

Praying in Crisis: Lessons from Gethsemane

Mark 14:32-36

Summit Church, at all of our campuses, let me welcome you in today as we worship together. And let me say it's a privilege for me to have the opportunity to share with you some of what God has been stirring in my own heart, in hopes that it will encourage and challenge you

I should begin with a bit of a confession. I am a recovering control freak. I quite prefer that things be done, well, my way. I hate to be caught of guard or taken by surprise. I like to know what's coming. I like to be in charge. I began my career here, convinced that if everyone would just do things my way the world would be a better place. But you all have so graciously reminded me on a regular basis through the years, that I am not in control. Then God have me a wife...enough said. And now I have two young boys, 6 & 7 years old, spirited boys, shall we say, who regular shatter any remaining illusion I have that I was ever ...or ever will be in control. So, like I said, I'm in recovery.

But I have a much deeper sense that things around me are not under control. Whether it's the devastation of the earthquakes in Nepal, or the brutality with which Isis has advanced in the middle east, the world seems to be reeling from tragedy after tragedy and atrocity after atrocity. But the chaos isn't just in other places, it's here at home too. From Ferguson, to New York, To Baltimore unrest and violence have erupted and torn communities apart. All across our land racism has raised it's ugly head and the result is devastating. Maybe, like me, you feel the unsettling sense that all is not well in our world. But maybe the feeling of life in crisis is more personal for you. Your job is not secure, or maybe you are unemployed. Your body is being ravaged by some disease and your health is deteriorating. Your family seems to be falling apart at the seams, your marriage is a struggle, your kids are rebelling. Or maybe you don't have the family you thought you'd have by this point in your life – the dreams of being married, of having kids aren't coming true. Your life isn't all you dreamed it would be. When disappointments rise, when crisis looms large, what can you do? How should you and I respond when we feel overwhelmed?

In the next few minutes, I want to show you from the life of Jesus how he responded in crisis and how that should form our response to the crises we face.

If you've got your Bible, turn to Mark 14:32-36

Mark 14:32-36

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."

The crisis for Jesus was real. It was not imagined, nor was it exaggerated. Unlike many of the impending crises that we face, Jesus knew the full extent of what was about to come upon him. There was no ambiguity or uncertainty. . that's why he says verse **34** "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," Jesus knows what is about to happen. He will be betrayed by one of his disciples. His closest friends will abandon him. He will be beaten and scourged, nailed to a cross. And on that cross, he will endure ALL of God's wrath for our sin.

The prophecy of Isaiah 53 is about to be fulfilled

*5 he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.*
*6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

He knew the pain that was coming. He knew the separation from the Father He was about to endure. He knew the brokenness that he would experience in his body and the hell he was going to endure on our behalf. His crisis was of a greater magnitude than anything you or I could ever imagine. More painful, more distressing than anything any of us will ever have to endure

For that reason, what Jesus does as the crisis unfolds is an appropriate guide for how you and I should respond when heartache, hardship, or crisis come our way. Jesus prayed...but it's not just that he prayed but what and how he prayed that offer hope and help to us.

I want us to look both at Jesus' approach to this moment and also his prayer. There are 2 important observations I want to make from Jesus' approach.

FIRST, Jesus shared the crisis with his closest companions.

verse 33 says "He took Peter, James and John along with him." He did not walk boldly into this by himself. He invited his best friends, his community to walk with him. I want you to see here that this was Jesus' pattern. He regularly drew these guys in close to himself, to share in and experience the work of God. In Mark 5 when he goes to heal Jairus' daughter, he takes only Peter, James, and John along with him. In Mark 9, he takes only these 3 up the mountain to witness his transfiguration, there they see Him glorified. They were his closest friends, his confidants, so in this time of difficulty, these men are his support. He humbly asked them to pray with him, to help shoulder his load. But it wasn't just about him deriving comfort from their presence. It was also for their benefit. Jesus knew they would soon face crises of their own and his invitation to them was watch and learn. Not only was he demonstrating how to handle agony and pain, he was letting them see the faithfulness of God in the midst of difficulty.

The application is obvious, I think. You need to be in a small group. You need to cultivate godly friendships. You need the body of Christ in your life. People who will walk with you through crisis and help shoulder the load. But you don't just need to be in a small group for your own benefit. You need to be in community for the sake of others. You need to let others see the faithfulness and goodness of God in the midst of pain and suffering. When you aren't in a small group, you aren't just depriving yourself, you're robbing others...

Michelle and I have had a rough year. I thought about detailing for you all the things that have gone wrong, I even listed them out as I prepared this sermon. But the details aren't really important. It's just been hard. We've faced disappointment and loss, we've experienced grief like nothing we've ever faced, it's just been hard. And often we've wondered what God is up to. And I'll tell you I don't think we could have made it if it had not been for our close friends and our small group.

