

Take This Cup from Me

The Cross (Part 6)

Mark 14:32-36 (Mt.26:36-39) 6/11/2022

One preacher said, “Prayer is not about getting God to do what you want. It’s about getting you to do what God wants.” But if that’s the case, why make requests? What is the real purpose of prayer?

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Introduction: Unanswered Prayer

Does prayer work? We all know the right answer: “Yes, of course it works. Prayer changes things!” But what about when you pray and nothing happens? Let me ask you this: Did Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane work?

To answer the question of whether prayer works, we need to know what the purpose of prayer is. If you think the purpose is to get God to do what you want, then lots of prayers don’t work.

But preachers will say, “Prayer isn’t about getting God to do what you want; it’s about getting you to do what God wants. The purpose is simply to align your will with what God has already decided.” But if that’s the purpose of prayer, why didn’t Jesus just say, “Father—your will be done. Amen”? If the purpose is just to align my will with God’s, why make requests?

The scene in the Garden of Gethsemane the night of Jesus’ arrest feels to me like some of the most sacred ground in all of Scripture. I wish we could take the whole scene in one message, but we’d only be able to skim the surface, so for tonight, I just want to focus on Jesus’ prayer. Let’s make sure we understand that, and then next time we can back up and see how his prayer fits into the message of the whole scene.

Jesus' Anguish

Jesus Comes Undone

Mark 14:32 They went to a place called Gethsemane¹, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."² **33** He took Peter, James and John along with him and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

Jesus leaves the 8 behind, and as soon as it's just him and his inner three, Jesus lets go of his brave face and just comes unglued. James says he became **deeply distressed**. That term refers to someone who is, disoriented, stunned, bewildered, and afraid. The other word (**troubled**) refers to anguish and inner turmoil. That's Mark's description. Then he records Jesus' own description of how he felt.

34 My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

The word translated "overwhelmed with sorrow" is the word used to describe how Cain felt before murdering his brother.³ It's also the term used in Psalms 42 and 43 in the refrain, "Why are you down-cast, oh my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" Jesus was downcast in his soul to the point of death. He was so torn up on the inside, he felt like he was going to die.⁴ And in Luke's gospel you get the sense that if an angel hadn't intervened, he would have died—just from the sheer horror of what he was feeling.⁵ You can imagine the knotted up stomach, nausea, migraine, feelings of panic, difficulty breathing. I think we'd be astonished if we knew just how close Jesus came to total collapse in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus knows what it's like to be down and out. He knows what it's like to have such blinding pain that you can't think straight. To have your soul encircled by suffocating grief, closing in and crushing the life out of you.

We Get to Go Further

That's how Jesus is with Peter, James, and John after leaving the others behind. But now he leaves even them behind. When he said that thing about being overwhelmed with anguish to the point of death—that was too personal, too private for the whole group. He only wanted to say that to the three. Now, this next part is so private, not even the three get to see it.

34 ... "Stay here and keep watch." 35 Going a little farther ...

So they set up a watch while Jesus disappears into the darkness alone. Peter doesn't get to go, John doesn't get to go, *but we do!*

¹ The name means, "olive press." It was a place where they used huge stones to crush olives, pressing out the precious oil. A fitting metaphor for what would happen to Jesus in that garden that night.

² Mark pictured Jesus as praying at the beginning (1:35), middle (6:46), and end of his ministry, implying that his whole ministry was characterized by prayer.

³ Genesis 4:6. It's also used in Mark to describes Herod's remorse over his foolish oath (Mark 6:26).

⁴ It's the same construction as in Jonah 4:9, where Jonah says he is angry enough to die.

⁵ I previously made a comment that God did not send an angel to strengthen Jesus in Gethsemane. My apologies for the error. According to Luke 22:43, an angel did come to strengthen him. But we should pay attention to the next verse. How did Jesus feel after being strengthened by the angel? Was he at peace and rest? No.

