

Prayer in the Waiting

A Reflection on How Jesus Taught Us to Pray



A Realisation of Life, While We Wait

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Prayer in the Waiting is part of the *While We Wait: Reflections on Kingdom Living* series.



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The While We Wait Series

Introduction

Why Prayer, and Why Now

If you have read *While We Wait*, you will already know that this series is built around a single question: how are we meant to live in the period between Jesus' ascension and his return? That question is practical as much as theological. It is about the texture of daily life — the habits, the choices, the inner orientation of the person who is genuinely trying to live faithfully in a world that can make faithfulness feel both urgent and elusive.

I want to suggest prayer sits at the very centre of that question. Not as one discipline among several, but as the thing that makes all the others possible. If the waiting period is about becoming a particular kind of person — ready, faithful, and increasingly attentive to God — then prayer is not a component of that process. It is the atmosphere in which the process happens. You cannot become ready in a deep sense without it. You cannot sustain faithfulness over the long haul without it. And you cannot remain genuinely attentive to God if you are never actually speaking to him.

That sounds straightforward. And yet most of us, if we are honest, find prayer harder than almost anything else the Christian life asks of us. Not because we don't believe in it, but because we don't quite know what we are doing when we do it. Are we informing God of things he doesn't already know? Are we trying to change his mind? Are we performing a religious

duty? Are we doing it because we feel we should, and if we are honest, expecting very little?

Jesus took these questions seriously. In fact, he took them seriously enough to address them directly — not once, but in a sustained and carefully structured way that the Gospel of Matthew preserves for us. And what he said was more searching, and more liberating, than most of us have had the chance to sit with properly.

What This Booklet Is About

This is not a comprehensive guide to prayer. I am not qualified to write one, and I am not sure anyone is. What it is, is a close reflection on what Jesus himself said and showed about prayer — particularly in Matthew's Gospel, and alongside that, in the portrait Luke's Gospel draws of Jesus's own prayer life.

The journey we will take together moves through three broad movements.

The first is perhaps surprising: before Jesus tells his disciples how to pray, he tells them how not to. The warnings he gives in Matthew chapter 6 are pointed, and they are aimed at recognisable human tendencies — the desire to be seen to be praying, and the anxiety that tries to compel God through sheer volume of words. These are not obscure ancient problems. They are alive and well in every generation, including ours, and Jesus names them with an economy and precision that suggests he understood them from the inside.

The second movement is the Lord's Prayer itself — what some have called the manual of Christian prayer. But it is a manual unlike any other, because it does not primarily tell you what words to say. It tells you what kind of relationship you are standing in when you pray. Each petition is less a request to be fulfilled than a posture to be assumed — an orientation of the whole self toward a Father who already knows what you need, and who is not waiting to be persuaded.

The third movement is Luke's Gospel, where something remarkable happens. Luke shows us Jesus praying — again and again, in specific places, at specific moments, with specific words. And what we see there is not a teacher demonstrating a technique. It is a person living, from the inside, exactly what Matthew's teaching describes. The hiddenness, the brevity, the directness, the complete trust in the Father's will — it is all there, embodied in the one who taught it.

Together, these three movements form something I have found genuinely useful: a picture of prayer not as religious performance, not as anxious petition, but as the natural language of a life that is oriented toward God. That orientation, I have come to believe, is what the waiting period is fundamentally about.

A Word About How to Read This

What follows is offered in the same spirit as everything in this series — not as instruction but as reflection. These are things I

have had to sit with, sometimes uncomfortably, and they have changed the way I pray, which is to say they have changed the way I live.

I have tried to let Jesus say what he actually says, rather than what we might prefer him to say. Some of it is challenging. Some of it is, I think, genuinely liberating. All of it comes from a teacher who was not offering religious self-improvement advice — he was inviting his followers into his own relationship with the Father.

That invitation remains open. Take what is useful and make it your own.

James

FOR REFLECTION

1. What is the honest question about prayer that you are bringing to this booklet — not what you think you should be asking, but what you actually are?
2. If someone who didn't share your faith watched how you spent your time and energy each day, would they conclude that prayer was central to your life? What might they observe?

Practice *Before reading Chapter 1, spend a few minutes simply noticing your instinctive assumptions about prayer. When you find yourself praying — formally or not — pause and ask: what do I think is actually happening here?*

A full five-session study guide for small groups is available at www.bereanpress.co.uk

Chapter 1: Learning to Unlearn

Matthew 6:5–8

There is something initially disorienting about the way Jesus begins his teaching on prayer. You might expect him to start with encouragement — with an invitation to draw near, or a reassurance about being heard. Instead, he starts with a warning. Two warnings, in fact. Before he tells his disciples a single thing about how to pray, he tells them about the ways in which people pray badly. And the precision with which he describes those ways suggests he had watched very carefully, and recognised something in what he saw.

That precision is worth pausing on. Jesus is not describing exotic or unusual failures. He is describing tendencies that are entirely recognisable — patterns of behaviour that emerge not from wickedness but from something far more ordinary: the desire to be thought well of, and the anxiety that drives us to try harder when we feel unheard. These are not the failures of bad people. They are the failures of people who care — which is to say, they are the failures of most of us, most of the time.

The First Warning: The Performance Trap

The first group Jesus identifies he calls the hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, he says, so that they may be seen by others. And he

adds, with a flatness that carries more weight than any rebuke: they have received their reward in full.

It is worth sitting with that phrase. They have received their reward in full. Not they will be punished, or they have done something wrong. Simply: they got what they were actually after. The transaction is complete. They wanted to be seen praying, and they were seen praying, and that is the end of it.

And here is what makes that so searching: the reward they received is entirely earthly. The approval of other people. The reputation for piety. The social currency that public religious observance could earn in first century Jewish life — and, if we are honest, in many Christian communities today. They were not oriented toward God at all. They were oriented toward the people watching. Prayer, for them, was not a vertical transaction but a horizontal one — not an encounter with the Father but a performance for the crowd. God was, at best, the occasion for the performance rather than its object.

Jesus, by contrast, is consistently and completely God-focused. Every recorded prayer he offers is addressed directly and simply to the Father, without a sideways glance at any other audience. There is no performance because there is no one else in the room. That is not a technique he has mastered. It is a reflection of where his attention actually is — of who, in the deepest sense, he is actually talking to.

The word translated as hypocrites comes from the Greek theatrical tradition — it refers to an actor wearing a mask, playing a part. Jesus is not calling these people villains. He is saying that their prayer has become a performance: something done for an audience, shaped by what that audience expects to see. And the devastating thing about a performance is that it requires an audience to work. Take away the observers, and there is nothing left. Their prayer was never really prayer at all. It was self-promotion conducted in religious language — and it worked, entirely, on its own terms. Which is precisely what makes it so empty.

