



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

Speaking with God with Kevin Halloran

Season 2, Episode 4 Transcript

[00:00:00] [Intro]: Welcome to the Gospel for Life podcast, we help churches make disciples and now here's your host Darryl Dash.

[00:00:20] Darryl Dash: Well hey, I'm here with Kevin Halloran, is that how you say your name, did I get it right.

[00:00:25] Kevin Halloran: Yeah.

[00:00:26] Darryl Dash: Okay, cool. And Kevin has written a great new book called *When Prayer is a Struggle*. I don't know anybody who doesn't struggle with prayer sometimes, so it's such a timely book. I could say that any time because it's always appropriate. So Kevin, I'm glad you could join us today, thank you for coming, thank you for being on the podcast.

[00:00:45] Kevin Halloran: Thanks so much for having me Darryl, looking forward to our time.

[00:00:49] Darryl Dash: So I don't know if you've heard the story of, I think it was Sinclair Ferguson and publishers approached him and asked him to write a book on prayer and he said no. Because he said it would have to be somebody who's older, more seasoned and more prayerful than he was. He suggested other names and the publishers laughed and said, "We actually asked those guys too and they said the same thing. And Sinclair Ferguson said, "Who can write or speak at any length easily on the mystery of prayer?" So why is it that even somebody like Sinclair Ferguson, you know, it's not just new believers, it seems like everybody struggles with prayer, why is that?

[00:01:30] Kevin Halloran: It's a great question, reminds me of the fact that there are two types of people who write books. The experts like your Sinclair

Ferguson and then you're kind of everyday people who want to go on a journey to grow and that's kind of my story. But yeah, prayer is a challenging topic. It's a super encouraging topic and there's so much to say and there are so many good books out there, but it's a challenging topic.

I think theologically there are questions we have about prayer. Sometimes we're wondering if God is sovereign, why pray? I encourage people to rest in God's sovereignty to drive you to prayer. He can control the whole universe and he understands what you're asking, what you need, and so that's very inviting, I think in terms of prayer. But as you're alluding to, I think we all realize we don't pray as we would like, and that's kind of the background for this book. Because about 10 years ago I realized that even though I was almost done with a seminary degree, and had various leadership roles in schools or churches that I had attended, prayer wasn't easy. It didn't come naturally, and I kind of kept making the same excuses.

I realized at one point, making those excuses and not really trying to grow is actually kind of an offense against God. Everything he's done for us in Christ to make prayer even possible. Him as our Father calling us his children, inviting us to pray. Like man, there's so much more of God that I'm missing out on just because I'm kind of lazy. Or I make excuses too easily instead of trying to figure out why is it that I have a hard time focusing in prayer and why is it that I have a hard time finding the right words for prayer.

And so I started a journey, I told myself maybe this will turn out into a bigger project that can help other people, maybe I'm the only person that'll help, but I need to know how to grow in prayer. And I praise God that it's been a long journey, but I'm just incredibly encouraged. And I think for everyday believers or everybody even Sinclair Ferguson sometimes it's the simple tools.

Remembering simple gospel truth for me is what motivates me the most to pray and helps me overcome the obstacles that I have, which sometimes seem like there are many.

[00:04:03] Darryl Dash: When you think about it, if I could pick up the phone and call the prime minister and ask him to do something or if you could phone the president and ask him to do something that's a huge privilege we would have. So to speak to the God of the universe and to know that he cares for us and wants to hear from us is an incredible privilege and yet it seems to be something that we're not odd that we get to do it a lot of the time. So why is that, why is there a disconnect between what prayer is and our unwillingness or maybe our struggle in doing that.

[00:04:40] Kevin Halloran: I think one of the answers is that we're busy, we have a lot going on and we can easily lose sight of some of those great Gospel truths. They feel ordinary. Prayer instead of calling out to the God of the universe who has more power than the prime minister or the president and loves us and cares for us. It turns into this is something I have to do. It's a duty instead of a delight and it's a discipline that we're not very disciplined in instead of a great privilege.

