

Prayer - The Mobile Connection

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 7th of October 2001. The preacher is Carol Elpherson.

Her sermon is entitled Prayer, the Mobile Connection Always in Range and is based on Luke chapter 11 verses 1 to 13.

Let us pray. Loving God, speak to us this morning so that we may come to know your word and to know you for more details.

Indeed this morning, Amen. Something that really struck me three weeks ago after the terrorist attack was that many, many people turned to God in prayer throughout the nation of America and throughout the world people responded by seeking God in prayer.

On the night of that fateful Tuesday members of America's National Congress were shown on TV gathered outside the steps of the building and they stood for a moment and prayed in a moment of silence.

[1 : 19] George Bush declared a National Day of Prayer several days later on a Friday. and thousands of people went to the church services. Here in Australia the following Sunday services were more noticeably fuller in their churches.

Some people sought out and came to the additional services yet the prayer services at night such as the one that we had here at Holy Trinity and other memorial services. At a time when the world had suddenly changed when previously solid and secure institutions had passed down when travel and many communication networks came to a halt people came together to seek God to pray to Him to comfort for help to seek Him as their refuge in a rock people knew that the line to God had not been pampered or cut off many phone lines may have been disrupted but God continued to be in reign God is and always will be as the farmer said a very real presence in times of chaos and confusion.

Prayer to our Maker and our God is a right and proper response in times of trouble. Prayer to our Lord But what about the ordinary times?

The times when the threat of war will start to be seen and when life starts to get back to its normal pace. People often say don't know how to pray or they feel their words are inadequate.

And perhaps that's how the disciple felt this morning in the passage in Luke. You may like to return to it on page 845. The disciple asked Jesus to teach him to pray.

[3 : 20] Of course, being a Jew he would have known the set Jewish prayers from morning and evening so private and public synagogue prayers. But having observed Jesus in prayer the disciple was wanting something more something deeper.

and Jesus answered by praying the Lord's Prayer. I think that's something for us to know when we're teaching others particularly children or our grandchildren that to teach them about prayer the best way is to pray with them.

The Lord's Prayer has been a prayer that's been used in corporate worship down through the ages. You may notice that Luke's version is shorter and more direct than the one that we're more used to in Matthew's version.

You'll notice that Jesus began this model prayer by speaking to God as his Father in verse 2. He prayed in a relationship as a son to a father.

The term used is Abba a familiar Aramaic expression for a child to use to his father. It's both intimate and yet respectful. Those who know Jesus as sons can know God as father and come to him with a childlike dependence and trust.

[4 : 42] Far from being the unapproachable and distant God God is close and concerned for his children. whilst addressing him as father we're reminded of our relationships with each other.

This is a community prayer and it impacts on the way we relate to others both in personal and in business lives. A bizarre example of this was seen in the 19th century when some cotton American cotton plantation owners decided not to allow their slaves to be baptized because they knew if they did then they'd have to relate to them differently the way they were already treating them.

After addressing God as father Jesus begins the first of five petitions in this prayer. He prays Hallowed be your name. Whilst our approach to God is close and personal we're taught to pray that God's name be hallowed or holy.

knowing my name tells you very little about me may tell you my sex and probably gives an indication of age I think most carols are around baby boomer age group and because I was born in February perhaps my parents were thinking about naming their coming child in around Christmas time I'm not sure of that one but it doesn't tell you very much.

In the ancient days though in Hebrew times to know a person's name meant to know something of their character and their identity these were closely related.

[6 : 23] Moses wanted to know God's name when he appeared to him in the burning bush because to know God's name was to know something of his power. To pray Hallowed be your name is acknowledging the holiness of God and at the same time dedicating ourselves to him coming before God and humbly aligning ourselves to him in prayer.

Because for God's name to be made holy is a prayer that God will act holy in his creation and through his people to bring honour and glory to him.

I'm reminded of the image in Isaiah of God sitting enthroned in his majesty. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and lofty with seraphs in attendance crying out Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory.

