

When privileges are grasped

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[0 : 00] The reading is taken from Luke chapter 11, verses 1 to 13, and can be found on page 1047 of the Church Bibles.

Luke chapter 11, 1 to 13. Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.

And he said to them, when you pray, say, 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 who is indebted to us, and lead us not into temptation.

And he said to them, which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.

And he will not answer from within, do not bother me, the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed.

[1 : 19] I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Marcus, thanks for reading. Let me pray for us. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you very much for this wonderful privilege we have.

[2 : 34] As our nation, it seems, dissolves into fear and anxiety of addressing you as our heavenly father. And we pray this morning, please would you teach us to pray.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I wonder if there's something you'd love to learn to do. Perhaps a language you'd love to learn.

Or perhaps a new sport or activity you'd love to learn. In my case, surfing. Kind of proper standing up surfing, I think that would be. Or perhaps learning how to design a garden or something like that.

Well, how about learning to pray? Luke chapter 11, verse 1. Now Jesus was praying in a certain place. And when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray.

It's rather striking, isn't it? That you and I need to be taught how to pray. It's also rather humbling. It suggests we don't naturally know how to pray.

[3 : 41] And yet also very wonderful. Because you and I have the great privilege this morning of listening to the Lord Jesus himself teaching us how to pray.

It's not a very wonderful thing to be able to do together this morning. Now if you were here a couple of weeks ago, we saw that this section of Luke's Gospel, which begins in chapter 10, verse 38, and goes through to chapter 13, 21.

It's all about discipleship. It's all about what it means to follow Jesus. It starts with what we might call key stage one of discipleship, listening to Jesus.

Do catch up online if you missed that talk a couple of weeks ago. As we saw the one thing necessary every day, regardless of what's in our diary, regardless of the other priorities in our lives, to listen to God speaking to us.

That then leads, of course, to today's verses on prayer. Prayer in the Bible, as you'll know, is always about speaking to God.

[4 : 46] Put the two together, and we see that listening to God, listening to Jesus, speaking to God, just like any other relationship, those two things together are foundational in terms of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

And I think what's really interesting is how Jesus answers the question. Notice how he starts, verse 2, when you pray, say, Father.

It's how he finishes, verse 13, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit?

Because the fact is, of course, there's nothing particularly distinctive about prayer.

Hindus pray, Muslims pray, in a crisis, I guess almost anyone prays. So what makes Christian prayer distinctive?

It is the fact that we address God as Father. Now, that is not simply sentimentality. You know, I like to think of God as Father.

[5 : 52] No, rather, this is Jesus himself teaching his disciples to address God as Father, just as he addresses God as Father. In a nutshell, of course, that is the wonder of the Gospel, the wonder of the Christian message.

Perhaps you'll hear this morning as an interested observer, or perhaps you'll hear, having been along to one of the rational faith talks a couple of weeks ago, at the heart of being a Christian is a living relationship with God.

Father, being in right standing with him. It is, of course, what sets Christianity apart from every other world religion.

So then, how should we pray? Well, you'll see on the outline on the back of the service sheet.

Firstly, we are to learn to pray God's agenda.

Verses 1 to 4. Now, if you're anything like me, it's all too easy to pray with a bit of a shopping list.

You know, the things on my agenda, the things which I think should happen, or I'd like to happen in any particular situation.

[7 : 07] Perhaps you've been in a meeting at work, and there's that person who's always trying to push their agenda. And frankly, they're a complete pain in the neck because they completely miss the bigger picture. All they're concerned about is, well, what they are concerned about.

And Jesus wants us to learn to pray with God's big picture agenda. And so how does he start?

Verse 2. Hallowed be your name.

Hallowed simply means to revere or honor. We use the word, don't we, from time to time. A rugby enthusiast may talk about the hallowed turf of Twickenham. A Crystal Palace fan may say the same thing about Selhurst Park.

An opera buff may say the same thing about the Royal Opera House. It means special or holy. It means set apart.

Twickenham is not any old rugby ground. The Royal Opera House is not any old opera venue. It is special. It is set apart. In that reading from Isaiah 6, which we had earlier, we see something of what it means for God to be completely and utterly different and holy and set apart, unlike any other.