And I think we need to remember that great opportunities and great duties that we have are a great delight. We should discipline ourselves for that act right? Like when I was dating my wife, we talked on the phone every single day because I wanted to know her more. That was a discipline, and I had to say no to other things to say yes to her. And I think it can be similar with prayer that we forget the great opportunity we have to respond to the conversation that God has already started in his Word and in the Gospel through Christ. The first chapter of the book is "We Forget Why Prayer Matters." That's one of the big foundational struggles that we have and ultimately I think a lot of it is an issue of faith. Are we truly believing in a moment-by-moment way, all the truths of the gospel and remembering who God is? And that's why at the beginning of the book, I encourage people to focus on faith, focus on the love for God because without a growing faith and a growing love for God, trying to grow in prayer is not going to be useful.

[00:06:33] Darryl Dash: Yeah it's ironic because the more we focus on prayer, the harder it gets and the more we focus on God, actually it somehow becomes easier, right? Because the goal isn't prayer itself, prayer is the means to the end, which is the invitation that God extends to us and intimacy with him.

[00:06:53] Kevin Halloran: And so often when we think of prayer, we think about ourselves and how we don't measure up, how we don't pray as well as so and so at church. Yeah, that's exactly right. We need to put our eyes on God and warm our hearts with what he's done for us in Christ.

[00:07:08] Darryl Dash: So what surprised you about some of what you learned about the problems in how you diagnose our lack of prayer and also the remedies to those struggles?

[00:07:20] Kevin Halloran: Yeah, I love that question and there were a lot of things that surprised me. One of them was just how many struggles that I had that I didn't really think about. So I searched scripture, I did an informal survey of about 100 believers about how they struggle to pray and what helps them. I read a bunch of books on prayer with the angle looking for how do we overcome struggles and I realized that I struggle with a lot of different things. So that was in one sense, a little discouraging, but the encouraging part was that there are

some tools, some ways of thinking about prayer that really helped me overcome multiple struggles all at once.

One of them was simply praying scripture, having a few tools to pray Scripture or prayers shaped in Scripture, maybe pray using the Lord's Prayer. Not only does that give me words to say, but it gives me a path for my mind to walk down, so I'm not as distracted. I have something in front of me I can follow and I have a rhythm, I know the next step to take and so I can do that. Also was surprised that just the universality of all of these struggles, we all at different times deal with all of them. I have nine in the book, nine different chapters and some of them are very obvious like focusing I think, just about every Christian would say it's hard to focus on prayer at times. I think one of the more universal ones that people realize is that sometimes we just don't have words for prayer, but other struggles like having mixed motives as it says in James 4.

One of the biggest surprises was realizing how I need to have a good system for intercession and I talked about that in the chapter called, "I'm So Unorganized." That's because God commands us to intercede for a lot of different things in scripture. We're supposed to pray for ourselves, family, friends, people at church, pastors. Supposed to pray for more gospel workers, the spread of the gospel locally around the world, politicians. It's a big list. And maybe Darryl, you felt overwhelmed sometimes, especially during a global pandemic, you just hear major prayer needs coming at you from every direction. I found that if I don't have a system to plug those prayer requests in to ensure that I will pray through them, probably not going to happen. And the system that I use is an app called PrayerMate, I'm not sure if you've heard of that, but it's a simple app that has kind of like an index card method that you can schedule different rhythms of prayer. So if a friend sees me at church and says Kevin, please pray for my wife and I in this situation, I can make a prayer card and say I want to pray for this each week or each month. And that ensures that as I'm cycling through those prayer cards in the morning and that's when I seek the Lord through prayer most of the time, that ensures that it comes up regularly. And so that was one of the more encouraging surprises, just realizing like there are very useful tools that take a little bit of time to set up. But someone could also at the same time get started with an app like PrayerMate or with a prayer journal or any number of other methods. You could take five or 10 minutes and get started and you'd still be a lot further ahead of where you would be without any effort.

[00:10:45] Darryl Dash: Absolutely. And what I love about PrayerMate is that it's free so anybody can download it and use it. There's not even a cost and it's very intuitive to use.

