

Sunday 15th June 2025 - Living Prayer: The Serenity Prayer

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Date: 15 June 2025

Preacher: Kim Thomas

[0 : 00] Morning, everyone. It's lovely to be back. I've been away for a few weeks because I just thought I'd give you a bit of an introduction.! I went away for a day riding motorbikes with my son Rob and he came off his bike. He's okay, but he was real bashed up. The weekend after, I then went away with Gresley Male Voice Choir, a wonderful male voice choir.

If you ever see them advertised, you must go and see them. I'm their vice president, so of course I'm always bigging them up. We went to Durham for the weekend, which was really lovely. Then I've been in France. We should have gone, me and my son, on our motorbikes because he bashed himself and his bike up a bit. We went in the car. So it's wonderful to be back at St. John's. It's absolutely brilliant. I just feel like I'm grounded and I'm rooted here. And it's absolutely lovely to be back amongst you all. And in the prayers before the service, because we do pray, in the prayers before the service, somebody said, I love church because it's real. And isn't that right? Church is... Hallelujah! Yeah, it was your husband that said it. It is. It's really good.

And so, of course, I've been missing out on lots of stuff that's been going on, but I have been catching up with things. And like I say, it's wonderful to be back in the family and to be able to have the real privilege.

[1 : 24] It is always a real privilege to stand up here and talk, to have the real privilege to talk about the serenity prayer today, to carry on the sermon series that we're doing on living prayer. Living prayer, prayer that really...

I mean, all prayer is important, isn't it? But prayer that really connects us with life, that we think, yes, prayer has made a difference to this. And that's what we're talking about. And today I get to talk about...

I've just told you the answer to a quiz question I was going to ask you, but never mind. Right. Does anybody know who this guy is? Right. OK. Nobody knows who he is.

I didn't expect anybody to, because I didn't know when I looked at the picture. His name is Reinhold Nearboer. Does anybody know who Reinhold Nearboer is? No, no. Mumbblings, mumbblings. No, no. OK. Not many people do know about him or know about his work. But he was a theologian and he was a pastor in a church a long time ago. And like I say, very little people know very little about him in the general public.

[2 : 30] But ever such a lot of people know about what he wrote. And it's this, the serenity prayer. Most people are familiar with this. If you don't know it, then read it, because it's fantastic.

The serenity prayer says, Fantastic prayer.

Now, the author, I'll call him Reinhold, because Nearboer is a bit of a mouthful. He was an American and he'd got German parents. And he wrote this prayer for a service to start with, because like I say, he was a pastor.

But then it got published in a book, a service book about the World War II servicemen. And they took this prayer book with them. As they took it with them, they read this prayer.

So it was a good one. Now, Reinhold was of the opinion that a lot of us are of the opinion of, that prayer doesn't have any copyright.

[3 : 36] So this prayer was not copyrighted and it's been used a lot. Since he wrote it. I think he probably, I don't know the man, but he would have been very proud to know that this prayer is used outside of Christian circles as well.

Outside of faith circles. Because the 12-step program of recovery for addicts start and end with this prayer.

So these are just some of the programs that are available in Britain. And there are 34 organizations, I could find anyway, in Britain that help people with addiction.

And like I say, every meeting begins and ends with this serenity prayer. Some places don't start with God. They don't start with the name of God.

But the 12-step program acknowledges that there is a higher power. Higher power than us. And like I say, every meeting starts and ends with the serenity prayer.

[4 : 43] So why is it so compelling? You know, why does it have, why is it used with such devotion? As I say, this prayer fits in really well with our living prayer series.

Because it shows how practical it is. And this prayer asks for serenity. That's how it starts off. Lord, give me the serenity. So what is serenity?

Why do we want serenity? Why is it a serenity prayer? Well, even now, just saying the word serenity, there's a stillness that comes about the place.

There's just something about a state of peace and a state of quiet and a calmness and an acceptance.

Serenity is a way to move forward from things that might hold you back. And it's certainly not just a prayer for the addicted.

[5 : 45] It's for all of us, every one of us. Can you feel that with just that word serenity and you just think about peace and quiet and stillness?

You can feel the serenity starting to move. But of course, not all of life is this serene. Not all of life is this calm pond.

There's a little ripple on that lake. Some of our lives have got huge waves in them or undercurrents. Life isn't like that. And sometimes life can be literally a battlefield.

Can you imagine these men who took this serenity prayer with them to war? They were literally in a battlefield. But of course, we're not all gone off to war, have we?

We've not all gone and fighting in the war. But I don't know about you. Sometimes the lack of serenity is in our minds. Certainly for me, the lack of serenity is like a battlefield in my mind.

