

Lessons in prayer

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Reading: Luke 11:1-13

There are times when we feel a deep longing for answers, or for someone to talk to. At those times we often find ourselves whispering a prayer to God. In Luke 11:1–13, Jesus meets us in that very place where we feel a desperate need to talk to someone. Jesus doesn't just teach us how to pray, he teaches us how we can pray with boldness, with persistence, and with hope.

Luke chapter 11 verse 1 reads, “He was praying in a certain place.” We all need to find a certain place to pray. When I was working in west London I used to pray while driving up the M3, not with my eyes shut, you will be pleased to know. The point was I drove up the motorway every day, 5 days a week an ideal situation to create a workable routine for prayer. But it could be any situation or activity you are regularly involved in each day. You could be walking or driving to or from work each day, or you could be taking the dog for a walk every day, or like Jesus go to a certain place each day. Jesus found a certain place so that he had a routine for prayer, we need to do the same.

When Jesus had finished praying his disciples asked him to teach them to pray. It is quite possible that they did not normally pray at all. Indeed, that may well be the case today. I went to a church of England primary school, and every day started with the Lord's prayer and a hymn. So, when Jesus was asked to teach them to pray, he gave them a formular that would cover all eventualities,

and which has withstood the test of time, and which we know as the Lord's prayer.

The prayer in Luke's gospel has five petitions. The first two petitions are in verse 2 and have to do with God. "Hallowed be your name," and "Your kingdom come." The Jewish word for God is Yahweh. In a recent film series of Jesus' life, the film used the word 'Adonai' for God which translated means 'my Lord.' The Jews used Adonai because they did not want to use the word Yahweh in case they used it disrespectfully, as indeed we often hear Christ's name used.

"Your kingdom come." God's kingdom is the place where God's name is revered and kept holy. When we revere God's name and keep it holy, we make it possible for God's kingdom to come into our lives. The idea of God as our Father has Old Testament roots. God instructed Nathan to tell David, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son," see 2 Samuel 7:14. And in a prayer, Isaiah said, "For you are our Father," see Isaiah 63:16. However, the universal use of calling God our Father was introduced by Jesus in the Lord's prayer.

The last three petitions are in verses 3 and 4 and have to do with the fulfilment of our needs. Each of those three petitions are plural. They are, 'give us, forgive us, and bring us,' emphasising the community of faith of which we are a part, rather than our individuality. Verse 3 reads, "Give us each day our daily bread." Jesus is reminding the disciples and all of us of our daily dependence on God for the basics of life. God is the source of life and everything that sustains life. Give us each day our daily bread also infers sufficient for the day. It was never God's intention to have some people starving while others have more than they

know what to do with. This was borne out when God sent Manna to the Israelites in the desert. “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you.’” “The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.” See Exodus 16 verse 4.

Verse 4a reads, “Forgive us our sins.” Sins are acts of rebellion against the authority of God. It is saying ‘no’ to God, and we need to confess the sin of disobedience. A faithful child reflects the image and values of their parents; in the same way Jesus expects us to reflect the forgiving nature of God. How can the world learn of God’s forgiveness unless we manifest forgiveness in our lives? Jesus links the giving and receiving of forgiveness, if we expect God to forgive us, we must forgive one another.

Verse 4c reads, “Bring us not into temptation.” We need God’s protection from the evil of temptation that would destroy us. Read any newspaper, and you will see the pervasive reality of evil. Drugs enslave young people. Sexual appetites lead to violence against women and children. Greed leaves victims in its wake. It is quite appropriate for us to pray for deliverance from evil for our loved ones, our community, our nation, our world, and for ourselves. We need to think about our context when we recite the Lord’s prayer.

Another point about the Lord’s prayer for me is that when I need to pray and cannot find the right words to express what I feel, then I recite the Lord’s prayer; not St Luke’s version, but the traditional version we use in our services. The very act of reciting the Lord’s prayer can help me to put into words what it was that I wished to talk to God about. If that does not happen it doesn’t matter, because God now knows anyway.

The next section is the parable of the persistent friend in verses 5 to 8 and tells of two friends. One has everything he wants and is tucked up in bed with his family, and the other has a need for food. Nineteen or so years ago, there was a very loud bang on my front door at about 4 in the morning which woke us up. I got up went to the door with some trepidation and asked who was there. It was my new next-door neighbour who needed help. I opened the door, and he explained that it was his wife who needed Jill's help. Jill went to her help and a baby was born in their house at about 7 in the morning.

I would have been ashamed had I not got up and answered the door. In the same way the friend who refused to get out of bed and give his friend food was shamed by his attitude. Jesus is making two points here. Firstly, he is saying that God is not like the shameful friend, God will always help where help is needed. Secondly Jesus is inviting us to have courage when we pray. In the case of the parable, 'be persistent,' in the case of my neighbour have courage and 'knock loudly.'

Verses 9 and 10 confirms 5 to 8. "Ask and it will be given to you." "Search, and you will find." "Knock, and the door will be opened for you." The verbs are present tense, suggesting a persistent asking, seeking, and knocking.

For me the tenth verse is the difficult one, it reads, "For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." Is that really our experience?

One of the problems we have is that we think prayer is about trying to change God's mind. Prayer is **not** about changing God's mind; it's about aligning our hearts with His. Small children tend

to ask their parents for impossible things, but as the children grow older and get to know their parents better, they begin to ask for things which their parents are only pleased to give them. The same applies to God, if you do not know God then most prayers will remain unanswered, and the more you get to understand God the more your prayers will be aligned to God's heart, and the more your prayers will be answered.

Verses 11 to 13 gets down to the crux of the matter. "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish. Or if the child asks for an egg, will give 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."

The greatest gift God gives is not just bread or answers, it is **Himself**. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God dwelling within us, guiding us, comforting us, empowering us, and giving us strength to overcome sins. When we pray, we are not just asking for things, we are drawing nearer to the heart of God. And He is not stingy. He is not distant. He is not annoyed by our midnight knocking. He is a Father who opens the door to us with joy.