

Sermon 27 July 2025 Prayer

Ephesians 6:13-18 Luke 11:1-10

I want to start off by saying that, in terms of our relationship with God, prayer would have to be the most important consideration, that, in fact, without prayer we simply don't have a relationship with God. Prayer is the primary method by which we communicate with God, and as with any relationship, no communication, no relationship. That in itself raises one or two issues with regards the way we pray, but I'll come back to that in a moment.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus taught the disciples what we know as the Lord's prayer, a prayer which has been the cornerstone of our prayer life ever since. I don't have time to go through each sentence, but I would like to look at how Jesus opens this prayer: *'Father, may your name be kept holy.'* This is very important because it makes a statement, right at the outset, about our relationship with God.

Jesus uses the Aramaic word, *Abba*. The word carries a sense of intimacy and, at the same time, respect. If we think about it, that surely conveys just what a father should mean to us. I often think that a father's role is something of a balancing act between being a friend and, at the same time, a disciplinarian. After all, law and order must be maintained! There is a pertinent passage, Hebrews 12:6-7: *'For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children.'*

But most importantly, there is a sense of security and comfort that is hopefully engendered. This is invariably illustrated when a little child reaches for your hand as you walk along.

In the end, there is undoubtedly a deep feeling of love implied and this is just what Jesus wants us to feel for God. John describes this beautifully in 1 John 3:1 – *'See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are.'* So this is the tenor of our approach to God when we begin our prayer with 'Our Father..' Yes, there is respect, but at the same time there is a deep love. And just as a child reaches for our hand, so we put ourselves into God's hand as we come before him with our petitions and our concerns.

A very important aspect of prayer is highlighted by Jesus in this passage, and that is the issue of persistence. Jesus begins with the story of someone going to a friend's house at midnight, knocking on the door to ask for three loaves of bread: *'Suppose you went to a friend's house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread.'* Luke 11:5. The initial reaction of the friend is to tell them to go away, they are all in bed and he doesn't want to wake anyone up. Remember that the custom was for the whole family to be sleeping together so if he got up, he would disturb everyone.

Now the laws of hospitality in the ancient Middle East were very strict and if a traveller arrived needing food and shelter, no matter the time of day or night, you were expected to provide it. So Jesus, once again, draws on the culture of the time as he makes a point. But the real point of the story is that if you persist, you will get what you want. This is pressed home in those verses where he says, *'And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened.'* Luke 11:9. These are some of the most important and pertinent words Jesus has for us.

There are many aspects to prayer but I can't help feeling that this is the most important aspect. Persistence shows that we mean business. Persistence shows that we are sincere. Persistence shows that we have a strong faith. Our prayer is not just a petition that is thrown out there in the vague hope that something might happen, that someone may hear us and act upon it. This is a genuine relationship we are talking about. This is something and someone we believe in. This is faith, and faith brings results.

On that note, just an observation. Sometimes, perhaps quite often, God doesn't appear to be taking our appeal, our prayer on board. There can be a significant time lag between our expectation of timing and that of God. Sometimes, despite our prayers, life just seem to be going our way. At those times, we can quite easily become frustrated, and even angry with God. Trust me, there have been occasions over the past few years when I have felt just like that, I have let God know in no uncertain terms. That's ok. He can handle it. And after all, it's a good indication of a genuine relationship, because it's quite difficult to get angry with someone whom you are not sure even exists! And after all, we all get angry with our loved ones at times, don't we?!

I mentioned earlier that prayer is about communication. A very important part of communication is listening. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if listening is not taking place, then genuine communication is not taking place. Listening is perhaps the only activity where multi-tasking is not befitting. So a very important aspect of prayer is to be quiet and still in the presence of God. Just listen, just revel in his presence. As the psalmist says, *'Be still and know that I am God.'* Psalm 46:10.

There is just so much more I could say about prayer. It is such a vital and integral part of our walk with God. Just a few points to finish on. Prayer does work. The power of prayer is very real, but only if we are genuine, in other words, we pray with faith and integrity.

There is the story of Jim Johnson who was given the job of saving a failing hotel. Other managers had tried, but unsuccessfully. The hotel was in a now-or-never situation. Jim decided to try something different. Each night he drove to the top of a hill overlooking the hotel. He parked his car and sat there for the next half hour – praying.

Jim prayed for the hotel guests. He prayed for the employees and their families. He prayed for those who did business with the hotel. Finally, he prayed for the city and its people. Night after night, Jim drove to the top of the hill, he parked his car, and he prayed.

Soon the situation at the hotel started to improve. A new confidence radiated from its employees. A new warmth welcomed each new guest. A new spirit permeated its operation. The hotel experienced a remarkable rebirth. Norman Vincent Peale, well-known Christian author who tells the story, credits the hotel's rebirth to Jim's nightly prayers.

As with any relationship, our relationship with God has its ups and its downs, its moments of frustration, irritation and uncertainty. Our prayer life will reflect this, after all, prayer lies at the heart of our relationship with God. British pastor, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, wrote, *'Of all the activities in which the Christian engages, and which are part of the Christian life, there is surely none which causes so much perplexity, and raises so many problems, as the activity of prayer.'* That, my friends, is another reason why we need to persevere and persist. God understands. He is, after all, part of us. As well-known Christian author, Philip Yancey writes, *'We ourselves are God's temple, the Spirit's home. God lives in us.'* We can draw great comfort from those words.

I want to reiterate a point I have made before. We can certainly ask God to fix a certain problem, but I don't think we can expect God to step in every time we have a problem and just take away that problem. After all, it is the wrestling with those problems that come our way that we are shaped and moulded, that we grow. So we do need to pray for the strength to deal with those challenges. Bruce Lee, martial artist and philosopher, gave an interesting perspective when he said, *'Do not pray for an easy life, pray for the strength to endure a difficult one.'*

Just to build on the notion that our relationship with God should be approached in the same way as any other relationship. I am sure that you would agree with me that if the only time you heard from a certain person was when they wanted something from you, that would hardly be the basis for a lasting and fulfilling relationship. Well, the same goes for God. Of course we are going to reach out to God when we need help, but in order to establish a lasting and fulfilling relationship, we need to communicate with him on a daily basis, thanking him, sharing with him, even, as I said before, just listening to him. Spiritual author, Kahill Gibran, wrote, *'You pray in your distress and in your need; would that you might pray also in the fullness of your joy and in your days of abundance.'*

I finish with a little story on that note. It was bedtime for your Jimmy. He said to his family, 'Well, I am off to bed and I'll be saying my prayers. Does anyone need anything?' It's actually quite a nice story about faith!