I find this uncomfortable, if I am honest. Not because I have stood on street corners to be seen praying, but because the underlying impulse — the desire to be perceived as a certain kind of person — is one I recognise. It does not only show up in obviously public religion. It shows up in the carefully chosen words of a prayer spoken aloud in a group, shaped more by who is listening than by what I actually want to say to God. It shows up in the gap between how I speak about my faith to others and what my private life with God actually looks like. The mask is rarely as obvious as the street corner. But the dynamic is the same.

Jesus's corrective is simple and radical in equal measure. Go into your room, he says. Shut the door. Pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

The geography here is deliberate. The room is not a suggestion about physical location — it is a description of a kind of prayer. Prayer that has no audience but God. Prayer that would look exactly the same whether anyone was watching or not. Prayer that is, in that sense, completely free — free from the need to perform, free from the approval of others, free to be honest in a way that performance never quite allows.

That freedom, I have found, is harder to enter than it sounds. We are so habituated to shaping ourselves for others that the idea of being fully, unguardedly ourselves before God can feel almost exposing. But that exposure is, I think, precisely the point. Prayer that stays safely within the bounds of what we are comfortable performing is prayer that never quite reaches the place where it becomes real.

The Second Warning: The Anxiety Trap

The second warning is aimed at a different tendency, and Jesus assigns it to a different group: the Gentiles. Do not heap up empty phrases as they do, he says, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

This is a description of a particular theology of prayer — one in which the goal is to wear God down, or work him up, or make yourself impossible to ignore through the sheer quantity of your petitions. If the first failure is about audience, this one is about technique. It treats prayer as a mechanism: apply

enough force, in the right way, for long enough, and the desired outcome will be produced.

The ancient world had very sophisticated versions of this. Pagan prayer often involved lengthy, precisely worded formulae that had to be recited correctly to be effective. Get a word wrong and you might have to start again. The gods were beings to be managed and manipulated through the right combination of flattery, sacrifice, and verbal persistence. Prayer was, in that framework, essentially a form of leverage.

We might assume we are far from that. But I am not sure we are as far as we think. There is a version of Christian prayer that operates on similar logic — that believes the answer to unanswered prayer is more prayer, longer prayer, louder prayer, prayer with more faith, prayer with more people. That treats the length and intensity of our asking as the variable God is waiting on. That, underneath the Christian language, is not so very different from heaping up empty phrases.

Jesus's corrective here is even more striking than the first: your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Before you ask him. Not he will know when you tell him. Not he will understand eventually. He already knows. The information asymmetry that drives anxious, repetitive prayer — the sense that God needs to be brought up to speed on the urgency of your situation — simply does not exist.

The Hinge

That sentence — your Father knows what you need before you ask him — is the hinge on which everything turns. Because if it is true, it dismantles almost every assumption that drives compulsive, performative, or anxious prayer. And it raises, with some force, the question that Jesus is about to answer.

If God already knows, why pray at all?

It is the right question. And it is the question the next chapter exists to answer.

What I want to suggest here, before we get there, is that the two warnings Jesus gives are not primarily about behaviour. They are about a picture of God. The hypocrite's prayer assumes a God who can be impressed by outward forms — a God who is, in some sense, susceptible to what others think. The Gentile's prayer assumes a God who is fundamentally reluctant or distant, who needs to be overcome through persistence. Both pictures produce recognisable kinds of prayer. And both pictures are wrong.

Jesus is clearing the ground. Before he gives his disciples a new pattern for prayer, he is dismantling the patterns they have absorbed — from their religious culture, from the world around them, from the deep human instinct to manage our relationships with power through performance and persistence.

What he is moving them toward — what he is moving us toward — is something far simpler, and far more demanding. Not a technique. Not a formula. A relationship. With a Father who already knows. And who, for reasons the Lord's Prayer will begin to illuminate, still asks us to ask.

James

FOR REFLECTION

1. Jesus says of the hypocrites simply: ‘they have received their reward in full.’ The performance worked — they were seen, and that was what they were after. Do you recognise that impulse in yourself: praying in a way shaped more by who was listening than by what you actually wanted to say to God?
2. Jesus’s corrective is ‘go into your room, shut the door’ — a description of prayer that would look exactly the same whether anyone was watching or not. What would it mean, practically, for your prayer to have that quality of freedom?

Practice *Choose one time each day this week to pray with no one listening and nothing to perform. Simply say what is actually true for you today. Begin with ‘Father’ and see what follows.*

Chapter 2: The Shape of Prayer

Matthew 6:9–13

At the end of the last chapter I left a question hanging deliberately. If God already knows what you need before you ask Him, why pray at all? It is the kind of question that, once you have really heard it, is difficult to unhear. And it deserves a serious answer — not a deflection, not a pious reassurance, but an honest reckoning with what prayer is actually for if it is not primarily about informing God or persuading Him.

The Lord's Prayer is that answer. But it is an answer that only works if we come to it having heard the question properly. Read in isolation, the Lord's Prayer can too easily become what Jesus has just warned against — a formula recited by rote, a set of words that have been said so many times they have lost their edges. Most of us learned it in childhood. We know it the way we know a familiar street — so well that we stop seeing it. The challenge is to read it again as if for the first time, and to ask not what the words say but what they reveal about the nature of prayer itself.

Because what the Lord's Prayer reveals, I have come to believe, is not primarily a set of requests. It is a posture. A way of standing before God. A structure for the whole orientation of the self toward the Father. Each petition is less something to be granted than something to be inhabited — a disposition to be assumed, a way of being that prayer is meant to form in us

over time. Jesus does not say these are the words to say. He says this is the way to pray. That distinction matters more than we might think. He is giving us not a script but a compass — a set of orientations that, once internalised, can guide us into prayer from wherever we happen to be: anxious, grieving, angry, afraid, or simply lost for words.

Our Father in Heaven

Everything begins here. Before there is a single petition, before any need is named or any request made, Jesus establishes the relationship within which all prayer takes place: Father.

It is a word so familiar in Christian usage that it has almost stopped surprising us. But it would have been surprising — startling, even — to the disciples who first heard it. Jewish prayer of the period was not characterised by this kind of intimacy. God was addressed with reverence, with appropriate distance, with the elaborate courtesy due to a sovereign. To address Him simply as Father — and not merely Father but our Father, the Father of this small gathered community of followers — was to claim a closeness that was genuinely new.

And Jesus makes it the starting point. Not a petition. Not a confession. Not an acknowledgement of unworthiness. A relationship. You are already the child of this Father before you say another word. Our entire prayer life should take place within this given reality, not as an attempt to establish it.

In heaven is not a geographical qualifier — it is not telling us where God lives so much as who He is. The same God we are invited to approach with the intimacy of a child calling to a parent is also the God we acknowledge as creator and sovereign — the one who spoke the world into being, who holds history in His hands, and whose purposes nothing can ultimately frustrate. The intimacy of Father and the majesty of in heaven belong together, and we lose something important if we allow them to drift apart. A father who is not sovereign cannot fully protect. A sovereign who is not father cannot fully be trusted. It is precisely because this Father is who He is that His love can be trusted, and precisely because He loves as a Father that His majesty need not terrify us.

