

Learning to Pray

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[0 : 00] Our gracious Father, speak to us through your word and change us to be more like Christ. Amen. Well, I wonder if you have one of those friends who just has no shame.

Anyone? The kind of person who's way too willing to cross social boundaries to get what they need. You're all thinking of someone, aren't you? Do you know the kind of person?

When I was a young youth leader, after the youth had gone home, the leaders would often go to Maccas.

And there was this one guy, Alex, who loved to show how good he was at taking his food back to get a replacement, even when there was hardly anything wrong with it. Alex knew that Maccas would almost never put up a fight if someone made a complaint.

Now, it's all well and good to take your food back when it's cold or something wrong with the order, but Alex was shameless. If there was even the slightest thing that he could find wrong with his order, he'd grin and then eat half of it and then take it back and get a new one.

[1 : 21] Now, I'm not saying that Alex's attitude was right or that he deserved it, but whenever he got up and took food back, even if he had to argue, he'd always come back with a new serve.

Sometimes he'd even try and get a second reorder in the same meal. Now, you might think this is quite brave, but the rest of the group who, like me, were born with a normal dose of shame would literally just be covering our faces, wondering who's drawing all the attention.

We'd be like, please not again, Alex. Just eat your food. Don't worry about it. But he'd just chuckle to himself and go back to the counter looking for another serve of fries.

Sometimes the staff made it hard for him. Sometimes he'd even have to argue or make up problems, which was more embarrassing for us. But without a doubt, he'd come back every time. His shameless persistence paid off. It always did. It was cringeworthy, isn't it? It's cringeworthy when we see someone persisting until people are uncomfortable.

[2 : 31] It just seems wrong to pester until you get what you want. But in today's passage, Jesus teaches that this kind of behavior or attitude is not only appropriate, but something that disciples of Christ should be like at all times.

So far in this series, we've been following Jesus as he has begun his journey to Jerusalem and death. Recently, he's been challenging those around him with the right attitude of those who follow him.

You remember loving your neighbor and listening to his word. And this theme continues tonight in regard to prayer, specifically the way in which a disciple should pray.

And how is that? Well, point one with boldness. Let's look again from verse one. 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.

[3 : 40] 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. In each short point of this prayer, Jesus teaches that they should make bold commands of God.

Now, I'm only going to say a few things about each of these points. So let's have a quick look.

Firstly, Father. Jesus teaches that his disciples should call God Father.

In chapter 10, you might remember when Jesus prays, this is how he addresses God in prayer.

Now, here, Jesus instructs his followers to do the same.

And it's quite striking because it implies that the follower of God, of Jesus, can approach God in the same way that his son can, with confidence and with closeness.

Secondly, Jesus says they should pray, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Both of these are commands of praise. The disciple who prays this has a desire to see the glory of God known on earth.

[4 : 55] Thirdly, Jesus prays. Jesus says pray for daily bread. Now, some may hear this and be reminded of Israel in the wilderness, where every day God provided their daily needs.

However, Jesus doesn't only mean food. The aim of this prayer sees the disciple depending on God for daily needs, but more than this, demonstrating it, demonstrating this dependence in prayer every day.

Fourthly, Jesus teaches that they should ask for forgiveness. But the odd thing that you may have noticed as you heard this point was that Jesus seems like he's implying a conditional nature of God's forgiveness.

Did you notice that? It says, forgive us for or because we also forgive those who sin against us. You might have expected it to say, forgive us and help us to forgive others, but it doesn't.

Now, while I don't think Jesus is teaching that forgiveness is based on merit, I do think Jesus is saying that we can't expect to come to God seeking forgiveness if we have no intention to forgive others.

[6 : 13] And fifth and finally, Jesus teaches that they should pray that God would not lead them into temptation or trials. Now, while testing and trial often mean a way of growing faith, like in 1 Peter 1 or James 1, not all temptation produces faith.

Already in Luke, back in chapter 8, we've seen Jesus talk about the testing which results in people giving up their faith. Now, I've moved through these points quite quickly, and there's more to say on them all.

And if you want to ask me more about them or discuss them, I'd be happy to do that after. But for now, how do we bring all this together to understand what Jesus is teaching his disciple how to pray?

In short, Jesus is saying that they should pray like him. Jesus knows what God is like, our provider, our saviour, our protector. And so he teaches his disciples to pray that God will act in line with his character.

If they know what God is like, they can approach God like Jesus does, and they will pray with boldness. It's a bit like standing at a shop counter and pointing to something on the back shelf and saying to the person serving, I'll have that one.

[7 : 40] No one stands around at the shop wondering whether or not the person's going to serve you. That's what they're there for. You just point and speak. That one. Likewise, the disciple of Christ must pray like Christ with boldness, confident of their relationship with God, understanding what God is like.

Well, here the passage changes a bit. The start is very obviously about prayer, isn't it? But after this, Jesus tells two slightly odd analogies about relationships.

But despite their oddness, Jesus is still teaching his disciples how to pray. Let's look at it again in verse five. Jesus said to them, suppose you have a friend and you go to him at midnight and say, friend, lend me three loaves of bread.

