

How to Pray

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[0 : 0 0] Luke's Gospel chapter 11 and the passage here are very famous, well-known passages, part of the Gospel teachings on Jesus educating his disciples to pray.

Now there was a while ago, probably before a lot of you young students were watching the television, where there was an advert that said it was good to talk, maybe it's not that long ago, but Colin before the service mentioned a tune and said it would be one that everyone would know, because it was sung at Prince's Dye's wedding, and I said half the people in the congregation weren't alive at Prince's Dye's wedding, so we need to put things into context and remember that some people are older than others, but there was an advert that said it's good to talk, and of course that's a reality, and it's also a reality spiritually.

It's very important, indeed it's essential, it's as important as breathing physically that we talk spiritually with God, that we pray with Him, and I want to use the word talking and conversation more than just praying today to remind ourselves of that, of what prayer is, and what we speak about or how we speak depends on whom we are speaking to, whom we are speaking.

We speak differently I would imagine to head teacher than we do to our brother or sister, and we find that we respond differently to different people, and we speak to them in different ways, it all depends on the company, and this is very much what is in Jesus teaching here.

We often call this the Lord's Prayer, and people say, well we shouldn't really, we should call it the disciples prayer, and that's right, it is the disciples prayer, but it is also the Lord's Prayer because Jesus is teaching in this prayer, and because it reveals more to us about the Lord to whom we are speaking than it necessarily does about us, so it's a great prayer, but it really reveals the character of the one to whom we pray, and I think that's important because it then influences the type of praying we do, and the way we pray, and our relationship and our dependence on Him in prayer.

[2 : 2 4] So, firstly we are going to look at who is listening to us when we pray. When you pray, when I pray we are not praying to ourselves, it's not just a ritualistic chant that we somehow get things off our chest, it's a spiritual conversation with the living God, prayer matters, and there's important principles in this teaching on prayer that Jesus gives us here in Luke's Gospel chapter 11, and the prayer he gives us is a model prayer, we can repeat it, we're going to repeat it at the end of the service together when we pray, but it's not just a prayer to repeat, it's a prayer that has principles that remind us of the kind of things we should know about our God and should pray to Him about.

It's a shortened version even, we can see that of the prayer in Matthew's Gospel, model prayer, but what's very important, the first word, father, very important, teaching, Jesus is teaching His disciples, they ask Him and He says, you begin prayer by saying father, and it's foundational, absolutely crucial, basic truth.

When we pray we are coming to God relationally, we are coming to God as our father, and we pray to Him as a loving, good, caring, providing, protecting father, all the characteristics that we would attribute to a good earthly father, we are coming to the God of the universe as our father, and that's the right way, in fact it's the only way that we can come to God in prayer.

Now we don't have time today to look at the parables or the pictures that Jesus gives us at the end of this section where he wants to expand what he means about praying to the father, and he gives us these different pictures of someone going to a friend, and then asking about it, and which of your father, if your son asks for a fish, will he give him a snake, and these funny pictures, you know, humorous pictures of crazy responses from a father to a child in need, but these parables at the end are giving to us, are comparative, they're there to compare what we would expect from an earthly father, a good earthly father, and say, well, even if he's not a good father, even if we are sinful and our motives are wrong as parents and as fathers in this life, he says, God is not like that, how much more will the perfect God want to give us good things?

And he finishes, of course, with that great picture of God willingly giving us the Holy Spirit to those who ask him, that he'll give us the very best, his own spirit, to breathe life into us, to work the great gift of salvation in our lives.

[5 : 39] Father, very important foundational truth for us when we're praying, but along with that is that the conversation of prayer is in the context of a spiritual family.

The disciples said, Lord, teach us to pray. The disciple didn't come up to Jesus and say, teach me to pray, but he quietly, I don't want anyone else to know, you take me aside and teach me to pray. No, teach us to pray. And Jesus in response says, give us each day our daily bread, forgive us our sins. So we have the context of a father and of a family, of a community, of a spiritual gathering of people.