God has blessed and strengthened us through our small group. They have prayed with us and cried with us. We've laughed recently and said we're sure they are tired of praying for the same thing for us week after week. But they have loved us and walked with us. And we have benefited greatly from their care. But they have also been able to see God working in us. They've seen God provide for us. They have seen and heard what God is teaching us and how he is working in us. We are all built up as we walk through this together in community.

For your own sake, for the sake of others GET IN A SMALL GROUP!!!

SECOND, Jesus cultivated his prayer life before the crisis hit.

If you look carefully at Jesus' prayer here, you will see that it is remarkably similar to the model prayer he gave the disciples. I'll draw some of that out as we walk through the prayer in just a moment. Jesus prayed the way he did in the middle of crisis because he was in the habit of praying this way. Over and over again the gospels tell us that Jesus withdrew to a solitary place to pray. *"In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there (Mar 1:35)* Prayer was not crisis management for Jesus, it was a way of life. He prayed before he broke the bread and fish and fed the five thousand. He prayed before he raised Lazarus from the dead. He prayed for his disciples before he sent them out. He prayed from the cross.

If Jesus thought prayer was necessary for His life, how dare you and I charge through life and act like it's optional and make excuses for our lack of prayer.

if you want to pray well in difficulty, you must cultivate a habit of praying rightly in the ordinary. I've heard it all my life – practice makes perfect. If you want to excel in praying, then start by praying. We want to see you grow and develop this area of your spiritual life. That's why we've provided resources on our website that will help you develop your prayer life. There are regular prayer gatherings at every campus during every service where you can go and pray with other believers – we call this the Boiler room. We've called the church to 30 of Days of Prayer during the month of June and are posting daily prayer points on the website. Over the next 4 weeks we are calling you fast and pray on Tuesdays. Why? Because we believe that prayer is essential for your life in Christ and for the life of this church. So whether you and I are in the middle of an urgent situation or not, we all need to learn from Jesus' prayer here.

Let's look again at his prayer in verse 36

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

It's not complicated, everybody can pray this way. There are no big words, it's overly-eloquent. Nobody would be unduly impressed by this prayer. It's really quite simple, but extremely powerful. And there's not a soul in this audience today who can't learn to pray this way.

Notice how he begins

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

Much like his instruction to his disciples to begin their prayers with "Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name" Jesus starts by focusing on God's fatherly compassion and his sovereign power.

“Abba, Father” It’s so easy for us to read this and not give it the weight it deserves. This is not just a casual greeting, a polite way to begin a prayer. This is an expression of tenderness and intimacy and delight. Papa, Daddy. It is an exaltation of the character of God. To say Abba Father is to adore God as he has revealed himself to us. Psalm 103:13 “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him”

We must believe that God is who he says he is, and worship him with hearts full of praise. Just like the Psalmist did in

Psalm 68:4-5

- 4** Sing to God, sing in praise of his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before him—his name is the Lord.
- 5** A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.

When we pray, we must learn to begin by looking full into the face of our Father – and adore our loving, merciful God. And when in difficulty we are tempted to question His character, to disbelieve His love for us - we must repeat the truth of His Word - *Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* Lamentations 3:22-23 Whether you feel like it or not – whatever your circumstances- marvel at the great love of your Father

But there is another aspect of this that we must not overlook. To call God is Father is to identify yourself as a son or daughter. A child who has every expectation of being heard, of being welcomed with open arms.

Listen to what Ephesians 2 says about those of us who have been saved by God’s grace. It says we were *dead in the trespasses and sins, sons of disobedience who followed the passions and desires of our flesh—children of wrath*, then verse **4** *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—* no longer children of wrath, but adopted sons and daughters by God’s grace in Christ.

Can I ask you this: do you know that you are a son/daughter of the most high God? Have you by faith in Jesus been adopted into the family of God?

You don't become a son on the basis of what you do, or where you were born, or who your parents were, or if you went to church - you become a son by trusting in what Jesus has done. For some of you, the most important thing you could do today is embrace the rich mercy and grace of God that can make you alive. Right now, say to God - *I'm a child of wrath because I've been living according to my own desires. I believe Jesus died to pay the penalty for my sin. I'm turning from my sin. Father save me, make me alive. I trust you. I surrender my life to you.*

I want to be really clear here - you are either a son/a daughter or you are not.

