

Jesus on the Road to Jerusalem

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Please have a seat, and perhaps you can turn with me in your Bibles to Luke chapter 11, where Jesus teaches us to pray. And as you're turning there, let me begin by saying that Jesus wants you and me to enjoy our prayer life. Our personal experience of prayer will be different.

Some will find it easy and natural. For others, perhaps there are times when it's a real struggle. Some people have a very disciplined, regular prayer life. For others, it's occasional.

For some, it feels strange. Maybe you've only just started. Maybe you've never prayed before. For others, it feels like home. Wherever we are today, Jesus wants to teach us how to pray so that we might enjoy our prayer life. And this matters hugely. Robert Murray McShane, who was a church minister in the 19th century in Dundee, once said this, what a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and nothing more. And he could say that because you and I, whoever we are, wherever we're from, we were made to know God. We were made to enjoy relationship with our God, and for that, prayer is vital. We're going to discover that Jesus, the only perfect man who ever lived, he enjoyed his prayer life, and he wants the same for his followers today.

Where this passage fits, a couple of weeks ago, we were back at the end of Luke chapter 10, and Jesus was teaching his followers there the importance of listening to God in his word.

So we need for God to speak truth to us. But now, he teaches his followers to pray. It's a conversation. God speaks, and we speak. And as we think about what Jesus teaches, we're going to see four things together. We're going to see the priority of prayer, and we're going to spend a lot of time thinking about the pattern of prayer.

[2 : 1 9] We're going to think a little bit about the practice and the promise that we find in this section so that we might know God, so that we might walk with our God, that we might talk with our God, that we might love him and enjoy him. So let's get into the first lesson, the priority of prayer. It's there in the first couple of verses. So Jesus, we've been seeing as a church, is on a journey. He's on the way to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem is the place where he's going to die on the cross to save his people from their sin. And then he's going to rise again, and he's going to return to glory. So Jesus is on this journey, and as he walks, he takes time to pray. One day, Jesus was praying in a certain place. Luke loves to highlight this fact. Jesus, the God-man, prayed and prayed often when there were important moments in his life, when there were decisions to take simply to enjoy the presence of his Father, to keep himself doing the Father's will as he faced the prospect of the cross. Indeed, even as Jesus hangs on the cross to die, he is praying.

Prayer is as natural and as vital as breathing for Jesus. Think about that. Jesus lived the perfect life, and the perfect life was a praying life. That tells us something for our own life. And the disciples get that. Because the disciples, they have the privilege as they spend time with Jesus to hear him and to see him. And so as he finishes praying, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray.

They know that they can learn from Jesus, the one who knows his Father in a unique way. And it's a really wise question that they ask, Lord, teach us to pray. Because the journey of Jesus is one on which they are also journeying. In their journey of faith, they're going to know opposition. They're going to face suffering. They're going to be really busy. They're going to need wisdom. They're on God's mission.

They're representing their master, Jesus. And so they know they need to pray. And notice Jesus' response. He's glad to teach them. Verse 2, he said to them, when you pray, notice not if you pray, but when you pray.

So for followers of Jesus, we're being reminded that we have this privilege of knowing our God. And we grow in our relationship with God as we get to pray. We are called to be disciples, to be followers, to be learners of Jesus, and to be on his mission. And so because of that as well, prayer must be a top priority for a Christian and for a church. So that's something that we could be praying for ourselves and for our church. The priority of prayer, very briefly. Now, let's think about the pattern of prayer in verses 2 to 4. What we have here in these short few sentences are some of the most famous words in history. If we had the privilege to travel across the globe today and to visit churches in huge cathedrals and in homes and out in the deserts, we would hear these words being repeated by tens of millions of people. Indeed, it's a prayer that unites the global church.