This opening is, above all, a heart posture for those who approach God with fear or with a sense of unworthiness — for those of us who have absorbed, somewhere along the way, a picture of God as distant, demanding, or difficult to please. Jesus does not begin by asking us to earn our place in the conversation. He begins by telling us we already have one. When anxiety about whether God is even listening tempts us to give up before we start, the first words of this prayer call us back: He is Father. He is your Father. Begin there.

I have spent a lot of my life addressing God with a kind of cautious formality — as though approaching someone important who might not be pleased to see me. Learning to begin with Father, and to mean it, has been one of the quieter

revolutions of my prayer life. Not because the word is magic, but because it reorients everything that follows. You are not petitioning a distant sovereign. You are speaking to someone who already knows you, already loves you, and already knows what you need. That changes the tone of everything.

Hallowed Be Your Name

The first petition is not about us at all. It is about God — about His name, His reputation, His honour in the world. Before we ask for anything for ourselves, we ask that God be regarded as holy. That His name — which in biblical thought means His character, His person, His presence — be treated with the reverence it deserves.

This sets the context for everything that follows — and context here is not a small thing. How we pray is inseparable from how we understand God. A person who approaches prayer with a diminished or distorted picture of God will pray diminished or distorted prayers. They will ask for too little, or ask for the wrong things, or bring to prayer the wrong expectations. To begin by hallowing God's name is to begin by correcting our picture of Him — to start the act of prayer by consciously placing ourselves before who He actually is, rather than the reduced version of Him we may habitually carry around.

Our prayers are always said in the context of our understanding of God. If that understanding is small, our

prayers will be small. If it is fearful, our prayers will be defensive. If it is transactional, our prayers will be calculating. Hallowed be your name is the petition that expands the space — that opens us to the God who is actually there rather than the God we have unconsciously constructed.

This petition is not a pious formality to be got through before the real business begins. It is the real business. It is the fundamental reorientation of the self away from its natural self-centredness toward the one who is the source and ground of all things. And it is a heart posture for those of us who come to prayer preoccupied — with our problems, our fears, our agendas. The instruction is not to suppress those things, but to begin somewhere else. Begin with who He is. Let that be the ground on which everything else is laid. What follows will be different for it.

Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done

These two petitions belong together, and together they form the heart of the prayer's first movement. Both are requests for God's purposes to prevail — in the world, in history, and in the life of the one praying. Your kingdom come: let the reign of God, which is already present in Jesus and breaking into the world through Him, become the governing reality of everything. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven: let what is true of heaven — the complete, uncontested, joyful

alignment of everything with God's purposes — become true of earth.

Both petitions ask for something vast. And both involve the person praying placing themselves within what they are asking for. You cannot sincerely pray your will be done and simultaneously insist on your own. You cannot genuinely ask for the kingdom to come without being willing to be part of how it comes. These are not spectator prayers. They are prayers that implicate the one who prays them.

This is where the Lord's Prayer most clearly answers the question about why we pray if God already knows what we need. We pray not to inform God but to align ourselves. To bring our will into conformity with His. To place ourselves, consciously and deliberately, within His purposes rather than our own. Prayer is not the mechanism by which we get God to do what we want. It is the practice by which we become people who want what God wants.

And this is the heart posture Jesus gives to those of us who come to prayer anxious, controlling, or gripping tightly to a particular outcome. The petition does not ask us to pretend we have no preferences, or to manufacture a peace we do not feel. It asks us to bring our preferences — honestly, fully — and then to place them beneath something larger. Your will be done is the prayer of someone who has not yet let go but is choosing, in the act of praying, to open their hands. It is not resignation.

It is trust — and trust, unlike resignation, is something that has to be chosen, often against considerable resistance.

I have found this both liberating and demanding in roughly equal measure. Liberating, because it releases prayer from the exhausting work of trying to change God's mind. Demanding, because it turns prayer into something that costs something — a genuine surrendering of my own preferences and agendas to something larger. Your will be done is the easiest sentence in the prayer to say and perhaps the hardest to mean.

Give Us Today Our Daily Bread

Having established who God is and what His purposes are, the prayer now turns to us — and the first thing it asks for is strikingly ordinary. Not a great spiritual gift. Not rescue from a crisis. Bread. For today.

The word translated daily is unusual — it appears almost nowhere else in ancient Greek, and scholars have puzzled over it. But its meaning is essentially this: the bread we need for this day. Not a stockpile. Not security against all future need. Just today's provision, from the hand of the Father who already knows we need it.

This is a heart posture for those of us caught in anxiety about the future — and that, at various points, is most of us. We are creatures who live in time, and the future is always uncertain,

and the gap between what we have and what we fear we might need can become a source of consuming worry. Jesus does not tell us to ignore that gap or to pretend the uncertainty is not real. He gives us instead a practice: ask for today. Not tomorrow. Not next year. Today.

There is wisdom here that goes beyond the immediate comfort. The practice of asking, each day, for what we need that day keeps us in a posture of conscious reliance rather than self-sufficiency. It is a daily reminder that we are creatures, not self-made, not autonomous, not the authors of our own security. Anxiety about the future is, at its root, a form of self-reliance — the belief that if we worry enough, plan enough, accumulate enough, we can secure ourselves against whatever is coming. Give us today our daily bread gently but persistently redirects that energy. Not toward passivity, but toward dependence on a Father who holds tomorrow as securely as He holds today.

I grew up with a fairly self-reliant streak. The financial reckoning in my mid-fifties that I described in *While We Wait* was, among other things, a prolonged lesson in what it feels like to be genuinely dependent rather than merely theoretically so. Give us today our daily bread is a very different prayer when you are not entirely sure where tomorrow's provision is coming from. But it is also, I think, the truest form of the prayer — the one that most honestly reflects the condition we are all in, whether we feel it or not.

Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors

This is the petition that comes with a condition attached — and Jesus underlines it immediately after the prayer, in a way He does for no other petition. If you forgive others their trespasses, He says, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. If you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you. The weight of that is considerable.

The connection Jesus makes is not mechanical — as if forgiving others is the price we pay for God’s forgiveness. It is more like a description of how forgiveness works in a person. Those who have genuinely received forgiveness — who have understood the depth of their own debt and the grace by which it has been cancelled — find it changes their relationship with the debts others owe them. You cannot hold tightly to a grievance against someone else while genuinely believing you yourself are entirely forgiven. The two things do not coexist comfortably.

This is the heart posture Jesus gives to those of us carrying unforgiveness — and unforgiveness is one of the heaviest things a person can carry. It takes many forms: the slow burn of a long-held resentment, the sharp pain of a fresh betrayal, the complicated grief of someone who has been genuinely wronged and does not know how to release it. Jesus does not minimise any of that. But He places it here, in the middle of

the prayer, between our dependence on the Father's provision and our appeal for His protection — as if to say that forgiveness is not an optional extra in the life of prayer, but part of its very structure.

