

# Lifeline

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to move to Matthew chapter 26 and Jesus' prayer and get seminary in there. So, probably a guess by now, the theme of our worship is a one-off sermon today.

We're not doing a series. We finished the discipleship series last week and so we're moving on a couple of one-off sermons and then we're going to begin, probably, begin at Zemba. We're going to begin a series on Matthew and on into infinity.

We haven't decided how long, but it's probably going to be quite long as we move into Matthew's Gospel. But prayer, so, and I'll tell you why we're looking at prayer particularly today in a minute, but prayer is absolutely crucial, isn't it?

And you'll hear that again and again from me. It's crucial for our life as believers. If you're not a Christian here today and I would ask you, I would encourage you just to talk to God at some point. Talk to God, because that's what prayer is, and if you don't know what to say, well, just, you know, when you think of when you talk to yourself, do the same thing, but talk to God, because He's real just as you are real yourself.

[ 1 : 06 ] You can't see Him, but He's real nonetheless. Ask Him to show you your own heart and your spiritual need before Him, and ask Him to show you Himself and His grace and His love.

And if you're a Christian here this morning, and many of you are Christians, I know that, then it's the key to everything for you. It's the key to knowing Him. It's the key to understanding Him.

Jesus, it's the key to your peace. It's the key to strength, to faith, to wisdom. Everything, everything is covered by prayer. Absolutely everything. It's the greatest reality for us.

Now, you know, Thomas always often uses the illustration of the iPhone and he takes the iPhone out. I'm not going to take the iPhone out, but the iPhone is a great thing, isn't it?

It's a great source of information and stuff, but it's useless if it hasn't been plugged in and charged up. It's just a piece of rubbishy kind of material. It needs to have been plugged in to the source of power to make it useful.

[ 2 : 09 ] And that's absolutely the case with our Christian life. We need to be plugged into the, it's going back to the discipleship series. Our roots need to be being sent out to the living.

Water and that comes in a relationship of prayer. It's everything for us. Without me, Jesus says, you can't do anything. We can't do anything of any spiritual value or we can't live spiritually without being in communication and in relationship with Him through prayer.

So William Wallace, I don't know whether he said this. I don't think he did, but Mel Gibson did anyway. And I've quoted it before here. A run in your life at least for a while and dying on your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they can never take our freedom.

Okay. This is not a political party broadcast, but I just say if there's one thing, one thing on my deathbed that I could relentlessly have taught you as a congregation is to make prayer your daily lifeline.

One thing, one thing you learn from however many years I am your pastor, not as a ritual, not in any ways a ritual, but what it is, is a living relationship with the Lord Jesus, communion with the living God, you know, the source of life and love.

[ 3 : 47 ] So in other words, it's all about Him. You will survive, you will grow, you will develop, you will persevere, you will keep going. Not if you're a ligest on the church or on ritualistic religious activities, but if you're in communion and relationship, daily relationship with the living God through prayer.

So in a couple of weeks, 24th of November to the 30th of November, we have seven days of prayer. We do it twice a year, seven days of prayer.

We gather together as a congregation in the morning, seven o'clock in the mornings, and we pray together. And it's a specific focus for us. I'll say more about it next week, a couple of weeks from coming.

But as a precursor to that, I want to focus on prayer again this morning, and the significance and importance. We don't do the seven days of prayer twice a year, just twice a year.

The hope is that it triggers and it inspires and it encourages all kinds of prayer in our lives, and it is a step up for us in that relationship, a reminder to us. And so I'm going to again focus on the importance, the significance of prayer for us today in our lives.

[ 4 : 54 ] And I'm going to look at Jesus and the disciples in this passage from, guess him, fantastic passage of Scripture, unbelievable passage of the Bible. And look first at Jesus.

And by way of introduction to that, reminding ourselves that I know that Jesus is unique. He's the Son of God. He was perfect. He was in relationship with the Father and the Spirit.

And He's not like us at that level. He is God, the Son who became flesh. So if we want, again, if you're maybe here today and you're not a Christian, and if you want to see God, if you want to understand who God is, you look at Jesus, because Jesus is God in the flesh.

