

1 Thessalonians 5:15-25; Luke 6:12-19.



As a Church we seek to have at our core the values of UP, IN, OUT. We see from the Gospel these values are reflected in Jesus own life. Jesus spends a night in prayer. If we read through Luke, we would read other times he deliberately prayed - at his baptism, on the mount of transfiguration, as well as his daily pattern. In Luke 5:16, it says "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Also, in Mark 1:35, Jesus gets up early and goes away and prays - and the disciples go looking for him. Jesus said in John - "I only do what I see the Father doing" (John 5:19). He had an *Upward* focus - looking to his Heavenly Father.

He choose the twelve. They leave all to be with him, as Peter later reminds Jesus. They keep company with him. He will make

them into disciples but he shares life with them, a community is formed isn't it? *IN*.

Finally Jesus was about OUT. He never lost sight of the Father's vision, why he was sent, he reached out to and brought the good news to a dark and damaged world. Jesus prayed to his father, before choosing 12, a community around him, he lived out his life among them and taught them, but Jesus kept walking among the crowds -feeding, teaching, caring, healing - he did not wait for the spiritually needy to come to him, he went to them.

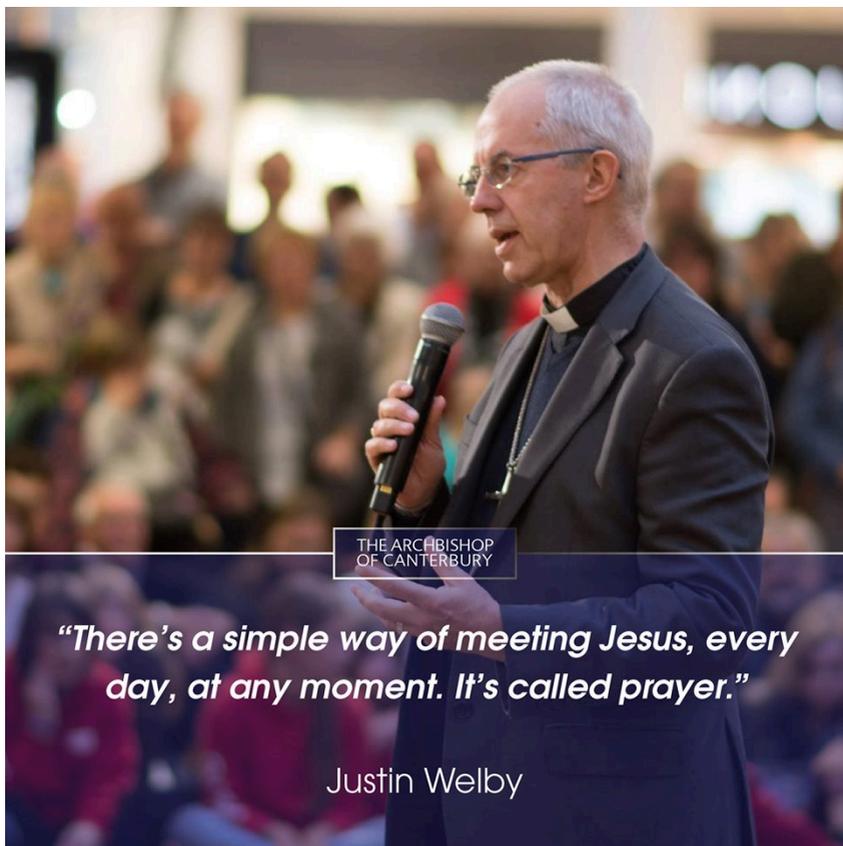
Jesus led an up, in, out life. 3 dimensions to his life. And as followers, as we seek to follow in his footsteps, which leads into that 3 dimensional life, that I believe the Spirit seeks to work out in our lives. Hence as a church gathered, we want to be a church of 3 dimensions; but also as individual followers. *Pause*.

Across this month we want to look again at UP, IN OUT as a church but especially how that can work out individually.

Here at All Saints, how we are encouraging 'up' - which we define here as Worship and Prayer. Four examples.

1. Our home groups have a time of worship (in a variety of forms) to begin each evening, and end with listening to each other and to God, how we can pray with and for each other.
2. Within our Sunday intercessions, and through other means, we pray for persecuted Christians across our world.
3. Our prayer ministry. At times we can find it hard to pray - at times praying with others is a great help, like the friends who carry their friend on a mat to Jesus and dig through the roof (see Mark 2) - our prayer ministry, your brothers and sisters are there to pray with you in confidence - whatever needs people have - illness,

struggles, fear, guidance, darkness, wisdom - two people to pray with you and for you, helping you in UP. 4. Final example would be our Emmaus Prayer Walks led by Ron and Nienke, two more on the coming Friday mornings, to set aside extended time, in prayer to the Heavenly Father in his creation.



We all pray. But how could we develop or grow in this personally? What can we learn from Jesus and Paul?