[00:10:54] Kevin Halloran: Yeah, it's on iPhone and Android I believe.

[00:10:58] Darryl Dash: Yeah that's right, so it's good.

Well how would you counsel someone who feels like maybe they see prayer as a box to check in the morning or an obligation or maybe it's something they feel guilty about. If I went to my wife and I said hey, I feel really guilty, I haven't taken you out and I kind of want to check that box that I've taken out for dinner and spent some time with you. I think she would take it, but she goes like man, it would be a lot better if it was a desire rather than an obligation. So how would you counsel someone who was feeling like that with prayer?

[00:11:33] Kevin Halloran: Yeah, a verse that comes to mind is John 17:3 where Jesus, he's praying to God the Father, he says this is eternal life that they may know you and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. So that reminds me that knowing God, knowing Christ and prayer is a major way that we know God, communicate with him, and live in that relationship.

That's what eternal life is, and that's kind of the point of the whole Bible, Genesis through Revelation. How many times do we hear the mention of the theme of the dwelling place of God? Revelation ends saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man, he will dwell with them, they will be his people and God will be their God. That's what life is all about. And we can so often forget that and like you said, focus on prayer itself instead of prayer as the means for knowing God and for shaping our lives and our hearts according to his will.

And so I just love how the Lord's Prayer opens, it reminds us of that relationship. "Our Father who art in heaven." And I love that God gives us this prayer, holy spirit inspired prayer, the Lord's prayer, that we can just take back to him and look at him, remembering that relationship.

I think one of the biggest issues or the biggest root causes of our struggles in prayer, especially guilt, is forgetting that God is our Father. We think of God more as an ATM machine that we pray a little bit, we get what we want. Or we think of him like the force from Star Wars that you know, the wind is blowing in one direction or the other is this kind of impersonal force. Or we can think of God as an angry boss who is very demanding and we have to do exactly what He wants to do, or He's going to get really angry at us and act out. But God is our Father and everyone with kids knows just how having a child can totally change your life and your affections. Before my daughter was born, I loved her more in a different way than any other person in the whole world because she's my daughter. She didn't do anything to deserve that, and just thinking about that's God's love for us, you know, for those who put their faith in Christ, repented of their sins. We were his enemies and He sent Christ to the cross, so we could be

his sons and daughters. I just love remembering that God is Our Father and we are his children and invites me to pray so much even with my sin because you know the Lord's prayer, we can pray 'forgive us our debts.' God knows we're going to need that petition, and he's not going to give us that petition if he's not 100% willing to answer it and to forgive us and to help us grow and be changed by grace.

[00:14:34] Darryl Dash: So Kevin, that's one of the things that barriers to prayer I think, when we do sin. I remember reading a book that said, the moment you feel a conviction of sin, run to your Father and confess to him, he's ready to receive you. And yet I find when I experience that conviction of sin, there's almost a desire to run away from God. I think of Adam and Eve in the garden, right? And we hide ourselves and we're embarrassed and filled with shame. How do we overcome the reluctance to come to God when we're really messy, needy and maybe even guilty?

[00:15:12] Kevin Halloran: Yeah, it's such an important question and thinking through my discipleship journey. I still remember the first time I heard and where I was when someone said that our sin should drive us to prayer instead of keeping us from it because of the gospel. And yeah, it's just such a life-changing thing to realize that God knows we're going to be sinners, he knows we are sinners and God has grace for us in our sin, in our feelings of pickiness and hiding from him.

It's also important to realize and I'm sure you probably know this from personal experience, I certainly do that, the more we do hide from God, the worse everything is in the end. You know, we're not abiding in him, and that's just going to cause other sins in our life, right? But as it says in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." One of my other favorite passages is Hebrews 4:15 and 16 talks about Christ being a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses but was without sin. Verse 16 says, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need." It's just so beautiful that we're sinners but we can cry out to our holy God because of what Christ has done. There is grace to help in the time of need and God gives that to us willingly.