And yet He was also man. He was a person. He took on human, He was a human being. So He's unique in that He's God, and He's unique in that He's God and man.

He, and He was sinless. We know that. I'm only saying to things you already know. Many of you sinless, but He took a body and a reasonable soul.

[ 6 : 00 ] He took a body that had many limitations because He was in our place. And He was tempted like what we are, yet without sin.

So Jesus knew a lot of the experiences that we knew, yet without sin. He knew loneliness and need and hunger and sorrow and tiredness and temptation and disappointment.

And yet within all of that, we know there's mystery, don't we? We understand and we acknowledge and appreciate the uniqueness of Jesus and the mystery of Him knowing these experiences and yet also being God in the flesh.

But we do know that He came to reveal God. He came to open up a way back for humanity, for you and I, to be in relationship with God and to give us eternal life through His death.

That's why His death is so important as is His resurrection and ascension. But in His uniqueness, in His uniqueness, we still recognize that He needed, He prayed.

[ 7 : 05 ] And I want to look at that for a moment and then look at the disciples, the opposite of that, the disciples who didn't pray. So we've got Jesus who prayed, He needed strength.

You know, we've read that in the account of what He did in Gethsemane. He went to a garden called Gethsemane and said, He said, Sit here while I go over there and pray.

He needed to pray because He was overwhelmed. He said, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death, remain here and watch with me. There was a cup that He had to drink.

My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but you will be done. So there was this, we talked about baptism earlier, it's a visual representation of spiritual truth.

Well, here is another image, another picture of a cup that Jesus was having to drink to the fool. And it's a visual, it's a picture, it's a representation of what He was going through.

[ 8 : 03 ] And He was about to face on the cross the wrath of hell and the wrath of heaven coming together. We often don't think about it in these terms, but both came together because He was facing the tremendous opposition of Satan and death and hell and the grave and the evil one who said, Well, if I can defeat Jesus then I become ruler and king and Lord.

But He also faced the wrath of God because He was dying in our place. He was taking our sin, the one who was sinless became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. So He's overwhelmed by that in His life and in His humanity, the darkness of it, the loneliness of it and the fact that His very best friends didn't understand in the slightest what He was going through. And so in His prayer, it seems He's tempted to turn back.

You know, my soul is sort of, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not I will but you. There's a great mystery in that prayer. I know that all the theologians speak about that great mystery. Almost a temptation to, is there not another way?

Please, can there not be another way that I could be the redeemer, that I could be the Savior, that I could help people to live and to be forgiven? And yet within that He knew God's will. He knew He was facing Jerusalem. He went there specifically. He knew He'd already said to His disciples that He had come and that He would die in the third day of raising again. He knew God's will.

He knew exactly what lay ahead but yet in His humanity there was the great consciousness of the terror and the horror of the event. And so He prayed. And He prayed in passion in the strength. Forget the band. Okay, it happens each time. Keep forgetting. I should really pray.

[10:06] I preach a shorter sermon on remembrance Sunday. Anyway, I'll try and concentrate. And you'll need to too. He needed strength because He was overwhelmed, tempted to turn back.

So He prayed. So we find Him going at this moment of unparalleled tension in His life, an unparalleled darkness and a sense of just being overwhelmed. It says to the point of death, it was almost killing Him there. It's to the Father He turns. That's where He goes. He goes to the my Father if it be possible. Then He goes back and He says, my Father if it be possible. Then He goes back and He says, my Father if it be possible. He goes to the Father because He knows that's where He must go for His strength. That's He knows where the source of company and friendship and union and love is. And He keeps going back to the Father in prayer because He has nowhere else to go.

Interestingly, you know, the disciples, Peter not long before said, you know, when Jesus said, are you going to turn away from Me as well? They said, well, no, Peter said, to whom else can we go? You've got the words of eternal life. They talked a great game.