Luke 22:43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

After being strengthened, Jesus was still in anguish and prayed even *more* earnestly and sweat drops of blood. He felt even worse. It sounds like that angel's strengthening was not to alleviate his agony, but to keep him alive.

Have you ever thought about that? We get to go in with him all the way. What an amazing grace God has given us to take us places like this to see Jesus in his most private, intimate dealings with the Father.

He walks alone, as far as he can before his knees buckle.

35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground

True prayer involves your whole being, including your body. This is Jesus at his lowest—by himself, in the dark, flat on the ground in the dirt.

The Cup

Why is he so upset? To use his words, it's because of the cup he's about to drink. Cup of what? People often say it was the cup of God's wrath, but the Bible never says God was angry with Jesus. He was pleased with Jesus.⁶

"The cup" can refer to whatever God has in store for you, positive or negative. Many times it's the cup of judgment or punishment. I believe that's what it means here. God made Jesus drink the cup of punishment for the sins of mankind.

That punishment did come from God's wrath. God was furiously angry over sin, and that anger demanded brutal punishment, and that brutal punishment was meted out on Jesus full force. So God punished Jesus *as if* he were angry with him, even though he wasn't.

Looking Inside the Cup

Jesus has known for years he would have to drink this cup, but we've never seen him like this. It's one thing to know something as a fact. It's something else to face it emotionally—to immerse yourself in thoughts about it. To imagine going through it to the point where you start to feel the horrors.

There have been times when I've thought, "What would I do if my wife died?" That's one thing. But there have been times I've not only considered that to think through what I would do, but I actually imagined it happening. I daydreamed about how I would feel and all the pain of it, and I had to snap out of it because it was getting too real—even to the point of bringing me to tears.

Why would I have tears? It didn't even happen. The same reason you can have tears watching a movie. Even if something hasn't happened in reality, you can let it happen to your emotions. And that's what Jesus was doing here.

One lesson we can learn from Jesus here is when something horrible is going to happen, don't let it happen to your emotions any sooner than you need to. He's known for years he'd have to drink a horrible cup, but this is the first time he's really looking intently inside that cup.

And when he does, it looks bottomless. The fury of the Father's punishment for all sin of all time is just frothing and roiling inside that awful cup. Jesus can smell it. He can taste it, and he almost drops it. Everything in him recoils from it. If you asked Jesus which was more difficult, Golgotha or Gethsemane (the cross or the night before), I don't know what he'd say. I can tell you Mark says a lot more about Jesus' agony in the garden than he does about his suffering on the cross.

Why Gethsemane? Why not just go from the last supper straight to the cross and get it over with? Gethsemane had to happen because it's where Jesus surrendered himself to the cross. God wants Jesus to spend a whole night peering into that awful cup. Jesus has to see and, through his imagination, to feel every drop ahead of time because every bit of his sacrifice must be voluntary.

Most of us don't have to make a decision about the most painful ordeals we go through. They just happen to us and we deal with them. God doesn't ask you to stay up all night the night before and decide whether you want to go through a really bad car accident or get news about your child dying. Can you

⁶ He said that audibly from heaven twice in this book (Mark 1:11; 9:7). God wasn't angry with Jesus any more than he was angry with the lambs that had been sacrificed in the past. The Bible does use the phrase "cup of wrath," but never in connection with Jesus.

imagine if he did? If we saw a movie of all the hardships we'd face in school, all the hardship you'd face in your marriage, everything ahead of time, before you make the commitment, we'd probably never commit to anything. But the cross was something that required informed consent. Jesus had to understand every line in the contract and agree to all of it.

Have you ever agreed to do something only to find out half way through that it was more than you thought it was? You wouldn't want Jesus' sacrifice for you to be like that, right? For him to be on the cross thinking, "Man, if I'd have known it would be this bad, I don't know if I would have done it." No, the Father made him stare the whole thing right in the face all night, so that when Jesus accepted the cup, it was 100% his choice to go through every bit of it.