To pray this petition honestly is to do something quite searching. It is to acknowledge that we are people who need forgiveness — not merely in some general theological sense, but specifically, today, for particular things we have done and left undone. And it is to commit, in the act of praying, to extending the same grace we are asking for. We cannot pray it in one direction only. The prayer will not allow it.

Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil

The prayer ends not with triumph but with vulnerability. We are people who can be led astray. We are people who need deliverance. The final petitions are a frank acknowledgement of our own fragility and an appeal to the Father's protection.

Lead us not into temptation does not mean that God tempts us — the New Testament is clear elsewhere that He does not. It is an idiom of dependence: do not let us enter into situations that are beyond us. Keep us from the places where we will fall. And this is the heart posture Jesus gives to those of us who live with fear — fear of our own weakness, fear of what we might do or become under pressure, fear of a world that can feel hostile and overwhelming. The petition does not ask us to pretend

that fear away. It asks us to bring it honestly to the Father and to ask for His protection rather than trying to manage on our own.

There is something deeply honest about ending a prayer this way — acknowledging not only that we have failed in the past but that we know ourselves well enough to know we may fail again. It is the opposite of the self-confidence that imagines it has prayer, and faith, and the Christian life, more or less under control. It is the prayer of someone who knows they are still fragile, still vulnerable, still in need of being kept.

Deliver us from evil — or, as it can be translated, from the evil one — is the widest petition of the prayer. It reaches beyond individual moral failure to something larger: the whole environment in which the life of faith is lived. We are not praying in a neutral space. We are praying as people who know that the waiting period, for all its possibilities, is also a field of contest. The prayer ends by placing us, and keeping us, in the hands of the Father who is more than equal to whatever we face.

The Manual That Is Not a Formula

I called the Lord's Prayer a manual at the beginning of this chapter, and I want to come back to that word and qualify it. It is a manual in the sense that it gives shape and structure to prayer — a framework within which the life of prayer can be

lived. But it is not a formula. It is not a sequence of words to be recited correctly in order to produce a desired effect. Jesus Himself says pray like this, not pray these words — a distinction that matters enormously.

What the prayer gives us is a set of heart postures — orientations of the whole self toward God that we are invited to inhabit rather than merely repeat. Begin with the relationship. Let your understanding of who He is expand before you bring your needs. Surrender your will to His. Ask for what you need today, in conscious dependence. Deal honestly with forgiveness, received and given. Acknowledge your own fragility and trust His protection.

These postures are not designed for a particular kind of prayer occasion. They are designed for every occasion — for the early morning quiet, for the moment of crisis, for the long middle stretch of an ordinary day. They meet us wherever we are: in our anxiety, our unforgiveness, our fear, our self-sufficiency, our sense of unworthiness. And from each of those places, they offer the same invitation — not to perform better, but to turn. To reorient. To place ourselves, again and again, in the presence of a Father who already knows, and who is always closer than we think.

Pray from inside those orientations, day after day, and something happens to the person who prays. Not immediately, and not without cost. But over time, the shape of the prayer

begins to become the shape of the person. The self that began prayer turned in on itself — anxious about being heard, performing for an invisible audience — gradually finds itself turned outward and upward. Toward a Father who already knows. And who, it turns out, was always closer than the performance and the anxiety allowed us to see.

James

FOR REFLECTION

1. The Lord's Prayer begins with 'Our Father in heaven' — intimacy and majesty held together. Do you approach prayer with the ease of a child speaking to a loving parent, or with a more cautious formality? What shapes that?
2. 'Your will be done' is the prayer of someone who has not yet let go but is choosing, in the act of praying, to open their hands. Is there something you are currently holding tightly that this petition would ask you to release?

Practice *Each day this week, use the Lord's Prayer as a compass rather than a recitation. Spend a moment on each petition — not repeating the words, but sitting inside the posture they describe. With 'your will be done,' name something specific you are placing beneath the Father's will today.*

Chapter 3: The Request That Changes Everything

Luke 11:1

Jesus has been praying. Luke does not tell us what He said, or how long He prayed, or what the occasion was. He simply notes, with characteristic economy, that Jesus was praying in a certain place, and that when He finished, one of His disciples came to Him with a request. Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.

Seven words, in some translations. And yet those seven words carry a weight that shifts everything.

What the Disciples Had Already Been Given

To feel the full force of this moment, we need to remember what the disciples already had. They were not coming to Jesus as people who had never heard anything about prayer. They had been present on the mountainside when He gave the Sermon on the Mount. They had heard the warnings about the hypocrites and the Gentiles. They had received the Lord's Prayer — that extraordinary compressed structure of relationship, orientation, dependence, forgiveness, and trust that we explored in the last chapter.

They had, in other words, the teaching. And the teaching was remarkable. It answered questions they had not even known to

ask. It cleared away two thousand years of accumulated religious assumptions about what prayer was for and how it worked. It gave them a pattern that, as we have seen, was not a formula but a way of being — a set of heart postures that could meet them wherever they were.

And yet here they are, asking to be taught to pray.

Which means the teaching, on its own, was not enough. Or rather — the teaching had done something unexpected. It had not satisfied their curiosity. It had created a hunger. And the hunger was not for more information. It was for something they had seen in Jesus Himself.

What They Saw

Luke's Gospel is unique among the four in the attention it pays to Jesus at prayer. Where Matthew gives us the architecture of prayer, Luke gives us the life of it — and the life, in Luke, is inseparable from the person of Jesus. Again and again, at the pivotal moments of His ministry, Luke pauses to show us Jesus withdrawing to pray.

Before He chose the Twelve, He spent the entire night on a mountainside in prayer. Before the great confession at Caesarea Philippi, He was praying alone. At the Transfiguration — that moment of blinding divine disclosure — it was while He was praying that His appearance changed.

In the wilderness after His baptism. In the lonely places to which He repeatedly withdrew, away from the crowds who pressed in on Him from every side.

This is not incidental detail. Luke is showing us something about the inner architecture of Jesus's life. And what he is showing us is precisely what Matthew teaches: the hiddenness, the withdrawal from the public gaze, the refusal to make prayer into performance. Jesus does not pray where He can be seen praying. He prays on mountains and in wilderness places and in the darkness before dawn. His prayer life is lived exactly where He said prayer should be lived — in the room with the door shut, before a Father who sees in secret.

And the disciples saw this. Not the prayers themselves — those were private, as Jesus said they should be. But they saw the pattern. They saw Him leave. They saw Him return. They saw the quality of what came after the prayer — the clarity of decision, the authority of teaching, the steadiness under pressure. They watched a man whose entire life seemed to flow from somewhere they could not quite access. And they wanted in.