A friend of mine on a journey has come to me and I have no food to offer him. The suppose the one inside answers, don't bother me. The door's already locked. My children are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

[9 : 02] I find this a pretty bizarre analogy, mostly because if Jesus is teaching about prayer, I feel like it could so easily be misunderstood.

Is Jesus saying God doesn't always want to answer our prayers? No. Is Jesus saying that sometimes we can catch God at a bad time?

No. Is Jesus saying that God will eventually give us everything that we ask? No, I don't think so. Is Jesus saying that we should keep coming back to God in prayer, shamelessly asking him over and over?

Yes. I think that's what he is saying. The image in this parable is of a person who's turning to a friend for help. And this is pretty relatable, isn't it?

I'm sure lots of you have asked a friend for help, a coffee, a post-church dinner, shout, pretty normal, right? But it seems to me like there's something here a bit abnormal.

[10:12] I wonder if you can picture it. Just say you've got an old friend over, haven't seen them for a long time, don't see them very often, you're talking and snacking late into the night, it's about two o'clock, and you've run out of snacks.

Oh no. The shops are closed. Oh no. And so you think, oh, I'll just ask the neighbours. Maybe they've got some chips. Obviously some of you are already thinking no one would ever do that. But, anyway, you go next door. It's two o'clock. Eventually a front light comes on.

You see a bleary-eyed neighbour, sticking her head out, struggling to understand who's woken her up and why. She sees you. She knows you. She's like, what?

And you say, would you just be able to go to the pantry and let me borrow some snacks, maybe a box of shapes, or actually kettle chips, they'd be great actually.

[11:22] Can you imagine the look of confusion? Did you seriously just wake me up at two o'clock in the morning for this? You could have woken my kids. What's wrong with you?

And she closes the door. Yes, she's your friend, as the passage says, but it's the middle of the night. Who's surprised that she doesn't help? But that doesn't bother you.

Your friend has come. You haven't caught up in ages and you need snacks. So you knock again. You hear a baby stir.

You hear loud steps. The door is whipped open and she throws a box of shapes at your face. Victory! It's a weird picture, isn't it?

And it's important again to recognize that Jesus isn't teaching those things I mentioned a moment ago about God being pestered to anger and then answering or God not liking to be bothered.

[12:34] Jesus is teaching an attitude that a disciple of Christ should have regarding prayer. And that is to continue in prayer with shameless persistence, to pray and then to pray again and then to ask again and then to beg and then to plead and then to pray some more.

I wonder if any of you remember from The Simpsons, I've got a photo, when Bart and Lisa would relentlessly pester Homer about doing something or buying something or going somewhere that he was reluctant to go.

I think this one was Mount Splashmore. They knew that Homer had a breaking point and they'd ask over and over and over and over and over and over and over until Homer would snap and give them what they want.

It's funny, isn't it? When you see cartoon characters doing this, but I can't imagine asking someone the same thing over and over expecting a different result.

Well, this image that Jesus teaches should reflect the attitude of a disciple in prayer.

[13:45] Coming to God again and again without shame persisting. So I think it's appropriate at this point for us to consider our own attitude in prayer.

are you more likely to shamelessly persist or instead tread carefully, perhaps leave it to tomorrow or maybe just not at all.

Sometimes I wonder if I'm a little bit too easily defeated in prayer thinking, will God really give me that or is it really worth asking for?

Sometimes when leading young people, particularly kids, I'm struck by their boldness in prayer. The kinds of things they pray I've found laughable. I hear them and chuckle to myself, cute, God, make me win my tennis game, make my weekend fun, let my parents give me more time for video games. Jesus has already taught about the content of a disciple's prayer and I'm not holding these prayers up to that. However, I do wonder if I and maybe others are unwilling to either bring some things to God or just give up too easily.

[15:05] Do you find yourself thinking, God won't care about that? That isn't really serious enough to get all the way up. Or maybe he's just had enough of hearing about that.

If ever you find yourself feeling this, just read Genesis 18 again that Michelle read for us. No fear of God getting cranky because we prayed too much. Whenever I read that passage, I'm astounded by God's graciousness with Abraham.

It makes me think of a child pulling on the sleeve of an adult. But what about 30? Yeah, but what about 25? Well, what about 20? What about who?

As I think about this, I feel rebuked. How easily have I given up? how often do I think God might not get it or just not care? Jesus teaches his disciples that their prayer should persist, go on without

shame.

This is the prayer of a disciple who knows what their master knows, that God hears, that he cares, and that he loves. Jesus wraps up this lesson with another slightly odd analogy.

[16:26] Look from verse 9. So I say to you, ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened.

For everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, the one 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?

Here Jesus uses a father-son relationship to explain God's attitude in responding to prayer. Now I wouldn't be surprised if some of you fathers or some of your fathers have enjoyed a practical joke in the past.

But there's a difference isn't there between letting your child put salt instead of sugar in their coffee compared to letting them pour bleach instead of milk. You just wouldn't do that would you?