Jesus' Prayer

Okay, so let's look at this private prayer that not even the disciples get to see. First Mark gives his summary of the prayer, then he lets us hear Jesus' actual words.⁷

35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.

That's Mark's summary. Now Jesus' actual words.

36 "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Not Like the Art

I don't know how influenced you are by paintings of this scene, but if you picture Jesus sitting up, with his hands together calmly breathing this prayer and glowing slightly—that's not the way Scripture describes it.

Hebrews 5:7 ... he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.

Jesus was shouting. And crying. Before the disciples fell asleep they heard him wailing and moaning and shrieking his cries to God.

When he said, "Take this cup from me," that's what he desperately wanted. And when he followed it by saying, "Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done," that may not have flowed from his lips as smoothly as you might imagine. It wasn't like, "Father, is there any other way? No? Okay. I just thought I'd ask." That's not the picture here at all. To me it sounds more like: "Father, take this cup from me. I don't want to drink it. I can't do it—I ..." Jesus had no doubt seen men being crucified.

And beyond that, he had spoken of paying a ransom for many. He knew what that meant.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus became sin in the same sense we became the righteousness of God—the Father was about to credit our sin to his account ... and treat him accordingly. His perfectly pure, innocent, holy soul would take upon itself the guilt of the most vile atrocities in all of human history—all of them. The most disgusting sins you can think of, and worse.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

⁷ Mark did the same thing with Jesus' inner turmoil. First Mark describes it in his words (v.33), then he quotes Jesus describing it (v.34).

Jesus looked down into that horrible cup and saw himself being cursed by God.⁸ It's the same word for the curse on the earth in Genesis 3 after the fall of mankind. God cursed the earth, and we can all see how that turned out. Now Jesus is going to be the object of God's curse.

And Jesus says, "Father, please, no. Please—I can't ..." Then he gets a hold of himself. "I know your will is best. Not my will but ..." then his words get choked off. His mind is flooded with the ramifications of saying the rest. If he says the other part, "Your will be done," that might mean he will have to drink this cup.

He tries again. "Not my will Father. But ..." again, he can't finish and collapses again in the dirt.

I don't know exactly how it went. But that picture I painted is definitely a lot closer to the biblical description than a guy in a spotless white robe with a halo.

And it's out of that mess of emotion that Jesus gives us what might be the most profound example of true prayer in the whole Bible. So let's take a close look. I'll cover this under four headings. The first one I'll call The Shocking Request.

The Shocking Request

The Opposite of What He Had Always Said

Jesus' request in this prayer is, "Take this cup from me. Let this hour pass from me. I want out. I don't want to be here, I don't want to do this, Father, don't make me drink this cup."

I call that shocking because it's the opposite of what Jesus has been saying his whole life. How many times had he told his disciples he had to suffer and die—it's why they were going to Jerusalem, it's why Jesus came into this world. He told James and John, "I will drink the cup, and so will you." When Peter suggested otherwise, Jesus called him Satan.

John 12:27 "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

And now he's saying, "Let this hour pass from me"? "Shocking" doesn't even cover it. Jesus boldly talks about that hour all his life, and now he comes right up to the brink of that hour, he sees what's coming, the Father puts the cup right to Jesus' mouth and Jesus presses his lips closed and turns his head and pleads, "Father, *please*, take it away."

Sleep Threatens to Overtake Jesus

When Jesus says the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak down in v.38—that didn't just apply to the disciples. It applied to Jesus. His flesh was weak too.

Jesus has been warning about spiritual sleep. Here we see it threaten to overtake even Jesus. Sleep is when you lose awareness of spiritual, eternal realities and can only see physical, temporal things. Jesus sees all the suffering, and the necessity of the cross suddenly isn't as clear as it was before.