You know, just like my daughter, she's young enough that she's not into any of the big major sins, but I think she told her first lie a week or two ago and yeah, that's not fun. I know things are gonna get worse, but I still want to have a relationship with her and I'm willing to forgive her. I want to teach her the Lord's ways, but just because she's my daughter, that sin doesn't cut her off from my

relationship with her. So it's the same way with God. You need to remember the Gospel is for sinners and preach the Gospel to ourselves.

[00:17:32] Darryl Dash: That's good. I want to give you a couple of the struggles that you cover in the book and just ask for a quick blurb from you or quick advice on how to handle these struggles. So distraction, how can we deal with distraction when we're praying?

[00:17:50] Kevin Halloran: Yeah, I encourage listeners to first think what are your major distractions? What are you thinking about when you should be praying? I want you to think about why those particular distractions are distracting you the way you are. There's an idol behind it you need to repent of, could be that you're just avoiding something painful. Could just be a mere lack of discipline and something I think we all need to grow in. Especially in our smartphone age, there are so many digital distractions. Every generation has had to battle distraction but ours is uniquely tempted I think in that way.

Then I would encourage people to think practically, find some good pads they can take in prayer. Maybe it's going petition by petition with the Lord's Prayer or praying as you read scripture. But I find when I pray the Lord's Prayer petition by petition, even when I do get distracted or have to take a phone call or something, I can make a mental bookmark of what petition I was at and then when I'm done, I can just go right back into it. So don't get too discouraged, when you realize you're distracted, just go right back to prayer.

[00:19:00] Darryl Dash: What about busyness? It seems like when I wake up in the morning, I have a to-do list. And I have a pattern, I go through a time of prayer in the morning, but I often feel that pressure of like, okay, I've got to get going. How do we deal with the busyness and the pressure to race through our prayer life?

[00:19:18] Kevin Halloran: Yeah, that's one of my biggest struggles and encourage people to just think about priorities and in your mind, in your heart, realize that prayer is vital. Prayer and Scripture reading, communicating with God, hearing his Word and responding back to him. Prayer is vital and so make it a priority. You know, none of us are too busy to pray, but it may seem like it and for all of us, there are plenty of things we can take out of our lives to be able to add a little more focused time in prayer.

One of the big encouragements I have in that chapter is to plan, plan a regular rhythm of prayer. For me that's in the morning with coffee, coffee helps me focus, keeping my phone in the other room helps me focus. So plan time, plan the place, maybe plan special prayer retreats or plan to pray with a friend. But I

also encourage people to take advantage of short pockets of time throughout the day. It's amazing as you look at scriptural prayers, just how short many of them are. You know the Lord's Prayer, you can pray in about 20 seconds. There are Psalms like Psalms 117 you could pray maybe about 10 seconds. Obviously, it's good to have longer times of prayer than that and you need to have a foundation laid of a deeper time with the Lord but we can commune with God throughout the day. I found that little chunks of time for prayer often lead to bigger times because I'm really enjoying a certain aspect of the Lord's Prayer or the Psalm that I'm reading.

One other encouragement is in the book *Atomic Habits*, there's a technique called habit stacking and it's finding something that you are already in the habit of doing and then tacking on a new habit to use that momentum to learn a new habit. So I encourage people to do that with prayer. What's something that you already do, or have a rhythm of doing? For example, if I get a bill in the mail, the electricity bill, I could complain about it, I wouldn't like that or it could pray. How could I pray because of my electricity bill? Well, it's amazing that electricity exists, right? Think about that for a second. I praise God, wow, thank you God for making people in your image who can create something like this to improve my life in so many different ways. Thank you for providing the funds to pay for this and thank you for all the people and work. Even to get a bill in the mail, dozens and dozens and dozens of people work in innovation to make that even possible. So just use little moments of time throughout the day to say short prayers to the Lord, like "Thank you Lord. Or if you see a beautiful sunset, "Wow, that's amazing Lord," and worship in little chunks of time throughout the day.