[17:33] I hope. The point of Jesus image is to help the disciple who tries and fails and struggles to pray to know that God is more able and willing to give good gifts to his children than any parent or friend.

When I hear this, I think the challenge for me and it might be for you isn't wondering if God has the power to give me what I pray for, but more so feeling like God's help may be a little less tangible than help from a friend or a parent.

God I think it's easy to say a Christian should care about prayer but much harder to truly believe that God's help is more helpful and even more likely to come than help from a friend.

It's a bit like when I asked Josh to get me a glass of water. Who have you thought that when I asked this that Josh would bring me back something undrinkable or maybe nothing at all.

Who thought that? No one, right? How much more is God our heavenly father able and willing to give us what we ask?

[18:58] And not only this but even more than what we ask. Jesus doesn't simply say God is able to give us good things he says how much more will your father in heaven give the holy spirit to those who ask him I asked Josh for a glass of water and I get a glass of water thanks that's great much appreciated you ask God for help and he gives the holy spirit I wonder what Jesus disciple was expecting when he asked Jesus how to pray maybe a ritual or a particular pose hands together eyes closed before bed kneeling down nothing like that Jesus teaches his disciples to pray like he would to approach our father with boldness with shameless persistence understanding just how able and willing God is to give us what we ask and need now whether you've been a disciple of

Christ for many years or few whether you have a great understanding of prayer or not how will this lesson of prayer from Jesus impact your understanding and practice as I was mulling over this during the week I wondered what should our response be is it pray more probably is it pray all the time and without shame very likely is it learn to pester God with our prayers without a doubt it is but before we can expect to do any of this I think something else needs to change and that is that we need to believe what Jesus has taught his disciples with real and deep conviction we need to believe that God really is the father of those who believe in Jesus our father we need to believe that God does want to hear our every prayer we need to believe that

God really is far more willing and able to give us what we ask than any person so how or why might we believe this well by seeing that God really does give us and has given us more than we could ask for or imagine in Romans 32 up on the screen Paul writes what we should expect from God and why he says he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things and in Galatians chapter 4 he writes again about what God has done for those who believe because you are his sons God sent the spirit the spirit who calls out Abba father so you are no longer a slave but God's child since you are his child God has also made you an heir once we truly believe that

God has already given us what is most precious to him and most valuable to us then we will believe how will he not also along with him give us all things how are we able to pray like Jesus taught by seeing what God has done by seeing how God loves those who come to him in faith by seeing that God gives even his Holy Spirit to those who ask him when we believe that God is and will do what Jesus says we will pray we will plead we will persist with boldness and with great expectation

because how could God ever hear my prayer and not give me what I really need he's already given his son he's already given his spirit and made me an heir with

Christ so the question we could finish with is do our prayer habits reflect our belief in God's love and willingness to give us what we need do you believe that you can pray boldly to your father persisting even shamelessly with great expectations of his goodness and love so let's ask ourselves how recently did I pray for the conversion of a non Christian family member or friend how much do I pray that God would heal someone with an incurable disease or when was the last time you came back to God in a single day regarding the same thing it's not my intention that these questions feel like a guilt trip but rather that we be challenged to consider what we believe God thinks of our prayer and wants from us do do

[24 : 17] I believe God wants to convert my oppositional friend who thinks that my God is a figment of my imagination do I believe that God wants my friends and family healed do I believe God desires to have me come back again and again I've got a genetic health condition which I've had all my life it's pretty manageable except for once in a blue moon whenever I think of who I am I always think of this disease it's like part of my identity always has been always will be scientifically it's incurable and in all honesty I 100% don't think it will ever go away I felt this for a long time but there was a moment in my life when I was challenged by the love and power of God and finally said to myself God loves me and he can heal me so I should pray for it but what

I find so sad about this particular topic isn't the fact that it might not happen but that deep down I still don't really believe that it will that God will take it away and so I don't pray for it there was another time at Macca's after youth group a different group of youth leaders I ordered chili nuggets or at least I thought I did I'd never seen them before so I didn't know that they were wrong we ate most of them out of the box but then the others in our group came with the real chili nuggets and I realized that I didn't get what I ordered and so I hesitated there was only one nugget left what would they think I thought of Alex from years ago wishing he was there to help me in my hour of need I stood up to go get my chili nuggets but what if it was my mistake what if they didn't believe me I sat back down chickened out they probably unintentional they probably would have given me another serve without even thinking but I couldn't do it it's all well and good to know what God can do I believe he can raise the dead I believe he can forgive the worst of sinners but often I struggle to believe that going back again and again and again will really be worth it if you're anything like me you need to hear Jesus lesson God is our father never stop coming to your father in prayer with bold shameless persistence and great expectations father make my friend believe father make my parents believe father make my family reconcile make my children love you deeply make me completely better give me everything that

I need help me to trust you help me to be happy make my work enjoyable give me good friends give me a heart that loves you keep me from temptation make me a faithful disciple give me he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things while your Bibles are still open and your minds are still engaged how about I pray father give us unwavering faith that we may boldly come to you in prayer without ceasing amen you you