And Isaiah cried out Woe to me for I am lost. He was struck by his own uncleanness. And as Isaiah was cleansed with the life whole he committed himself to doing God's will.

When we recognise and are convicted of God's holiness we want to align ourselves to God and to do his will. Whilst God is addressed as Father he is not our mate or our peer and coming before our Lord and Maker ought to be in reverence.

[7 : 56] The next petition your kingdom come longs for others to come to know God's reign in their lives as well as our own. And that God's kingly rule will spread throughout the world.

It also looks forward to the consummation of the coming kingdom that Jesus already had inaugurated in his ministry. And following these petitions are three more for our own needs in verses 3-4 for bread forgiveness and for deliverance.

A few weeks ago I was having lunch at my next door neighbour's. She has a three year old son and as is usual with children of that age James had many requests and demands throughout that lunch.

It was Mummy can I have this or Mummy can you pass that or Mummy can I have this. But James is still too little to get what he needs or wants. And being free James had lots of needs and wants at that time.

He's still very dependent on his parents. Asking for our daily needs is expressing our dependence and reliance upon God. It's showing our trust to him to provide for our daily needs.

[9 : 12] It's that same sense of trust and dependence that Jesus sent the disciples out on mission a few chapters earlier in Luke instructing them to take nothing for the journey. Their reliance was beyond God and his provision for them.

As God provided manna daily for his people in the wilderness we can trust God to provide for our daily needs. God meets not only our physical needs each day but also our spiritual ones as we seek his forgiveness.

The petition forgive us our sins is the only one that has a condition attached to it we need to be willing to forgive others their sins as we have our sins forgiven.

Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew illustrates this point. The servant was forgiven a great debt and yet he went out and forgave another a very wouldn't forgive another a very small debt.

Giving and receiving forgiveness forgiveness is part of living in a Christian community because we all fall short of God's perfect standards and we do things. The final petition do not bring us to the time of trial poses the question that sometimes asks does God lead us into temptation or trial?

[10 : 37] and there's an ambiguity in the wording here. Testing can be seen in either a positive or a negative sense. On the one hand a negative response to testing can lead to a broken relationship relationship.

But on the other hand a positive response can lead to growth and maturity. Scripture reflects this ambiguity. In James 1 it says that James says God tempts no one and yet throughout time and in the Bible we see that believers are tested.

In the Old Testament Abraham was tested when he was told to take his son Isaac up onto a mountain and offer him as a sacrifice. Job was tested as he had all his possessions his family and his health taken from him.

The Israelites in the wilderness and Jesus in Gethsemane are all examples of testing that we see in Scripture. The writer of Hebrews says although he was a son Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered and having been made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation.

So the petition to keep us from the time of trial is a recognition of human weakness. We know we can't get through the trials and testings on our own strength but we aren't left helpless.

[12 : 07] We can pray to God as the one who controls all of life and ask for deliverance from any trials which threaten our needs. and this final petition reminds us yet again of that relationship with God as Father the one to whom we can cry out to for protection in any circumstances.

The disciple asks Jesus to teach them to pray but it's not a magic formula that he gives them. Instead he teaches them more about the nature of God the one to whom they pray.

Praying to our Heavenly Father for the provision of our needs means we come to him as a child. He will also provide us for the protection from the evil that we need.

As a good earthly father seeks to protect his children from harm we can confidently pray to God for protection from threatening circumstances. Children quickly learn that they can cry out to their parent when something frightens them or threatens them.

A bad dream, a monster in the cupboard or a gigantic spider on the bedroom wall. They cry out knowing that the parent will come and respond.

[13 : 30] The Lord's Prayer shows that prayer is an act of worship of God as Father acknowledging his holiness and devoting ourselves to the coming of his kingdom and looking to him for the provision of the needs that we have.

Then Jesus goes on to tell some parables that are highlighting this teaching in the Lord's Prayer from verses 5 to 13. We see that we have assurance when we pray.