And so Jesus wants us to pray foundationally, not just to our father in Christ as believers in a covenant relationship with him, but he wants us to pray and recognize that prayer has a vast corporate part to it, that we're part, not just of a covenantal relationship with God as individuals, but together that we're a part of a family and that that comes through in our prayer emphasis.

Lord, teach us to pray. Give us each day our daily bread, forgive our sins, so that prayer at its most Christ-like is prayer that is either with others or for others.

It doesn't mean we always need to be together to pray, but it does mean that in our prayers we don't just give God our shopping list of needs and we say, oh, at the end of it, I've asked him everything I need, it's great.

[7 : 18] But that we're looking to be praying and upholding and bringing before God the needs of others, the needs of others in the community, because, you know, we live in a self-obsessed nation and a self-obsessed generation and we could pray for hours about our needs and my self-worth.

But we find in Christ our self-worth in giving and in praying for and in being concerned with and in bearing the burdens of other people. We pray as community. We're a bond in blood together.

We sacrifice for one another. We serve one another. We give for one another. We forgive one another. We put others before us. Look at all the New Testament teaching of Christ as he encourages us to give in our Christianity and relationship to other people.

I wonder if that reflects my own prayer life and does it reflect yours? This intimacy with a father and this perspective of belonging, of being in a family, praying with, certainly praying with others, but also praying for others when we can't be with them.

Because from that fundamental basic foundational truth there will be immediate issues that come up for some of us here today, maybe. Can you call him father?

[8 : 43] That's a very basic question that you might want to ask yourself today. Can you call him father? Do you know Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord and can you come to God as father?

Remember last week we looked at the Holy of Holies, that place that no one could go into and that was the curtain that was ripped into and access was made open through the death of Jesus so that we can be friends with God and forgiven by God and in relationship with God through Jesus have you come to Jesus to be washed and cleaned and forgiven and healed so that you can come in prayer and say, not whatever ultimate beings up there will you listen to me now and again or whatever kind of God there is, but can you come to God and say, father, father you love me and father you've sent your son for me and that is the essence of our Christian faith and it's the essence of being able to pray that we can pray to this father that we come to through Jesus who has died in the cross for our sins.

So that's an issue that maybe you need to consider. But maybe you also need to consider the imagery itself of fatherhood and of family and you know all of us struggle as Christians with different aspects of the Christian faith some of us struggle with one aspect more than others and we all probably struggle with different aspects maybe today you struggle with the concept of the fatherhood of God and of the image of community and family.

You may come from a family that is in modern parlance dysfunctional where there hasn't been great unity, great love, great self-giving you may come from a family who has a rotten father in human terms you've had a harsh, distant, abusive, oppressive relationship with your father it's not a nice, good and wholesome one and your memories of your father and of family are very difficult are very problematic, are very broken and so you have genuine issues about calling God your father and of being part of a community, part of a family because these are issues that are of deep pain in your heart it's important to recognise the image here is of a good and loving father and a balanced and committed family and that we need to pray to be able to see that and even too long spiritually for what you never had physically and relationally and socially in your upbringing and to ask for God to overcome that pain and hurt and division that you feel and to know maybe for the first time a loving fatherhood in God different of course from an earthly father but nonetheless eternal and real and a community of believers together to whom you can be committed and who are committed to you maybe in a way that your brothers and sisters never wear praying for that because we do struggle sometimes with these images of fatherhood images of family but also maybe on the other scale of things maybe your relationships with your family and with your father and mother are so good, so wholesome, so loving that they provide for you all you think you need and that you live for your family you live for your brothers and sisters and you live for your parents and you live for your children because it's so complete and so good so they say I don't really have any need for God the Father and for the community of believers