[00:22:09] Darryl Dash: No, that's great. Anxiety, I find that a lot of us are struggling with anxiety these days. Where I am, I'm planting a church in downtown Toronto and among the younger generation, I'm noticing there's a lot of anxiety. How do we fight that anxiety using prayer?

[00:22:29] Kevin Halloran: The chapter I wrote on anxiety, I kind of frame the chapter around a certain time that I was super anxious. I remember the promise of Philippians 4:6 and 7 which says, "Don't be anxious about anything, but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." So in my anxious bout, I remembered that and so I started to pray but I realized that prayer actually made me more anxious. I think it's incredibly important for us to realize the type of prayer God is looking for in Philippians 4, and it's not a self-centered prayer. When I was praying in that situation I mentioned, I was really just focused on myself. I wanted a silver bullet answer to just take away my anxiety at the snap of the fingers. Instead of really

looking to God as the creator, the source of all things, the giver of peace and thinking about my situation from a God-centered perspective. And so that's one of the major encouragements I would give to the anxious person looking. Because unfortunately, anxiety is a major obstacle that keeps people from prayer, but it also might poison our prayers if we don't think about it the way the Lord wants us to.

There's another passage of scripture in 1 Peter 5 that mentions praying and anxiety, but it connects it to something that's surprising. It connects it to humility. The verse says, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you. Casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you." So we need a God-centered view of our anxiety, of our existence, what's happening in our lives and looking to him. That's what's going to lead us to the peace that passes all understanding.

What I love in that passage in Philippians 4 that it mentions the peace of God twice, not just once. If we follow Paul's example and his teaching and set our eyes on what's true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. As we do that, we reach God's peace. And for the people listening, if you feel like what I was just describing prayer makes your anxiety worse, see it as an exercise. The greater your anxiety is you might have to work much harder in order to reach God's peace. Work and battle it out in prayer and ask the Lord for help. Lord... and I'm probably thinking through the situation in the wrong way, but please cleanse me of that and help me think your thoughts and immerse yourself in scripture in such a time. God is going to lead you to peace and sometimes the harder it is to reach, the greater it is once you reach it. Just delight in God and who he is, even through a terrible storm in your life.

[00:25:41] Darryl Dash: Okay, how has your prayer life changed as a result of writing this book?

[00:25:47] Kevin Halloran: That's a great question and that's something as I've had more conversations about the book, I'm just growing more and more grateful for. I'd say it's helped me in my view of God as I've talked about God as our Father and we are his children and that changes everything. And remembering that really warms my heart and makes prayer easy because I realized I can run to my Father with anything.

I've also been more intentional in practicing what I preach. Realizing writing a book on prayer is in some ways easier than living out a book on prayer for the rest of your life, and so the Lord has challenged me. Kevin, you thought a lot about it, you've done a decent amount of prayer, but you need to practice what you preach because there's a lot of spiritual fruit to be born. A lot of people to

care for through intercessions. Who knows how God wants to use our prayers right?

One of the things that have blessed me the most is just having a lot of time to meditate on the Lord's Prayer. Have a whole chapter that's pretty much an exposition of the Lord's Prayer, which is the first chapter "We Forget why Prayer Matters." And I kind of frame it saying that the Lord's Prayer reminds us why we pray. But it's just such a concise but comprehensive look into what prayer is and who we pray to that I feel like I could spend the rest of my life digging into that scripture. And just plumbing its depths and having that drive me to prayer for a million different things.

I mean, how many people listening to this conversation haven't heard of the Lord's Prayer? Everybody. It's potentially the most repeated little chunk of text in the history of the world, with all these different religious traditions and in scripture and worship gatherings. But it's a gift from the Lord that we can take right back to him in a lot of different ways.

[00:28:05] Darryl Dash: Kevin, I want to ask you a couple more personal questions and that it can be about prayer or it can be about anything else. I'd like to ask all my guests the same questions as we wrap up. What are you learning lately?

