

Bible Study: How to Pray 3

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 0 0] It is a great delight to see you all, and our job is to look at Luke chapter 11, and we're talking about prayer. We've spent two weeks now on the Lord's Prayer, which comes at the beginning of Luke chapter 11, and I want to do a quick review of that, as though you didn't know all about it already anyway.

But it's such a fascinating statement that I would like just to remind you of it again. Then I want to go on to the story, which immediately follows that in Luke chapter 11.

So that we're reading about, just listen as I read the section down to verse 13.

Of Luke 11, page 68 in the church Bible, I don't know. He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, 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 thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.

[1 : 2 9] Forgive us our sins, as we 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 answer from within, Do not bother me. The door is now shut. My children are with me in bed. 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 importunity, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

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

He who seeks, finds. And to him 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?

[3 : 1 3] Let me just pray a moment. Father, these are, for most of us, very familiar words.

Words that have echoed through the chambers of our minds, through the whole of our lives. And yet, they are your word for us today.

And we ask that by that gift of the Holy Spirit, which you have given us, we may understand them as your provision for the needs of this day and for the circumstances of our lives on this day.

Help us to see how it is you have chosen to feed us through your word, that we may be fed and nourished by it.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. With John Chapman around, I haven't had a chance to say anything for about two weeks, and I'm pretty rusty.

[4 : 33] However, let me tell you this about it to start with. These are the things that I want you to look at first. I want, as I said, to give you a quick review of that first one, which is the Lord's Prayer.

And the word that I would like to put here is the ultimate. And what I think, I mean, one way of saying this is, is that, that at some point, we want to, in a sense, reach down and find the rock under our feet.

You know when you're swimming, and you're getting perhaps a little panicky because you're tired and you've been over your depth for a long time, and you finally come to the place where you can feel the bottom.

You can feel something to stand on. Well, I think that that's, that's true of our lives, and that, that the reason we say the Lord's Prayer is we want to make sure what it is we're standing on.

And so Jesus teaches us to address our prayer to the Father, our Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 06] And then he says that these are the things we are to ask for. We want to come in touch with the ultimate reality. And the ultimate reality is the name of God.

And that is to be hallowed. That is the central reality of our lives, is to be our God and Father.

And so we say to him, hallowed be your name. You know, when you wake up in the morning and your back's bothering you and your stomach's upset and you haven't had enough sleep and you've got a lot of worries on your mind and things are not going the way they ought to be going and you have this problem crowding in on you this way and you don't know how to face this problem over here and you're all those things crowding in on you and they insisting on being, this is your reality, you say, Father, in the midst of all these circumstances, may the reality be you.

May your name be hallowed. You are the one over and above everything else in the circumstances of my life, the reality I want to be in touch with. The reality is that the bank manager is going to call.

The reality is that I've got to see the doctor. The reality is all those things are only passing circumstances of our lives. The reality is that God is our Father and his name is to be hallowed.

[7 : 42] So in that sense, when you say, hallowed be thy name, you're saying, for me, this is the ultimate reality. If someone was to say to you, what is the great function of your life?

Now you would never say this, but in fact, I think it's true. The great function of our life is that at the center of it, the name of God should be hallowed.

Whatever else happens, that that name of God should be hallowed. The second thing that I think we ask for is the ultimate kingdom.

You see, I want to use ultimate every time here. And that is, we're all involved in kingdoms. The kingdom of British Columbia or the kingdom of Canada or the kingdoms of the Western world or the private kingdoms of this parish or this community or my life or my world or my family.

All those competing kingdoms are things that we work on and invest in and spend time on. And we like to carve out and create a little kingdom of our own or to be part of a group that is creating a little kingdom of its own.

[8 : 58] All those things are true. But we say, no, the ultimate kingdom is the kingdom of God, the rule of Christ. Jesus is Lord.

And that's the kingdom that I want to see come. Not my kingdom. My kingdom, even if it came, would only pass. But that kingdom is the ultimate kingdom and I want to see that happen.

The third thing is the ultimate source of our lives. We say, give us this day our daily bread. And the problem with it, I think, as you know, is that the word daily is a word that is never used anywhere else in the New Testament, so they're not quite sure what it means.

but it seems to be that it is that God has made provision for us all and we very much need to be in touch with that provision that God has made because we can't live apart from that provision.

And so we pray, God, provide for us what we need. And we do that, as you'll see, in a way that we're taught more about in the next section.

[10 : 15] So that there is the ultimate reality that God's name should be hallowed, the ultimate kingdom, the ultimate source, and what I'm calling forgiveness is the ultimate transaction.

