

Try Praying

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Preacher: David Court

[0:00] We have a scripture reading tonight from Luke chapter 11, verses 1 to 13. I'll read the text for us, and then David will come and preach from it. So this is God's holy word in Luke 11, verses 1 to 13.

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.

And he said to them, when you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins.

For we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us, and lead us not into temptation. And he said to them, which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, friend, lend me three loaves.

For a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him. And he will answer from within. Do not bother me. The door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed.

[1:03] I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything, because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you. You seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? Instead of a fish, excuse me, if you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

This is God's holy word. David. Well, we're going to turn with me to Luke chapter 11, to those verses that Corey read for us just a moment ago.

So, this is our sixth, I think, sermon on discipleship from these middle chapters of Luke's gospel. And as you'll have gathered, we're touching the subject of prayer this evening.

[2:17] Now, many years ago, during one of his visits to Scotland, the American evangelist, the latter half of the 19th century, is a man called Dwight L. Moody.

He had a number of visits to Scotland, came to Edinburgh, I think, in the 1870s. Quite an impact, his ministry and mission. And anyway, at one of his visits, he was asked to speak at a primary school here.

And so, he turned up, and the kids were all there, and he asked the youngsters a rhetorical question. He asked them the question, what is prayer?

And much to Moody's astonishment, almost all the children's hands went up in the air. Hundreds of them. And he called on a boy near the front, and the boy said, prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of His Spirit, with the confession of sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.

That's the answer to question 98 in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. And Moody, who was taken aback, responded, be thankful, son, that you were born in Scotland.

[3:37] Well, I don't think I'm overstating things when I say that we now live in a Scotland where prayer is perhaps less well understood. And yet, nonetheless, the concept of prayer has still quite a measure of cultural currency.

You may have seen slogan emblazoned on buses and billboards across the city that say, you know, try praying. An evangelistic initiative designed to try and get people thinking about God, exploring what it means to be a Christian.

Well, that slogan, try praying, simply begs a number of questions, doesn't it? Try praying, but to whom? Try praying, but what? Try praying, but how?

And I think our text this evening provides us with an answer to those kinds of questions. Because here we discover the disciples learning about prayer from Jesus Himself.

We read in verse 1 of our passage, Jesus was praying in a certain place. And when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.

[4:51] Perhaps these men had been trying to pray, but had left them unsure, uncertain about what they were doing. It may be that as they were confronted with the prayer life of Jesus, it prompted curiosity and desire.

Then Jesus, they saw someone who spent time with God. He was a man of prayer. And it was common among the rabbis of that time to have a special prayer for their own followers and disciples.

Probably, I think, that John the Baptist followed this custom. And so here, Jesus, the disciples rather turn to Jesus and ask Him how they should pray.

Lord, teach us to pray. Now, there's a lot in these verses. And I've already edited down this sermon drastically.

You'll be glad to hear. So, we have to move through things fairly quickly. But in these verses before us tonight, we have Jesus giving His disciples the Lord's Prayer.

[6:01] And following that, giving them further teaching on this important subject for His disciples. And I want to mention, I usually have three things.

I've got five things tonight about prayer and Christian discipleship. So, the first is this. The disciple is to pray intimately.

And He said to them, When you pray, say, Father. Father. That is the starting point. Not Almighty God, not eternal sovereign, though He is both, but Father.

That's the word that fell from the praying lips of Jesus during His earthly life. And it's the word He now places on His disciples. All through the Gospels, Jesus calls God His Father.

The word used, an Aramaic term, Abba. An everyday word, a homely word, a family word, secular word. Word of tenderness, intimacy, dear Father.

[7:08] No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner. For to say Father was to claim sonship.

It's a breathtaking presumption. Except that here, it is Christ's own gift to His disciples.

And what the Gospels make clear to us is that Jesus enjoyed a special relationship of divine intimacy and fellowship with God.

And the reason for that, of course, is that Jesus was God's Son in a unique sense. God was uniquely and specially His Father. Jesus' manner of addressing God, His Father, just part, really, of a larger picture in which He claimed in many different ways to be uniquely one with God.