Jesus, as we heard, spends the whole night in prayer. Only time in NT this happens. So Jesus **sets aside the time** to pray. And he

has a **focus** to his praying - discerning out of the many disciples, who the 12 are to be apostles. He has a focus to his praying - to talk **and** listen. When he returns he has heard the Father's voice - hearing the voice of God, is an element we continually grow within our prayer lives.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: "Prayer is simply talking to God. He speaks to us, we listen. We speak to him; he listens. A two-way process: speaking and listening."

Jesus returns and is **obedient** to what he has learned in prayer.

So, he sets aside **deliberate time**, he does not leave it to chance. He has a **focus** for his praying, he **talks but also listens** for the voice of the Father, and what he has heard he acts upon, he is **obedient**.

Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to '**pray continually**'. The word, means *not ceasing, not stopping*. The letter shows what he has in mind. When he began his letter,

"we always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work prompted by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." (1:2-3).

A little later. "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith." (3:10)

He goes on to say he prays that the Lord would clear the way for them to come, that he would make their love for each other increase and that God would strengthen them so they are

blameless and holy when the Lord Jesus comes. Near the end of the letter, he then says "Brothers and sisters pray for us." (5:25).

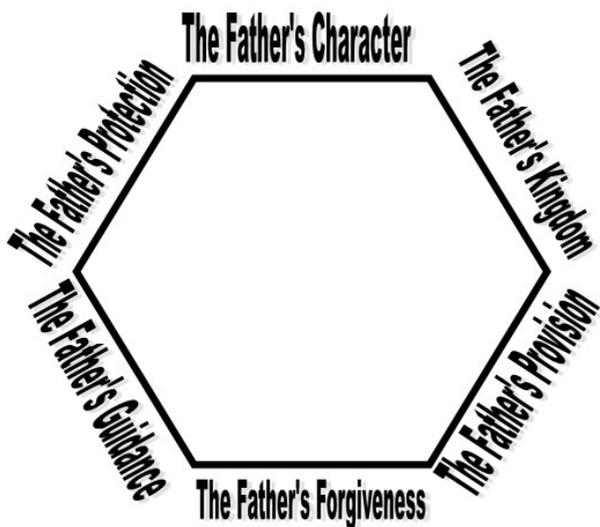
He prays for them and he asks them to pray for him and those with him. Jesus once told a parable (Luke 18) about a persistent widow in prayer - he told it so 'we ought to pray and never lose heart'. That seems to be what Paul has in mind. We could easily feel, I can't do that! But let's focus upon **why** Paul says it. For Paul, prayer is an essential part of his discipleship - a top priority in life - action yes, evangelism yes, spending time with other believers yes, but also prayer - Up. And he believes, that while the answers may not come as quickly as he wants - he keeps on praying for these things because they have not happened yet - he knows prayer is not a wasted exercise and he will **continue** at it.

William Temple - Anglican Archbishop wrote " When I pray, coincidences happen, when I don't, they don't."

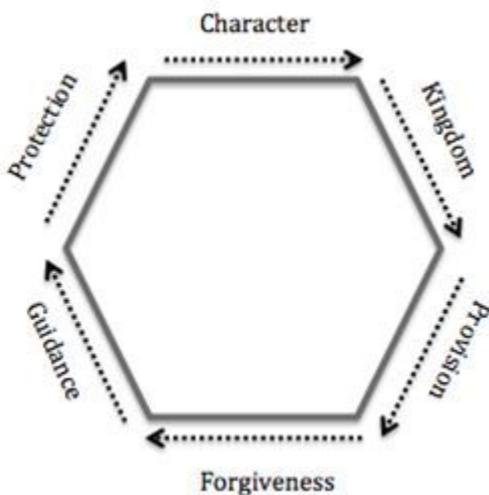
Prayer is powerful, Jesus did it and encouraged and taught us to. "It makes a difference in our lives, it changes events, it changes the world," (Nicky Gumbel).

How can we pray? I want to share one tool I have used. This is not the only tool I use but I've found it helpful. It is based upon the 6 elements in the Lord's Prayer to shape / structure your prayers. Jesus says 'this is how you should pray.' Yet we see how he and Paul do not use this prayer that Jesus shares in Luke 11 (and Matthew 6). Suggesting it is a prayer we can pray, but also it gives us a **model** for our prayers as well. These will be very brief and incomplete comments due to the time we have.

These six elements form a hexagon around which you move in prayer.



*This prayer hexagon comes from Life Shapes, work developed by Mike Breen and others, in books such as Passionate Church.*



*You move clockwise around the topics*

**The Father's Character** - 'our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name.' Father - our relationship with God - we are his loved children - the word used, takes us back to the Aramaic *Abba*. It is a phrase which shows respect for the Father's authority and yet contains a sense of intimacy. Hebrew children still say *Aba* to their father today. We can feel close to God because we are part of his family and have 24-7 access to him. Yet we know he is holy. The term name, refers usually to the 'character' of God. We desire his character - his name - to be manifest in our world.