[6 : 53] I mean, how many of you wake up in the night and this is going on? You know, as soon as you wake up, your brain's awake. Do you know, it happened to me at two o'clock this morning. I thought, yes, I know this is an illustration, Lord, but I don't want it.

And as soon as you wake up, it's like, and you're thinking about all the things that you can't do anything about at two o'clock in the morning. And that is a lack of serenity, isn't it?

I mean, there's no serenity in that chaos that's in our minds. But asking for serenity, it's that cry to bring peace, bring peace, to bring acceptance to some areas of our lives.

Asking for us that lovely hymn. I don't know if you know this hymn. I'm sure a lot of us do. Dear Lord and Father of Mankind. It asks for all our striving to cease.

Because, as the words there say, That's what asking for serenity is.

[8 : 01] Asking for the strain and the stress. Not to be taken away, because we know, don't we, in life, that strain and stress will never be taken away. It will always be some part of our life.

In fact, it's been shown that we can't manage, we can't cope without a little bit of stress in our lives. Stress helps us hold everything together. But sometimes it just becomes overwhelming, doesn't it? And when we sing that prayer, that song, Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, it asks for the take from our souls, that strain and stress.

But of course, try as we might, there will be circumstances and people in our lives that simply won't change.

Because we ask for change in the serenity prayer. To change the things we can. Now, I'm not a married woman anymore. I'm not a married woman.

[8 : 57] And I have been on my own long enough to forget what it's like to be married. I've been on my own for nearly 40 years now. So I got together with some girlfriends, and I said, who were married, and I said, What most annoys you about your husband?

If you could change something, what would it be? Now, ladies who are not married like me, it doesn't just mean husbands.

It could mean us. You could ask this of your family. What is it about us that annoys you? And you don't really want to know the answer, do you? But when I asked my girlfriends this, I said, What

really pushes your buttons?

And one of them said, Why does he take the stuff out to the dishwasher and put it on top of the side instead of putting it in the dishwasher?

What's so hard about putting things in the dishwasher? Another one said, Yeah, actually, along that same line, Why do they put their clothes on the floor and not in the washing basket?

[10:06] So some of you blokes who do this, you're getting real brownie points because you go, I do this, I do this, that's no problem. So what about, Well, I'm just going to go and do a bit of gardening just before you're about to put dinner on the table.

You know, these were the things that came back from my friends who said, Yeah, these are the things that push the buttons. And I found this cartoon, which I thought actually with my ex-husband, he used to do this to me all the time.

I'd go into another part of the house. It says, I'm going to be vacuuming. If you want to go into the farthest room and start asking me questions. But joking aside, there's things we cannot change.

And in the serenity prayer, we ask for acceptance for the things that we just can't change. Do you know, our husbands might do that to us, or our wives might do that to us, or our partners, or our children, or anybody we live with might do that to us.

And we think, Right, okay, just let me accept this. Let me accept this. Accept the things that I cannot change. There are some things, ladies, about your husbands, you just won't change.

[11:20] And husbands, there are some things about your wives, you won't change. But you need to remember that they're always right. Okay? Then you'll live a long and happy life.

But the prayer then goes on, doesn't it? It doesn't just ask for, to accept the things that you can't change. It goes on to ask to courage, to change the things that you can change.

There are things in our lives that you need courage for. There are things that you think this is intolerable. And so, if you have the facility to change things, you could change things, but it takes a lot of courage.

Now, I go, once a week, I go to a women's refuge. I go, and I'm the chaplain at the refuge, and I go and talk to ladies who have had the courage to change things.

They've had the courage to change their lives, and the situations that they're in, and they have decided that they're going to leave. And many, well, most of these women come with nothing.

[12:30] They come with nothing. They bring their children. They come with nothing, with some stories that you wouldn't believe, but breaks my heart every time I hear them. And they are women of courage, and women of integrity, and women who have just done it, not knowing what's going to happen to them.

It might have happened to any of you. Any of you. They've changed the things they can. They've done that bit of the prayer. They've had the courage to change the things they can.

And some go on to change lives for others. Our Cathy here. Cathy set up this women's refuge, the Pathway Project.

What a brave woman. Not only did she have the courage to change her life, but she thought, that's not enough. I'm going to change the lives of other women who are going through the same thing.

Well done, you. And every time I go into that refuge, and every time I hear the harrowing stories, I think it's because of you that they have got hope for the future.

[13:47] You know, honestly, I can't big this woman up enough, because I've spent so long listening to the stories now. And I don't think Cathy really realises exactly how much change that she's brought about, but it took a lot of courage, didn't it?

It took a huge amount of courage to do what she did. And when you set up something like a women's refuge, you're going to think, how on earth am I going to do this? And Cathy's told me before that, you know, she manned the helpline, womanned the helpline at two o'clock in the morning from her home, talking to women who just couldn't go on any further.