His relationship belonged to the life of God from all eternity. I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me, He tells His disciples in John 14.

[8:17] And yet here, the astonishing thing in the Lord's Prayer is that Jesus authorizes His own disciples to repeat the word Abba after Him.

He teaches His followers to address God in the same way. Through Jesus and only through Jesus, His followers now enjoy something of that close and special relationship with God as their Father.

Now, of course, it may well be that for some of you here, or people you know, and their experience of fatherhood has been less than positive.

Some of you may have had absent fathers, fathers who were brutish or abusive. For many people, the idea of fatherhood is laden with negative connotations.

And of course, to varying degrees, human fatherhood is always flawed and far from perfect. I can say that as a father. But that is not the case with God.

[9:31] He is the perfect Father who loves and cares and protects and delights in His children at all times. It's one of the key ways in which

the New Testament writers describe what it means to be a Christian. It is to receive His love and become a child of God. Those who repent, place their faith in Jesus. Those who vow allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord are said to be born of God and to have been adopted into His family. They enter into a new relationship with God as their Heavenly Father. A new access, as it were, a new type of relationship to God is opened up through Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son. Ben Packer in his book, Knowing God, writes this, If you want to know how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, having God as his Father.

If it is not the thought that controls his worship and prayers and whole outlook on life, it means that he has not understood Christianity very well at all.

[10:49] Father is the Christian name for God. I wonder to what extent you think of God as your Father. Outside of Jesus, we have no right to call God our Father, but in Jesus Christ, united to Him, we have every right.

It's one of the great privileges of discipleship. Remember John writing in his first letter, he says, How great is the love the Father has lavished upon us that we should be called children of God. We think of that famous story of Jesus and how the Father welcomes His wasteful, prodigal son instead of meeting His Son with anger and hostility.

Remember, we read these great words later on in Luke's Gospel. Luke 15, 20, While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced and kissed him.

Instead of the prodigal being disgraced and shamed by his father, it's the father who shamelessly runs out to meet him and lavishes love upon him.

[12:02] And this is what God has done for us in the Gospel through Jesus Christ. He has run out to meet us and He's thrown His arms around us and He has welcomed us into His family.

In Christ, He has endured the shame and disgrace, our shame and disgrace, that we might be welcomed as sons and daughters of the living God. Those of us in the far country might be welcomed home and enjoy intimacy with God, that we might call Him our Abba Father. And if that does not move us to worship and to pray, my friends, then what will? We sometimes sing, don't we, how deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure.

So to take this word Father on our lips is a great and wonderful privilege. A small wonder that in the ancient church the Lord's Prayer was prefaced by these words of introduction, grant that we may dare to call Thee as Father and to say Our Father.

It's in Jesus Christ alone that we can dare to call Him Father and to pray with the intimacy and closeness that that relationship allows.

[13:39] Pray intimately. The disciple is to pray intimately. Secondly, the disciple is to pray reverently. There's two petitions that follow.

Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Intimacy does not exclude reverence. And these two petitions focus attention, you'll notice, on God's name and His kingdom.

The first of these expresses a desire that God's name be hallowed. And to hallow means to treat or consider something as sacred or holy. Calvin writes, we would wish God to have the honor He deserves.

Men should never think of Him without the highest reverence. His name is to be considered holy and sacred. It's not to be disdained. To treat God's name in a careless, thoughtless manner is to despise Him and to despise all that He stands for.

The psalmist tells us that God is exalted above all things, His name and His word. And the name of God is shorthand for all His attributes and works. The Heidelberg Catechism says of this petition, hallowed be Your name, it says, grant that we might rightly know You and sanctify, glorify, and praise You in all Your works, in which shine forth Your almighty power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy, and truth.

[15:07] Grant us also that we may so direct our whole life, our thoughts, words, and actions, that Your name is not blasphemed because of us, but honored and praised.

The petition is asking that God would be seen and acknowledged for who He truly is, that we would see Him in His greatness and glory, and others would see Him also, to be one of the great concerns

of our hearts and lives.