I'm content and committed to what I've been given in this world well again that needs to be addressed because families are God's gift but they are never to replace God and our parents are never to take God's place because one day they will be taken from us and God is the only one who can be a redeemer and our Saviour and our Lord when they have gone and even when they are here so we do need to realign and tonight we're looking a lot about realigning our thinking into what the Bible reveals about himself and maybe we need to realign our thinking with regard to prayer our Father and briefly I'm just going to go through different aspects of the prayer in that context our Father our Father in worship or our Father to worship hallowed be your name so he's different from an earthly father even at that level because we are to worship him and we are to magnify him we are to hallow him and adore him it's the balance to calling him Daddy that we need always to have in our lives and remember he is also not only our covenantal Father but infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being wisdom, power, justice, goodness and truth he is to be worshipped not small, not pocket sized not in a box but to be hallowed and worshipped as the living God and I hope that our evening services where we're looking at the doctrine of God is beginning to help us to see that a bit more that he is absolutely worthy of our worship and adoration as Jesus wants us to do with him slow down worship him what idols do we have that replace him in our lives so much so that we don't even have time to pray you know we can be sure if we have no time to pray then there are idols in our lives that are more insignificant and important than God that he is not worthy of worship that we are spending our lives and committing our lives to other things that have become idols that we put before him if we have no time to be in relationship with God in prayer then we can't be worshipping him we are worshipping something, someone else our Father to worship who can be more significant than God in our lives our Father to worship our Father as sovereign king your kingdom come and again this is just three words under pins a great deal of the the Bible's teaching about who God is and who Christ is and what salvation is about it's a petition really isn't it that we acknowledge that he is the King of Kings and that we are willing to come under his lordship that we recognise that his kingdom is coming that we recognise as Christians we are part of that kingdom and as the other prayer in Matthew says your kingdom come, you will be done on earth as it is in heaven that we are acknowledging and looking for God's will to be done in our lives and in the world that we know as purposes it's really a prayer about obedience about mission about our priorities when we pray, we can glibly pray I guess but when we are praying it, we are praying

[16 : 23] Lord take me into your will help me live behind you in your draft let me follow you, maybe I go your way and may that way be absolutely great and good for me focusing for us on the eternal not just on the day to day living that's very important but on the eternal in our lives, teach us to pray our Father sovereign king also pray our Father as provider give us each day our daily bread and as a principle it's simply Jesus reminding his disciples and ourselves that he wants us to counteract the lie of independence that everything is because of us I'll provide for myself and maybe even for my family and I'll live and be responsible just for me and in my own strength and in the way of independence that we don't need and aren't dependent on God the petition is a reminder to us that ultimately our every breath every good gift every heartbeat every meal is something that we are reliant on the God of the universe to provide not in a kind of silly way

I don't mean that we think in a silly way that we just sit down and pray and a meal appears in front of us but it's a much, much, you know, more deep thinking reality that we recognise that ultimately God is the giver of all these things indeed of our life as well and he promises not only to provide us with what we need but absolutely provide us with far more he's looking for us in our prayerful lives to be in daily dependence isn't it interesting, he doesn't say give us each month our daily bread give us each day, give us each year our daily bread no, he's encouraging from us a daily daily dependence a recognition as we get up and as each day signifies a passage of time a new day, a new reality that each day that we are dependent on him that each day we rely on him it's not good to store up our relationship with God for a monthly conversation he wants us to be in daily dependence on him recognising that we have got up today because he's ordained that he's allowed that he's gifted as is that he wants us to be alive today he wants us to serve him this day and he wants us to recognise that he's our provider our father, a sovereign king our father as provider and of course our father also as saviour forgive us our sins as we also forgive everyone who sins against us it's another reminder that we're not coming to daddy who simply is an eco with us but we're coming to God and God is saviour we're coming as the saved to the saviour so that the cross which we looked at last week remains and must remain absolutely central to our prayer life and to our life in general that we recognise that daily we need the power of the cross in order to or the power of Christ revealed from the cross in order to live as Christians we need his grace to be, to accept his forgiveness and to offer that forgiveness to others you see the truth that Jesus is reminding us here isn't that in God should forgive us because we forgive others something that we merit from him but rather if we've been forgiven then we will always have a forgiving heart towards others one of the commentaries I was reading for this said an unforgiving heart is not in a condition to accept forgiveness you know if we go into God's presence and thank him for his forgiveness and go out of his presence in prayer with bitterness and anger and jealousy and judgment towards others then something's wrong because grace by nature is a softening of our heart recognising we receive what we don't deserve and wanting to share that with other people if today your life outwardly might look great everyone looks great here today y'all look lovely, great clothes, great everyone looks lovely and awake and refreshed and complexions are great this morning but in your hearts what are you like are you holding grudges are you angry, are you jealous are you bitter, can you not stand some people do you have a judgmental spirit looking around and seeing who you can find fault with and when I say to you where's your freedom where's your joy in the Lord where is your appreciation of having been forgiven