**The Father's Kingdom.** "Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Praying for God's promise to be realised - the hope. But this is more than eternal life. That prayer is about the creation being restored to its fullness and beauty, and that sin, the devil, injustice, and chaos be banished. We live our lives in reflection of what God will eventually do. But it is more than praying for the consummation of the kingdom, it is also praying, as we see in Jesus and in Acts, for the kingdom to break in - Jesus inaugurated the kingdom, and we see that reign of God break in and through and around Jesus but also his disciples. We are praying for such moments and times. "We're praying for the future to break into the present so people can see it, " (Mike Breen).

**"The Father's Provision."** "Give us today our daily bread." Jesus allows us to bring basic needs to the Father. We trust that God cares daily for his own as he did for his people in the wilderness for 40 years. We trust in God's presence and also his care for us. We bring our needs - food, shelter, clothing, money to pay for it, employment, strength for the day - to him.

**'The Father's Forgiveness'** 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.' At times we offend and hurt others - we trespass onto lives that we should not have gone into. Forgiveness is not a right but comes by God's grace. In order to ask for forgiveness, we should be ready to give it as well. Should we ask God to do something for us, that we are not willing to do for others? We are to forgive others as God has forgiven us, (cf Ephesians 5:32).

**"The Father's Guidance"** - 'lead us not into temptation'. God's power we seek to protect us and keep us from giving into temptation; we rely on and ask God to guide our steps. We want to go where God leads, and embrace all the wisdom, provision, and protection he supplies us.

**"The Father's Protection"** - 'and deliver us from evil.' Jesus includes it, suggesting the devil who comes to kill, steal, destroy, a roaring lion who seeks to devour, while defeated at the cross, is a powerful destructive enemy. We call on the Father to deliver us from the evil one - which is probably a better translation of the Greek - so evil one - than evil.

These themes become the shape of your prayer eg for you or people. These themes are like the skeleton of your prayer, you put the flesh on it. As you use this shape to pray for someone, we note the times when we may stick - where God's Spirit draws us in more deeply into that section, brings things to our mind, perhaps wants us listen for him...

So a few examples how to use this structure I'll read:

*"For your working day."*

Father I know you are my caring loving heavenly father, and you will watch over me from your throne. Let your glory be seen, let you be honoured in my work today. I want your rule, your will to be done in all my actions and meetings today. Thank you that you continue to provide for my needs through this job.

Lord forgive.,,

Now that may be where there are a range of thoughts or issues come into your mind... as you may be aware of a work colleague you were snappy towards last week, and perhaps someone you promised to contact about a work idea, which to be honest you didn't want to follow up on ... So you realise in your quiet time, that this is the area of your life today, in your work, that the Lord wants to work through with you together.

The next time you pray for your work, using the structure, you may get stuck at temptations in work or maybe you get stuck at the first line, longing that God's character would be known by your work colleagues around you...

You don't need to complete the structure - unless you have time.

*Praying for someone.*

Father, I thank you for Jesus who enables me to call you Father. I pray for James, thank you that he calls you father. May your character be formed in him more. I pray that your rule and reign would expand in him, ...

perhaps at that point *you stick*, and you think about the issues and struggles in James life. And you think about what the

kingdom looked like when Jesus walked among us... like the song we sing later, 'the one who made the deaf hear, who can silence fears, the One who made people whole', and so you ask God to do so in James life...

And so that could be what the Spirit - speaking to your spirit - is guiding you to pray today for James, for the work of the kingdom within his many struggles.

*Praying for a country.*

Lord, I pray for the Netherlands. I thank you for the many who call you father. I pray for you to be manifest in our streets and cities and work places and political spaces. I ask for your rule and reign in all its power and glory to be seen working in and around your children. Provide for the many homeless and unemployed in our land. Would this be a nation where people know your forgiveness and where it is known as a place of forgiveness towards others. Guide and lead our church pastors, priests and bishops across this land to be good shepherds of your people. And deliver...

And *this* sticking point, could be as you think of the threats faced eg by our police, or a town or estate you have heard on the news which is greatly struggling with crime or you have heard about human trafficking which takes place here in our naiton.

This is one model. As you pray in a shape following the model Jesus taught us. I recommend it. Perhaps for those who find praying has become stagnant, a new way may help you. For those who need structure how to pray or themes to pray, this could be away. Or there are people or places you pray for that you need to freshen up how you pray as you feel you always

pray the same things. Finally, I find, when I pray this through for someone, I find it stirs my soul as I find I'm not just praying my good ideas, but some of the priorities Jesus talked about. Jesus said 'this is how you should pray'. A man who prayed, who encouraged us to pray, showed us prayer, and taught us how to pray.

So shall we pray. Let's be still. Invite the Lord to speak about how to develop or grow our lives of prayer with him.

In Jesus name. Amen.