The Difference Between Matthew and Luke

It is worth pausing on the difference between the way Matthew presents the Lord's Prayer and the way Luke does, because the difference is itself instructive.

In Matthew, the Lord's Prayer arrives in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount — a great sustained piece of teaching delivered to the crowds on a hillside. It is structured, sequential, carefully positioned between the warnings that precede it and the teaching on fasting that follows. It is, in the deepest sense, instruction. Jesus is teaching His disciples, and the prayer is part of what they are being taught.

In Luke, the context is entirely different. Jesus is not addressing a crowd. He is not in the middle of a formal discourse. He is finishing His own prayer — a private moment that a single disciple has been close enough to observe. And when He finishes, that disciple does not ask for clarification about something Jesus has said. He asks to be let into something Jesus has done. Lord, teach us to pray as you yourself pray.

That shift — from instruction received to life observed — is everything. It means that in Luke, the Lord's Prayer is not primarily a lesson. It is a sharing. Jesus is not telling His disciples how prayer works in the abstract. He is opening the door of His own prayer life and inviting them to step inside. The prayer He gives them in response is not a template to be applied. It is a glimpse of how He Himself relates to the Father — and an invitation to relate to the Father the same way.

This is why Luke's framing of the Lord's Prayer is in some ways the more searching of the two. Matthew gives us the pattern

and tells us what it means. Luke shows us a man for whom the pattern is not a discipline imposed from outside but a description of something that already lives in Him — and then invites us to want what He has.

What They Were Really Asking

There is one more thing to notice about the disciple's request, and it is perhaps the most important of all.

He does not say: Lord, give us a prayer. He does not say: Lord, teach us the correct way to pray. He says: teach us to pray as John taught his disciples — which is to say, teach us the way you pray. The comparison with John is not incidental. John the Baptist, whose disciples were known for their devotional practices, had evidently given his followers a distinctive form of prayer. The disciple is placing Jesus in that tradition of teacher and asking for the same thing: not theology, not technique, but formation. Shape us into people who pray the way you pray.

This is a request that could only come from watching. You do not ask to be taught to pray like someone unless you have seen them pray and wanted what you saw. The disciples had the teaching from Matthew's account. What they lacked — what the disciple is asking for — is the life that the teaching describes. And that life was visible in Jesus in a way that made

the teaching feel, not complete, but like a door that had been opened onto something they had not yet entered.

The Lord's Prayer, in Luke, is Jesus's answer to that request. And it is an answer that says, in effect: you can have this. The relationship I have with the Father — the intimacy, the trust, the daily dependence, the alignment of my will with His — is not mine alone. It is what I came to make available. Our Father, He says. Not my Father, offered to you as an example. Our Father — the same Father, the same relationship, the same access. The prayer I pray is the prayer you can pray. The life you have watched is the life you are invited into.

The Bridge

Matthew shows us what prayer is. Luke shows us what it looks like when it is lived. And the distance between those two things — between the teaching and the life, between the pattern and the person — is the distance this chapter has been trying to cross.

The disciples crossed it not by studying harder or trying more diligently to apply the Lord's Prayer correctly. They crossed it by watching Jesus — by paying attention to a life that embodied everything the teaching described, and by allowing that life to create in them a hunger that the teaching alone could not satisfy. And then, out of that hunger, they asked.

That asking is available to us too. The same Jesus who withdrew to lonely places, who prayed through the night before the decisions that shaped His ministry, who in His darkest hour said not my will but yours — that Jesus is not a historical figure to be studied at a safe distance. He is, as Luke's second volume makes clear, the one whose Spirit now lives in those who follow Him. The prayer life the disciples watched from the outside is the prayer life that, through the Spirit, becomes possible from the inside.

Which is what the next chapter is about.

James

FOR REFLECTION

1. The disciple's request — 'teach us to pray as you yourself pray' — could only come from watching. Is there someone in your life whose prayer has made you want what they have? What was it about it that created that desire?
2. Jesus answers 'Our Father' — not 'My Father offered to you as an example,' but our Father: the same relationship, the same access. Does that feel like good news to you? What gets in the way of receiving it fully?

Practice *Read through Luke chapters 3–22 with attention to the moments when Luke mentions Jesus praying. Notice the pattern: where does He go? When does He pray? What comes after the prayer?*

Chapter 4: The Life of Prayer

Luke's Portrait of Jesus

We ended the last chapter with a promise. The prayer life the disciples watched from the outside, we said, is the prayer life that through the Spirit becomes possible from the inside. But before we get to the Spirit, and to what that means for us in the waiting period, we need to stay a little longer with what the disciples actually saw. Because Luke's portrait of Jesus at prayer is not a general impression. It is specific, repeated, and deliberately placed. And the more carefully you look at it, the more clearly you see it is not simply illustrating the teaching of Matthew 6. It is living it.

A Life Shaped by Withdrawal

The first thing Luke shows us is a pattern. Not an occasional retreat, not a spiritual discipline practised when circumstances allowed, but a consistent and habitual withdrawal from the crowd toward the Father.

Luke 5:16 gives us this with unusual directness: Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. The word translated often matters. This is not a description of a single notable occasion. It is a description of how Jesus lived. The withdrawal was regular enough, and characteristic enough, that Luke can summarise it as a feature of His life rather than an episode within it.

And the places He withdrew to are telling. Lonely places. The wilderness. Mountaintops. The darkness before dawn. These are not places of comfort or convenience. They are places of hiddenness — places where there is no audience, no crowd, no one to perform for. They are, in the most literal sense, the room with the door shut that Matthew 6 describes. Jesus is not teaching His disciples one thing about prayer and then quietly doing another. He is living, in plain sight of those who travel with Him, exactly what He taught.

What the disciples see is not the content of the prayers — those remain private, as Jesus said they should. What they see is the commitment. The leaving. The returning. The fact that no matter how many people press in on Him, no matter how urgent the demand or how great the crowd, there is always a point at which Jesus turns away from all of it and goes to be alone with the Father. That pattern, observed over months and years of shared life, is what creates the hunger that surfaces in Luke 11:1. They are not asking for information. They are asking for what they have watched Him do.

Before Every Pivotal Moment

Luke does something else that is easy to miss unless you are reading with attention. He consistently places Jesus in prayer immediately before the moments that will define His ministry.

This is not accidental. It is a theological statement about where Jesus's life and decisions come from.

Before He chooses the Twelve — the decision that will shape everything that follows, the men who will carry His message to the ends of the earth — He spends the entire night on a mountainside in prayer. Luke 6:12 is precise about this: He went out to the mountain to pray, and He continued all night in prayer to God. Only then, when morning came, did He call His disciples and choose the Twelve. The decision does not precede the prayer. The prayer precedes the decision.

Before the great confession at Caesarea Philippi — the moment when Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah, the pivot point of the entire gospel — Luke 9:18 tells us that Jesus was praying alone. The disclosure comes out of solitude. The most significant affirmation of His identity in the gospels is preceded not by preparation or strategy but by prayer.