[8 : 23] Do you remember how Isaiah, he simply sees the hem of God's robe, a mere glimpse, if you like? And yet he cries out, Woe is me, for I am lost.

For I am a man of unclean lips. Am I dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips? For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

So then this is a prayer that God's name would be honoured and set apart. And because in the Bible God's name always represents his character, it is more than simply taking the Lord's name in vain.

It is honouring God as he really is. It is treating him as God. Do you long for God's name to be hallowed and honoured in your family, at school, in your workplace, in our nation, in our world?

Then this is the thing to pray. Next, your kingdom come. Now we've seen, haven't we, in our growth groups over the last couple of weeks or so that God's kingdom, his rule if you like, has both a present dimension and also a future dimension.

[9 : 44] His kingdom comes now as people turn to him in repentance and faith and put their trust in Jesus. And then as they live under the rule of Jesus. And his kingdom will ultimately come on that future day at the end of history when sin and the consequences of sin will be completely banished forever.

Do you believe that God wants his kingdom to advance amongst friends, colleagues, at school, at neighbours?

Well, if we do, this is the thing to pray. Next, give us each day our daily bread. One of the ways we honour God is by trusting him for our daily needs.

We honour God by recognising his provision for us. It's why the writer of Proverbs, Proverbs chapter 30 verse 8, writes, Give me neither poverty nor riches.

Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

[10:53] Next, forgive us our sins. Because of course the wonder of the gospel is that just as Isaiah's guilt is taken away by God, his guilt before God is taken away, so is ours if we put our trust in Jesus and belong to him.

Jesus died on the cross once for all time, for sin's past, for sin's present, for sin's future. When we come to him in repentance and faith wonderfully, those sins are forgiven.

And yet, of course, we continue to sin. And therefore it's entirely right that when we pray, we ask for God's forgiveness. And yet, what do you notice that actually this is the one request in this prayer that is qualified?

Do you see that in verse 4? Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. I guess it raises the question, doesn't it?

Is God's forgiveness of me dependent on my forgiveness of others? Now, I think we have to say that it is, in a sense.

[12:09] In other words, if I believe that Jesus died for my sins, then it will inevitably change the way in which I have regard for and treat others.

Whereas, of course, if I have a bitter and unforgiving spirit, then I take it that is a sign that actually I haven't really repented of my own sin before God.

Finally, lead us not into temptation. It acknowledges Satan and his desire to wreck our discipleship. And it also, of course, recognizes our own spiritual weakness. I put James 1, verses 13 to 15, on the outline, which tells us that God doesn't tempt anyone.

So I guess this is really a prayer for spiritual protection. Learn to pray for God's agenda. As a church, as a growth group, those of us who are in growth groups, or as a prayer triplet, those of us in prayer triplets, and certainly as individuals.

[13:20] Notice, really, that as we pray for ourselves, our physical needs and well-being are just one of the three areas that the Lord Jesus encourages us to pray about.

I wonder, perhaps, if some of us need to recalibrate, therefore, perhaps the way in which we pray. Perhaps to spend less time praying about purely physical needs, whether it's health or jobs or the education of our children or whatever it is.

Perhaps to spend more time confessing our sins deeply, thoughtfully, praying for our spiritual protection, aware of our weakness, and how easily we fall into sin.

And if you're anything like me, it's also a challenge to pray more thoughtfully. Bruce was helpful on this earlier, I think, but let's take, you know, the coronavirus outbreak.

How should we pray about that in the light of the Lord's prayer? Well, I guess our instinct is simply to pray, Lord, take it away.

[14:30] But what might it look like to pray with God's agenda in mind? Well, I guess by all means, pray, take it away. But I guess pray that above all, that God's kingdom would advance through it.

That people would come to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus through it. as, in a sense, death stares at us as a nation in a way that it so rarely does.