[6 : 06] It's a real privilege for us. We call this the Lord's Prayer, that wasn't actually a prayer that the Lord Jesus would have made himself. And we can say that because we know he never had to ask forgiveness. But we should think of it as a model prayer. And it's such a gift. You know, many of us perhaps grew up with it. So what we have in our heads is we have Scripture that we are carrying around God's Word. We have this pattern for prayer that we always have with us. John Calvin, the Reformer, said that this prayer contains all that we can and all that we ought to ask God for. So it's a huge privilege what Jesus has given you. But I think if you're anything like me, perhaps you're aware of this danger that we can be so familiar with these words that we kind of overlook them. Perhaps we miss them as the wonderful resource that they are. Because these words come to us as a gift. To pray the Lord's prayer is to reorder our love so that God comes first. To pray the Lord's prayer is the key to a less busy and divided heart as we learn to take all of our life to God, knowing that we can trust him, that he cares for us. So I want to focus on the six words that Luke focuses our attention on. You'll probably have noticed this is a shorter version of the Lord's prayer than the one we find in Matthew's gospel.

And I want to say that these six words could literally change your life and mine. They could be a revolution in our praying. They could be our first steps of growing to know God or to know him in a deeper way.

The first word is the word Father. Jesus' praying was recognized as unique. The people in his day did not dare to use the name of God. Jesus called God Father. And the wonderful thing that we discover here is that when our faith is in Jesus, we are invited to call God Father too. By faith in Jesus, we thought about this together as a church, we become children of God. And so the way is open and we are welcomed in by a Father in heaven. And when we believe that and when we embrace the fatherhood of God, it changes everything.

Now we have confidence to pray in all situations because we know we have a powerful father who loves us. Now we come with a sense of security to enjoy our father's love personally. This isn't just, oh, I know God is love. This is to say, God loves me. And this is an invitation to live trusting him, to put our hands in the hand of our great loving father in heaven. There's a really powerful biography of a woman converted from Islam, I think in the 70s, with the title, I dared to call him father.

What drew her to faith in the Lord Jesus was watching a Christian family and especially paying attention as they prayed to notice the intimacy, the love, the friendship they enjoyed with God. And that drew her to the Lord Jesus.

[9 : 56] I have up on the screen, I don't know if you can see it, a famous picture. There's a series of pictures taken of JFK in 1963. So this picture here takes us to the Oval Office of the White House, perhaps the most, powerful room, the most powerful man in the world at the time, surrounded by very important people, having a very important meeting. But under the desk is little John F. Kennedy Jr., who's playing quite happily at his father's feet. Children of God have full access to a throne of grace. We have full access to a father in heaven. The king of the universe has invited us to call on him. How is that possible?

It's possible through Jesus' death on the cross. That Jesus came to die for us, to deal with our sin, to cleanse us, to remove what separates us from our God. It's possible through Jesus returning to the glory of heaven where he right now is praying for us and he's pleading our cause. And it's because of Jesus that just like the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15 that we'll meet in a while in Luke's gospel, when we come to a father, we enjoy his generous welcome. He loves us. He honors us. He throws a feast over us. He is our father. The second word is a far less common word. It's the word hallowed. That's a very unusual name. It's an unusual name nowadays in the English language. What does it mean? Well, when we pray, hallowed be your name, we are praying, in the first instance personally, for a desire that we would hold our holy God in highest honor, that we are praying that we would give him glory in our lives, that we are praying with a concern for the honor of our father. The last thing that we would want to do is to dishonor him in our lives. Martin Luther reminds us that at baptism, the name of God is put on us as his people. Baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And so personally, we are praying that we would drag the name of our Father through the name. Hallowed be your name. But it's also a mission prayer. It's a prayer that, again, we as Christians, that we as a church, that the people of

God would be spreading his glory. As we would love in Jesus' name, as we would bring the good news of Jesus, we are praying so that others would come to worship God, to see him as glorious too.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts that we could give to our neighbors is this, that we might live and act in such a way that the people around us could see the glory of Jesus in us. That we would be able to share our stories. Do you know I couldn't have got through this moment were it not for Jesus?

Jesus. Hallowed be your name. The third word is the word kingdom. Your kingdom come.

[13 : 33] Again, when we pray this and as we begin praying personally, what are we asking? We're asking that God would teach us to submit to his agenda, that we wouldn't live according to our own agenda, that we would accept the rule of God over all of our lives, not just put God in a box and say, this part's for you, this part's for me. Here's one of the reasons why we need to read the Bible and to pray the Bible. Because in the Bible we find the promises of God and the warnings.