Hallowed be Your name. Father, hallow Your name in my life. Hallow Your name in our church. Hallow Your name in my family, in my heart, in our land, in the dark places of this world. This is the great focus, isn't it? One of the great focus of Christian discipleship, this hallowing, this honoring of God's name. There's a story told some years ago now, a group of American tourists that were in London that were being shown around the Houses of Parliament, and as they were being taken along one of the corridors there, Lord Hailsham, at that time he was the Lord Chancellor, and he appeared on his way to some official reception.

He was attired in all his regalia, finery. He cut a pretty impressive figure as he strode along the corridor. However, as he strode along the corridor, and as he drew near to these tourists, he saw standing behind them the man who was the leader of the opposition at that time.

[16:48] It was a guy called Neil Kinnock. And so, wanting to speak to him, he raised his hand and he called out, Neil! Whereupon, all the American tourists dropped to one knee.

Now, you know that's a true story, don't you? You know that's true. That kind of behavior seems anachronistic, unusual to us, even humorous.

That kind of deference and display of submission before another seems out of place in our day and age. And yet, you know, while that may be true in relation to other people, it is certainly not inappropriate in relation to the living God.

Showing him honor quite literally involves us bowing the knee before him as king and publicly acknowledging his greatness and glory.

To reverence the Lord as king means having an eye on the king and an eye on his coming kingdom.

[18:02] That's something we must not lose sight of. Your kingdom come. God's kingdom is coming one day in all its fullness.

And that's what we look for and pray for when we take the second petition here upon our lips. Our eyes are being fixed ahead onto the far horizon. Our great hope as God's people does not lie in this world ultimately or with the rulers and powers of this world.

Our aim is not to build this world's kingdom but rather to share in the glorious reign and triumph of Jesus Christ. The one who has already established an everlasting kingdom through his life and death and resurrection and ascension.

He reigns today. He rules over all things now. And all of human history is moving towards an end when that will be fully revealed.

The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and that new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells. Our hope lies in the ruling and reigning Christ who is coming again.

[19:19] Yes, our eyes are on the king who is great and whose name is to be hallowed but our eyes are also on his kingdom that is surely coming.

It's part of what it means to be a Christian. We've bowed the knee and we have given up the reins of our lives to our great king Jesus Christ.

And so when we take his name upon our lips we dare not forget that. And so as disciples we must pray intimately and reverently.

Third thing the disciple is to pray dependently. A number of petitions follow. The next one give us each day our daily bread.

It expresses doesn't it dependence on God. When we pray these words we are saying that we are relying and leaning upon God. We are looking to God to meet our needs.

[20:20] We are not living our lives our way we are living our lives God's way and under his authority. In the words of this prayer we are acknowledging that we are not masters of our own destiny and that our lives are in God's hands.

Perhaps it's true in our affluent western culture and affluent western churches that we have lost sight of something of that reality. Our culture is often one of self-sufficiency and independence. Maybe that's why prayer is low on the list of priorities in many churches because in prayer we turn away from ourselves to God.

In prayer we express our weakness and inadequacy. In prayer we acknowledge that we don't have all the answers and that we are not in control.

Dr. Ol Hallisby who is a Norwegian theologian he once wrote a famous little book on prayer. It was very popular when I was a young Christian and it was published by IVP.

[21:32] And in that little book on prayer he says this. He says there are two aspects to prayer. One is faith the other is helplessness. prayer is for the helpless.

This is what he writes I never grow weary of emphasizing our helplessness for it's the decisive factor not only in our prayer life but also in our whole relation to God.

Our helplessness should make us attached to God and make us more strongly dependent upon Him than words can describe.

The Bible teaches us that God Himself is the ultimate source of every good whether it's food or clothing or work or leisure or strength or friendship or family or whatever. And God doesn't owe us these things.

They're gifts of His grace. He wouldn't be unjust in withholding them from us. For we are ungrateful creatures often taking His gifts for granted.

[22:37] And so give us each day our daily bread are words that are kind of antidote to that kind of attitude because they acknowledge our absolute dependence on God for each day and for each meal that we enjoy.

Now these words are not to be read as a promise that God will always supply His people with bread and that no Christian will ever starve. They're a reminder to us rather that our lives are ultimately in His hands.

