experience times of darkness and tragedy, when our circumstances seem to suggest that God has abandoned us: We lose a job, or a home, or a loved one; we find ourselves desperately ill or overwhelmed by grief. When we are unable to pray, the prayer does not cease. These are the people who continue our prayer when we ourselves can pray no more. And when we are able, we resume our part in the life of prayer, perhaps in turn holding up others who are falling.

Jesus Prayed With Many³

For Jesus, prayer was also something to be shared in community. Jesus prayed in public groups. He taught his disciples to pray at their request. Among his disciples, he prayed for them and all who would come to know him through their witness (John 17). He engaged in public prayer and rituals of prayer in the temple. “[Jesus] went up to Nazareth,” writes Luke, describing the earliest days of Jesus’ ministry, “and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom” (Luke 4:16). In fact, many of Jesus’ healings and conversations take place in synagogues, where he so often joined with others for worship and prayer.

The Gospels also show Jesus praying the traditional blessings before and during meals; we find him blessing God before breaking the few small loaves that would feed the great multitude (Matt 14:19), and again during the Passover meal he shared with his disciples in the upper room (Matt 26:26).

Like Jesus, we too can learn to pray with many. Perhaps the greatest single resource available to those who want to nurture a stronger life of prayer is the local church community. We all need the experience of corporate prayer where the community offers a litany for the world, for the church, for marriages, for peace, for justice. Together we bring before God the needs of our families, friends, community, and world.

A Life of Prayer

Whether alone, with a few, or with many, prayer was a habit and priority for Jesus. It was sustained by a desire to connect and grow in intimacy and communion with the Father. When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, Jesus doesn’t give them magic words to say. Instead, Jesus teaches them about the nature of the one to whom they pray. Luke 11:1-13 begins and ends by emphasizing that the disciples can pray to God as a heavenly Father, whose goodness and love is greater than that of any human father. Those who prayerfully ask, seek, and knock are met at the door by a God who graciously gives, opens, and allows us to find.

² This section is adapted from Webb’s article, “Becoming Like Jesus: Prayer-Filled Life” ([Link to article](#)).

³ Webb, “Becoming Like Jesus: Prayer-Filled Life”

Jesus said that he could do nothing apart from the Father and that his mission in life was to do his will. So for Jesus, prayer was always more than a form of words expressing praise, sorrow, needs, or desires. Prayer, at its core, was a recognition that God was constantly present at every moment. Jesus' life of prayer involved talking to God, but most of all, it meant dwelling in God's presence and being conformed to the will of the Father.

As we seek to find a regular habit of prayer in our own lives, the model of Jesus is a good one to follow. Through his rhythms of praying alone, with a trusted few, and in larger groups, Jesus teaches us that a life of prayer keeps our hearts close to the Father's.

"The primary purpose of prayer is to bring us into such a life of communion with the Father that, by the power of the Spirit, we are increasingly conformed to the image of the Son."

– Richard Foster

These habits made him a role model for the disciples, because when they looked at Jesus, they longed to be like him, to have the same kind of intimacy with God that he had.

Jesus' life of prayer became a model for them to imitate, and the same is true for us today.

Discussion

1. Did you ever pulled an "all-nighter" in college (or perhaps later in life for work), sacrificing sleep in order to get something done or to meet a deadline? If you remember a specific occasion, and what you had to do, share it with others. Have you ever felt that way about a time of prayer with God — that is was more important than sleep? If comfortable, share those experiences, too.
2. Do you think Jesus "needed" those times alone with the Father? What did he "need" and why did he "need" the time alone?
3. Why do you think Jesus spent time in prayer not only in times of great difficulty but also in times of great success (for example, Luke 5:16)? What can we learn from this particular rhythm of Jesus' prayer life? Is it harder to spend time in prayer during times of success? If so, what does that reveal about our understanding of prayer?
4. What links do you see between Jesus' habits of prayer in Luke and the church's life of prayer in Acts?
5. As to Jesus habit of praying with a few intimate friends, who are those people in your life — people who continue your prayer when you don't have the strength to pray? Have you been that person for someone else? Describe what those experiences have meant to you.
6. Share with the group a practice or routine you have found helpful in your prayer life. Do you have natural stopping points in the day that lead you into prayer? What helps you ignore distractions?