And the ultimate transaction is forgiveness. That's the thing that's needed. And, you know, you discover in a parish like this or in a family like yours or a family like mine, in relationships between people, some of them, people have been deeply hurt and deeply offended.

And they tend to nurture that hurt over sometimes years and years and years. I mean, it's not unusual for me to go as I went to one family, you know, of a man who's in his 70s and a wife who's in her 70s and they say to me, 70 years ago or 30 years ago, we brought our child to St. John's to be baptized and the minister didn't turn up and we haven't been back since.

Now, you know, over a period of 30 years that begins to look ridiculous. When it first happened, it was a terrible affront and it offended somebody and somebody was sensitive and it hurt somebody and that sore has festered and there's been no forgiveness around it and no attempt to find a place of forgiveness around it.

And so, what you had as a kind of tiny scratch 30 years ago is now a deep festering wound that makes it almost impossible for that family to relate to St. John's.

[12 : 08] In that, over and over again, you would be just amazed at the fact that forgiveness does not take place. And it's usually over something which in the perspective of time diminishes almost to total insignificance.

But because it's been nurtured and kept and worked on, it's become a major dis-ease which requires a whole lot of healing to take place.

And that's why the ultimate transaction is forgiveness. That forgiveness is part of our daily health.

It's something that has to happen in our relationships between one another. And one of the things a mission does is force people to, I mean, it tends to dig up old issues and problems that have not been treated with the ultimate transaction, not been subject to the ultimate transaction of forgiveness.

And the unhealth and hurt and dis-ease that's built around it has become enormous. So, Jesus, when he says to pray, he says, pray that we might learn to forgive as we have been profoundly forgiven.

[13 : 40] It's the ultimate transaction between people. You know, if you could go around with forgiveness in a bottle and take this relationship between a husband and wife and this relationship between a father and son and this relationship between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law and you could pour a few drops of forgiveness on it, you could change the world in an afternoon.

so that this is the ultimate transaction for which we want. And the final one is, and I'll write it up here so that is despair.

Despair is the unforgivable sin really because if you're despairing then there's nothing there's nothing else can happen.

And so you pray against despair when you say lead us not into temptation. The temptation to give up and to despair.

To give up on what God is doing. So that's you know I've repeated that having done it twice already I just feel that this Lord's Prayer is for our lives an absolutely unfathomable resource that we need to be very much aware of.

[15 : 09] So there you have it. That review of the Lord's Prayer. Now we've got to go on. The next thing that happens and I think this is still Jesus replying to the disciples request Lord teach us to pray.

And so what he does is he takes a very simple story. A story about someone who comes late at night and you're required to provide some kind of hospitality you have nothing in the house you go next door you bang on the door and say someone's come and I need this and your neighbor who is in bed with his six children knows that he will bruise some of them severely perhaps permanently by getting out of bed and he says I can't do it I'm in bed the lights are out the house is locked I can't do it and yet Jesus goes on to say that's the situation with which we are all familiar in fact it's the situation that we anticipate that it can't be done lots of people during the course of last week when

John Chapman was here they considered the possibility of going and knocking on somebody's door and inviting them to come and hear John Chapman and this week has been full of delightful stories of people who expected to be rejected when they did that and in fact somebody said I'd love to go and they went because somebody went and screwed up their courage because of the situation and said will you come and listen and it was good but it's you see what Jesus is doing here I think and the thing is that he's taking a kind of very mundane illustration out of everyday life you know he's not saying if you want to learn to pray the thing you need to do is divest yourself of all your wealth and leave your family behind you and go up to the top of yonder mountain and find a cave where you can dwell for anywhere from a year to two years and sit there and have nothing but water and soda crackers to eat and as time goes by you will ultimately sense the reality of

God and as the days and months roll by you'll come into a state of prayer and then you will know the presence of God and then you will be able to pray now most of us think that that's how a great religious guru would teach us to pray you know it's done all the time and people are fascinated by the prospect you know that you put on a pink shawl and wear sandals and shave your head and go off and learn to pray what Jesus does is exactly the opposite he points to the very center of your reality and he says there's where you learn what prayer is about you learn how to pray when you learn what prayer is about when you are caught in a circumstance at night there is nothing you can do and you find yourself caught in a situation where you have to do something because somebody is depending on you so that I think what

Jesus is saying to us is if we want to learn to pray the first thing we got to do is to be honest about ourselves where we are what our what our situation is and and that's where you learn to pray from within the existential situation in which you live you know I'm single I want to be married I haven't got many friends I haven't got the income I should have I'm worried about my health all those kinds of things are the things that surround me I've got a neighbor that I should do something with I've got relatives that I all those kinds of things are they're the kind of bricks and blocks of our own lives you know a husband who doesn't understand me and I don't understand him children that are ungrateful all those kinds of things and I think