We find commands and invitations, and they're all directing us. How are we to live under the rule of God as King? So to pray this makes a difference personally, but it's also again a mission prayer.

Because to pray your kingdom come is to seek that people and nations would bow to Jesus as King. It's also a prayer that looks ahead to that promise that Jesus will come again, and he will gather his people to himself, and he will renew creation, and that people from all nations would spend eternity giving praise and glory to God the King. And so we're looking forward to that day.

When we think about the Lord's Prayer, and maybe this kingdom come is a helpful place to think about it, it's like throwing a stone in a pond. We throw a stone in a pond, the ripples move out.

As we pray the Lord's Prayer, it makes sense that we begin with ourselves. Your kingdom come, well how does that impact on me? But then it's really helpful to let it ripple out. So we begin with ourselves. Then we think about our circle, our family and our friends. What does it look like for them to live under the rule of King Jesus? Then we pray for our church. What difference would it make for Edinburgh if Becluia was living seeking God's kingdom? We pray for our country. We pray for the nations of the world. In this wonderful pattern of prayer that Jesus gives us, we're reminded that we are invited to know the King of the universe as our Father, to seek his honour and his kingdom, to live in his joy, and to ask that others would know it too. The fourth word brings with it a change of focus. It's the word bread. Give us each day our daily bread. Notice the balance of Jesus' model prayer. He turns us first to God and his glory, only then to us and to our needs. Give us each day our daily bread. Why bread. Bread is a great picture of daily needs. Old Testament Israel was fed by bread from heaven each day for 40 years. In Jesus' day, many people lived that kind of hand-to-mouth, need to make bread every single day. So it's a great picture of daily needs. But as we pray it, it's important for us to recognise that this has wide application. This isn't just, please give me enough food for today, though it does certainly include that, one of the reasons why it's good to give thanks before every meal. But Jesus is inviting us to ask for whatever it is that we need this day to accomplish whatever task we have this day. And that will vary hugely from person to person and from day to day. Again, to just speak practically about prayer, I think this is one of the great benefits of praying in the morning. Because if you have time in the morning, you can lay out your schedule for the day before God in prayer. It helps you to recognise, here perhaps are the pressure points, here are the parts where I'm going to need help. I think it's also the benefit of where it's possible to have margins within our day. Before you send that email, before you go on to your next task where you have that next meeting, can we take a moment to pray, to ask God for what we need in that task to come? Because the needs that we will face are many. Physical, emotional, spiritual need.

[17 : 59] Sometimes we'll need patience when we're dealing with people. Sometimes we'll need courage when we need to stand up for truth. Sometimes we'll need discipline in the workplace or in our homes. Sometimes we'll need to be praying for compassion as we're confronted by needs but our own sense of exhaustion. Sometimes and often we'll need to pray for the gift of faith. And remember, as we pray for ourselves, we're also being told to pray for the needs of others. The needs of our Christian family are many.

even just to recognize that globally, while we are incredibly well off, hundreds of millions today, our brothers and sisters in Christ, do lack their daily bread. And so we pray for compassion and for mercy and for justice. Word number five is the word forgiveness. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. So having just thought about our daily needs, Jesus then draws our attention to what's our greatest need. And our greatest need is our need of forgiveness. It's our need to be right with our God. Now, the Bible uses all kinds of language to speak our sin. The language of guilt, the language of debt, the language of debt, to remind us how serious a problem our sin is before a perfectly holy God. And so our greatest need is that we might be right with

God, that our guilt might be removed, that that moral and spiritual debt might be cancelled, that we might have an answer to the shame and to the fear that we experience. And again, the good news is that one who teaches us to pray for forgiveness is the one who will go to the cross to secure our forgiveness.

And so we pray that the benefits of Christ would be applied to us, that the work that he has completed would be applied to us today. Luther, writing on the Lord's Prayer, he wrote on this, he said, and I like this imagery, he said, everyone must duck their head and come into the joy of forgiveness only through the low door of humility.