But of course, they did turn their back on Him. But Jesus knew exactly where to turn to and knew exactly where to go. And He wanted the company of His Father in this unique mysterious relationship of the incarnate Son with the Father. That's what He went to God in prayer. That was the model. That was the way He lived His life. He wanted the company of His Father and the strength and the renewal that He would receive from that. He also wanted the company of His friends.

Stay here with me and pray. Sit here with me while I pray. He wanted them. Peter, James and John is three best friends. He wanted them to be with Him. He wanted to be praying with them as He prayed to the Father. That's most intimate, most desolate time when, you know, many people think, I can't take any human intercourse here. I can't take any human relationship. I just need to be me and God.

[12:16] No, Jesus, the perfect Son of God, wanted Peter, James and John to be with Him alert and praying. Are we listening to that? Do we hear that? Do we hear the implications of that for our lives?

If Jesus, the perfect Son, in the moment of unique darkness, looked for poor, miserable, failed friends to come alongside Him and hold Him up in prayer, are we listening to the implications of that for us in our own lives? So we have Jesus praying, and then we also have the disciples.

Jesus prayed because He needed strength to move forward with this unique and deadly task that lay ahead for Him and for the universe. The disciples also needed strength greatly, but they couldn't see it, and that's the difference. They couldn't see that this was an optimum time for praying. If ever in their lives they needed to pray, it was at this point right now with Jesus in Gethsemane before the crucifixion. They couldn't see it, and so often isn't it the case that we can't see the need for prayer. We don't really see the need to be strengthened and to be given courage. We don't recognize the intimacy of our Father when we see Jesus praying that, and we certainly don't live as if we need our closest friends to come alongside us and pray with us at the bleakest and darkest moments of our lives. And so there's great lessons here about discipleship and also about what God is saying to us about prayer, and we'll look at that just now.

What was it that the disciples, why was it that they couldn't see? Why was it that they slept here instead of praying at this moment? And this will not be treated to impose all kinds of guilt on you, because that was not what Jesus did to the disciples here, and we shouldn't either. But why was it that they couldn't see enough to pray? I think there's two things, because they were weak spiritually at this point, and they were also weak physically at this point. They were weak spiritually. In verse 31, Jesus predicts of them as the shepherd of the sheep. He says, we didn't read this, when they had sung of him, they went to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus said to them, you will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. So he'd already prophesied that they were weak spiritually and wouldn't stand up to the

tensions of the moment that he was going into.

They didn't, they didn't truly get where Jesus was going or what he had to do, which is why Peter drew his sword out in the garden and cut off the servants here, because he thought it was going to be a physical fight that they had to win in that moment. And so they had become disciples who were relying on their own abilities and their own strength and even their own faith. They were men of faith, there's no doubt about that. They were, the Spirit was willing in their lives. They meant well, but at this point they weren't looking with the eyes of faith, and they didn't seem to understand God's will in this darkness that Jesus was going through, that they were part of. You know, despite seeing Jesus' turmoil, despite seeing his example, they didn't see that prayer was what they needed to do at that significant point. Why on earth? Why on earth would Jesus need them to be an encouragement and a help? Why would He have chosen them? And that's why even when He sees them not praying, sleep mattered more to them for what lay ahead, because they weren't alert to understand exactly what it was that lay ahead. So they were weak spiritually. There was many times, and as the

[16:25] Gospels tell us leading up to this, that they weren't listening to Jesus, that they had their own ideas, that they thought, yeah, it'll be alright on the night kind of thing. They were weak spiritually, but also they were weak physically, you know, watching pray. The Spirit is willing, He says, but the flesh is weak. And He's just saying that about their physical makeup, and the events that had led up to this, they were tired, they were confused, their brains were mashed as well as their bodies. There was so much for them to understand, they couldn't really take it all in, they were weak physically in their makeup. They faced opposition, there was the smell of betrayal in the air. Jesus had spoken about that, and Judas had walked out into the night earlier on.

