

Let's Pray: Who We Pray To

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[0 : 00] So that's Luke chapter 11, it's on page 1042. What are we reading? 1 to 13?

So Luke chapter 11, starting at verse 1. 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.

Then he said to them, Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.

Then the one inside answers, Don't bother me, the door is already locked, and my children are in bed with me. I can't get up and give you anything. I tell you, Though he will not get up and give him the bread, because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

[1 : 26] So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives.

He who seeks, finds. And to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Thanks very much, Alex.

Well, it is a text and teaching on prayer. So, why don't we pray and ask for God's help?

[2 : 37] Amen. Our Father God, thank you for your word to us.

And thank you that you, by your Spirit, speak to us through your word. And thank you that through your word, you tell us and remind us and invite us to talk to you, to come with our requests, to ask, to seek, to knock.

And so we come to you, Father, and ask that you will give us the wonderful gift of your Holy Spirit.

Pour out your Spirit upon us so that we may understand your word, not just intellectually, not just intellectually, but that we may experience it in our hearts and in our lives, that it may teach us afresh the relationship that you call us to have with you.

Thank you that even as we talk to you now, your Son is taking these prayers and speaking them also to the Father on our behalf.

[4 : 17] We ask for your help to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, I wonder when was the last time you had a time of prayer on your own? What was it like? Perhaps it started very well.

But after a couple of sentences, your mind began to wander and you were thinking about work or college next week or a friend that you had to meet and before you knew it, you'd actually forgotten what you were doing.

Maybe as you sat down to pray, you never really got going at all because all of a sudden you became very conscious of a whole lot of sin in your life and you just felt far too guilty and you just thought, there's no way I can talk to God.

Or maybe you've just given up on prayer altogether. You're disappointed that things that you had asked God for just never materialised and you are really just fed up with the idea of prayer.

[5 : 35] Or maybe you've actually tried to bring a bit of structure to it and you've planned things out and you said, right, at this particular time on each day, I'm going to pray. But after a couple of days, it all stopped as the busyness of life overtook.

That's my experience. And the fact is, we all struggle to pray, including the disciples. So look at chapter 11, verse 1.

One day, Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray.

Teach us to pray. Just as John taught his disciples. You see, we know we should pray. We know it's good to pray.

But we all find it so hard to pray. In fact, in our determination to be people who are better prayers, it seems the more we try, the more we fail.

[6 : 38] As soon as we begin to pray, our mind wanders or we just find there's something more important to be doing. So rather than prayer being a privilege to enjoy, it just becomes a duty to perform.

Well, as Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer, he's bringing us back to some very central themes that encourage us and remind us that we can all pray.

And over the next few weeks together, we're going to look at these three things. Who we pray to, how we pray, and what we pray for.

Who we're praying to, how we should pray, and what we should be praying for. And this morning, we're going to start with who we are praying to.

So, who are we praying to? Look at verse 2. Jesus responds to their question. He said to them, when you pray, say, Father.

[7 : 44] Now, it might seem so obvious to us, but we must understand, we must know who we are talking to. We are talking to God as Father.

And in a sense, as Jesus teaches us, he is inviting us to join him in relationship with his Father.

Father. The disciples had heard Jesus pray, they had watched Jesus pray on many occasions, and now they're wanting to be able to pray as Jesus did.

Go back to chapter 10, verse 21. Here they are watching, and here they are listening to Jesus pray. So, chapter 10, verse 21.

At that time, Jesus, full of joy, through the Holy Spirit, said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.

[8 : 47] Verse 22. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

You see, in that prayer, we see that there is a deep relational intimacy between the Father and the Son. Only the Father knows the Son, and only the Son knows the Father.

They are one together. They have existed in relationship before time began. They loved each other before all eternity, and now Jesus is saying to his disciples, you can call me Father too, or you can call him Father too.

Jesus is inviting us to join him in relationship with his Father. But how can we join in with this relationship? How does it actually happen?

Well, look back at verse 21 again of Luke chapter 10. At that time, Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, I praise you, Father, Lord and heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things.

[10 : 09] Hidden what things? Hidden this idea that you can have a relationship with the Father. He has hidden these things from the wise and learned, those who think they know it all, and think that they can just have it any way they want.

But he has revealed it to little children, people who come in dependence. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

You see, it's the Father's desire that we should be in relationship with him. It tells us there that he takes pleasure and delight in making himself known to us.

it pleases the Father that we should know him. So how can we know the Father? Well, look down at verse 22 again. The last part, it says, no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Jesus is the only one who makes the Father known to us. It is through Jesus that we get to know the Father personally, and intimately. And we know that when Jesus died on the cross, he was coming into this world to join with us.

[11 : 31] Joining with us to become like us, to take the blame for all the wrong things that we have done, so that we could join him in relationship with the Father.