So we must duck and be humble if we are to enjoy the great expanse and the great joy of forgiveness. What does he mean by that? To humble ourselves is surely to see that we are sinful, that we don't love God perfectly, we don't love our neighbor perfectly. To humble ourselves is to see that we cannot save ourselves, we cannot make ourselves right before God. To humble ourselves is to then look at Jesus and to see that Jesus gives grace. Jesus, though we don't deserve it, is ready to show kindness to us and forgive us all our sins and to cleanse us and to make us new. And that's something we need to begin in the Christian life, but we also need to be praying for forgiveness all through the Christian life because we still sin. And so Jesus would have us to slow down and to think deeply. Where have I wandered today? Where have I broken God's law today? And notice too that social dimension, forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. It's God's grace that makes the forgiveness of others possible. Forgiving others is always difficult, but when we understand that God has graciously forgiven us, it makes our forgiving others possible. And again, to think about that humility, when we understand that our debt before God is massive, to be a money term on it, be billions of pounds in debt.

[22 : 25] So whenever someone wrongs us, that debt is tiny compared to what we have done before God. And as we understand that, and as we understand the grace of forgiveness, then it makes it possible that we pass it forward. We need to pray about it because it's hard. Word six is the word temptation.

And lead us not into temptation. Again, humble Christians understand, sometimes we understand by hard experience that without Jesus and without living by God's grace, we will so quickly go wrong, give in to sin, and we will drift away from the love of God. Just like perhaps if you've ever had this experience in Edinburgh, probably many of us have, if we're drivers, you hit enough potholes and eventually your tires become misaligned. So if you ever take your hands off the steering wheel, you discover that your car begins to drift off course really quickly. What that looks like spiritually?

Perhaps it's us thinking, do you know what, in this moment I feel like I have enough resources, so I don't really need God, I don't really need to pray. Perhaps the drift looks like ignoring God's Word is no big deal. Lots of other people seem to be doing it, so it can't be a problem.

Drift might look like allowing our circumstances to lead us into despair or into bitterness towards our God. And so we pray, lead us not into temptation. It's a reminder that we pray in a spiritual battleground, that Christian life has not lived on a playground, and so we need to keep alert to attack that come from the world and the flesh and the devil. Again, we see this through Scripture. We often talk about using arrow prayers, those quick, brief prayers that we offer up to God in a moment. When we face temptation, then we would learn to pray and to pray quickly. God, help me to say no to sin in this moment.

As my heart is tempted in this direction, help me to see that Jesus and what He offers is so much better. We pray, help me seek Your glory in this moment. So that's the pattern of prayer. Just six words.

[24 : 56] Father, hallowed, kingdom, bread, forgiveness, temptation, but they are a gift from Jesus, so you and I might enjoy our prayer life. Let me give three suggestions. I found it really helpful to be using the Lord's Prayer this week. Three suggestions on how you might use it, how we might use it each day and through the day. Perhaps you could simply pray the Lord's Prayer each day.

It's going to take maybe 30 seconds, probably not even that great way to refocus. We could take time to pause on each of those ideas and expand them with our personal prayer.

Perhaps you'll pray the Lord's Prayer and one phrase will stick out and you think, that's what I need to focus on this night, and you can use that for your praying life. But Jesus gives us this pattern for our good so that we might enjoy our prayer life. So let's take it as a gift.

Now far, far more briefly, the last two things. Let's look at the practice of prayer in verses 5 to 10. The next thing is Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, and He focuses on the point of view of the person who is asking. Okay, so we're going to see there's a switch that happens later, but for now, the point of view of the point of view of the person who is asking. So it's the focus on the prayer. So it's on our side. How should we practice prayer? And in a word, verses 5 to 10 encourage us to persistence. Okay, so there's that story that Jesus tells of the friend who comes for bread. Let's picture this story together. So imagine it's three o'clock in the morning, and you have a knock on your door. A visitor who comes, they need a bed, they need some food, they've been on a long journey, but your cupboards are empty. They're starving. Cupboards are empty. What are you going to do?

