

Prayer in the Gospel of Luke

It can be very rewarding for us to identify themes which run throughout the Bible as a whole, and within the individual books contained in it. One of the key themes which stands out in the Gospel of Luke is that of prayer.

Frequently we read of Jesus praying to his Heavenly Father and there is even a parable about prayer which is recorded in none of the other Gospels (see Luke 18:1–8). Fascinatingly, Luke presents Jesus as praying during the times when significant events were happening in his life, such as his baptism and transfiguration.

This all contributes to our understanding of how important the theme of prayer is in Luke's Gospel and we can look out for it whenever we read this wonderful book.

Praying at Great Events

Jesus' baptism was an enormously important event in his life. What imme-

diately followed it was recorded by Matthew, who saw:

...the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16–17).

This is recorded with an additional detail in the Gospel of Luke – the type of detail which can be very easy for us to miss:

*Jesus also was baptized; and **while he prayed**, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21–22).*

Very early on in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is presented to us as a man of prayer and this theme flourishes as we continue to read through the rest of the Gospel.

Another very important event in the life of Christ was his 'transfiguration' (which means to have one's form changed), which Mark describes thus:

Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus (Mark 9:2–4).





Again, an additional detail is provided in the record of Luke:

*He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain **to pray. As he prayed**, the appearance of his face was altered, and his robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with him, who were Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:28–30).*

Perhaps we don't instantly associate the transfiguration with prayer but we learn from the Gospel of Luke that Jesus was praying at the precise time he was transfigured.

Praying Every Day

Jesus did not only pray during the particularly significant events in his life however, as we will now see.

He was frequently surrounded by crowds of people eagerly desiring his attention.

Great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities (Luke 5:15).

However, Jesus needed time alone with his Father.

So he himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:16 – see also Luke 9:18).

If prayerful solitude was so important for the Son of God, it would certainly be beneficial to us as well.

After an episode where he was in confrontation with the Jewish leaders and went on to heal a man with a withered hand, we read that Jesus “went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). We can conclude that this extraordinary episode of prayer was driven by two things.

- ❖ After the healing of the man with the withered hand, the Scribes and Pharisees “were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus” (Luke 6:11).
- ❖ After praying all night to God, Jesus “called his disciples to himself; and from them he chose twelve whom he also named apostles” (Luke 6:13).

In the midst of the plots of his enemies and the momentous task of choosing the twelve, prayer was the dominant activity of our Lord's life. It would provide him with comfort and confidence in his Father's power, as well as preparation for the task ahead.

As we might expect by now, the Gospel of Luke also includes specific instructions about how to pray to God. Appropriately, the ‘Lord's Prayer’ is recorded immediately after Jesus had finished “praying in a certain place” (Luke 11:1–4).

Praying in Crisis

Luke's Gospel also records Jesus praying in the midst of some of the most painful moments of his life and

these are recorded particularly in the twenty-second chapter. Jesus addressed his disciples and Peter in particular when he said:

*“You are those who have continued with me in my trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one upon me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But **I have prayed for you**, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren.” (Luke 22:28–32).*

Luke is the only Gospel which records the detail of Jesus praying for Peter at this time (compare Matthew 26:31–35, Mark 14:27–31 and John 13:36–38).

Jesus’ distress in the Garden of Gethsemane involved both his personal prayers to God and his direct instruction for his disciples to do the same:

*He went to the Mount of Olives, as he was accustomed, and his disciples also followed him. When he came to the place, he said to them, “**Pray** that you may not enter into temptation.” And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and **he knelt down and prayed**, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.” Then an angel appeared to him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony, **he prayed more earnestly**. Then his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*



*When he rose up from **prayer**, and had come to his disciples, he found them sleeping from sorrow. Then he said to them, “Why do you sleep? **Rise and pray**, lest you enter into temptation” (Luke 22:38–46).*

Despite knowing that his excruciating death was imminent, and being in indescribable personal distress, Jesus had great concern for the spiritual well-being of his disciples. Prayer would have helped his disciples in their battle with temptation and human weakness, and it can help us with our battles today.

Despite experiencing the physical and emotional torture of the crucifixion and everything which preceded it, Jesus had heartfelt compassion towards those who were in the process of ignorantly murdering him. It is prayers like the one Jesus made on the cross which mark him out as unique – who can fail to be moved to the very core by the words of his prayer?

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do (Luke 23:34).

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