A Superman Is not a Man

This is hard for us because we think of Jesus as being God, so we choke a little bit when his humanity becomes a little too human. We have the opposite problem as the disciples. The disciples were first introduced to Jesus as a man, and they had to come to believe he is also God. That would be tough. Just think of someone you recently met. What would it take for you to become convinced that person is God?

That was their hurdle; ours is the opposite. You and I were first introduced to Jesus as God. And so for us, the difficulty is realizing his is also fully human. Not superhuman. Human human. A superman is not a real man.

⁸ A curse is the opposite of a blessing. When God blesses you, that brings good, beneficial things to you. When he curses you, it's the opposite.

Jesus never got any spiritual boost in his fight against sin from the fact that he was God. None. No special divine power ever leaked over into his human nature in a way that made it easier for him to resist sin than it is for us. Otherwise the Bible couldn't call him a sympathetic high priest who has been tempted in every way just as we are.

When we read the stories of the great heroes of history, usually we see them face death fearlessly with calmness and poise. But here's Jesus coming apart at the seams—literally, blood seeping out of his pores. Screaming and crying—he's a mess.

Take any hero you want, and he may have been calm and poised right before his death, but at some point in his life he was a slobbering mess of tears and weakness. All of us, at some point, go through a dark valley that's too much for us, and we feel like we're drowning. If Jesus never went through that, how could he claim to be a sympathetic high priest?

Hebrews 2:17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest.

And if this all seems too low for the Son of God, we probably don't understand the incarnation. Going from his strongest moment down to the depths of Gethsemane is nothing compared to leaving his glory in heaven and becoming a man in the first place.

The Favorite Attribute

Why Tell God He Can Do Everything?

So that's heading 1—The Shocking Request. The next one I'll call, The Favorite Attribute. Before making his request, Jesus appeals to God's omnipotence.

36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you."

The reason I say that's his favorite is because he's always quick to mention that attribute of God. When the disciples asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God."⁹

When the disciples couldn't cast the demon out of the boy and the kid's father says, "Jesus, if you can do anything, take pity on me," Jesus said, "If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes."¹⁰ In chapter 11 he told Peter, "Have faith in God and you could tell a mountain to throw itself into the sea and it would happen."¹¹

He's said this multiple times to people, but here he's saying it to God. Why say this to him?

He's making an argument. Like Moses pleading with God not to destroy Israel because of the effect it would have on his reputation with the nations. God wants us to make arguments for our requests based on his character.

And it's also good for our own hearts. One of the purposes of prayer is to say things to God, hoping that your heart is eavesdropping on the prayer because it's something you need to be reminded of.

Satan's Use of Scripture

So Jesus' argument is, "God, everything is possible for you, so please, use that omnipotent power and wisdom to come up with a way you can take this cup away from me." So this is the right way to pray, but at the same time, the thing he is requesting gives us the willies because of what came earlier in the book. Jesus made it clear in ch.9 that any ideas of Jesus avoiding the cross are satanic. Satan's whole objective is to prevent Jesus from drinking that cup.

⁹ Mark 10:27.

¹⁰ Mark 9:23.

¹¹ Mark 11:23.

And you know Satan was there tempting Jesus. The serpent slithers in to this garden, slides right in to Jesus' prayer, and tempts him using Jesus' own words—using Jesus' favorite attribute of God. You can imagine Satan whispering to Jesus, “All things are possible for God. *All* things. Think about it Jesus. Do you not believe the Father is smart enough to think of another plan? Is he that powerless, that he can't do it a better way? Don't you trust him, Jesus?”

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting it was wrong for Jesus to pray this. It wasn't wrong. It was a perfect prayer and it's a model for how we should pray. But even the best things we ever do, Satan will try to twist into a temptation. That's why it's so important to stay alert.

The Power of Desire

So this is a dangerous moment, a moment that requires extreme spiritual alertness. But it's a good prayer. God wants us to come to him with our desires. He wants us to pour out our hearts to him. Desire is what powers prayer. If there's no strong desire, there's no real prayer.

Psalm 10:17 You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted.