He joined with us so that we could join with him. It is summarised for us very well in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 18.

No need to look it up, I can read it out to you. Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 18 says this, for through him, that is, through Jesus, we both have access to the Father by one spirit.

And in Ephesians 3 verse 12 it says, in him, in Jesus, and through faith in Jesus, we may approach God, our Father, with freedom and confidence.

Jesus is the only one who makes the Father known to us. So when we pray, we are talking to the same Father that Jesus talked to.

[12 : 45] The relationship that he enjoyed with the Father now becomes our relationship. The intimacy that Jesus enjoyed with the Father becomes ours to enjoy.

Again, this father-child relationship is very well illustrated for us in Luke chapter 15.

The well-known story of the two lost sons in Luke chapter 15. The first part of the story tells us about a son who had wished that his father was dead, wished that he had been buried and that he could now have his share and inheritance and basically he takes it and he leaves home.

But after a life of self-indulgence and ruining his life, he now begins to return home broken and ruined and we pick it up in Luke 15 verse 18.

I will set out the son, this is the son speaking, I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

[13 : 57] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men. Maybe he'll just take me back so I could just work in the fields or something. So he got up and he went to his father but while he was still a long way up his father saw him.

The idea there that the father's looking out for him and he was filled with compassion for him and he ran to his son and he threw his arms around him and kissed him and the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son and before he could give any other words of explanation, verse 22, but the father said to his servants, Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him.

Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. All signs and symbols of the fact that he is now part of the family. Bring the fattened calf and kill it.

Let's have a feast and celebrate for this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate.

[15 : 11] The point is so clear that when we repent and turn to God the father, he forgives us, he welcomes us, he accepts us and he treats us as his own son so that we can be in relationship with him.

This is what it means to talk to God as father. father. There's a very famous picture, have it on the screen there, we've seen it before, of President JFK and here he is sitting at his desk in the Oval Office, the Presidential Suite, perhaps the most guarded room possible and here he is, the President, the most protected person, but sitting underneath his desk is his little son, JFK Jr.

The office is the centre of all power and authority. Here is where everybody who's important gets to be invited. National and international decisions are made in this office and nobody is allowed in there.

It's off limits. Access is denied and if you tried to force your way in there, you would be arrested or perhaps you'd even be killed. But yet, because of this unique relationship between father and son, Junior has access to his father.

Now, through Jesus, we have been given access to the father. He alone is the one who reveals the father to us. The father who is Lord of heaven and earth.

[17 : 05] the creator, the sustainer, the ruler of all things. And just as Jesus talked with his father and had that intimate relationship with him, so we can talk to our father without fear, in freedom and in confidence.

but what kind of father are we talking to? Well, we are talking to a father who listens and answers.

A father who listens and answers. Go back to Luke 11. Let's pick it up in verse 5.

Jesus tells a story. Verse 5, he said to them, suppose one of you has a friend. And he goes to him at midnight and says, friend, lend me three loaves of bread because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me and I have nothing to set before him.

Now, as we read this, we've got to remember that people then lived in very basic accommodation. It wasn't all very kind of separate rooms as we have today.

[18 : 22] The kitchen was simply the living room and the living room became the bedroom. So we can imagine the scene here, we've got this family all snuggled up in the one room, all nice and warm and then this neighbour comes along and starts knocking on the door at midnight.

Well, maybe if I stay quiet he'll go away. But the knocking persists, verse 7. Then one inside, then the one inside answers, don't bother me, go away.

The door's already locked and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything. You see, he knows if he gets up to answer the door, the whole family are going to be woken up and then the baby's going to start crying and will need fed and then the kids will need the loo.

Why don't you try Brennan's next door? Verse 8. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness.

Now, commentators, when you read this passage here, will all say that that's not a very helpful translation, boldness. It should really be something like shamelessness. Yet, because of the man's shamelessness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

[19 : 50] Now, when it says here, because of the man's shamelessness, it can refer, and we need to follow this through very carefully, it can refer to either the man knocking on the door or it can refer to the man on the inside.

And I think here, it's primarily about the man who's on the inside, who's asleep with his family. So, the reason the neighbour gets bread is not because he keeps on knocking shamelessly whatever time of the night it is, and he won't give up knocking, but because the man on the inside does not want to be shamed by his neighbour.

His reputation, his integrity is at stake. You see, if he doesn't get up and answer the door, if he doesn't get up and help his neighbour, then the whole village is going to know how stingy and selfish he is, and he's going to bring shame on the whole community.

So, verse 8, yet because of the man's sense of shame, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

You see, the point of this little story here is not to make comparisons, but it's to draw a contrast. Jesus is not saying God is like some reluctant neighbour and you have to keep on nagging and knocking and keep on banging on the door until eventually he answers.