So you walk across the road to your friend. It's a family with four kids and a dog, and both parents work nightshift, and they have one of those doorbell security systems that's bound to wake the whole household. What do you do? What does Jesus say? He says, push the button. He says, ask boldly.

[27 : 32] Jesus encourages us to persistence, because this persistence is rewarded. Even though he won't get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity or your persistence, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. It's the same point in those sayings in verses 9 and 10. These are all continuous. Ask and keep on asking, and it'll be given to you.

Seek and keep on seeking, and you will find. Knock and keep on knocking, and the door will be open to you. Jesus invites us to pray boldly and persistently. Here, I think, is where we can learn from our children. You know, if a child wants something, well, unless the answer is yes first time, they don't typically stop with the first request, especially if they really, really, really want something. You will hear about it again and again and again, and that's a wonderful thing when it comes to teaching us how to pray. If we don't want what we're asking for enough to persevere, then perhaps we don't want it very much, and we need to examine our own heart. Calvin, the reformer, said the only prayer that's acceptable to God springs from the presumption of faith. There is a boldness. Maybe because we know that we're children of a loving Father, we are called to bring our heart's desires to our Father.

And again, doesn't this matter for mission? This calls us to pray boldly and persistently for our family members to come to faith, for our friends and our colleagues to have spiritual interest that would lead them to faith in Jesus, to pray persistently for renewal in the church in Edinburgh and in Scotland, to pray persistently for God's work in the world, remembering God is pleased to work through the prayers of His people. Lesson four, the promise of prayer, in verses 11 to 13.

So the question, I guess, that we might ask as we hear the parable that Jesus told is to ask the question, is that what God's like? Is God the reluctant giver in the story? Does God have to be dragged to hear, to hear, to respond? That's why it was important to recognize Jesus was focusing on our point of view as the people who pray. But now we need to hear the shift in focus. Now we come to the receiving end of our prayers to think about what is God like? And God is like a generous Father who is eager to give the best of answers. He is the one who gives. He is the one who meets the needs of those who are seeking. He is the one who opens the door. And then think about these pictures in verse 11 and 12.

You know, Jesus can say, you know, if imperfect fathers can give good gifts, you know, if a son asks for a fish, no father says, hey, do you know what's better? Here's a nice cuddly boa constrictor. Nobody does that.

[31 : 03] Dad, I'm hungry. Can I have an egg? Do you know what? I've just seen on Instagram a live scorpion salad. You're going to love it. No father does that. And so if imperfect fathers know how to care and to give good gifts, how much more are perfect father in heaven? So we seek, we ask, we knock, boldly, boldly, because we know our Father is good. Our Father is generous.

And isn't it lovely the way Jesus finishes this section on prayer? Because it shows us that God cares to give us the very best. God's grace. How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Because the greatest gift that God can give is himself. And the gift of the Spirit is say that God's Spirit works in the hearts and lives of his people. Is God generous? Yes, he is. How do we know it?

Because it's the Father who gives us the gift of new birth. He makes us new. Is our Father good and kind? Yes, he is. Because in love he adopts us into his family. Does God care for us? Yes, he does. Because by the Spirit he comes to live in our hearts. Is God good and kind? Yes, because he unites us to the Lord Jesus. So, the promise of prayer is that the one who we pray to is a Father who loves to answer, far and above our asking for our greatest good and for his great glory. A Father who loves his children and who gives what's best. Jesus teaches us to pray so that we can enjoy our prayer life. So, that it would be a vital part of our life of faith as we seek to live as followers of Jesus. It would be a priority. Jesus teaches us what we ought to pray for. And he tells us to ask boldly and to not give up.

And he gives us the promise of a loving Father who delights to hear and to answer. What a wonderful privilege we have. So, as we finish, let's pray together. This isn't the familiar Lord's Prayer that we use, but since we're in Luke's Gospel, let's use this as we close. Let me lead us as Jesus teaches us to pray. Father, Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.

[33 : 58] Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. Amen. Amen. Now, let's close our time with the hymn, What a Friend We Have in Jesus, which reminds us of