

What do you do when you're between a rock and a hard place? Over the years I've done some difficult funerals. One from a few years ago will always stick out in my mind. It was for a 72-year old man who was driving his truck to a local flea market as he did every Sunday morning, but his truck was knocked off the road by another driver who'd fallen asleep at the wheel. The truck started on fire. He was just a few miles from home, so he called his son to come and rescue him, but his son wasn't able to get there in time. *What do you do when you're between a rock and a hard place? Who do you call?*

Remember Aron Ralston (**picture**)? In April of 2003, he was canyoneering alone in the Bluejohn Canyon in eastern Utah. Canyoneering is the sport of exploring a canyon by rappelling and waterfall jumping. As he was descending the lower stretches of the canyon, a suspended boulder became dislodged, struck him and pinned his right wrist to the canyon wall. He hadn't told anyone of his hiking plans and didn't have a way to call for help. After five days, in an act of desperation, he amputated his forearm with a dull pocketknife, rappelled down a 65-foot drop, and hiked 7 miles to safety. *What do you do when you're between a rock and a hard place? Who do you call?*

If you're not between a rock and a hard place, you will be. Maybe not today, this week or this month, but rest assured, all of us ultimately find ourselves there. It might be whether or not to stop life-support on someone you love.. Your rock and a hard place could be what to do with a rebellious or perhaps addicted child. It might be a crisis in your marriage. Or you feel you're at the end of your rope. Your hard place is battling with whether or not you to take your own life. The critical question is: *Who will you call?*

The Lord Jesus found Himself in that spot in our passage in Luke that we're considering this morning. Jesus was between a rock and a hard place that was so extreme, so difficult – that humanly we can't even begin to comprehend it. Please turn to Luke 22:39-46 (p. 882).

So, what did Jesus do? When the Savior was between a rock and a hard place, He prayed and urged His disciples to do the same. Is that how you respond? Do you pray when you face a crisis? Is prayer your default setting?

I wish that I could say that's how I always respond. It's not, but I'm growing. My tendency has been to worry or plan. I'm so thankful for God's grace. I'm learning to pray more and more.

Why don't we pray? Can you imagine being billionaire Warren Buffet's (**picture**) child, you're facing a financial crisis and you try to work it out by yourself? Yet, our Heavenly Father makes Warren Buffet look like a pauper. Yet, rather than going to Him, we do nearly everything we can to fix it ourselves and rarely pray.

What do you do when you're between a rock and a hard place? Who do you call? It should be your Heavenly Father. That's what Jesus did. Unfortunately, His disciples didn't. Let's work our way through this. If you're taking notes...

Every trial is either a test of our faith or a temptation for failure. The first Adam rebelled and brought sin and death into the world from a garden. Jesus, the last Adam, resisted temptation and overcame the enemy in the Garden of Gethsemane, bringing salvation and life. If we want to overcome trials and temptations, we must learn to pray as Jesus prayed.

Life can get very dark. Darkness creates doubt and fear. One woman told about her favorite spot at the local zoo. It was an exhibit called *the House of Night*. There you could see creatures of the night that would crawl and fly about. Because it held creatures of the night, it was nearly completely dark. She said that on one very bright day, she stepped into the exhibit and of course, was instantly plunged into total darkness. Almost immediately she said, "a small hand grabbed mine." Smiling, she asked "And who do you belong to?" A little boy, in a very quiet voice said: "I'm yours...till the lights come on."

Jesus' disciples were in a very dark place and didn't know it. All the darkness of hell was headed their way. Jesus knew what was coming. That's why He urges them, "*Pray that you may not enter into temptation.*"

What do you pray about? When was the last time you prayed you wouldn't succumb to temptation? We're so this world focused, we miss true danger. Our greatest needs are not health or safety as we travel. Our greatest needs are spiritual safety. That's what makes an eternal difference. Prayer is vital. It expresses a need for God, a desire to depend on Him and rest in His care.

Every problem we have finds its roots in sin. Why do you get angry? *Sin*. Why do you get discouraged or depressed? *Sin*. Why do you have problems in your marriage or with your children? *Sin*. Why do you have problems at work? *Sin*. What's wrong with the world? *Sin*.

"*Pray that you may not enter into temptation.*" When was the last time you prayed that God would protect you from temptation? Jesus' instruction here corresponds with the final petition of the Lukan version of the Lord's Prayer, "*And lead us not into temptation*" (Luke 11:4).

They needed to pray that they wouldn't *doubt* because they did. They needed to pray that they wouldn't *deny* Him because they're going to. They needed to pray that they wouldn't *desert* Him because they will.

"*Lead us not into temptation,*" acknowledges the weakness of our hearts. It's an admission that if God were to withdraw His gracious hand, we'd fall into sin immediately. It's an attitude that flees temptation rather than sees how close to the brink we can come. Our options are – pray or enter into temptation.