At the Transfiguration, Luke is again specific: Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain to pray, and it was as He was praying that the appearance of His face changed. The glory that breaks through in that moment is not a performance arranged for the disciples' benefit. It is an overflow — something that happens in the intimacy of prayer and spills, unexpectedly, into visibility.

Matthew 6:5 warned against praying in public in order to be seen. Luke shows us a Jesus who consistently prays in private

before public moments, rather than during or after them. The real prayer happens in the hiddenness. The public moment is downstream of it. The disciples can see the pattern even if they cannot see the prayers.

The Quality of the Prayers Themselves

When Luke does give us the actual words of Jesus's prayers, they are remarkable for what they are not. They are not long. They are not elaborate. They are not anxiously repetitive. Every prayer Luke records is brief, direct, and addressed to the Father with a simplicity that is itself a kind of eloquence.

In Luke 10:21, after the seventy-two return from their mission with joy, Jesus bursts into spontaneous thanksgiving: I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. It is personal. It is direct. It is over almost as soon as it has begun. There is no preamble, no extended formula, no working up of emotion. There is simply a heart responding to what the Father has done, in the most natural language available.

In Gethsemane — the most agonising moment of His life, the place where everything He has been walking toward finally arrives — His prayer is a single sentence: Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done. One sentence. Utterly honest about what He wants.

Utterly surrendered to what the Father wills. This is not a man who has suppressed His own desire or manufactured a peace He does not feel. This is a man who brings His desire fully and honestly, and then places it beneath something larger. It is your will be done, prayed not as a formula but as a living act of trust under the most extreme possible pressure.

From the cross, Luke gives us two more prayers, both of extraordinary brevity. Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And then, at the very end: Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. Six words. The whole of life and death placed, without elaboration, in the Father's hands.

Matthew 6:7 warned against heaping up empty phrases, against the anxiety that thinks God will hear us because of our many words. Jesus's own prayers are the living refutation of that anxiety. He does not need many words because He is not trying to persuade or overcome or wear down. He is talking to someone He trusts completely. And trust, it turns out, is economical.

Your Father Already Knows

There is a thread running through every prayer Luke records that connects directly to that hinge sentence in Matthew 6:8 — your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

In the spontaneous thanksgiving of Luke 10:21, Jesus does not explain to the Father what has just happened with the returning disciples. He simply responds in joy. There is no briefing, no catching up. He is responding to what the Father has already done, in the confidence that the Father knows it more completely than He does.

In Gethsemane, He does not argue His case or lay out the reasons why the cup should be taken. He states His desire honestly — take this cup — and surrenders immediately to the Father's will. There is no attempt to persuade. There is no information the Father needs that Jesus is providing. There is only the honest cry of a human heart, and the trust that what the Father has already purposed is more to be relied upon than what He Himself would choose.

In the final committing of His spirit, there is no petition at all. It is not a request. It is a placing — the ultimate act of dependence by someone who has already decided that the Father's hands are the safest place there is. It is prayer stripped of everything except trust.

This is what it looks like to pray to a Father who already knows. Not silence — the prayers are real and spoken. Not passivity — the desires are honest and named. But a quality of surrender that is only possible when you genuinely believe that the one you are praying to is already fully acquainted with your

situation, and already working within it for purposes more reliable than your own.

The Ideal Human Being at Prayer

Luke's portrait of Jesus at prayer is not simply a record of devotional practice. It is a portrait of what fully human life looks like when it is completely oriented toward God — and that portrait is, I want to suggest, one of the most important things Luke gives us.

Jesus in Luke is not a reduced or simplified figure. He is not merely a good man with an impressive prayer habit. He is, as we said in the introduction to this booklet, the ideal human being, fully inhabited by the Spirit, living out the life that humanity was always meant to live. His prayer life is not separate from that — it is the engine of it. It is where the Spirit-filled life is continually renewed, continually reoriented, continually brought back into alignment with the Father's purposes.

And this matters for us in the waiting period because Luke does not present this life as unique to Jesus and therefore merely admirable from a distance. He presents it as the pattern — the shape of what human life looks like when it is fully surrendered to God. The same Spirit that filled Jesus and sustained His prayer life is, as Luke makes clear in Acts,

poured out on His followers. The life they watched from the outside becomes, through the Spirit, available from the inside.

We are not called to copy Jesus's prayer life through sheer effort and determination. We are called to be filled with the same Spirit that made His prayer life what it was. The withdrawal to lonely places, the hiddenness, the brevity and directness, the trust in a Father who already knows — these are not techniques to be imitated. They are the natural expressions of a life that is genuinely oriented toward God. And that orientation is precisely what the Spirit makes possible.

From Watching to Living

The disciples began by watching. They saw the pattern of withdrawal. They saw the prayer before every pivotal decision. They overheard, perhaps, the quality of what Jesus said when He prayed — the directness, the brevity, the trust. And out of all of that watching, one of them finally asked: teach us to pray as you yourself pray.

That asking, as we saw in the last chapter, was the right response to what they had seen. And Jesus answered it not by giving them more teaching but by opening His own prayer life and inviting them in. Our Father, He said. Not mine. Ours.

But the full answer to their asking came later — at Pentecost, when the Spirit fell on the gathered community and the life

they had watched in Jesus became, for the first time, their own lived experience. That is the moment toward which all of this has been pointing. And it is where we turn next.

James

FOR REFLECTION

1. Jesus's actual prayers — in Gethsemane, from the cross, in spontaneous thanksgiving — are remarkably brief. This brevity comes from trust: He doesn't need many words because He is not trying to persuade. Does that reframe how you think about the length or intensity of your own prayers?
2. In Gethsemane, Jesus brings His desire fully and honestly — 'take this cup from me' — and then places it beneath something larger. Is there something you are currently praying about where you need to move from honest asking to genuine surrender?

Practice *In your prayer time this week, try to pray as Jesus prayed: briefly, directly, without repetition. Name your desire honestly. Then say: 'not my will, but yours.' Sit with that for a moment before moving on.*

Chapter 5: The Pattern Continues

Prayer in the Waiting Period

There is a moment at the beginning of Acts that is easy to read as a filling passage before the important part — before the drama of Pentecost, before the first sermon and the first healing and the first confrontation with the authorities. It can feel like scene-setting. It is actually a foundation.

Jesus has ascended. The disciples have watched Him go, and two men in white have gently redirected their upward gaze: this same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go. The waiting period has begun. And what do the disciples do next?

They go to Jerusalem. They go to an upper room. And they devote themselves to prayer.

Not to strategy. Not to organisation. Not to working out how eleven men — twelve again soon, with the addition of Matthias — are going to take a message about a crucified and risen Messiah to the ends of the earth. Before any of that, before Pentecost, before the first sermon or the first healing or the first controversy with the authorities, they withdraw. They gather. And they pray.

