

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Prayer is hard work.

This is a truth about prayer that seems hard to take. Sometimes it's easier not to engage in prayer because it's such a difficult thing to do.

Jesus knew that prayer was hard work, that it was among his most important work. How did Jesus approach the work of prayer?

*Jesus and the work of prayer*

*- in his earthly life*

Let's turn in our pew bibles to **Mark 1:35-37**.

**Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. Later Simon and the others went out to find him. When they found him, they said 'Everyone is looking for you.'**

What happened the night before? Had Jesus said to his disciples, 'Well, guys, I plan to get up for an early morning of prayer, so I'll just turn in with the sparrows, good night?'

No! Verse 32 tells us that it was only *after dark* that many sick people were brought to Jesus, and he healed them, and the whole town gathered at the door to watch.

Jesus has had a *hard day*, preaching and healing, and a late night. He had every excuse to sleep in a little. But prayer was still his first priority. The very first thing Jesus does is seek intimacy with God, connecting to the Father's heart.

There is a conspiracy against prayer. I don't know about you, but I find that when I try to set aside time to pray, *everything else tries to get in the way*. All the other priorities of the world crowd in on us – children, breakfast, telephone, tiredness. This conspiracy against prayer was also in place in Jesus' life.

What was the first thing Peter said to him? 'Everyone is looking for you!'

The world has a to-do list for you, Jesus! There is urgent and important stuff that is happening! People to see! Ministry to do! Missions to plan! But Jesus sets prayer as his first priority. The hard work of prayer doesn't drain him, but refreshes him in his relationship with the Father, and gives him new strength for the work in front of him.

And it can do the same with us.

*Jesus' ongoing work of prayer*

Jesus' prayer life didn't stop after his resurrection and exaltation.

In fact, prayer – intercession, pleading with the Father for us, is Jesus' continuing work.

Romans 8:33-34 says, **Who shall bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who will condemn us? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**

Hebrews 7:24-25 says this: **Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.**

Jesus continues his work of intercession right to this day! He always stands at the right hand of the Father, pleading your case before God. Prayer *is* hard work. It is Jesus' continuing hard work

for us!

In the first sermon in this series, I said that prayer draws us into God's heart. But as with all heartbeats, it doesn't leave us there. There comes a time when God says, 'It's time to roll up your sleeves and get to work in my power.' The time comes when the love I am receiving from God impels me outwards to start sharing that love with others.

It's only in the glow of the prayer of the heart, only in the strength and grace of intimacy with God, that we can begin to enter into prayer as work. Otherwise it becomes guilt-driven instead of joyful; draining instead of refreshing.

Prayer is truly important. Prayer is the most important work of all for God's people. There is no greater joy or higher calling than intimacy with God, and there is nothing we can accomplish without letting him give us his power for his work. Our effectiveness in parenting, in our jobs, in our ministry, our eternal impact on the world and people around us – they all revolve around our intimacy with God and the power he wants to give us through prayer.

Hallesby writes: '*Prayer is work. And all work takes time. When it becomes clear to us that prayer is part of our daily program of work, it will also become clear to us that we must arrange our daily program in such a way that there is time also for this work. If the work of prayer is to be successful it must also be properly planned.*' P65

### *Big Rocks illustration*

The point of the illustration is this: If you don't put the Big Rocks in first, all the little things of life will certainly crowd in, and you won't be able to fit the most important things in. Now, prayer is the most important thing of all, from an eternal perspective. But I can *guarantee* you, that if you don't plan time for it, and make it the most important priority like Jesus did, *it will always get pushed out of the way.*

If prayer is truly important, then we need to *make* prayer a priority! Not only say it is a priority, but actually plan it, book it in the diary and calendar, and put the big rocks in first!

It is out of observing Jesus in *fervent, planned, prioritised* prayer that the disciples come to Jesus with this request.

Let's look at Luke 11:1. **Once Jesus was praying in a certain place. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and asked, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'**

Are you willing to pray that prayer? 'Lord, teach us to pray.' Lord Jesus, teach us just how powerful prayer is. Teach us just how important it is. Give us the grace to set aside times for prayer and to give them the highest priority. When do you want me to set aside time for prayer? For what and whom do you want me to pray? Lord, teach *me* to pray.

Jesus rubs his hands with glee when one of his disciples prays that prayer. 'Okay,' he says with a big grin on his face. 'This is gonna be fun. It's gonna be awesome. Hold on to your hats for the most challenging, joyful, difficult, fulfilling and growing thing that's ever happened to you.'

We are all beginners in the school of prayer, in the work of prayer. We all need to learn from the Master himself, and he is most willing to teach us.

If you're willing, after this service, tell someone else about when and how long you believe God is

inviting you to spend time with him in prayer. Hold each other accountable! Ask each other what answers your friend has seen in this week of prayer! Ask God to give you the grace to make this one of your big rocks. Commit to meeting with him, with his word, in prayer at that time. Ask him first for intimacy, ask Jesus to come into your heart, invite him into your helplessness, and see where he takes you in blessing the world!

### *The power of Prayer*

Why is it so important for us to work at prayer? Because God graciously wants to use us as conduits of his mighty power. To change the world. To change us. To change our families for God's glory. It's only through connecting to *God's* power that we are going to be able to do the exciting things he wants us to be part of.

Ephesians 1:19,20 and 2:20. says this:

**I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe in him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honour at God's right hand in the heavenly realms...**

**Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work in us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.**

Prayer is work. It's God's work. Prayer is power. It's God's power. Prayer is accessing God's power for God's work

[What does God command and invite us to pray for?

**Luke 10:1-21 teaches us to pray for workers** – for those God wants to send out into the world to spread his good news of forgiveness, redemption and hope.

**We are to pray for our government. (1 Tim 2:1-4)**

**We are to pray for those who do not yet know Jesus, that their hearts and minds may be open and they may hear the gospel. (2 Cor 4:4-6, Matthew 5:14-16, 2 Tim 2:4, 2 Thess 3:1).**

**Especially we are to pray for those we know, those who are close to us, who don't yet know Jesus as Saviour.**

As I put up this list, I wonder who God is putting on your heart?

'God, who do you want me to pray for? Show me specific names.'

As names come to mind, write them down. Again, you might like to share these names with someone else, and ask each other next week how that is going.

Prayer is work. At first that sounds like bad news. But our gracious and powerful God invites us to share his grace and power. *God* invites *us* to be involved with *his work, in Jesus' name*. What an amazing privilege that is!

May God our Father draw you into his heart and impel you out with blessings for yourself and the world through prayer.

Amen!