Jesus is our positive example of how to endure; the disciples are our negative example of what to avoid. How did Jesus do it? Notice that phrase, "*as was His custom.*" It was His "habit." Prayer was Jesus' default. When praying is our habit, resisting temptation becomes our habit as well.

When Robert Louis Stevenson (**picture**), was a boy he told his mother, "Momma, you can't be good without praying." "How do you know, Robert?" she asked. "Because I've tried!" To resist temptation, we must learn to pray. **Every trial is either a test of our faith or a temptation for failure.**

2. Jesus is our model for testing, we must learn to pray. "*And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.' And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*"

The Gospels record at least six prayers that Jesus prayed. Jesus' prayer at the Mount of Olives is His last prayer before His arrest and crucifixion. His words clearly indicate that He has a human nature.

What was Jesus' *agony*? For months, He'd been telling His disciples not only when, but how He would die. It was no mystery to Jesus how He would be mistreated, scorned, tortured and crucified. He also knew He'd rise from the dead three days later. Yet when Jesus prays here, it's as if a supernatural cloud of discouragement and fear had enveloped the Savior.

Was Jesus afraid to die? I don't think so. No, He dreaded the "*cup*" He would have to drink. A seismic change is about to take place in His relationship with God the Father, as the guilt of every sin ever committed was placed upon Jesus. He was being asked to drink from a cesspool so vile it's beyond our imagination. His agony, wrote the Puritan Richard Baxter (**picture**), "*was not from the fear of death, but from the deep sense of God's wrath against sin; which He as our sacrifice was to bear; in greater pain than mere dying.*"

While believers struggle to abandon sin and embrace holiness, Jesus struggled to set aside His holiness and embrace sin-bearing. He wasn't fighting against sinful impulses to become holy, but against holy impulses to allow Himself to be made sin for believers (2 Cor. 5:21). Satan tempts believers to cling to sin; he tempted Jesus to cling to holiness. This "*cup*" Jesus dreaded represents the divine death penalty for sin that every guilty, unrepentant sinner must one day drink. God's wrath for sin was poured out on Him, so it didn't have to be poured out on us.

It was this death, this separation from His Father, that He chose to suffer because of His love for us. The miracle of Christ's resurrection is not that He rose from the "sleep" of the 1st death. Others had risen back to life. The miracle of the resurrection is that Jesus rose from the 2nd death. He paid the ultimate price for sin, so that you will never have to if you surrender your life to Him.

Back then it was customary to stand when you prayed. That Jesus "*knelt down*" indicates the intensity and unbelievable burden of His prayer. Jesus' prayer stems from His perfect humanity. He's our example of how we, as weak human beings, should be totally dependent on God. Prayer is the language of dependence. When we fail to pray, we fail to depend on God. Let me suggest that we apply **five facets** of Jesus' prayer in the garden to our own prayer life.

Jesus prayed out of a great sense of need. Jesus knew He was weak; so He prayed fervently. To deny that Jesus was weak is to deny His humanity. Jesus was the God-man, fully human and fully God. Hebrews 2:17, "*Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*"

While Jesus didn't have a sin nature and wasn't tempted by sinful drives, He was "*tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*" (Heb. 4:15). This wasn't the only time that Jesus was weak and needy. He came into this world as a newborn, weak and defenseless. As a man, He was often weary, hungry and thirsty. He was so tired He fell asleep in a boat in a storm. He was thirsty enough to ask a Samaritan woman for a drink. He was hungry enough in the wilderness that Satan could tempt Him to turn stones into bread. On more than one occasion, He was moved to tears and had normal human emotions. He suffered the pain of rejection and the physical pain of death on the cross.

What led Jesus to be in such agony? His agony was the looming realization of what it would mean for Him, the sinless Son of God, one with the Father from eternity, to bear the sins of all humanity on the cross. As Isaiah 53:6 states, "*But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.*"

The extent to which we're holy is the extent to which we recoil in hatred from sin. Being perfectly holy, Jesus was horrified at the thought of being defiled by sin. It was out of His great sense of need that Jesus prayed. And the awareness of our own great needs should drive us to prayer in every situation.

Jesus prayed intimately to His Father. He repeatedly addressed God as “*My Father.*” Mark 14:36 says that He cried, “*Abba, Father.*” *Abba* is the Aramaic word of closeness and intimacy children used when addressing their fathers. It means “Daddy” or “Papa.” It indicates the kind of relationship a young child has who crawls up into his father’s lap, curls up and falls asleep. Our awesome God becomes the tender “Daddy.” Jesus instructs us to pray to God as our *Abba* (Matt. 6:9). At salvation God becomes our *Abba*. We have access to the Sovereign of the universe as His children through faith in Christ. We can draw near knowing He will welcome us as a Dad welcomes his children.