They were filled with all kinds of doubts and temptations and fears, it's all swirling about in their heads. And so sleep offered them a different reality. Sometimes that happens in church, doesn't it? Because we're really tired, it's maybe too hot, maybe we're in a hard week, and our physical makeup, we just think, I'd rather sleep than listen to the sermon, because it offers a different reality, and it offers us something that we can escape into for a while. And that might happen in lots of different avenues and areas of our lives. So they couldn't see because they were weak spiritually, but also weak physically. But what the passage goes on to reveal for us is what happened because they didn't see the significance of their father, and the significance of spiritual strengthening from him at this point. In verse 56, we didn't read this either, it's slightly further on, after Jesus is betrayed and arrested. But all of this had taken place that the scripture of the prophets might be fulfilled, then all the disciples left him and fled. All the disciples left him and fled. They abandoned Jesus. So at that moment of critical significance, they abandoned Jesus, they give up, they give in, they denied Him, they were defeated by fear, by their circumstances, and the negative adrenaline just overtook them, and they begged it.

They left Jesus for dead, literally, as it were. And also, they scattered from each other. That earlier verse we read, the prophecy that Jesus gave that the shepherd will be struck and the sheep will be scattered. They scattered from each other. They didn't even look after one another.

They looked at that point after number one. They just fled for their lives. They lost sight of Jesus and of each other. Thankfully, temporarily. Thankfully, by God's grace and patience, they returned a new great healing. So what is God saying to us if we take this passage and what He says here about prayer and prayerlessness, I guess, what is this living word? Remember, it's a living word. God is speaking to us today because it's a living word, isn't it, for us?

And so, don't just think, oh, now comes an application of something that happened a long time ago. This is a living word, and He knows your situation, and He knows your heart, and He knows what you need to hear just as much as He knows what I need to hear.

[19:46] What do you think God is saying to us in our lives this morning? Well, there's several things. I say, I know, first of all, can I speak to you if you're Christians here today, if you're believers in Jesus Christ, and you follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior? First thing, He says, I know your Spirit is willing. He says that, and verse 41, the Spirit is willing, the flesh is weak, and He says, I know that. I know He says you want to do the right thing. I know you love me. I know you appreciate that I'm your Savior, and I know you've come to me as the only way of hope in the future. And I know you've been saved, that you know you've been saved by grace, and you want to follow me. I know these things. I know your Spirit is willing. And He also beautifully says, I know you're weak. I know your flesh is weak. That isn't that great. Isn't that great that Jesus says that to us? He doesn't

take us and batter us and beat us up because we're hopeless. He says, I know that we're weak, because He experienced it himself. And He says, I know that we, I know you struggle today. He says, I know you're overwhelmed by temptation. I know that you give in. I know that you recoil from the battle. I know you find it easier to prepare the things that I hate. I know you want to escape sometimes and run away.

That you're full of doubt and fear. And you fall and you struggle with others and church and the expectations and commitments. And you're easily distracted and you're tired and you're ill and you're weary. I know, I know you're weak. I know that your Spirit is willing. And I know you're weak. He's no surprises from Him this morning. And He says, but God says, I am your Father. I'm your Father. As believers, we say the Lord's privilege is our Father, because we are reunited with our King, our Maker, our Lord, our God. And He's, and as our Father says, He says, I'm your Father. You're perfect, loving, heavenly Father. You will never be alone. I'm with you. I love you. My Son drank your cup of death and separation and sin so that you don't need to. He's paid for your forgiveness. And I'm absolutely committed to you and I appreciate you. Do we know how big that is that we have a Father in heaven who said, I have a home prepared for you. I have a purpose and a plan for your life. I am your loving Father. So I love, I know your Spirit is willing. I know you're weak. I'm your Father. But then He says, watch and pray, watch and pray. And that's what He says. That's what He encourages the disciple to do here in this whole passage. Watch and pray.