We're dependent on Him and His Word. The issue here is trust and dependence because disciples of Jesus constantly acknowledge their own need of God and His grace and they do that day in and day out.

His care extends of course beyond our daily bread to our need of pardon and forgiveness. Verse 4, forgive us our sins. We ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us and lead us not into temptation.

Our great need before a holy God is that divine forgiveness would so embrace our lives that a spirit of forgiveness would rule in our hearts. For without it we run the risk of becoming bitter and hard-hearted.

[23:57] Not just God's provision, His pardon, but also His protection. Lead us not into temptation. Guard us, guide us, O God, keep us from the one who is the enemy of our souls.

You see, these petitions cover the very fabric of Christian life. Our God is Jehovah-Jireh, the one who provides. And very often it's our ordinary mundane needs that become the arena for God to display us great wisdom and power and provision.

Our emergencies, our difficulties, our needs should drive us towards God in prayer, that we might acknowledge His provision and pardon and protection.

Because it's knowing God, who He is, and what He's like that will drive us and move us to pray these words. It's His sheer, abundant goodness that should draw us to call on His name, knowing that He is our Heavenly Father, knowing that He loves us with an everlasting love, knowing that He has promised to provide for us.

these things should make us come before Him and pray dependently, intimately, reverently, dependently, fourth thing, shamelessly.

[25:18] There follows, you'll notice, a story, a parable, sort of the whole subject of kind of asking for help. A friend who disturbs his neighbor at midnight in order to borrow some bread for an unexpected guest.

In that culture, day, time, age, people didn't use knives and forks and spoons to eat the used bread, essential part of any meal.

In Middle Eastern culture, the providing of hospitality to visitors, very important, matter of honor, an inability to provide for a guest reflected badly on a family, perhaps even on a village, the kind of obligation, a duty to provide food and hospitality to a guest.

And this is what lies behind the story that Jesus tells. This man doesn't want to bring disgrace on his family, so even at midnight, he goes to his friend, he asks for bread. He's prepared in his desperation to be rude, demanding of his friend, and Jesus explains the point of the story in verse

8, I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he's his friend, yet because of his impudence, he will rise and give him what he needs.

The ESV translates that word as impudence, other translations sometimes use the word persistence. I think the word is better understood as shameless, a sense of audacity and boldness to go beyond what is socially acceptable.

[26:52] This man's actions in the story are embarrassing, getting his friend and family out of their beds at midnight to ask for bread. And it's this shameless attitude that wins the day.

In the west of Scotland, where I come from, we have a saying that someone has a brass neck. It means they're not worried about what anyone else thinks. Shameless people are willing to do anything.

They don't care what other people say. Some of you might remember there was a film many years ago called Out of Africa. Robert Redford, Meryl Streep.

And Meryl Streep played Baroness Karen Blixen. And I won't go through the whole thing, but she's been trying to save the Kikuyu tribe from being put off their land by the authorities.

And everything she does fails. She doesn't get a response to any of her letters and petitions. And then she attends a reception for the new governor of Kenya.

[28:01] And she goes in this long line of people waiting to be introduced to the new governor. And out of desperation, she disregards the proper protocol.

In front of all the assembled dignitaries guests, she throws herself on her knees in front of the governor and begs for the Kikuyu tribe.

She begs the governor to give his word that he will look into the matter. It's an embarrassing situation. And then suddenly the governor's wife stands up and says, you have my word.

Her shamelessness won the day. And the point of the story is not to tell us here that God is like the reluctant friend at midnight. He's quite the reverse.

When we come with our prayer requests, he doesn't say, I've had enough. Stop bothering me. He doesn't put us on hold. You don't listen to all that terrible music.

[29:09] It doesn't screen our calls. It doesn't close the door. So don't let any sense of modesty or hesitation keep you back coming to your heavenly father.

At every midnight in life, we always have a friend, a father to turn to. This story is really about laying hold of God's willingness, not overcoming his reluctance.

Pray intimately, reverently, dependently, shamelessly, be bold. And then finally here, pray expectantly. And I tell you, ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. There's some staggering promises, aren't they?