Pray that those of us who are following Jesus, that we wouldn't be led into temptation, the temptation perhaps to doubt God's goodness, the temptation to be anxious or fearful for the future. These verses in Luke, they're so helpful, aren't they, in God's providence, actually, to be looking at them now, of all times, because they really help us, I think, to keep our heads clear in a crisis to see what's important, especially when we combine it with the last part of Luke chapter 10, Mary and Martha, with the reminder of the one thing necessary each day.

Put those two things together, what's the one thing necessary each day, so listen to Jesus' words, listen to the Bible, then learning to pray with God's agenda, and surely those things will help us to keep clear heads in a crisis.

[15:56] So learn to pray for God's agenda. Secondly, learn to pray with boldness and confidence, and that's these two little parables, I guess less well-known than the Lord's Prayer, two little parables in verses 13, in verses 5 to 13.

Now, if I was to ask you whether you find prayer hard or easy, I wonder what you'd say. Now, I don't know about you, but I think simply asking the question makes me wish I prayed more.

So what is the secret? Where does the answer lie? All we see is that it lies in grasping God's character, understanding what it means to pray to the one who is our Heavenly Father.

Because Jesus says, firstly, we can pray to him with boldness. You see, why do we find prayer difficult, or why might we find prayer difficult? Well, perhaps it's because we think God is rather detached.

that, you know, he's so kind of busy running the universe, how would he ever be interested in my little prayers? He's got so much else on his plate, then surely I shouldn't clog up his inbox.

[17:09] Or perhaps he's the kind of God we need to nag and badger. Is that why praying is so hard? Listen to that kind of thinking that Jesus tells. The parable, verse 5.

Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say, Friend, lend me three loaves. For a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him. And he will answer from within, Do not bother me.

The door is now shut, and my children are in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up, because he is a friend, yet because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

Now I think it's easy for us to miss the point of this, simply because we are so far removed from the first century. But imagine a world, there are no 24-7 supermarkets open the whole time, there's no, you don't have a fridge, you don't have a freezer, and where the social obligation was to provide a meal if someone came to visit, rather than simply a cup of tea and a kind of biscuit from the biscuit tin somewhere in the cupboards.

And then things begin to look rather different. And the point is, of course, that even though it's midnight, and even though the guy in the house, when he's being knocked up by the neighbor, even though him going to answer the door, it's going to disturb his children and all the rest of it, yet actually who is going to say at that point, get lost, go away, we're asleep?

[18:39] No one. The key word is that word, it's an unfamiliar word really, isn't it, verse 8, that word impudence. Because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

Now some Bibles translate that persistence, which I think is very unfortunate, partly because the word doesn't mean unfortunate, doesn't mean persistence, I mean, the word doesn't mean persistence, and also, of course, the guy doesn't knock persistently.

There's no hint of persistence in the story. It's also unfortunate because it gives the impression, of course, that God is a reluctant giver. You know, do I have to keep on and keep on and keep on and kind of twist his arm?

No, that's completely not the point of the story. Now the word impudence means shamelessness. It means boldness.

It means an unabashed forthrightness, which doesn't hesitate to ask for the good gifts that God has promised his people.

[19:44] I guess it's the way, isn't it, that any child speaks to their father. Now he may be held in awe at work, such that colleagues dare hardly ask him anything, and if they do ask him anything, it is in great trepidation and a sense of awe.

And yet, of course, as soon as he walks home in the front, as soon as he walks through the front door at the end of the week on a Friday evening, and, you know, the children are there, Daddy, Daddy, can we go and watch a film? Daddy, Daddy, can we go and have an ice cream?

Daddy, can we play a game? Such boldness, such unabashed forthrightness. Well, of course, it's the nature of the relationship between a father and a child.

And if we belong to Jesus, that is how we are to approach our Heavenly Father. But notice that as well as praying with boldness, we are also to pray with confidence.

You see, perhaps some of us find prayer hard because we fear that God might be a bit of a prankster, a bit of a joker who delights to deal a rotten hand in life, or just because we fear he might be fickle.

[20 : 57] You know, we're never quite sure what God has got up his sleeve next. And that's the point of verses 11 to 13. Let me read them for us.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? Again, the point, of course, is, I mean, it's ridiculous, isn't it? The point is, this is just unthinkable.

Imagine it's a child's birthday. You take them to a pet shop.