The hour that was coming for Jesus and crucifixion is an hour we need to face up to as believers continually, because we're involved in His crucifixion. Our sins were paid for on the cross, and His death on the cross leads to the defeat of death and the death of sin in our lives. And it's important to know the context here. So we understand when He says, watch and pray, because great spiritual relevance and significance and importance from what Jesus went on to do. And we need to be people who are going to Him daily for His strength. That's the key. That's the key to everything. I will leave and I will retire if we all get that. And if I get it myself, that He is the strength every day. He is the answer every single day. Communion with the living God. That's what is the key to our spiritual health and our spiritual lives. That we make it our intentional reality to be in communion with the living God because we are weak and because we are flesh and because we have a good, a spirit that He has given to us but our flesh is weak. And there's that recognition that we need to be alert and aware of the day that the disciples didn't really understand the danger. And we're in a spiritual battle, similarly. Jesus is victorious, but we need His strength and

[ 23 : 51 ] His help. You know, you always hear, or you always hear, but you've maybe heard occasionally of these people that are climbing in the highest mountains and they get lost and they're experienced climbers and they just can't find their way back. And the great temptation after many hours when they are exhausted and they just feel the warmth of lying down and falling asleep, that's the greatest, that's what they crave, that's a huge temptation for them on the mountain just to bury into the snow and fall asleep gently. And it's so tempting and so attractive and yet we know that that leads to death, doesn't it? Because it leads to just that gentle hypothermia that leads to death. And it's so tempting to be spiritually taken over by hypothermia, spiritual hypothermia, where we just, we don't pray. There's a million things that we would, we would rather do maybe or we just feel it's so tough to take another step in prayer just like that man in the mountainside, taking one more step into the snow can't do it. And yet that is the way of life. And for us, prayer is a hugely significant in our weakness, but also because in our weakness that's where we find our strength. So watch and pray. And also I think he's saying, pray, pray with others, pray with others. In the darkness of your life, when you are fed up of maybe company and what you perceive to be the failures of others and the loneliness of the Christian walk and the battles we face, the seven days of prayer is an encouragement. It's meant to be an encouragement to come together and to be, to have our lives triggered by the benefit and the value of upholding each other in prayer and to know transformed lives and to be inspired and to be persevering in prayer.

The corporate prayer, so important. Jesus saying, here I need you, I need you. I need to come with you and hopefully the encouragement is as a people of God, we use that seven days of prayer, just a trigger to pray in small groups, to pray in big groups, to pray in city groups, to pray in every context we can throughout the year. It's to pray in our engine room, which the engine room, which is so significant and important and to see, I'm seeing lives changed in prayer in St.

Columbus in these days and I'm seeing answered prayers are in marvelous ways in St. Columbus. You want to be part of that, you want to be part of that, praying with others because Jesus says, I

hear and I answer, I hear and I answer. And you say, well, really? Jesus says, you know, may this cup pass from me? But it didn't, did it? Cup didn't pass from me. There's a verse in Hebrews chapter 5 verse 7, I think I've put up on the screen. Hebrews 5 says, in the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death and He was heard because of His reverence. So He was heard and He was saved from death, but not in the way that maybe we would have expected. We look at that and say, well, was He, He wasn't saved from death, He died on the cross. But we see a deeper and a stronger answer that we have here revealed to us. Yes, He faced death and hell on the cross, but two things happened. One, God sent an angel, we're told that in Luke 22. God sent an angel to strengthen Him. So God immediately showed that He had heard His prayer and sent an angel to strengthen Him. Well, what did the angel say? Oh, that would be great to find out. The words of conference sentencing, the Father knows, the Father is here, the Father is with you, the Father, remember what we have, whatever, must have been remarkable. But He was reminded and encouraged in God's will and able then to go forward and face what lay ahead because He knew the love that was pouring out from the Trinity. But also the answer was not just in the Be strengthened, but that He overcame death. You know, He rose from the dead. He was saved from the defeat of death and from the power of death in His own strength by His third day resurrection, which is our hope. That's why we have hope today. No insignificant part-time faith and hope that we have. It is the reality of an amazing life with Him so that He answers, but very often not the way we expect Him to answer. If you look at the quote from Tim Keller on your bulletin sheet, you'll see a really useful reference to that, which I don't have, because I didn't take a bulletin up with me.