Jesus prayed honestly, presenting His desires to His Father. Though intellectually Jesus knew God’s eternal decree, His humanity recoiled in horror from the thought of bearing God’s wrath. That’s why He prayed, “*If You are willing, remove this cup from Me.*” Luke greatly condenses the narrative; the other Gospels report that He prayed it repeatedly. He first fell to His knees and then on His face (Matt. 26:39). It shows the intensity of emotion Jesus was expressing in His prayers. He poured out His soul honestly to the Father, even to the extent of asking that somehow, if possible God’s eternal decree might be altered! We, too, can pour out our souls honestly before God, knowing that He cares about us.

Jesus prayed submissively, seeking the Father’s will above His own. “*Not My will, but Yours, be done.*” While Jesus honestly prayed His feelings, He quickly restrained Himself and brought Himself into submission before the Father’s perfect will. God’s will is often the most difficult path for us in the short run, but it always results in great blessing in the long run.

If God’s will is the only rule of what’s right and good, then anything at variance with it is wrong. Just as Jesus did, we, too, must trust and submit to His perfect will. We may express our desires to the Lord, as long as we always bow before His will even though we may not fully understand it.

The result of Jesus’ prayer was that He was strengthened to enable Him to endure victoriously. His Father sends an angel to strengthen Him. We don’t know how the angel strengthened Him. Maybe He came with a special message. Maybe just his presence reassured Jesus of the Father’s care.

The reality of Jesus’ being strengthened is seen in the account of His arrest. The disciples fall apart, while Jesus remains composed and in control of the situation. He’s not surprised by Judas, but rather confronts him one last time with his terrible betrayal. While Peter swings the sword, missing his target (the center of the servant’s head) and lopping off an ear, Jesus calmly stops this violent response and heals the severed ear which was His last miracle. When the armed mob surrounds Him, Jesus calmly confronts the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders, who easily could have arrested Him in the temple. Then, He went peaceably with them to His final destiny.

Jesus’ prayer beforehand strengthened Him to endure victoriously the trials afterward. You know what I tend to do and you probably do the same thing. I don’t pray until after the trial hits. Of course we should pray then, but wouldn’t we be much stronger if we’d been praying before it all hit?

Was His prayer heard? Yes, though His request was denied. The writer of Hebrews, referring to Gethsemane comments, “*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*” (5:7). He was heard because of His submission. It’s the prayer God always hears. His prayer was one of great faith because He totally trusted His Father. All true prayers of faith end with, “*not my will, but yours be done.*”

Jesus was alone physically, socially and even spiritually. Yet, after He was touched by an angel, His agony is worse. Verse 44, “*And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*” Agony, deep pain is part of the human experience. The Joel Osteens and Joyce Meyers would have us deny this reality of the Christian life – *lament*. You lose your spouse or child or everything like a Job, lament is a biblical response. God never promised us an easy, pain free, always happy life now.

Michael Card (**picture**) said, “*It seems to me that we do not need to be taught how to lament since we have so many models in Scripture. What we need is simply the assurance that it’s okay to lament. We all carry deep within ourselves a pressurized reservoir of tears. It takes only the right key at the right time to unlock them. In God’s perfect time, these tears can be released to form a healing flood. That’s the beauty and the mystery of the prayer of lament.*”

There are many prayers of lament in Scripture. Every major Bible character poured their hearts out to God in lament. Yet, it’s a type of prayer we rarely hear about. At times, it’s a necessary part of our prayer lives. Jesus’ prayer here is one of lament. When experiencing the dark night of the soul, prayers of lament are helpful.

We live in a broken world where things don’t always go right. Prayers of lament are a form of worship and faith. We worship God even in the midst of pouring our difficulty out before Him. Instead of backing away from God during the darkness of suffering, we face the pain and worship Him with it.

Prayers of lament may appear to be prayers of complaining, but they can be prayers of faith. This type of prayer refuses to let God go even in the hard times. God may seem absent, but He’s not. Prayers of lament are honest and bring us face to face with God, as we try to understand what’s going on in our heart. Job prayed deep prayers of lament. He’d lost everything—his family, friends, home, and health. Yet he wrestled through with God and clung to Him as he sought for

meaning to his struggles. He held onto His faith in God and turned to Him with all his heart. He wanted to see God in the midst of his pain.

We trust though we groan. It's faith in the darkness of Habakuk 3, "*Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation*" (vss. 17-18). The great lesson of Gethsemane is not that Jesus suffers *with* us, but much more, He suffered *for* us.

3. We are asleep when we need to pray. "*And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and He said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.'*" The contrast between Jesus' earnest prayer and the disciples' lethargy is a prequel for what will happen when the arresting mob comes. All except Peter will disappear from the narrative until after Jesus' resurrection.