Ask and it will be given. Seek and you will find. Knock, it will be opened. Not vague hopes. Declarations from the words of one who could not ever lie.

[30:23] What then does the father give to his children? Not always what we ask for in our short-sightedness, but always what is for our good.

He calls us to come to him and to ask him. Here's Charles Spurgeon. He says, it is well said that asking is the rule of the kingdom.

It's a rule that will never be altered in anybody's case. If the royal and divine son of God himself cannot be exempted from it, you and I cannot expect to have the rule relaxed in our favor.

God will bless Elijah and send rain in Israel, but Elijah must pray for it. If the chosen nation is to prosper, Samuel must plead for it. If the Jews are to be delivered, Daniel must intercede.

God will bless Paul and the nations shall be converted through him, but Paul must pray, and pray he did without ceasing. His epistles show that he expected nothing except by asking for it.

[31:26] are you asking? Our denomination, the Free Church of Scotland, has recently launched a call to prayer entitled Engage 2026.

It invites all of us really to identify ten people and to pray for them urgently, faithfully, persistently, trusting God's power and timing, watching for the opportunities that we might have to share the good news of Jesus.

Very simple vision. Ten thousand Christians across our congregations, each committing to pray regularly for ten individuals, family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, perhaps even people we struggle with.

And that will see a hundred thousand people brought before God in prayer. what an impact that may have for the cause of the gospel in Scotland and further afield.

And we'll hear more about it in the following weeks. Will you take up that challenge? What father among you, says Jesus, if his son asks for fish, instead of a fish, give him a serpent.

[32:48] If he asks for egg, give him a scorpion. If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Our father knows what we need. He knows what our loved ones need. He knows what our nation needs. And what better gift could there be than the Holy Spirit himself?

The down payment of our gospel inheritance. The guarantee of final glory. Yes, we often ask for health and provision and relief, and these things are not wrong, of course.

But the father's heart is set on giving himself in the person of his Spirit. And to pray as Jesus taught is to enter into the very life of God, dressing the Father through the Son by the Spirit.

Many of us struggle. Yes, I understand that. We pray little because we believe little. We ask little because we expect little. Tim Keller relates a story.

[33:56] I don't know if it's a true story, but I have no idea where it came from. I could never find the source of it, but it's a great story, so I'll tell it. And it's a story about Alexander the Great, who was once approached by one of his generals, and the general needed money for his daughter's wedding, I think.

And so in front of all the other commanders and generals and advisors, he asked Alexander for what was an astronomical amount of money.

And one of those occasions when, you know, everybody's watching just gasped, their jaws dropped, you know, held their breath. That amount.

they awaited Alexander's response. But contrary to all expectations, Alexander didn't go ballistic. Instead, he told the general that he was very happy to give him the money, sent him off to his treasurer or paymaster to collect what he needed. And this really confused all of Alexander's advisors, the other generals, they just don't get what's happening here.

[35:10] They say to him, why did you give him the money? It was such a huge sum. And Alexander tells him, he says, this man has done me a great honor.

And asking for such a big sum, he shows that he thinks I am both fabulously wealthy and incredibly generous. John Newton wrote these words, thou art coming to a king, large petitions with thee bring, for his grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much.

great God we worship. He is fabulously wealthy and he is incredibly generous. And the extent of his abundant wealth and generosity are laid out before us in the gospel.

They are spread before us on a table of bread and wine. Our Father in heaven who spared not his own son but gave him up for us all. what stops you coming to him and calling on his name?

What keeps you from him and from the place of prayer? Peter says, cast all your anxieties upon him because he cares for you.

[36:44] He cares for you. This is what the Lord's supper, isn't it? This is what it reminds us of. God who cares. Come to him this evening and be renewed, refreshed by the Father's grace, the Father's love, the Father's care, the Father's forgiveness.

Plead his gracious name. Try praying intimately, reverently, dependently, shamelessly, and expectantly.

Let's pray. Lord, grant us your grace and mercy that in all our weakness and frailty and failure we may look not inward but outward to you, the living and eternal God.

Lord, expand our hearts, fill them with faith and trust and confidence in you. Renew us, refresh us, and grant us the help of your Holy Spirit, for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.