And if you are a son/a daughter, then adore and worship your heavenly Father
1 John 3:1 - See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

You're a beloved son, a treasured daughter - bask in it, revel in it, embrace it - and worship your God

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

Everything is possible for you - this is a resounding declaration of faith in the middle of unbelievable turmoil. This is not an empty platitude. It is anchored in all that he has seen God do. Jesus was there in the beginning when the world was created. God made everything out of nothing. He knows His Father can do anything. Jesus was there when God began to fulfill his promise to make a great nation out of impotent Abraham. He saw the Father rescue his children from the bondage of Egypt and bring them into the promised land. Jesus was there when the lame walked and the blind received their sight and the dead walked out of the tomb. He knows NOTHING is impossible for God. Because he has seen God do the impossible So in his IMPOSSIBLE moment Jesus remembers the deeds of God, he recalls the work of God and he gives thanks.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 we are given this instruction:

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Rejoice continually because the Most High God is your Father and give thanks in all circumstances because everything is possible for Him.

In crisis, we need to do what Jesus did - He set his gaze on God the Father- he started with who God was and what God could do. He came with adoration and thanksgiving. And the strength to forge ahead came not from a change in his circumstance but from the steadfast character of God.

Just last week, we were at the beach and I watching my 2 sons play in the sand. I had been struggling with my disappointment about our circumstances and the seeming inactivity of God in our situation. As watched my boys, I heard this question rise up in me: "If you knew beyond a shadow of a doubt what was best for your boys, and you had the power to do it, would you?" And I answered "YES" Then God spoke to me - "I'm that kind of Dad." Then this verse rushed into my mind Matthew 7:11 *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*

Our best praying, in any situation will come not from a thorough examination of our circumstances, but from a thorough exaltation of the character of God. More than I need to know the details of my situation, more than I need to describe it to God; more than I need to formulate a plan of action, and ask him to do what I think is best; more than anything else I need to know who God is and who I am in Him. I need to be familiar with his ways, I need to recall his deeds, I need to recount his promises. More than my praying is about getting something from God, it is about getting to God. More than I need what He can do, I need who he is.

Now let's look at the second half of Jesus' prayer

36b "Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Again, we see Jesus following the pattern for prayer that he gave in the model prayer, when he taught us to pray "your kingdom come, your will be done"

I find this to be so intriguing. Why would Jesus say "take this cup from me?" He knew there was no plan B. Jesus knew what the plan was for our redemption. In eternity past, he and the Father had conceived this plan and agreed upon it. Revelation 13:8 says that Jesus was "*the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.*" This is where the humanity and divinity of Jesus collide. Jesus, fully human wanting to avoid the unimaginable pain that was before him - Jesus, fully divine willingly participating in the eternal plan for the redemption of mankind

This verse gives us both permission and direction. Permission - I can honestly cry out to God - is there another way? I don't want to walk this path, I don't want to endure this pain, this heartache. Can we please do it another way? God can handle your complaint. He can deal with your objection. According to this prayer it is perfectly acceptable to ask God to change your circumstance. And the scriptures are full of instances where God did just that - he heard his child's cry for help and he responded. So ask, You not only have permission - you have been instructed to ask.

Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Philippians 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Or how about this one?

2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Clearly, God expects us to ask

Not only does this prayer of Jesus give me permission, it also gives me direction – “yet not what I will but what you will.” This was not resignation, it was not reluctant surrender. It wasn't a result of being "defeated" or overpowered by God. It was joyful, expectant embrace of the plans and purposes of God. **Hebrews 12:2** *Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,*

More than Jesus wants to escape pain and suffering, he wants to see salvation purchased for mankind.

The heart that longs for a change of circumstance must also have a greater longing...a longing to see God accomplish his purposes in the way he deems best. Our hearts must believe **Psalm 18:30** *As for God, his way is perfect.* And we need to learn to love God's dreams for us more than we love our dreams for ourselves.

At the end of the day, you and I need to be able to say with confidence

Psalm 33:10-11 *The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. 11 But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.*

Philippians 1:6

6 (I am) confident of this, that he who began a good work in (me) will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Let me be really clear here, you will never honestly be able to pray this “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” Until your heart is full of praise and thanksgiving for who God is (Father) and what he can do (everything)

I'd like to challenge you this week to begin praying this way. It may not come naturally at first. You'll have to discipline yourself to pray through the character of God and the work of God. Your instinct will be to rush to your requests – but don't. Worship and adore your Father. In your Bible reading, look for verses that describe the character of God. Write them down and let them fuel your adoration. Give God thanks for his great power and awesome deeds. Again use the scriptures and your personal experience to promote gratitude. Then make your honest request. *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7.* Then release your desires to him. Ask Him to do all that is in his heart.

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

Would you bow your heads with me and let's take a few minutes to pray together?

Worship and adore your Father who is full of compassion and unfailing love, the one who forgives wickedness sin and rebellion

Give Him thanks for his great power, for his sovereign rule over all things – nothing is too difficult for him

Now lay out your request, honestly, humbly ask Him to move in your circumstance

Finally, can you release your dreams and desires, embracing his purposes and his desires for your life?