When we pray, what God hears is our desires.

James 5:16 The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain

Prayer is powerful when it is earnest, and strong desire is what makes it earnest. Desire is like the rocket engine that propels your prayer into heaven.

But the thing about rocket engines—they're dangerous. If it gets pointed in the wrong direction, it can be a disaster. So the goal is not to reduce the power of the engine (tamping down your desires). The goal is to make sure that rocket is pointed up.

Dance of the Wills

Sometimes people think of Jesus' Gethsemane prayer and all they remember is, “Not my will, but your will be done.” That's how the prayer ended, but it's not how it started. And if you just reduce the prayer that part, you're going to miss a lot of what prayer's all about and what this passage is designed to teach us.

Prayer is like a dance of desires—your desires and God's desires. I'm thinking of a ballroom type dance where sometimes the woman is stepping forward and the man is backing up, then a moment later he's advancing forward and she's giving ground. If one of them just steamrolls the other one, that's not a dance.

God wants that dance. Sometimes he wants us to press our will forward. God enjoys responding to our desires. He loves it—just like you love giving things to someone who really wants what you're giving. What's more fun than giving your kid something he really, really, really loves? That's one of the greatest joys of parenting. When you find out that thing that would make your kid over the moon with happiness, and he begs you for it, and you give that to him, there are very few joys in life more satisfying than that. That's the kid advancing, and you giving way.

But is that the only thing you want to do with your kids? No. There are also those times when you know what's best, your child doesn't, and you really want him to let go of what he wants and adopt your will. This is the moment for you to step forward and your child to back up. He's latched on to some really bad friends, you try to show him the folly and danger of that path, and one day he comes into your room and says, “Dad, you're right. I'm not going to hang around those guys anymore. Instead, I'm going to start going to youth group at church and find some godly friends.” Moments like that are also one of the great joys of life for a parent.

God wants us to walk in the path that will be best for us and that will honor him most, and that path is the path of righteousness. God is delighted when we bend our will to do that. But God also loves bending his will to give us what we really want when that's possible. He wants you to care. God works

through people who care deeply and pray passionately. He doesn't do much through bumps on logs. So he allows himself to be moved by our impassioned requests.

The aligning of wills moves from both directions. And that's the purpose of prayer. The guy who said, "Prayer isn't about getting God to do what you want; it's about getting you to do what God wants"—that's too simplistic. Prayer is about advancing and retreating and advancing and giving way back and forth, turning and coming together, each of you moving toward the other until your desires and God's coalesces into one.

The Highest Desire

So now let's look at the climax of the prayer where Jesus says, "Not what I will, but what you will." Heading one was The Shocking Request. Heading two was The Favorite Attribute. What should this heading be? I kicked around words like "surrender"—Jesus' surrender to God's will. Submission. Acceptance. But none of those really capture the point of the passage. It's not just a matter of Jesus surrendering "Okay God—whatever. Just steamroll me with your will regardless of what I want because your will is better." That's not what he saying.

Three Wills

When Jesus says, "Not my will but your will," does he mean that? Yes. How many wills do you count in that statement? I would suggest three. There's God's will—that's one. Then Jesus says, "Not my will"—so that will Jesus doesn't want to prevail is #2. But there's a third will at work. It's the will Jesus is using when he willingly says, "Not my will." He's deciding that. He's requesting that. He desires it. Wanting something and choosing that thing—that's what "will" means. Jesus is backing up in the dance, but he's *choosing* to back up as an act of his will because it's what he really wants to do.

Jesus, like all human beings, had two competing wills. Let's call them the lower will and higher will. Your lower will is kind of your animal appetites—the impulses of the flesh. The higher will is the part of you that can see the bigger picture.

Your alarm goes off and your lower will wants to stay in bed and your higher will wants to keep your job. Your lower will wants a third helping of dessert; your higher will wants to live past age 50. Our lower and higher wills battle all day every day. And here Jesus' higher will is speaking when he says, "Not my will—not my lower will." And he says that because that's what he wants the most. So instead of surrender or acceptance of God's will, let's title this third point, "The Higher Desire."