There's a wonderful fish there. And they say, you know, I'd love to have that fish. Well, a few days later, the big day arrives. They go into the kitchen, expecting all their presents to be, you know, beautifully arrayed there on the kitchen table.

And instead of the fish in a fish tank, there's a kind of slithery snake instead. Or imagine your child comes home from school, starving, and she asks for an egg.

[22 : 03] What parent thinks I know? Let's give her something with a bit more of a kick. A scorpion. That's the answer. I mean, it's just ridiculous. The point is there in verse 13.

Human parents are sinful. We are evil. Our hearts are full of greed and envy and lust. It's what all of us are like, even the kindest of human parents. And yet, despite that, most parents are pretty good at knowing how to give good gifts to their children.

How much more our heavenly father? Jesus says, don't imagine that your heavenly father will be less generous to you and less kind than human parents.

Perhaps some of us are wondering what the reference is to the Holy Spirit at the end of verse 13. I think most likely the Lord Jesus is simply looking forward to the day when he will no longer be physically present with his disciples as he is here in Luke 11.

And yet, the intimate relationship which he has with them will continue despite his absence. How? Because he will send his Holy Spirit. It seems that Luke is deliberately recording this to make the point to his readers that us, that although Jesus is no longer physically present, nonetheless, we have the same relationship with God as father that these original disciples had.

[23 : 37] And therefore, we are to pray with both boldness and confidence. Now, the application comes in the middle of the two parables, verses 9 and 10.

And I tell you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and the one who knocks, it will be opened.

Now, these verses are clearly not a blank check. what loving father gives his 17-year-old son a Ferrari as soon as he has passed his driving tests. It comes, doesn't it, in the context of verses 1 to 4.

The sort of prayer that God longs to hear, the sort of prayer that God longs to answer, is based on his agenda and not on our agenda.

And yet, I guess, there will be some of us for whom actually these are rather painful verses.

Perhaps we feel that God hasn't answered our prayers. Perhaps we feel that actually as we've prayed, life has become more difficult and not easier.

[24 : 50] Perhaps we feel that the answers to those prayers have been more like a scorpion than a fish. And yet, of course, the fact is you and I cannot always see what the best gift is in a particular situation.

there may be a better gift, which actually is a better answer to the prayer of verse 2, your kingdom come, hallowed be your name.

A gift that may demonstrate the rule of God more clearly in our lives than the thing which we had in mind. It's what we saw in Romans 8 a few weeks ago, the assurance, the wonderful assurance, that God works in all things for our spiritual good and benefit to conform us to the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus.

I don't know about you, I think for me it's all too easy simply to pray for ease and comfort. Lord, please would you make my life easier? Please would you make my life more comfortable?

Please would you take this difficult thing away? And yet those things of course, that is not my ultimate good. God's ultimate purpose for me is that his kingdom might be displayed more and more in my life.

[26 : 17] Maybe we've asked God for something, a particular job or a particular relationship or better health or whatever it is and we haven't received it or perhaps we've had those things and

we've lost them.

And Jesus is saying we can be confident that God knows far more than even a loving, kind, human parent how to give good gifts to his people.

We are to learn to pray with God's agenda. We are to learn to pray with boldness and confidence.

Maybe we've been convicted this morning that we don't pray as we should.

in which case what is the answer? Well I think I've noticed a growing number of Christian books seem to suggest that the answer is simply to learn to enjoy praying.

In response others interestingly have suggested that we should simply recognize that prayer is hard work and just get on with it. well Jesus' answer is rather different isn't it from both of those.

[27 : 29] It is simply to grasp what it means for God to be our heavenly father. I take it if I've understood that I will pray.

If I know God is my heavenly father why wouldn't I set time aside each day to pray to him? why wouldn't I want to attend the monthly church prayer gathering?

Why wouldn't I want to pray with my children? Can we see what Jesus is saying? Whether I pray or don't pray the things I pray for or don't pray for really reveal more in terms of what I think about God and his character than anything else.

let's spend some time in quiet and then I shall lead us in prayer. 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 who is indebted to us and lead us not into temptation Amen