It is worth noticing what they are doing, because it is precisely what Jesus told them to do — and precisely how He had shown them to do it. The withdrawal is not a preamble to the prayer.

It is part of the prayer. The going apart, the gathering in, the turning away from the noise and demand of the world toward the Father — this is what they had watched Jesus do, again and again, throughout the years they had spent with Him. And now, without Him physically present to model it, they do it themselves. Before Pentecost fills them, they position themselves to receive. They go to the room. They shut the door. And they wait in the presence of the Father who already knows what they need.

That detail is not incidental. It is Luke telling us, at the very opening of his second volume, what the waiting period looks like. It looks like prayer. And prayer, as Jesus had always shown them, begins with withdrawal.

The Same Pattern, Extended

What happens next — the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, the explosion of the early church across Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and toward the ends of the earth — is the subject of the rest of Acts. But running through all of it, quietly and persistently, is the same pattern we watched in Jesus throughout Luke's Gospel.

The early community prays before its pivotal moments. When the apostles need to choose someone to replace Judas, they pray. When Peter and John are released from custody and return to the gathered community, the community prays —

and Luke records the prayer in full, a prayer that hallows God's name, acknowledges His sovereignty, and aligns itself with His purposes. When the church in Antioch is about to send Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey — the decision that will change the shape of Christian history — they are fasting and praying when the Spirit speaks.

Prayer precedes decision. Prayer accompanies crisis. Prayer is the atmosphere in which the community discerns and acts. It is, in Acts, exactly what it was in Luke: the practice by which a community of people stays aligned with purposes larger than its own.

And this is not coincidental. Luke is making a deliberate point across his two volumes. The same Spirit that filled Jesus and shaped His prayer life has now been poured out on His followers. The pattern does not end with the ascension. It continues — in a community of people who have received the same Spirit, and who are learning, together, what it means to live from the same source.

What Changed at Pentecost

The disciples in the upper room were praying before Pentecost. But there is a difference between the prayer of people who are waiting for the Spirit and the prayer of people who have received Him.

Before Pentecost, the disciples' prayer life was formed primarily by watching. They had observed Jesus withdraw to lonely places. They had seen Him pray before every pivotal decision. They had heard Him say Our Father and understood, imperfectly, what that relationship looked like from the inside. They had the teaching of Matthew 6 and the model of Luke's Gospel. But they were still, in an important sense, on the outside of what they had been shown.

Pentecost changes that. When the Spirit falls, something that had been visible in Jesus from the outside becomes available from the inside. Paul, writing to the Romans, captures it precisely: the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, Abba, Father. The word Abba — that intimate, direct address to God as Father — is the same word at the heart of the Lord's Prayer. And Paul says it is the Spirit who enables it. Not our effort. Not our religious discipline. The Spirit Himself, praying within us, orienting us toward the Father with the same directness and trust that characterised Jesus's own prayer life.

This means Christian prayer is not, at its deepest level, something we do. It is something the Spirit does in us, and through us, as we make ourselves available to Him. The withdrawal to lonely places, the hiddenness, the brevity and directness, the trust in a Father who already knows — these are not techniques we master through practice. They are the natural expressions of a life that is genuinely open to the Spirit.

And the Spirit, as Paul says elsewhere, helps us in our weakness. When we do not know what to pray for, He intercedes for us.

That is good news for those of us who find prayer difficult. Which is most of us, most of the time.

Prayer as the Language of the Waiting Period

We said in the introduction that prayer sits at the very centre of the question this booklet is trying to answer — how are we meant to live between the ascension and the return? We are now in a position to say why.

The waiting period is not a passive time. It is not a gap to be endured while we wait for something more interesting to happen. It is, as the parables of Matthew 25 make clear, the time in which we become who we are going to be — in which the habits of the heart are formed, the character is shaped, and the inner life is either attended to or neglected. The ten virgins did not fill their lamps at the moment the bridegroom arrived. They filled them — or didn't — in the ordinary time before he came.

Prayer is how that filling happens. But I want to be careful here, because there is a version of this idea that puts all the weight on us — as though prayer is the effort we make to fill our own lamps through sufficient devotion and discipline. That

is not quite right, and it is not quite what Jesus shows us. When we look at Luke's portrait of Jesus at prayer, we do not see a man straining to fill himself up through religious effort. We see a man who withdraws, regularly and habitually, to a place where the Father can reach Him — and who returns from that place renewed, reoriented, and resourced for whatever comes next. The filling is the Father's work. The withdrawal is ours.

This is the deep logic of the oil in the lamp. We do not manufacture the oil. We cannot. What we can do is return, daily and honestly, to the one who provides it — placing ourselves in His presence, open to His Spirit, available to be filled by a generosity that is always greater than our need. Prayer, understood this way, is less about what we bring to God and more about what we allow God to bring to us. It is the practice of making ourselves available to be filled — of holding out the lamp, in whatever condition it is currently in, and trusting the Father to do what only He can do.

Matthew 6 gave us the dangers of getting that orientation wrong — the self-focus of the hypocrite, the anxious striving of the Gentile, both of them forms of prayer that circle endlessly around the self rather than opening toward God. The Lord's Prayer gave us the shape of the right orientation — a structure of relationship, surrender, dependence, forgiveness, and trust that, inhabited rather than merely recited, gradually forms us into people who want what God wants. Luke's portrait of Jesus

showed us what that orientation looks like when it is fully lived — a life so thoroughly rooted in the Father that every decision flows from prayer, and every prayer is marked by the directness and trust of someone who knows they are loved.

And Acts shows us this life is not a private achievement of Jesus alone, sealed off from us by the distance of history. It is the life of the Spirit — available to, and intended for, every person who follows Jesus in the waiting period. The pattern that began in Jesus continues in His people. The prayer He prayed is the prayer we can pray. The relationship He had with the Father is the relationship we are invited into. Our Father, He said. And He meant it.

The Ordinary Practice

I want to end not with theology but with something more practical. Because the risk of a booklet like this is that it makes prayer sound grander and more elevated than it actually is in the ordinary life of an ordinary person — and that grandeur becomes, paradoxically, another reason not to pray. If prayer is all of this, we think, then surely what I manage on a Tuesday morning, half awake, distracted, running through a list of requests that feel embarrassingly small — surely that doesn't count.

It counts.

The whole point of Matthew 6:7–8 is that God is not impressed by the scale or eloquence of our prayers. He is not waiting for us to get our prayer life to a sufficient standard before He pays attention. He already knows what we need. What He is after is not performance but presence — the daily, honest, sometimes stumbling return of a person who has not given up on the conversation.

The Lord's Prayer, as we have seen, is not a formula for impressive prayer. It is a compass for ordinary prayer — a set of orientations that can be entered from wherever you happen to be, in whatever state you happen to be in. Anxious about the future? Give us today our daily bread. Carrying something unforgiven or unresolved? Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Afraid of your own weakness? Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. The prayer meets you where you are. It does not require you to be somewhere else first.

