



Discipleship Pathways : Pray

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.” (Luke 11 v 1)

Call to worship.

Jesus said, ‘Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.’

Come now, the door is open.
God says, ‘Welcome,
the door of this place is wide open
to all who wish to come in and find peace.’
Amen

Roots 2016

Hymn – StF 254 Seek ye first

Seek ye first the kingdom of God
And His righteousness;
And all these things shall be added unto you.
Allelu -, Alleluia

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and you shall find.
Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
Allelu -, Alleluia

Man shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds out from the mouth of God.
Allelu -, Alleluia

Reading Luke 11 v 1 – 3 We begin by looking at three verses from Luke chapter 11

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.”

He said to them, “When you pray, say:
“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”

Reflection 1

The Lord’s prayer, as we often refer to it, is familiar to many. Those of us of a certain age will probably have said it most days at school. But if we look carefully, in this passage from Luke, a disciple asks Jesus - “Lord teach us to pray.”

Not **what** should we pray, or **how** should we pray, **but teach us to pray**. And maybe we can all identify with that. I am sure that at times we all find it difficult to pray for all sorts of different reasons and this outline, this framework that we call the Lord’s Prayer might well stand us in good stead. And indeed, during this coming week in our study booklet ‘Go Deeper’ (ask someone from your church if you would like a copy) we will be spending time each day, looking at and thinking about each part of the Lord’s Prayer.

Jesus said ... “**when you pray say ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’**”

It starts with God, with reverence, with acknowledging who and what God is.

I am rubbish at remembering things – and so my bible is full of sticky notes with pearls of wisdom from various preachers or services, quotes or insights from bible reading notes. When I opened my bible at this passage, Luke 11 I found a sticky note. It says,

‘Note the order, first of all Jesus praised God and then he made requests. Praising God first puts us in the right frame of mind to tell him about our needs. But in our prayer life, how often do we actually do that. We are more inclined to launch into our list of needs, our requests, our shopping lists.

Many of our services begin with just that, a time of adoration, praise and thanksgiving. We are putting God first, coming into his Holy Presence to worship Him.

So let’s approach God, put Him first in a time of adoration and thanksgiving.

A prayer of adoration

You, God, are the centre of our being,
the plumb line by which we measure our
lives.

For you are God of all,
and all are your children.

You are the promise of what is right
and the measure of what is wrong.

You are the teacher of love, respect and
understanding.

In you we find sufficiency and more.

It is you, O God, we worship.

It is you and your ways we adore.

It is you and your giving that shows us how to
live our lives.

Amen.

Roots 2022

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is in our hearts as we worship
our God.

For freedom to pray: thanks be to God.

For lessons taught: thanks be to God.

For gifts given: thanks be to God.

For care offered: thanks be to God.

For love flowing: thanks be to God.

For life in its fullness: thanks be to God.

For the Word made flesh, dwelling among us:
thanks be to God.

For the Holy Spirit, inspiring and moving us:
thanks be to God.

For the promises of God lived out between
us: thanks be to God.

For sustenance for body, mind and soul:
thanks be to God.

For bread for the day: thanks be to God.

For the promise of God’s kingdom: thanks be
to God.

For life everlasting: thanks be to God.

Thanksgiving is in our hearts, as we worship
our God

and live out our lives, day by day.

Amen.

Roots 2022

Hymn – StF 57 We sing our praises with every corner of the world

Let all the world in every corner sing,
"My God and King!"

The heav'ns are not too high,

God's praise may thither fly;

the earth is not too low,

God's praises there may grow.

Let all the world in every corner sing,

"My God and King!"

Let all the world in every corner sing,
"My God and King!"

The church with psalms must shout:

no door can keep them out.

But, more than all, the heart

must bear the longest part.

Let all the world in every corner sing,

"My God and King!"

Reading – Luke 11 v 5 – 13

So let’s read a bit further in this chapter. After teaching them how to pray, Jesus tells them two parables. But I am going to use an imagined retelling of what happened by the disciple who asked the question in the first place, although we are not told which disciple it was and I find that quite interesting – I wonder who it was?!!! Let’s listen to what he has to say.

I asked Jesus how we should pray. First of all, he gave me an example. He said, ‘When you pray, say this: 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 indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.’

Then he surprised me. Without pausing for a moment, he started to tell us a story. He said, ‘Just think. You’re all tucked up in bed for the night. You’ve finally got the little one off to sleep, he’s sucking his squeaky ted’s ear in his cot by your bed. And then comes an absolutely thunderous knocking at the door. And someone shouts up at your window, “Oy! You up there! I need three loaves of bread. Quickly. Jim’s turned up, and he’s absolutely famished. And there’s nothing in the house to give him.” Would you say, “Go away! You’ll wake the baby! I’ve locked the door for the night and that’s it! I’m not coming down”? I don’t think so. I think that, even if you didn’t care about his trouble, because he was your friend you’d jolly well get up and do as he asked just to get rid of him.’

