Sermon 8 November 2026 Be Prepared (PUSH)

Ephesians 6:13-18 Matthew 25:1-13

Our youth group have made an excellent presentation on being prepared if we are to establish a relationship with God and Jesus. As well as relating the story from our gospel reading that Jesus told about the ten bridesmaids, five of whom were ready to meet the bridegroom and five of whom were not prepared and so missed out on meeting the bridegroom, they also quoted from our first reading in which Paul says, *'And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying.'* Ephesians 6:18. I would like to pick up on that point.

I think the most important message that comes from the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids, is that we need to prepare ourselves for a relationship with the Son of God. As we have said before, building a relationship with Jesus is like building anything significant – it is hard work, very hard work. If we are not prepared to put in the hard yards, it is simply not going to happen.

So, if my purpose is to build a relationship with God, how would I go about it? What would I have to do? Well, there are a few things I could and should do, but there is on thing especially, and to illustrate that, let me tell you a story.

A man was sleeping one night in his cabin when he was suddenly woken by a bright light that filled his room and God appeared to him. The Lord told the man he had work for him to do, and he showed him a large boulder in front of the cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the boulder with all his might. So this is what the man did, day after day.

For months he toiled each day, his shoulders set squarely against the massive boulder, pushing with all his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin exhausted, his body aching. The boulder, however, never budged and the man was getting discouraged. In the end, the man prayed to God, 'Lord,' he said, 'I have laboured hard and long in your service, putting all my strength into what you have asked me to do. Yet, after all this time, I have not managed to move the boulder one millimetre. What is wrong? Why am I failing?'

The Lord replied, 'My friend, when I asked you to serve me and you accepted, I told you the task was to push against the boulder with all your strength, which you have done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you come to me thinking you have failed. But look at yourself. Your arms and back are strong and muscled. Your legs have become massive. You are a different person. True, you haven't moved the boulder, but your call was to be obedient and to have faith in what I asked you to do. You have done that. Now, I will move the boulder for you.'

This story is about P.U.S.H. What does this stand for? Pray Until Something Happens. Whether it is a relationship with God, or whether it is something significant we want to achieve in life, or just dealing with life's challenges, pray, pray, pray, or should I say, PUSH, PUSH, PUSH.

Jesus tells us in that wonderful passage in Luke, *'And so I tell you, keep on asking and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on seeking and you will find. Keep on knocking and the door will be opened for you.'* Luke 11:9.

One of the important things about perseverance is that it shows that we are genuine; it shows that we are deeply rooted in our relationship with God. This is not a fly-by-night relationship; this is a 'in for the long haul' relationship, and that means that it is genuine, and that in turn means that God is going to be far more receptive to our pleas.

There is the story of the sea captain, who in a terrible storm feared for the safety of his passengers. He asked if anyone knew how to pray. No one volunteered, so the captain took it upon himself to seek God's protection. His opening words were, 'God, I've never bothered you before, and if you help us through this storm, I'll never bother you again.' I am not sure that's quite right way of going about getting onside with God and basking in his blessings. In fact, I know it's not!

The final point I want to emphasise is that anything in life worth achieving, we invariably have to work very hard for; we have to put in the hard yards. Ask anyone who has reached the very top in any field of endeavour. Thery will tell you that only through perseverance, through sweat and invariably a

degree of pain, do they attain their goal. My friends, if our goal is a lasting and meaningful relationship with God, then the same applies.

One assumes that because we are gathered here this morning, we are intent on that relationship. So that means we have to work at it, because it is not going to happen on its own accord. One very good way of doing that is through prayer. PUSH. PUSH. PUSH.

I finish with a very interesting and insightful quote from William McGill, American psychologist and author: *'The value of persistent prayer is not that he will hear us, but that we will finally hear him.'*