Jesus wanted the cup removed, and he wanted the Father's will. If there was some possible way to have both, fantastic. But if it's not possible—it has to be one or the other, then Jesus' strongest desire was to let go of his request and give way to the Father's perfect will.

Do you see why I don't want to call this mere acceptance or surrender? It's Jesus highest, strongest desire. That's the goal in prayer—to get to that point.

Everything Is Possible ... Except Nonsense

One quick word about this phrase "if it is possible." Why say, "If it is possible" if he already said everything is possible for God? The answer is this: When the Bible says all things are possible for God, it means God has enough power to do any good thing. But there are things that don't fall within the realm of possibility because they are nonsense. Can God make a married bachelor or a round square? No, not because he lacks the power or wisdom, but because a married bachelor and a round square are nonsense. Those are just misuses of language. And nonsense doesn't become any less nonsensical just because you put the words, "God can" in front it. Asking if God can make a round square is like saying, "God can blah blah blah blah." It's not saying something that has any meaning.

And the same is true of asking, "Can God do evil"? No, he can't—not for lack of power, but because God doing evil is self-contradictory nonsense.

Basically, what Jesus is praying is, “Father, take this cup from me—take it away, unless what I’m asking is nonsense. If I’m asking you to do wrong, then of course that’s not a possibility. I’m only asking for it if it’s possible for you to do it and still be God.” That’s what “if possible” means. God, please do this if it can fit into your perfect plan. But if it can’t, I don’t want anything to do with it.

And isn’t it wonderful that we can count on God to sort through what’s possible and what’s nonsense? Isn’t it great that you don’t have to figure that out before you pray? Nothing causes more misery in our lives and brings more destruction than getting our own way when our way is the wrong way. Isn’t it wonderful that we can count on God to say no to prayers for that which would harm us?

Moving Your Will

Now, anyone can say the words, “Not my will but yours,” but there’s a difference between saying that and really desiring it. Again, the title of this third point is crucial—the higher desire. We get so married to our desires that you might have to dance a long time before your heart embraces God’s will. Or to use another metaphor, you might have to wrestle a long time—wrestle all night (like Jesus did) before the wrestling turns into dancing. Remember, the goal is not for your will to be steamrolled by God’s will. The goal is for you wills to coalesce—for God to happily grant whichever parts of your request are possible and for you to embrace whichever parts of his plan are immovable. And that brings us to the fourth heading, which is actually the beginning of the prayer.

The Intimate Appeal

I’ll call it The Intimate Appeal. Look how he begins his prayer:

36 Abba, Father

Abba

If Jesus’ argument is “all things are possible for you,” then you might expect a different address. Maybe something like, “Almighty God, all things are possible for you.” Or “Lord of Hosts, all things are possible for you.” But Jesus doesn’t go that route. You address God in prayer with whatever title for God you most want to appeal to. And what Jesus needs most right now what he needs most is intimacy.

I held this heading for last so we could appreciate the purpose of it. The purpose of prayer is to get the dance going to coalesce our will with God’s, and if you want to dance with someone, you start by coming close to them. Begin the prayer seeking intimacy.

You might have heard *abba* is like our word, “daddy,” but that’s probably not right. It was the common word adult men used to address their fathers. It’s just the Aramaic word for father. What’s striking isn’t so much that word, but the fact that Jesus uses two words. Why does he say “father” twice—once in Aramaic and once in Greek?

When you address someone twice, you’re trying to make a connection. You say to your wife, “Sweetheart ... my love ...” now you’ve got her attention. It’s different. And it’s intense. And it’s very personal. That’s what Jesus is doing.

And it’s striking because there’s no record of any Jew ever addressing God as Abba. It would have been an overly familiar, presumptuous way to speak to God. Only Jesus had that kind of unique father-son relationship with God.

