

Sunday 5th March 2023 'Be prayerful'

Luke 11:1-13 Jesus' teaching on prayer

¹ One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." ² He said to them, "When you pray, say: " 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. ³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴ Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. ' "

⁵ Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶ because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷ "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

⁹ "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ 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 the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

This week marks the half way point in our sermon series 'Be Good News!' looking at Luke's gospel for everyone, and I hope you have been encouraged by all we have learned together over these past weeks. As the world lurches from one crisis to another and division and uncertainty challenge both the church and our nation, returning to the Gospel to fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith is perhaps the best way to anchor ourselves and calm our scattered senses.

Hebrews 6v19 says: 'We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.' Whatever happens around us whether fair or foul, we can return to the Lord and find solace in his presence.

And being welcomed into the presence of our Father in heaven is perhaps the greatest privileges of our lives as Christians. No-one can earn the right to approach God's throne – under normal circumstances the alarms would go off and the pollution of our sin would eject us away from the Father's presence like magnets repelling. But Jesus died to offer us forgiveness and a new robe of righteousness, so we are covered and justified – just as if I'd never sinned. All we need to do is turn to Jesus and ask him to forgive us our sin as we in turn forgive others.

So at this central moment in our series we are focussing on the privilege of entering our Father's presence and what Jesus had to say about prayer.

Jesus' teaching on prayer follows directly from the story of Mary and Martha, where Martha is frustrated at Mary's choice to sit at Jesus' feet rather than helping in the kitchen. Jesus concludes 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.' So we see that sitting at the feet of Jesus in prayer is the highest priority we can have – even when our task list seems pressing and essential.

But just like us, the disciples recognised that although the desire to pray is inbuilt in the human heart, we easily get confused whether we are doing it properly.

'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'

We don't have any specific example of what John the Baptist actually taught his disciples to say but if it was anything like the traditional Jewish way of praying, it would be through reciting verses of the Torah or Psalms. But Jesus lays out a new way of prayer which begins with a radical first word: 'Father'.

It is estimated that over 2 million children in the UK live without meaningful contact with their fathers. The doubling of knife crime and violent offenders ending up in prison is directly linked to Fatherlessness and the absence of positive male role models.

Yet Jesus teaches us to pray 'Father'.

Yesterday morning on Radio 4 the award-winning Christian Rapper Guvna B was reflecting on the death of his father and how the Lord's prayer helped him navigate that traumatic time in his life. He said this: 'It means even more to pray "our father in heaven", when you no longer have one on earth'.

Jesus knew that our deepest longings as human beings stem from our need for both a mother's love and a Father's care. And whilst God clearly shows the compassionate nurturing care of a mother's love, Jesus taught us to begin our prayer focussing on the presence of our Father. Our privilege in prayer starts from a place of protective security.

Luke's gospel renders the shortened version of the Lord's prayer but many manuscripts also include the usual words from Matthew's gospel. Starting with the words '*Our Father*'.

This is the great leveller. The first posture of prayer is to recognise my place is part of a wider family of anyone who has ever uttered these words with heartfelt conviction. Alongside criminals, judges, children, farmers, politicians – we are all children of the same Father. The Lord's prayer is so wonderful because it is a great unifier. As we humbly come before our Father, everything else falls into place – our physical needs, our temptations, our spiritual needs.

So prayer begins by posturing ourselves humbly within the protective presence of our Father.

We often say the words of the Lord's prayer without realising it is a framework on which we can hang our deeper thoughts, reflections, intercessions and petitions. So far we have focussed on the Privilege of prayer and addressing God as our Father in heaven

After the privilege of addressing our Father Jesus shows 5 further pegs on which to hang our prayers: which I suggest all begin with the letter P!

1. **Privilege** – *Our Father in Heaven*
2. **Praise** and honour to our heavenly Father – *hallowed be your name*
3. **Purpose** *Your Kingdom come (on earth as it is in heaven)* – the Kingdom of God is our purpose and priority in life. We have been sent as heralds and ambassadors of the Kingdom
4. **Provision** – *Give us each day our daily bread*. Prayer is a daily thing. When George Muller was feeding numerous orphans in Bristol he often had to ask the staff to survey the Kitchen cupboards to see whether there was enough food for them all. They often ended up praying for provision but George Muller said ‘This kind of living keeps the Lord very close’. Jehovah Jireh is our provider – he wants to be involved in providing for our daily needs. Whether it is a million for the Rock project or the rent for the roof over our heads, he can handle it.
5. **Pardon** for sins: *Forgive us our sins*. Time to get right with God and get our feet washed. When we first put our trust in the Lord Jesus to save us, we are cleansed from sin through his blood shed for us on the cross. But just as Jesus demonstrated after the last supper, we need our feet washed.
6. **Protection** *lead us not into temptation (but deliver us from evil)* We return full circle to the protection of our heavenly Father to deliver us from evil and steer us away from sin and temptation.

Here’s a diagram of the headings which may or may not be helpful – don’t let the diagram ruin the simple beauty of the Lord’s prayer! However it does illustrate that we begin and end with the privilege of placing ourselves in the loving care of our heavenly Father.



Sometimes I will write out these 6 headings in in my journal or more often just a letter to denote the first line of each sentence in the Lord's prayer to help me pray things through in a helpful way.

As we go through and remind ourselves what a privilege it is to pray, how much we can praise God for who he is, and remember our Kingdom purpose, then we can move into our petitions from a place of faith.

We can ask for God to provide all our needs, for forgiveness of our sins and protection from temptation and evil.

I've drawn it in a hexagon shape because traditionally we return to praise once we have been through our petitions: For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.

Jesus sets it all in the context of a parable about persistence in prayer, which tells us an amazing thing. Prayer is cumulative!

Even if we don't see much happening, beneath the surface prayers build up. As the friend kept on knocking on the door, so the request for help built up until eventually it was answered. If persistence will move even grumpy human beings, how much more our heavenly Father who loves to give good gifts (especially the gift of the Holy Spirit) to those who ask him.

And Jesus goes on to encourage us to be persistent in prayer – until we receive an answer! Prayer shouldn't come from a place of fear, but rather trust in the love our heavenly Father has for each one of us. Yet amazingly Jesus encourages us to be a prayer nag!

The NIV puts it beautifully in v8. 'I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need!'

I love that - *Shameless Audacity*.

Who needs a bit more 'shameless Audacity' today?

In his book 'Love Does' Bob Goff tells a wonderful story about a young man whom he met while sitting on his back porch. Bob's house backs up to a waterfront path and this guy was hanging around near the garden looking hopeful at Bob. After Bob introduced himself, this young man asked him if he might be able to use his lovely back porch to ask his girlfriend to marry him. Bob enthusiastically agreed! But then the young man returned several more times asking more and more of Bob. Would you mind if I ask several of my friends to serve us dinner on your porch? Might it be possible for you take us out on your boat afterward? Bob said yes and yes, but he didn't stop there. Bob ended up calling the coast guard and got them to show up with their fireboat and blast the sky with several streams of water for the grand finale! The story was epic and yes, the girlfriend agreed to marry him.

It's a wonderful story of shameless audacity but it also reflects the heart of the Father, delighted to be able to bless the one who is asking.

Jesus encourages us ⁹ "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Who needs something from the Lord today, who is seeking guidance? Who is knocking at the door waiting for a response?

I know I am and I am sure each of us is in some way too.

Sometimes I wear a wristband that simply says PUSH – **Pray Until Something Happens!**

Let's keep Pushing, let's keep praying. Let's respond with the words of the Lord's prayer.