Jesus demonstrates that we can be confident in our prayers based on the character of God. God is approachable, gracious, generous and ready to hear our request.

The parable in verses 5 to 9 illustrate this. A man asks his friend for help. Just imagine the awkward dilemma. The host has been caught short in a very embarrassing situation.

His friend has arrived late at night, he's been travelling and now he's hungry. But there's nothing to eat. He has absolutely nothing to offer him in his cupboards.

[14 : 41] What to do? He leaves his guests and races across to a nearby friend and tells him of the dreadful situation he's in and asks for three loaves of bread.

How would you respond to this request? In Middle Eastern culture hospitality is not a matter of choice or manners, it's a duty.

And neglect of this duty brings shame to the host. Jesus was sensitive of this when he turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

In these verses there's an emphasis on friendship. The word friend is mentioned three times in the verses five to six. For a neighbour to help someone meet their needs of hospitality would have been expected a refusal of such a request is highly unlikely.

But for a friend to refuse this was unthinkable, totally out of the question. And yes, this friend does refuse initially.

[15 : 50] He's comfortable and settled down with his family for the night. Middle Eastern homes usually only had one or two rooms, so for the whole family to be sleeping together in that room would not have been unusual.

And they're down there ready to go to sleep or probably already falling asleep. I'm sure you know the feeling. All snuggled down comfortably in bed and then you hear it faintly at first and it grows louder by the seconds.

Drip, drip, drip. Somebody hasn't turned off that bathroom tactfully. Verse says that though the neighbour doesn't get up out of friendship, he does get up because of the friend's perseverance.

Like the dripping tap, the friend knocking boldly on the door at midnight doesn't go away until he's been attended to. He will give his friend the bread and risk disturbing the family, not because of the friendship, then at least because of the petitioners bold persistence.

The conclusion we can draw here is if the neighbour will not continue to refuse the request, we can be certain that God who is trustworthy will act on a request from his children.

[17 : 16] And also at the end of verse 8, not only does the neighbour get up and give him the bread, but he also gives him whatever he needs. There's real generosity here, extended beyond what was requested.

He didn't end up giving begrudgingly as if he'd sort of opened the door a crack and shoved the loaves out the door, but wholeheartedly as if he flung the door open and said, here, take whatever you need.

It's a real invitation. If the neighbour acted generously, how much more will a loving God, who never slumbers or sleeps, respond to those who come to him in prayer?

Now, verse 9 and 10, and we all know verse 9 off by heart too, I'm sure I could ask you to repeat it. Verses 9 and 10 encourage confidence in prayer with metaphors to ask, speak and knock.

Why? Because Jesus says in verse 10, everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who searches, signs.

[18 : 23] And everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. No one is refused, there are no exceptions. So we are to ask and keep on asking, search and keep on searching, knock and keep on knocking.

Continuous action, persevere and persists. Jesus concludes his teaching on prayer with a further illustration in verses 11 to 13 from a parent-child relationship.

He poses a hypothetical question that if a child asks for food, such as a fish or egg, which parent would give it? A snake or a scorpion?

None, of course not. Therefore, the argument goes, if earthly fathers who are evil give good things to their children, how much more will the heavenly father give who is good?

And then, best of all, is the promise that he will give the greatest gift. He will give the Holy Spirit. As Paul writes in Romans, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the very Spirit intercedes, whose sighs too deep for words.

[19 : 55] The disciple asks for a lesson on prayer. What they got was a lesson on the nature of God. So when we come to prayer, we are to be mindful of who we are praying to.

Name our needs before God the Father, in utter dependence upon him. And we are assured that God hears and answers prayer.

Though Jesus doesn't say that we will be given whatever it is we are, and I think that's where people sometimes get disappointed, what is promised is that for everyone who comes to the Father in need, seeking God's will, the door will be opened, God will respond, he is actively engaged.

Wherever we are, whatever we're doing, God is always contact for. Our connection with God in prayer, along the lines of the Lord's prayer, is always in range.

Amen.