[ 28 : 38 ] So He answers above and beyond. And it's huge that we see that, that we don't see a relationship with God as if God is some kind of genie in a lamp who will just when we go into His presence, He's going to answer our prayers exactly the way that we want, and life will be just great and easy for us.

It's a recognition that He is answering our prayers as believers in a far greater way than we could imagine, wanting us to conquer the darkness, the battles, and the weakness that we have with His transforming grace in His good way, which will be better than what our way is, even though it's hard for us to understand that. That's a huge project that He's engaged in, but we go to Him daily, and we know that He strengthens us and loves us and never leaves us and doesn't forsake us. So that's so important. And I implore myself and you as believers to watch and pray. Watch and pray because of the world we live in, because of our own hearts, because of our weakness, because of the temptations, because of the struggles.

You know, sometimes when we're really struggling, that's when we pray less often, isn't it? Somehow we're embarrassed, somehow we're ashamed, somehow we think God wouldn't hear us because of who we are. That's when I want you, He says, like, I know you're weak, this. And I know, I know, I know, I know. And then as we close, what is God saying to you? If you don't believe, if you're not a Christian, come on today, you know, whatever level, maybe it's the first time you've ever been in the church here. Maybe you've come a lot of times to church, but you've never committed your life and heart to Jesus. Maybe you don't know anything, maybe you know lots. Maybe it's just a way of life, but you've never asked Christ into your heart and asked Him to forgive your sins. What do I say to you? Well, what do I think God is saying to you from the word that we've read today? Well, I think he's saying, one, I know you, I know you. And He says, I even know your spirit might not be willing. I know that you may be antagonistic, you've been dragged along today. Or I know you may be searching, or you may be religious, or you don't think you're a bad person in any way, or you don't get sin, or you think being a Christian is weird, or you can't commit to giving your life to Him, you can't take that step of faith. You don't know how to pray, you don't understand, you love too many of the wrong things. You would love to believe, but you just don't get it. I don't know what's swirling about in your head if you're not a believer in Jesus Christ today, but God knows. He says, I know you. I know you. I know every thought that you have. I know you in the intimacy of your being, intimacy of your being. And He says, I love you. I love you more than you can ever imagine. I love you. I made you. I've gifted you life. I knew exactly what you would be like when you were in the womb. And I now see your brokenness. And I see sometimes the spiritual rebellion and the rejection of the living God. And I see your confusion and your anger. And I still love you. I still love you. I sent my son to die for you, to offer you life. So I know you, and I love you. And I would just say to you, and encourage you also, therefore to pray.

Just pray. If you've never prayed, pray, Lord, Lord, you know, show me my heart. And show me what I can't see. Open my eyes. Give me the strength to trust in you, even though it seems a strange thing to do, to trust in a Jewish man from 2,000 years ago who died in a cross and who claimed to be raised from the dead a third day later. Show me that this is truth. Let me look at the people around me who are Christians and see the transformation in their lives. And let me ask them, but above all, help me just to know your love and your grace and your truth.

[ 32 : 48 ] Pray that prayer. And I hope that we all recognize the power and the significance of daily prayer in our lives. Watch and pray so that you'll not fall into temptation. He knows how prone we are to temptation. We thank God for Jesus Christ and for what He's done. Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God, we thank You for who You are. We thank You for the amazing, good news, the gospel, which exposes who we are and reminds us that You know everything about us.

We just can't have any pretense, even though we may hide our real selves from everyone in the universe. We know that You know, and yet we know that makes no difference to Your love, that You still invite us to Yourself, that You invite us to come to Jesus who has paid the price for even the vilest of sins in our hearts and who offers us life and hope. We thank You for that.

And we pray and ask that You would give us the courage and the strength and the dependence on You simply to invite You into our lives and hearts and to know You as King and Lord and to know that transformation and that peace that passes understanding that isn't in any way simply emotional or worked up in our own strength. So Lord, hear as we pray and bless us as we sing together and respond to You in worship for Your worthy. In Jesus' name, amen.