If I were to distil everything in this booklet into something you could carry away and actually use, it would be this: find the room, shut the door, begin with Father.

The room does not have to be a room. It is any place of withdrawal — any deliberate turning away from the noise and demand of the day toward the Father who is already present and already knows. The withdrawal is not a preparation for prayer. It is part of prayer. Shutting the door is the act of

intention — the decision, made again every day, that this time is for God rather than for the performance of being someone who prays. And beginning with Father is the act of remembering who you are and who He is before you say another word. You are already the child of this Father. The relationship is already given. You do not need to earn your place in the conversation or establish your credentials or apologise for the state you are in. Begin there, and let the Lord's Prayer give you the rest — not as a script, but as a compass.

And the withdrawal itself — the unhurried time with the Father — does not require grand arrangements. It requires intention and repetition. The same intention that took Jesus to the mountainside before dawn, repeated day after day until it became the rhythm of His life. It will not feel significant every time. It will often feel like very little. But over time, in ways that are not always visible from the inside, it shapes the person who keeps returning. The lamp is filled in the ordinary time, before the bridegroom comes.

What We Are Waiting For

There is one final thing to say, and it is perhaps the most important.

We are not waiting for an event. We are waiting for a person. The two men in white did not say something will return. They

said this same Jesus will come back. And the whole of the Christian life in the waiting period is, at its heart, a relationship with that person — sustained, deepened, and kept alive through prayer.

This is why prayer is not one discipline among several in the waiting period. It is the thing that makes the waiting intelligible. Without prayer — without the ongoing, daily practice of placing ourselves in the presence of the one we are waiting for — the waiting becomes merely temporal. A gap. An absence. Something to be endured.

With prayer, it becomes something else entirely. It becomes a relationship conducted across a distance that is real but not final. It becomes the daily practice of turning toward someone who has not yet returned but who is, as Jesus promised, already present — in the Spirit, in the gathered community, in the secret place with the door shut where the Father sees and knows and is closer than the silence suggests.

Pray like this, Jesus said. Not as a performance. Not as an anxious technique. But as the natural language of someone who knows whose child they are, and who the Father is, and what He has promised.

The bridegroom is coming. In the meantime, there is a lamp to be filled. Find the room. Shut the door. Begin with Father.

James

FOR REFLECTION

1. The disciples devoted themselves to prayer in the upper room before Pentecost — before anything had happened, while they were still waiting. What does it mean for you to pray faithfully in an ordinary season, when nothing dramatic seems to be happening?
2. The booklet ends with three words: find the room, shut the door, begin with Father. Of those three, which is the hardest for you right now — making the space, shutting out the noise, or truly beginning with the relationship rather than a list?

Practice *Choose a regular time and place this week. Don't start with a list. Start with silence. Say 'Father.' Let that word settle. Then let the Lord's Prayer be your compass — not as words to recite, but as orientations to inhabit.*

A full five-session study guide for small groups is available at www.bereanpress.co.uk

Scripture Mentioned

The following passages are mentioned in the course of this booklet. All scripture references are taken from the New International Version (NIV) or are the author's own paraphrase.

Introduction

Matthew 25:1–13 — The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Chapter 1: Learning to Unlearn

Matthew 6:5–6 — Praying to be seen; the room with the door shut

Matthew 6:7–8 — Vain repetitions; your Father already knows what you need

Chapter 2: The Shape of Prayer

Matthew 6:9–13 — The Lord's Prayer

Chapter 3: The Request That Changes Everything

Luke 11:1 — Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples

Luke 11:2–4 — The Lord's Prayer in Luke

Matthew 6:5–8 — The warnings on prayer revisited

Matthew 6:9–13 — The Lord's Prayer revisited

Chapter 4: The Life of Prayer

Luke 5:16 — Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed

Luke 6:12 — Jesus prays through the night before choosing the Twelve

Luke 9:18 — Jesus praying alone before Caesarea Philippi

Luke 9:28–29 — The Transfiguration; praying as His face changed

Luke 10:21 — Spontaneous thanksgiving after the seventy-two return

Luke 22:42 — Gethsemane; Father, not my will but yours be done

Luke 23:34 — Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing

Luke 23:46 — Father, into your hands I commit my spirit

Matthew 6:5 — Praying to be seen

Matthew 6:7–8 — Empty phrases; your Father already knows

Chapter 5: The Pattern Continues

Acts 1:10–11 — The two men in white; this same Jesus will come back

Acts 1:13–14 — The disciples devoted to prayer in the upper room

Acts 1:24–26 — Prayer before choosing Matthias

Acts 4:23–31 — The community prayer after Peter and John's release

Acts 13:2–3 — Fasting and prayer before sending Paul and Barnabas

Romans 8:15–16 — The Spirit of adoption; by Him we cry, Abba, Father

Romans 8:26 — The Spirit intercedes for us in our weakness

Matthew 25:1–13 — The Parable of the Ten Virgins

About the Author

For most of my life I refused to take responsibility or ownership for my life, looking outward to find something or someone to blame whenever things went wrong. At fifty-five, for the first time, I took full ownership and responsibility — and realised that whatever came next was down to me, and God.

What followed was a long process of rewiring — not a single dramatic transformation, but a slow and honest reckoning with who I was, what I believed about myself, and what I was actually going to do about it. And it was in that season, perhaps for the first time, that prayer became something real rather than something religious — not a discipline I performed but a relationship I began to depend on. The deepening of that relationship with the Father changed not just how I prayed but who I was becoming.

Out of that season came the book *While We Wait* — a record of a journey through responsibility, stewardship, and accountability, grounded in three parables from Matthew 25. This booklet grew from the same soil: a realisation that everything else in the waiting period flows from the quality of our relationship with the one we are waiting for.

The While We Wait Series

Reflections on Kingdom Living

This booklet is part of a wider body of work drawn from three parables Jesus told in a single sitting, on the Mount of Olives, in the final week of his life. Together they form one of the most searching portraits of kingdom living in all of scripture — and together they ask the question that sits at the heart of the Christian life in every generation:

How are we meant to live faithfully in the time between Jesus' departure and his return?

The three parts are:

Part One — Be Ready — *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*

About the inner life — the habits, the character, and the slow preparation of the self over ordinary time.

Part Two — Be Faithful — *The Parable of the Talents*

About stewardship — what we do with everything we have been given, in the confidence that it is meant to grow.

Part Three — Be Accountable — *The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats*

About the life fully lived — what readiness and faithfulness actually produce in the world.

Prayer in the Waiting sits alongside this series as a companion piece — a deeper exploration of one of the threads that runs through all three parts. The waiting period is not simply about what we do. It is about who we are becoming in the presence of the one we are waiting for.

More details about the While We Wait series and other titles from Berean Press Ltd will be available soon.

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