The amazing thing is, Paul mentions the use of “abba father” twice—Romans 8 and Galatians 4. In both passages, the point is that you and I have the special privilege of addressing God that way, as sons rather than as slaves. A slave might refer to the head of the household as father, but not as abba. And now that we are in Christ, we enjoy that same astonishing intimacy and can come boldly to the Father in prayer.

So back to our question—does prayer work? Did Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer work? When Jesus asked the Father three times to remove the cup and the answer ended up being no, do you think Jesus walked away saying, “Well, that was a waste of time”? Do you suppose Jesus thought, “In retrospect, I

could have spent that time doing something a little more productive”? No, because getting his request answered wasn’t his main objective. His main objective was for him and the Father to end up wanting the same thing. And so Jesus draws his heart as close to God’s as possible in the way he addresses him—Abba, Father.

Enjoying Being Listened To

That’s one reason for using this title. Another may have been simply the fact that in that moment, there was nothing Jesus needed more than his Father. He needed his Father to hear his cries.

What happens inside you when you hear your child scream in pain? Every parent knows what I’m talking about. Sometimes a child starts crying in the other room and the parents just roll their eyes. Then a minute later there’s a cry, and both parents are up off that couch like it’s electrified and they run so fast into the other room you wonder if they’ll be able to make the corner. When you’re a parent, and you hear that scream of real pain or real fear, there’s just no describing what that feels like. It’s like a giant hand reached inside your chest, squeezed your heart.

God built parents like that to teach us what he feels when we come to the end of our strength and we feel like we can’t handle it another second and we cry out, “Abba, Father!” We’ve all given thought to what it was like that night for Jesus in Gethsemane, but have you ever given any thought to what it was like for the Father? For a Father with infinite, perfect love to hear that scream of pain and terror from his boy? Was the Father choked up in heaven? I’m guess it went way beyond choked up.

And when mom or dad care that much, isn’t that part of the remedy of the child’s problem? Why does a young child come in crying after taking a fall, then mom kisses his elbow, and he instantly stops crying and runs off to play? Does the kiss do anything physically? No. The kiss is simply proof that yes, mom knows how bad I got hurt , yes, she stopped what she was doing to pay attention to my little crisis , and yes she cares and loves me and wants me to feel better. And that’s all I need.

Those desires are not childish. Accepting a kiss on the elbow as proof might be childish, but the desire for parental compassion is the human condition.

Jesus’ wanted to talk to the only one who could possibly understand what he was going through. He wanted to call him Abba and feel his compassion and know that he cared.

Did he see it as a waste of time once he realized the answer to his request was no? It wasn’t a waste of time—it’s probably what kept him alive.

Conclusion: Does Prayer Work?

Does prayer work? Have you ever gotten a “no” answer to one of your prayers on something you just knew in your bones was God’s will, and you prayed like crazy, but it didn’t happen? And you come away thinking, “Does prayer even do anything?”

But if we understand the purpose of prayer—to move God’s will where it can be moved, and move my will when needs to be moved—does prayer work? It works better than anything else in life. The real question is, if that’s the goal, does prayerlessness work?

Summary

Jesus suffered with the most extreme inner turmoil in the garden when he deeply considered what was in the cup. He had to feel it all so his acceptance could be full informed consent. She makes the shocking request of taking the cup away (the opposite of what he had been saying). He argued that if God can do all things (a favorite attribute) he should be able to come up with another way. Satan could use Jesus’ own words against him in tempting him. The goal of prayer is a dance, you and God both advancing then giving ground until your wills are one. God loves granting requests, and we must let go of requests that aren’t possible to fit in his perfect plan. So we cry out Abba, Father to seek intimacy for that dance.

Harmony

Matthew 26:36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." 40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." 43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. 45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Mark 14:32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." 35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." 37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.

40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

41 Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Luke 22:39 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.

44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.

46 "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."