And then Jesus said, ‘Prayer’s a bit like that. Ask, like the man in the story. Look for help, and you’ll find it. Knock at that door, and someone will come. Because if you ask, you will receive. If you look properly, you will find, and if you knock loud enough, someone will open the door.’

*He paused, but he hadn’t finished. There was more – an anecdote; a tease, perhaps. ‘If your child, when he’s a bit bigger, asked for fish fingers for lunch, would you fob him off with something inedible, like the mouse you caught in a trap yesterday? Or if he wanted a nice boiled egg, would you slap something dangerous and nasty down in front of him? Come on, even if you were the worst person in the world, you’d still know what’s good for your own child. So, of course, your heavenly Father knows what’s good for you – because you are God’s child. And the best thing of all that God can give you – all of you – is the Holy Spirit.’
Makes you think, doesn’t it?*

Source unknown

Reflection 2

I don’t know about you but I found this really helpful. If we read these words in the bible the questions asked are whether fathers would give snakes instead of fish and scorpions instead of eggs. I have never found that helpful. But here we can see what Jesus is saying and what that tells us about God and prayer.

So the first thing is that we have to **knock at the door and ask**. How good are you at asking for help? Not just where prayer is concerned but generally. Do you battle on, trying to cope, afraid of being seen as a failure or not being competent, or not worthy of help? Everyone else is coping – why can’t I? No-one else is struggling, so it must be my fault. I can’t give in, it’s down to me. The thing is that by asking for help we are make ourselves vulnerable and none of us like that. Would you have gone out in the middle of the night, knocked on a friends’ door and asked for help? Conversely, by not asking for help we often become grumpy and resentful, or I do anyway. It’s often better for everyone if we just say ‘help!’

But let’s reverse the situation and look at it from the point of view of the man inside the house. How do you respond when a friend asks for help? Most of us, most of the time, would say “of course I can help – it’s not a problem.” And although this is a parable about prayer, inevitably we can think about the human, practical responsibilities we all have – to be there for people.

Some time ago Nigel was away for a night, and I went round to see mum and dad in the evening. As I was walking down the drive, dad called out – “If you need anything in the night you know where I am.” I replied, “if there’s a thunderstorm, I will be round!”

As a young child I never liked thunderstorms and would always end up in my parents’ room. But that conversation, just made me think of this parable. Dad was there even in the middle of the

night. Now to some people, to disturb my parents, even as a child, because of a thunderstorm, might seem trivial, or unacceptable. But I think after the first couple of times my parents would be expecting that knock on the bedroom door. Sometimes feel that our problems, our troubles are too trivial or unacceptable to God. But you know what, just like my dad in the middle of a thunderstorm, I think God expects to hear from us.

In any relationship, talking is important and sharing helps. There is mutual benefit from helping each other. So if we are to have a relationship with God, he expects us to talk to him in prayer. And maybe Jesus set the parable in the middle of the night to emphasise that God doesn't work 9 – 5, that his door is always unlocked, if not open, if we only knock.

I go through phases where I don't sleep well. My mind is often working overtime, thinking about problems and worries. Some of these may be quite trivial in the light of day, but in the middle of the night they seem to be the biggest issue imaginable! And then of course another worry comes – I should be asleep, I need to get to sleep. How on earth will I function tomorrow if I can't sleep!! I can often lie wake for an hour or more, tossing and turning, or trying to lie as still as possible so as not to disturb Nigel. But then I remember, there is someone awake in the middle of the night, someone who expects me to knock and someone who will open the door. My prayer is often, "Lord, will you just look after this worry until the morning so that I can sleep – I will have it back then."

Notice I haven't quite handed it over completely – that's the next step, a work in progress. But it's amazing how often when I have handed the worry and restlessness to God, the gift of peace and sleep comes. "Ask and you will receive"

Now I am sure that some of you are sitting there thinking "Look Cath, I am sorry, but I have prayed for x, y and z and it's not happened. I can't feel God's presence, I can't see that God is there or listening." I am sure we have all felt like that at some point. So can this parable shed any light on that.

Tom Wright is an eminent theological scholar and has written a series of bible commentaries which are very accessible and which I find really helpful. In his commentary on this passage he talks about **being persistent in prayer**. I don't think that that's about grinding God down, it's about investing, trying again and again, recognising that the door is always open if only we knock.