[20 : 27] Jesus is taking this very mundane illustration about how prayer works by going to the center of our lives and a typical situation within our lives and say there you have the the primer on prayer there you have the very context and situation in which you were to learn to pray right there you have it it belongs uniquely to you it's not you doing something that you've seen somebody else do it's you taking yourself seriously and your own situation seriously and praying from within your own situation learning what happens now if you look at it you'll soon see what happens what prayer is all about and what happens is this you see you have this fellow who lives here in this house and there is a road coming up to this house and going on into infinity and coming up the road there is a gentleman with his goods on a stick over his back and he's walking up this road and he's coming towards this house and he happens to know that his friend lives in this house and he goes up and he knocks at the door and he and he says

Joe am I ever glad to see you I've been walking since dawn and Joe says come in come in have a seat let me take your coat what can I get for you well I haven't eaten since early this morning and I really am pretty tired and pretty hungry so if you just had something for me to eat oh sure just sit down I'll go out to the kitchen and get it and so he goes off to the kitchen and get it knowing full well he hasn't got anything in the kitchen to give him so while his friend sits in the front room he goes out and next door there's another house not unlike his and the door is shut and there it is so there he is standing out here this is Joe now and his friend is comfortably ensconced in his house and he's standing out between the two houses in the dark and he knocks at the door and this is when his friend says I'm in bed the doors locked the fires out everything's done

I'm finished for the day I'm waiting for the dawn I can't do anything to help you now this you see becomes a magnificent picture of prayer not some esoteric encounter with the transcendent reality but a very human situation involving human people in a very human dilemma and that's what Jesus says this is where you learn to pray now what prayer is he says is this you knock at the door and the reason you knock at the door is because you're dependent upon your friend to be the source for your doing what you have to do with there's a kind of chain reaction going on here as I was thinking about it this morning I was thinking well he'd have been better when he saw this guy coming to have blown out the lights to got in bed and locked the door himself and then we would have moved the chain back one but he allowed this fellow in now

I want to tell you at this point that one of the things that I think that makes prayer hard for us is that we try very hard to design our lives in such a way that we are never caught in a situation where we have to pray we try to make sure that we have enough food in the pantry or we try to make sure that this guy instead of coming to my house goes to the house next door we try to be sure that in whatever situation we are we're not going to be caught dependent upon anything or anybody we try to be totally self sufficient and of course our society teaches us that when I was a child to go next door to borrow an egg to borrow a cup of sugar to borrow a loaf of bread to borrow a pound of butter that was just happened every day nobody ever

I never thought about it it was just something you always did and I don't know whether it was ever paid back or not but I presume that relationships were such that something must have been done but that was the kind of thing you do but now everybody with their refrigerator and their deep freeze and their bulk buying and all the other things we make it so that we are totally sufficient for any situation that comes along we are never dependent upon anybody now there's probably nothing wrong with that except that spiritually there's something wrong with it because we are meant to be dependent and that's why Jesus uses this illustration to show that we are meant to be dependent now the way he does it he says this fellow says no but then he says keep on knocking and he goes on subsequent to this and says ask and it means keep on asking seek keep on seeking knock keep on knocking keep doing it because what happens is that you begin to develop a confidence that as you do this you keep asking you keep seeking you keep knocking that that confidence will be rewarded that your friend will finally get out of bed and give you what you need and so he says what you need to do as a person is you need by this exercise of prayer to become aware that

[27 : 13] God is one in whom you can have confidence I have prayed and he has heard and answered my prayer so that I have confidence in him so that in a very real way what is being said is God who puts it in your heart to pray as you do it in order that you may build your confidence in him as your heavenly father who hears and answers your prayer so that your confidence or your faith is built up so that as you find yourself in all the whole range of human circumstances you live through those circumstances with an increasing confidence in God to be able to meet you in those circumstances and to provide for you and that's what that's what

Jesus is trying to illustrate to his disciples that when you're standing alone in the dark with someone who needs help on this side of you and a resort to meet that need on the other side of you that that's what prayer is and this is the place of prayer to be in this situation where there are needs around you which need to be met and there is a resource in your heavenly father which can meet this need now what happens here then is very powerful I think it's powerful because there is there are I don't know there's three things that I think you can do I remember now whether there's two or three but I I yeah he does it this way what he says is that you have a neighbor and that