undeservantly, wholeheartedly and completely all your sins it must be that as we recognise grace we are able to forgive others and Jesus wants us to recognise that in prayer and also we see not only our Father as Saviour but our Father as guide and protector and lead us not into temptation a recognition that we have attended to ourselves to go our own way to go the wrong way we want Jesus to keep us from the edge to keep us away from places of danger where our hearts are going to be vulnerable it's a recognition that we want Jesus or God or Father to be our leader, our guide or keeper that we are willing to be led that we're willing to be kept and we're willing to follow it's not suggesting to us that God will lead us into temptation because he doesn't tempt anyone to evil but it's a reminder to us that that is our tendency and a request that God will keep us from what is our own tendency in life our Father as guide and protector so there we have a very quitsummary of the Lord's prayer as it is here and a reminder to whom we are speaking who's listening when we speak to God and so the challenge again goes out can you call him Father is he your Father spiritually today and then also very briefly what characterizes our conversation with God there's a couple of things to finish off with here in this teaching and this passage when we come to God in prayer

Jesus is encouraging us to be both humble and persistent he wants us to be humble in prayer we see that in the attitude of the disciples who see him I see Jesus in absolutely attracted by his example they are triggered by his example they were watching him praying and after he had prayed they say Lord teach us to pray teach us to pray his example was worth imitating I wonder for us in our Christian life is anyone motivated to ask how to pray from our example of prayer as mums and dads do our children see in us examples that would encourage themselves you would teach me to pray what about in our Christian life as mature believers in this congregation do the young people look up to you and say will you teach me to pray like that also are we known for that example but the disciples were clearly they were keen to learn from Jesus they were hungry to learn from him they had the attitude of the tax collector not the Pharisee remember the Pharisee went up to God in prayer and the temple said

Lord God I thank you I am not like other people I give and I am whereas the tax collector fell on his knees wouldn't even go up to the temple and say Lord have mercy on me a sinner great humility and that is very powerfully Jesus image for us in our own prayerful life that we would humbly be seeking to learn how to pray maybe you think today one earth we talk about prayer is a personal thing it is a conversation with God how can you learn to converse it is something very private very personal that may be what we think that that is not what Jesus thinks Jesus says that we can learn to pray that we can be educated and he gives us the model for it here and that we come to him asking in prayer not demanding of him or of others and of course within that the greatest thing that he offers us is his Holy Spirit it is greatest of all gifts to enable us to pray to pray in the spirit and to pray in reliance on him humility can I ask you as I must ask myself does humility characterise your prayer life with God your daily dependent fatherly child relationship with your father is it marked by humility are we humble before God in prayer and learning to pray are you able and willing to learn to pray but also persistence is what he teaches in this passage he does so in the famous promise of verse 9