[00:28:20] Kevin Halloran: Yeah, great question. I think often the Lord just deepens my appreciation for the simple things I learned in Sunday school and those are often the things that transform my life the most. He's deepening my understanding of his Word and my need for it. In the ministry I'm a part of and the ministry I transitioned from recently, it's easy to talk a lot about the Word and a lot about the power of the Word and not experience it as much yourself. I want to be immersed in the Word and have my life be like the man from Psalm 1, "Tree firmly rooted by streams of water, bearing fruit in season and blessed of the Lord."

Psalms 1 and 2 are actually two passages that the Lord has been really driving home to me because you look at Psalm 2 and that's kind of the introduction to the psalter. Starts with "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the ways of the wicked, but delights in the way of the Lord." And then Psalms ends talking about the nation's raging and Christ is the judge and ruler of all things, but blessed are those who take refuge in Christ. And the more I realized that that's what life is all about, the delighting in God's word and taking refuge in him. Prayer is one way to do both. To delight in God's Word, we hear from God and so we respond in prayer, then we also take refuge in Christ. We run into the strong tower of Christ and we are safe as Proverb says.

[00:30:07] Darryl Dash: It's good, this is arguably a very discouraging time, what has been encouraging you lately?

[00:30:15] Kevin Halloran: Yeah, it is very discouraging thinking through so many different aspects of life and in the world and politics and the state of things. But I think the freshness and the life that comes from the Gospel has been encouraging.

And I love the name of your podcast and platform Gospel for Life because it transforms us, we need God's grace, all of us. Even when you've been in the church so long, we can never forget what grace is and the prayer that comes to mind from scripture is Ephesians 1:15 through 23. Paul is praying that the Ephesians would understand in a deeper way, all of the great Gospel truth and they know about the great Gospel truth he was just talking about. You know, the hope they have in Christ, the fact that they're God's treasured possession, and that they would know in a deeper way the power of Christ in their lives. That's been my prayer for myself and my family and my church in very discouraging times. And part of it is we have so much the Lord has given us in society, in life, a roof over our heads, food, relative, safety. We can be so discouraged by things. The scope of world history is so unique to our times, whereas we still are just as broken and needy as anybody else in world history, it's just a lot easier to forget it nowadays. And so the beauty of dependence on the Lord not knowing what tomorrow's going to bring, but not worrying about it because guys got the whole world in his hands. So that's kind of what the Lord's been encouraging me with of late.

[00:32:09] Darryl Dash: That's good. I'm very grateful for your ministry. Talking to Kevin Halloran and he's written a book called *When Prayer is a Struggle* and I think it's a very helpful book for anybody who struggles with prayer, which is really all of us.

Kevin, I really appreciate the way that you've not only given us good counsel, but you're writing I think as a fellow struggler. I think that's deeply encouraging to know that you're not up there lecturing down to us saying get your act together. It really seems like you've listened to other believers and you've shared your own struggles as well. And given this very practical Biblical advice for how to move through these struggles and improve our prayer life; improve is almost the wrong word. To delight in who God is and enjoy communion with him in our prayer life. So I really appreciate your book.

How can people find out more about you and also where can they find your book and buy your book?

[00:33:02] Kevin Halloran: Yeah, you can visit KevinHalloran.net and from there, you can connect with me on social media. My book is on [Amazon](#), it's on [Westminster Books](#), it's on [Reformation Heritage Books](#). I know there's a [Logos](#) edition and there's an audiobook coming out soon through [Christian Audio](#). I think it comes out next week and a number of other places, but those are probably the best bets.

[00:33:26] Darryl Dash: Are you the narrator of the book?

[00:33:28] Kevin Halloran: Unfortunately I'm not, but the guy who did narrate did a great job. I've never done an audiobook, so probably a lot better with him.

[00:33:36] Darryl Dash: I think it's a lot harder than it probably looks, so yeah, it would be a very intimidating task. Well Kevin, thank you for joining us today, really appreciate your ministry and I hope that this isn't your last book. I look forward to reading the next one too.

[00:33:50] Kevin Halloran: All right, thank you so much Darryl, it's been a joy.