So, courage to change the things. But do you know what? It's not always the big things. Sometimes it's the little things as well that you need the courage for.

Sometimes you need more courage for little things than the big things. Courage to change the things you can. And the final part of the prayer asks for wisdom.

And the wisdom that leads to a peace of mind knowing some things in life just won't change. Some things in life we can change for ourselves. Some things in life we can change for others.

[15:02] But sometimes we won't be able to change anything. And it's having that wisdom to know what we can change, what we can't. That's part of the serenity prayer. So, we're going to watch a clip and it's one of my favourite stories from the New Testament.

It's about Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus? Zacchaeus? However you want to say it. This is a man who was a tax collector who was hated by the people. This is a man who God didn't grant him too many yards in his height.

So, he's a little short man. But he was absolutely hated by his society. He was hated by the people around him. He didn't do himself any favours. He swindled money out of people.

Sucked up to the Romans. You know, he was really a guy that nobody really liked. So, we're going to watch a bit about him. Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through.

A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was. But because he was short, he could not see over the crowd.

[16:10] So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately.

I must stay at your house today. So, he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, Look, Lord, here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.

Jesus said to him, Today, salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Courage to change the things I can. However, we might change, we might do something, we might have that courage, we might do something and this comes with a warning that the people around you might not accept your change.

[17:37] Because Zacchaeus, like I say, I love the story of this man and I love that clip because it's like, Zacchaeus, come down. He goes, who, me? Come down. Come down and meet with the living Lord.

Come down and meet with me. And as he came down from that tree, he met with Jesus and he met with him knee to face. You know? So he's looking up at Jesus going, oh, yeah.

But that meeting with Jesus changed his life. Changed his life forever. And as he came down, he was convicted in his heart that things had to change. So he changed and he said, if I've cheated anybody, if, ha, if I've cheated anybody, let me pay it back and then pay it back four times.

Do you think the people around him would have just gone, oh, look, Zacchaeus has changed? No, they wouldn't. You know, the people who he's cheated, the people who hated him, the people who really didn't like him, they won't change or they might do, but it'll take a while.

When we have, we ask for courage, the courage we need to know is that it might not change for the people around us, but it will change for us in our heart.

[18:49] And I tell you something, change is exhausting. You know, when I've tried to change anything in my life, it's been absolutely exhausting. And I've thought, come on, Kim, you need to do this about your life.

You need to stop doing this. You need to do this or whatever. And I've gone, oh, I just don't have the energy. It's too exhausting. Yes, it is exhausting.

And then when it stops being exhausting is when you say, okay, Lord, come and meet with me and help me. Take over. Take over this. I want to change.

I want to do this. I've said it recently to God. I've said, Lord, I need to address this area of my life that is out of control, but I can't do it on my own.

I'm exhausted. I need to change. And then, it doesn't just happen. Well, some people, it might do, you know, it might just happen.

[19:43] But all of a sudden, things, my perspective starts to change. And it's no coincidence. You know, God is working with us. He wants us to work with him. And then, you get the point where you think, well, I've changed, but people around me, haven't they still expect me to be the same old person?

And that will happen. I'm sure it happened with Zacchaeus. And we have to know the wisdom, the wisdom of that. We have to ask God for his wisdom to know the difference between what we can

change, what we can't change, but also what circumstances might not change around us. And we can only do that as Zacchaeus did through meeting the living Lord. and it's with him, walking with Jesus, whatever's going on in our lives, walking with Jesus hand in hand, that things will change.

Maybe it's our perspective will change. Maybe it's our broken heart will change. Maybe it's something else in your life. Only you know. All of you come here with all different things going on in your lives.

but that understanding that you can change the things you can with courage, you can accept the things that you can't change and you can have that wisdom to know the difference.

[21 : 10] And that wisdom comes from God. That wisdom comes from God alone. It doesn't mean because you're old you'll have wisdom. It doesn't mean because you're young you'll have wisdom. Wisdom comes through experience.

Wisdom comes through trust. Trusting in God. When people have let you down you can always trust in God. Wisdom comes from that, doesn't it Ann?

Yeah? Wisdom. That's where wisdom comes from. Trusting in God. He will never ever ever let you down. Never. People will.

Friends and family will. God will never let you down. And I just hope that we all have that serenity in our hearts to know that.

The living Lord is still with us. He will never leave us. God is a loving and generous giver.

[22 : 08] We ask grant me the serenity. Give it to me Lord. Give it to me. So that I can move on in my life. Let's hope this generous giver speaks to all of our hearts this week.

I want you if you feel able to you don't have to this is not this is not a thing you have to do but I'd like you with me to say this prayer together.

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference.

Amen. Amen.