[21 : 24] No, it's saying the opposite, that God is always attentive, he is always listening to our every cry, and he will answer because his integrity is at stake.

To avoid being shamed, he will hear and he will answer. In other words, if a reluctant neighbour would listen and would answer, how much more will your Father in Heaven listen and answer?

Father in Heaven So we must never think that God is asleep and that he can't be disturbed. He's never asleep. We must never think that God is so tied up that he mustn't be inconvenienced.

He is never put out with our coming to him. We must never think that God is uninterested in our affairs or he wouldn't be bothered with us. He is deeply concerned.

And so the invitation is to come and talk to our Father any time, anywhere, about anything because he is always listening and he will always answer.

[22 : 37] That is the character of Father God, one who listens and answers. And second, the Father that we pray to is a Father who gives good gift.

Look down at verse 11. Here he tells another story, which is again quite humorous. Which of you fathers, he says, verse 11, if your son asks for a fish, we'll give him a snake instead.

Or if he asks for an egg, we'll give him a scorpion. Now what kind of father would treat his child like that? Could you imagine a father who goes and buys a poisonous rattlesnake for his son's birthday instead of giving him a nice little tropical fish?

Or could you imagine a father who serves up a live scorpion underneath some lettuce to his daughter who would ask for egg salad? No father would do that to their child.

Verse 13, if you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more, how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

[24 : 01] Again, the point of the story, like the other one, is to draw a contrast, not a comparison, a contrast. If our earthly fathers, even though they are evil, in other words, even though they mess up and get things wrong and they're not perfect people, even though earthly fathers would never give such a dangerous and a horrible gift to their children, how much more will your heavenly father, who is perfect, give good gifts?

Sometimes we may feel that God is out to harm us or to trick us, telling us one thing but then doing another. Maybe we see God as some kind of practical joker who promises us all kinds of good things but then they only turn out to be bad.

But nothing could be further from the truth. He is always generous, always good, always kind. Now of course that doesn't mean that we get everything that we ask for.

We'll look at this in detail next week. God doesn't give in to our spiritual tantrums just because we nag and shout and whine and whinge. He's not swayed by our selfish, sinful desires.

But he always gives us what is right and what is best for us. He is the perfect father who does not withhold what is good for us.

[25 : 38] And if it isn't good for us, then he's not going to give it to us. He will withhold something if it's not going to be good for you. Again, this is summarised for us so well in Romans 8.

Let me read those verses. Romans 8 verse 15. It says there, it's talking about the relationship that we now have with God the Father through Jesus.

He says, For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry Abba, which means Father.

Verse 32, He who did not spare his son, so the Father. who did not spare his son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

You see, this is the relationship that we have. He has given us the greatest gift possible, the Lord Jesus Christ. So if he's given us the greatest gift, how will he not also, along with him, give us everything else that we need?

[26 : 55] Our Father will not withhold what is right and best for us. And so the invitation is to come and talk to our Father, who gives good gifts to his children.

So, talk to the Father. Talk to him. One of the reasons I think we all find prayer so hard is because we see it as something that we have to do.

It's like a duty that we have to perform. A little box that we have to tick. Somehow we think we must do something to better ourselves, to kind of dress ourselves up before we come to God, or that we have to improve our technique, or maybe we need a little bit of soft music, or a few candles, what do we need to somehow that God would hear me and see me and accept what I'm saying.

But prayer is not a duty to perform. It is a relationship to enjoy. Jesus is inviting us to join him in relationship with his Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, who is always listening and answering, and he only gives what is good and right to us.

And because of our faith in Jesus, the relationship that Jesus had with his Father is now our relationship. The intimacy that he enjoyed is now ours to enjoy.

[28 : 33] So it's not about us trying to better ourselves. It's not about us trying to improve our technique in prayer. It's not anything to do about what we do. It's all about what we now have because of Jesus.

we are already in the relationship. So when the disciples ask Jesus, Lord, teach us to pray, he simply starts by saying, when you pray, say, Father.

Say, Father. Prayer starts when we understand that it is not a duty to perform, but a relationship with our Father in Heaven that we can enjoy.

Let's pray to our Father now. Amen. Father, we're sorry we confess that we complicate prayer.

We're sorry that we make excuses about prayer. And we're sorry that we treat prayer in the wrong way.

[30 : 07] Thank you for showing us through your word afresh of the relationship that we can have with you through your Son Jesus. Thank you that you are the ultimate and perfect Father.

Thank you that you are always listening and that you always answer our every cry and our every call.

thank you that you are a father who only gives good gifts to us. Teach us to pray.

Teach us to enjoy our relationship with you. and may this week be a week of deep intimacy of talking to God as father.

Please help us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. we're going to sing for us.

[31 : 30] Thank you for us.