God said that this is the second great commandment that you love your neighbor as yourself the whole meaning of our life is to be found in our relationship to somebody else you know I say that a lot but I want to say it again that it's not us in relation me in relationship to me God isn't even concerned about that if you get all wrapped up in your relationship to yourself well more power to you but that has nothing to do with God because God's great concern is your neighbor and God's access to your neighbor is through you and God's access to you is through somebody else that's how God works in our lives is through somebody else and so he says if this neighbor here can be persuaded to help you so that gradually you may pick up the awareness that even though he is grudging and bad tempered and not easy to approach he nevertheless will in the end help you well please know that

God is not bad tempered grouchy or difficult to approach and will in the end help you so he's saying in effect if you can from life know that your neighbor will respond how much more will God respond and he goes on and he does that in a second way by talking about a father and a son we come to that in a minute but it's again it's the same analogy that if a human father can do it how much more can your heavenly father do it if you have some measure of confidence now you get this with with salesmen all the time you know I think this text would be a great text if you had to talk to your 17 life insurance salesmen on

Monday morning before they go out to sell a million dollars worth of life insurance you know you would say to them ask seek knock phone write do anything you can and you will be rewarded you know and so you get kicked out of one office bounce down one stair and all that keep asking keep seeking keep knocking you know and the people who last week knocked their fists off Monday Tuesday and Wednesday landed this most amazing life insurance contract on Thursday and this will probably happen to you and so what the manager does is try and persuade his poor beleaguered salesman that though they will be frustrated over and over again because they won't get what they're looking for that ultimately they will and so they gotta have you know they gotta have leather for skin and go out and keep asking seeking and knocking but this

[33 : 07] Jesus says is in a sense the human parable because ultimately the good salesman knows that if you ask seek and knock you'll get the sales he begins to develop confidence in what he's doing and Jesus says and if that happens in human circumstances and it does well in relationship to God how much more is it going to happen if this salesman has confidence that he can sell how much more should we have confidence that God can provide and so he teaches us to have that kind of confidence and to work from our own situation well that's how Jesus uses I think this situation to help us learn how to pray and he uses these lovely illustrations if you know that that's just a fish but you see and that's a serpent now and then he goes on and he talks about an egg and a scorpion with a stinger in its tail you know and then he goes on and talks about a loaf of bread and a stone and he says humanly speaking this is what happens you know if you ask for a fish your father won't give you a serpent if you ask for an egg you won't be given a scorpion if you ask for bread you won't be given a stone and Jesus says that's that's the way it works so you know that that's the way it works unless there is some very malevolent or malicious intent that's the way it's going to work and he says how much more will your heavenly father give good gifts to his children in other words what

Jesus is portraying is a God who is very anxious to hear your prayers and who is going to give you not less than you ask for but far more than you ask for if you can learn to have confidence in him and so that you know you get back to you learn to pray by praying and you learn to pray not by some profoundly religious experience in you know some lovely cathedral like setting or some great place of natural beauty those things may be conducive to prayer they also may be destructive of prayer but he says in the nitty gritty of the existential human situation where you are standing alone in the dark at night is where you learn to pray and you're praying to a

God who is going to give you if your neighbor will hear you God is going to do more than that if your father will hear you God is going to do more than that and that's what that's what the life of prayer is very practical and you see what it means is that where you are right now in your life you have all the basic ingredients to learn to pray you know you can you don't have to go anywhere or do anything all you have to do is recognize this kind of situation a need on the one hand and a resource on the other and the willingness to call on God so that he can teach you to have confidence in him and so what happens of course and what we're pushed to in this experience is that is that we is that this

God proves to be ultimately dependable because the ultimate reality is this God with whom you come in touch with by prayer the ultimate kingdom is his kingdom and his rule and his authority the ultimate resource is from him the ultimate transaction is based on what he has done in forgiving us and the ultimate the ultimate escape from despair is confidence is praying to him and being dependent on him not being led into temptation but led into dependence on and confidence in God let us pray our God and father we thank you that the

Lord Jesus with infinite wisdom takes this very common picture with which we can all identify and holds it up to us and says if you want to learn to pray this is where you start and father we ask that as we have tried to put this into words and to get our minds around what it is your teaching so we may in obedience to you and that you may in answer to our prayers bring us to the place where we know that even to express our prayer is your gift to us and to answer that prayer over and beyond any understanding we have of the reality of our need is the way you choose to build confidence into us so grant to each of us here we may in the circumstances of our individual lives share the heart's cry of the disciples when they said

[40 : 58] Lord teach us to pray and find in the way you taught them the means to teach us to pray we ask this Lord Jesus in your holy name amen to we would