[26 : 21] I say to you ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find knock and the door will be open to you for everyone who ask receives he who seeks finds and to him who knocks the door will be open there is a gradation there isn't it you are asking and then more persistently and more powerfully you are seeking and then when that is not been answered you are persisting and you are knocking at the door there is a gradation there of persistence that you are not giving up and of course there is the great picture which will come to you I suppose in the year 2011 or whenever we get to look at chapter 18 where Jesus is encouraging prayer and he says he told this parable that they should always pray and not give up and gives the parable of the persistent widow and that is what he is looking for in us even that boldness I tell you in verse 8 because of the man's boldness or if you can see it can be translated persistence Jesus wants us he says he wants us to be persistent in prayer is that a characteristic of our prayer along with humility see it is about our relationship with God and our desires not about his willingness it is not that he needs to be persuaded by us it is not that he needs to be argued to answer our prayer if we hang on long enough it is never that in scripture it is never that it is all about us it is about God saying well show me how much you are really longing for this show me the seriousness of your intent by being persistent in prayer and some things clearly need more persistence than others sometimes we can simply ask and it will be given sometimes we can just seek and we will find but other times we have to ask, seek and knock before the door is opened and we mustn't give up because that is God's pattern for us so if you are praying for something say well I have been praying for it for 5 minutes don't give up if you are praying for something

I have been praying for it for 50 years don't give up because God wants us to be persistent let us die and go and meet God before giving up praying for the desires of our heart for the things that we know we need and we long for and we are praying to him for so the encouragement for you today is never to give up in these matters to be humble and to be persistent and to recognise that that is God's model for us both as we pray alone as we pray as families and as I hope we also pray as a congregation we looked on Wednesday night at 10 Prayers for St. Columbus that we are hoping to get a card with that next week now it's not a gimmick please don't think these things are gimmicks they are encouragements to us they are means to encourage and help us to pray we are going to pray for 10 specific things that we reckon are important to us as a congregation there is a lot more than 10 things but these are 10 things we are going to come back in February and look for the answers in prayer thanksgiving to God for his answers we are also going to come back in February 2010 for some of the longer term prayers and look for the answers God has given us but let us be persistent let us be humble and let us look for God to be at the centre of our lives let us be here a praying community our Father in Heaven that's why it's nice occasionally for us to pray this prayer as it stands together because it's not just a private prayer it is also very much a prayer for us as a community of believers as a family who are under the Lordship of God so before singing our concluding Psalm together we are going to pray and we are going to pray and as we finish that prayer we will use the words of the prayer we've looked at as it is in Luke we are not going to pray the version we are more used to or the version from Matthew we'll pray it, you can put it up in the screens just now that's the prayer we will pray and we will add amen to it can I remind our young people that there is a meal today in the church after the service, after coffee and tea so if you are visiting with us for the first time and you would like to have a meal with us here then please stay behind and we hope you will be welcomed and spoken to and invited to stay and you are very welcome to do so so let's bow our heads in prayer

Lord God we ask and pray that we would have a humble spirit as we come before you in prayer that we would be willing to learn from you and that we would ask above all things for your Holy Spirit your Holy Spirit which is that great submission of all prayer that we would pray for God's presence in our hearts by faith through Jesus Christ and the cross that we would come and no cleansing and no healing and no wholeness and no salvation as we accept Jesus as our saviour and as we ask for the gift of his Spirit to breathe spiritual life into us so that we can know and see and understand what it means to be a disciple of him Lord we ask and pray that you would bless our corporate longing for prayer that it would be absolutely core and foundational to what we are as a people and that we would deal with all the difficulties and hang ups and problems and issues that we have with church and with people that so often threaten to destroy our sense of community and our sense of God's purpose for us help us to be able to call you Father be particularly near to those who struggle with that image whose own human experiences are detrimental to seeing God in that loving and protective and caring and good gift giving way

Lord God we ask that you would bless our fellowship and bless the meal that will be shared together among the young people and bless the community that is developing among them within the congregation and may it be part of the whole congregational community and commitment and bless as we ask with persistence may we not be weak and spineless and may we not give up at the first discouragement or the first sign of opposition or difficulty or the first feeling of tiredness or that God isn't hearing or listening may we pray by faith and live by faith and in grateful obedience may we persist in the great conversation of prayer with our Father Lord we ask all these things in your name and we ask that you reclose our prayer today that we would pray together in the words of the prayer that we have looked at today from Luke's Gospel our Father hallowed be your name your kingdom come give us each day our daily bread forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who sins against us and lead us not into temptation

Amen