Apparently, the rollercoaster of emotions took its toll on them. They're emotionally exhausted. They'd been eager to fight God's war with man's weapons, but now fumbled with the essential weapon – *prayer*. It's clear that what Jesus is about to experience He'll suffer through alone. Even when their prayer lives were a complete failure, Jesus did not stop telling His disciples to pray. Their failure, like ours, is neither fatal nor final.

If we could only see ourselves as the Lord sees us, we'd pray about everything because we'd see how truly needy we are about everything. We can't even draw our next breath without the Lord's mercy. We won't have food on the table if God doesn't provide. We can't serve Him unless we rely on His strength. Jesus said, "*Apart from Me, you can do nothing*" (Jn 15:5).

The disciples failed because they didn't have the needed spiritual resources. If they'd been in prayer, they could have responded in the Spirit. The options are *prayer* or *temptation*. The early church father, Cyprian (**picture**) said, "*If He prayed who was without sin, how much more it becometh a sinner to pray.*"

Conclusion: What do you do when you're between a rock and a hard place? When the cross was looming, Jesus went to a place where He could get alone with God and prayed. Prayer shouldn't be your last resort, but your first resort.

A guy named Jack was walking along a steep cliff one day when he accidentally got too close to the edge and fell. On the way down he grabbed a branch, which temporarily stopped his fall. He looked down and to his horror saw that the canyon fell straight down for more than a 1000' feet. He couldn't hang onto the branch forever, and there was no way for him to climb up the steep wall of the cliff. So he began yelling for help, hoping that someone passing by would hear him and lower a rope or something. "HELP! HELP! Is anyone up there? HELP!" He yelled for hours, but no one heard him.

He was about to give up when he heard a voice. "Jack, Jack. Can you hear me?" "Yes, yes! I can hear you. I'm down here!" "I can see you, Jack. Are you all right?" "Yes, but...Who are you, and where are you?" "I am the Lord, Jack. I'm everywhere." "The Lord? You mean, GOD?" "That's Me." "God, please help me! I promise if You'll get me down from here, I'll stop sinning. I'll be a really good person. I'll serve You for the rest of my life." "Easy on the promises, Jack. Let's just get you down from there; then we can talk.

Now, here's what I want you to do. Listen carefully. "I'll do anything, Lord. Just tell me what to do." "Okay. Let go of the branch." "What?" "I said, let go of the branch. Just trust Me. Let go." There was a long silence. Finally Jack yelled, "HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE?"

Isn't that what we do when we're between a rock and a hard place? We say that we want God's help but want it on our terms.

Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane reminds us again of the tremendous power of prayer. Prayer didn't deliver Jesus from suffering, but it did take Him through it. Prayer is one of God's primary provisions for our perseverance. His words to His disciples apply to us as well: "*Pray that you will not fall into temptation.*"

How's your prayer life? Let me encourage you to take some steps forward in your prayer life? Here are some suggestions I believe you'll find helpful.

Know to Whom you are speaking. Prayer is a conversation with God. Jesus prayed to His Father. He focuses on a distinct person, His Heavenly Father with whom He has a personal relationship. Every believer has the same right to call God "Father." A personal relationship with God is the place to begin.

Learn to thank Him. A heartfelt thank you is always a great conversation starter. Like any parent, God loves when we have grateful hearts. As we praise God for all He's done in the past — the answered prayers, impossible situations overcome — our faith to believe for even greater answers to prayer grows stronger and more confident.

Ask for God's will. In a world where right and wrong are frequently confused and the future is so uncertain, it can be hard to know how to pray or what to ask for when difficult circumstances arise. The one thing we can know with absolute certainty is that God's plan for those who love Him is good and the safest place we can be is in the center of His divine will.

Say what you need. We often hesitate to bother God with the little things we need, thinking He shouldn't be bothered. When big problems come, we try everything we can to solve the problem before we pray. The Bible says, "*You do not have because you do not ask God.*" Never hesitate to ask God for what you need. Your Heavenly Father delights to give you good gifts.

Ask for forgiveness. James 5:16 reminds us that if we want our prayers to be heard, our hearts need to be right with God and with one another. If you feel your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, take time to check your heart.

Pray God's Word. The Word of God has power and is our great spiritual weapon. That's what Jesus did when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He trusted in the power and authority of the Scriptures.

Pray with another believer. There's power in unity when we pray together. If you don't already have one, find a trusted prayer partner. And join us as we pray together at church in our weekly prayer meeting.

All of us will find ourselves between a rock and hard place. Every Christian agrees that prayer is essential to living the Christian life in a God-glorifying and joy-filled manner. The only thing that we don't do is pray. Start today. Determine to grow in prayer. If Jesus needed to pray, we certainly need to pray. Let's pray for each other that we will grow in praying as a church family!