When we meet someone for the first time we might call it an encounter. If we meet them again and invest in times of sharing and getting to know them, then the encounter may become a friendship or a relationship. And I think that's the same with God and Prayer.

Tom Wright says that we should be **regular in our prayer life**. And I get that. When I make a point of talking to God regularly, praying regularly, making prayer part of my daily routine things happen.

A few years ago I was chatting to a lady. I didn't know her very well, but for several weeks I made a point of praying for her regularly and the situation she was in. When I saw her a few weeks later she said to me "Have you been praying for me?" When I said yes, she said "I knew you had!" That was a real encouragement to me, and I hope to her too.

But also when I pray regularly, when I am not afraid to hand things over to God, when I make myself vulnerable, I find that I am more at peace, calmer and generally a better person.

Tom Wright also said **don't be discouraged**. Are we discouraged because we don't get an immediate answer to our prayers? We live in a world of immediateness. And so if God doesn't answer immediately then we get discouraged. But we might also get discouraged if God doesn't answer in the way we want. Those strange examples in the parable show this

God wouldn't give you a snake instead of a fish, or a scorpion instead of an egg. God knows what is good for us, but it might not be what we think!

Tom Wright also says we should **be bold in what we ask**. The man at the door was bold. During the day, the doors of the houses were often open, anyone could walk in, and that was the expectation. If the door was closed that was an indication that the householder doesn't want to be disturbed. The householder made this clear, "The door is already locked" And yet the man was bold, he knocked and explained the problem.

In our prayers, I don't think being bold is about asking for a big lottery win for example. I think it's about being confident in what we say. I am not that sort of person, and I tend to beat about the bush, "God if you don't mind, if it's not too much trouble, if it's what you want to do ..." Instead maybe I should be bolder, more confident "I need to sleep, please take the worries away!"

The final thing Tom Wright said was that **the world needs our prayers**. I think that we would all agree with that. But in a world so in need of prayer, it's difficult to know where to start. It seems to knock on the door with the problems of the world on our heart is just too much. It's easy to be discouraged, the problems seem too great, it's easy to give up and not persist because we seem to be asking for the same things time and time again. It's easier to say, "Why God?" Rather than "Please God"

Maybe that's how that disciple felt – whichever one it was. And maybe those three short verses say it all - God first, Our needs, Confession and forgiveness.

When we are struggling, when we haven't the words, when we are discouraged or can't find that personal rhythm of prayer, maybe praying as Jesus taught us and praying that prayer will help us to knock so that the door may be opened.

Amen

Hymn StF 518 Father hear the prayer we offer

Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.

Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would smite the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.

Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.

Prayers for others

So we come to our prayers for others – Give us each day our daily bread, recognising that daily bread may be food, water, love, peace, healing or stability. And in the midst of an election campaign we think of those issues which are likely to take centre stage.

The continued cost of living crisis. People not being able to afford bills, of having to make choices as to which basic needs take priority, of being cold, or hungry, of where this leaves families, of the impact this may have on physical and mental health.

We pray for those in positions of authority, that they may seek realistic solutions to help those most in need.

Holy Spirit of God ... **Hear our prayer.**

For the crisis in health services and Social Care in our country and around the world, where underfunding, lack of resources, lack of support and misuse and abuse by so many causes stress

to staff, deteriorating care at crisis times, delayed diagnosis and insufficient support. We pray for those who work, who plan for, who fund and who need to use such services.

Holy Spirit of God ... **Hear our prayer.**

For governments and regimes around the globe who find themselves in turmoil. We pray for a wider recognition of the needs of all and seek equality and fairness for all humanity. We pray that we may, in our small way, be part of the solution. For those who seek to flee corrupt and violent regimes and who put themselves in danger to simply find a better way of life. May they find, welcome, care, love, support and guidance as they journey.

Holy Spirit of God ... **Hear our prayer.**

For the lost, the lonely, the ill, the dying and the bereaved, that in times of pain, confusion and grief they may find comfort in God, in family, friends or neighbour, in a touch, a word, a smile or companionable silence.

Holy Spirit of God ... **Hear our prayer.**

This day, these are our prayers for those whose lives touch our lives, our consciousness, our very being, they are the prayers for the people whose needs weigh heavily upon our hearts and lives.

Holy Spirit of God ... **Hear our prayer.** Amen

Hymn - StF 531 What a friend we have in Jesus

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

Blessing – pupils' version of the Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, you are awesome!
Show us who you are and how you want us
to be.
Make earth more like heaven.
Please give us what we need to keep going
each day.

Help us when we are wrong and clean us up
on the inside.
Help us to let other people off and move on.
Keep us from bad stuff.
You're in charge!
You're strong and powerful and always there.
Forever!
Amen.