



When You Pray: In Troubled Times

Recap from Sunday:

Quotes:

"Prayer is an expression of who we are. We are a living incompleteness. We are a gap, an emptiness that calls for fulfilment." Thomas Merton

"The very weakness that drives us to pray becomes an invitation for God to respond with compassion and power."
Philip Yancey

Why should we pray in troubled times?

- it's a conversation with your loving Father
- prayer is powerful and can change circumstances
- because that's what Jesus did

Jesus' example - John 17

As the most difficult time in Jesus' life & ministry was approaching, He prayed:

- for Himself - v1
- for His disciples - v6
- for all believers - v20

Stephen's example - Acts 7

- he didn't bow to the pressure of false accusations from powerful people
- he didn't shy away from the challenge before him
- he made the most of the opportunity, even in the most difficult circumstances
- when facing the very worst outcome, he prayed
 - and he mirrored Jesus' example
 - see **Acts 7:59-60 & Luke 23:34, 46**

Questions:

- can you think of a particularly hard time in your life and how much or little you prayed?
- are you able to share it with your group?
 - what made it possible to pray?
 - what made it particularly hard to pray?

What do we know about Stephen?

- [full of faith and the Holy Spirit - **Acts 6:5**]
- [full of God's grace and power - **Acts 6:8**]
- [full of wisdom from the Spirit - **Acts 6:10**]

How was it possible for Stephen to respond the way he did?

- Read **Acts 4** and look out for the parallels with **Acts 6**
 - [Peter & John before the Council/Sanhedrin / Stephen before the Council/Sanhedrin]
 - [brought for the same reason]
 - [both accused their accusers of murdering Jesus]
 - [nothing to say in opposition to their wisdom]
- When Peter & John were released, what did they do? [they all prayed together]

- Pay attention to v29 - could this be the reason Stephen was able to stand against the Sanhedrin and share God's story the way he did?
 - [v29 *"Now, Lord, consider their threats and **enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.**"*]
- What happened in response to their prayers?
 - [v30 *"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.**"*]
- If it was possible for Stephen to pray even whilst being stoned,

Jesus in the Garden at Gethsemane - Mark 14:32-42

There's a couple of helpful things to note about how Jesus prays in this passage:

- What do we see about His attitude to praying (even in troubled times)
 - [He was intentional & He made time, going to a specific, quiet place]
 - [He falls to the ground - humility]
 - [posture is an important outward indicator of our inward attitude]
 - [the closeness of His relationship with His Father in the way he addresses Him: Abba (Daddy/Papa)]
 - [He doesn't hold back - He prays with honesty, expressing His heart's desire, even though He doesn't think it is in line with what His Father wants]
 - [see **Mark 15:33-34** - in difficult circumstances, Jesus demonstrates the same brutal honest in prayer]
 - [then He submits to His Father's will - humility again]