

# Prevailing Prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Gracious God, as we come to look at your word now, and particularly as we look at the issue of prayer and as Jesus has taught his disciples, taught us how to pray, we pray, Father, that we would model that, model a prayer of discipleship of the Lord Jesus, that the priorities that have been outlined here in this prayer will be our priorities, and we ask it for your sake.

Amen. One day out in the Canadian wilderness, an atheist was taking a walk, admiring the amazing wilderness that was, in his mind, a freak of accident.

It was an accident. It was a freak of some random causes. The wildlife that were there because of some random chance, the pristine stream that flowed beautifully by thanks to a bunch of molecules somehow mistakenly colliding many, many, many, many years ago.

When all of a sudden he was awoken out of his godless dreaming by a grizzly bear charging at him straight down the trail. He had no chance. He knew it.

And before he realized that he was on his back, pinned to the ground, with his huge grizzly bear, one paw on his chest, another one raised, ready to strike.

[ 1 : 18 ] And without even giving it a thought, he cried out in a loud voice, God, save me! Of course, then he realized the inconsistency of living a life confident that God didn't exist and then in a moment of need, decided to call out to him for help.

And so he had a brainwave. Instead of saving me, God, what he decided was, God, if you're there, make the bear a Christian. And he figured if the bear was a Christian, then the bear would need him.

And pretty smart. He thought it was a pretty smart move and he was quite surprised when all of a sudden the bear pulled down its paw, stepped back, put his paws together and said, for what we're about to receive, may the Lord make me truly thankful.

When difficulty or danger strikes, the immediate response of many people is to pray.

Most humans at some point on this planet will pray at some point in their lives, usually without giving it much thought at all about what they are doing. We notice that children often pray with a real simplicity and an ease which adults can't muster up.

[ 2 : 37 ] And yet I want to say that prayer for me is the one thing that exposes my ungodliness.

There is nothing quite like a lack of prayer or even the kind of prayers that I pray that really expose what my heart truly is. I want to be a man of prayer.

Prayer. And it's the one area in my life where if it's not humming, if it's not working, I feel like a fraud like nothing else. Prayer, as I said, is something that we all might do, even the ungodly do, but it does expose our ungodliness.

I think that this is a particularly difficult passage for us. It's a passage that we know so well, and yet it's a passage which reveals our ungodliness.

Ungodliness in the sense that we go about our daily business, even good people, moral people, religious people go about their daily business and give no or little thought whatsoever to the purpose of God, the glory of God, or our dependency upon Him day by day.

[ 3 : 57 ] We attack our work, we attack our retirement, we attack our education, just like anyone else. We may begin the day in a bit of prayer, we may end the day with a bit of prayer, but daily, as we move from that point, we give little regard to God's purpose, His will, our dependency upon Him, and His glory.

And that's what I think the Bible calls ungodliness, going about as if God doesn't exist. Or our prayers themselves reflect our ungodliness.

Do we pray for kingdom purposes, or do we have a long list of things that are just the things which are troubling us at the moment? The content of our prayer can reveal whether or not we are actually human-centered, or we're actually God-centered.

You might remember that we are traveling with Jesus, having resolutely set His face for Jerusalem to die, and on the way there, He is clarifying with His disciples the misconceptions they have of what it means to follow Him.

And today we see His teaching on one of the essentials of Christian discipleship, a life of prayer. We are looking at the famous, the most famous of all prayers.

[ 5 : 19 ] We know it. We've said it again and again and again throughout the centuries. We say it most week in this church. In fact, we say it in most services most week in this church.

I think that it's ironic that when Matthew records Jesus' teaching on prayer, this very passage here in Matthew's Gospel, he does it in the context of telling Jesus' disciples, of Jesus telling His disciples not to go on mindless babbling with words and not to be like the hypocrites.

And so we have taken Jesus' prayer and throughout the centuries have mindlessly babbled His prayer and not actually understood what is behind His prayer instead of just repeating the prayer but actually seeing it as a model of prayer.

What we know is that Jesus Himself was a man of prayer. He was praying when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove in Luke 3, verse 21.

He began His ministry with a 40-day fast in the wilderness in chapter 4, verses 1 to 15. Other times He withdrew into the wilderness to pray in chapter 5, verse 16.

[ 6 : 40 ] He prayed all night before choosing the 12, chapter 6, verse 12. He was praying alone just before He asked Peter, who do you say that I am?

In chapter 9, verse 18. And just before He was transfigured, He took Peter, James and John on the mountain to pray in chapter 9, verse 28. And He was praying here at the beginning of our text in Luke 11, verse 1.

As a man, Jesus sought His strength and His guidance from His Father in prayer. From this alone, we should feel motivated to make prayer more central in our lives.

I want to be a man of prayer more than ever. Jesus also taught us to pray.

It's an amazing thing, isn't it? His disciples, religious people themselves, go to Jesus and said, teach us to pray. I mean, haven't you guys been doing that all of your life? Isn't that what you do?

[ 7 : 43 ] Isn't that what you do? And they said to Jesus, you need to teach us to pray. In other words, teach us the priorities of prayer. Jesus taught us to pray.

He made amazing promises to us about prayer. And so He lived a life of prayer and He taught us a life of prayer. It is the will of the Lord Jesus that St. Paul's be a church of prayer.

That this building that we're seated in now be a house of prayer. That our people be given daily to prayer.

Prevailing prayer for personal needs, for the power of the Spirit, for the progress of the Gospel and for the glory of God's name. They're the things that Jesus teaches us here.

The first thing Jesus teaches us is to make our praying God-centered. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray in verse 1, He says in verse 2, When you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

[ 8 : 55 ] Notice here that these are requests. All of the Lord's prayer is actually requests. It's not prayer, thanks, it's not praise. Jesus says, Our first desire, our first request, should be that God's name be hallowed or glorified and that His kingdom be advanced and that His kingdom would come.

That's what I mean when I say God-centered prayer. The glory of God's name and the advancement of God's kingdom are the primary concerns of this prayer. The God-centeredness or lack of it has to be the difference between mature prayer and immature prayer.

I know plenty of non-Christians who pray. But the difference is between God-centeredness and human-centeredness in their praying.

The plea is that we have Jesus' priorities in praying, namely that the Father's name be hallowed and that His kingdom come. If this feels foreign to you, if you have never pleaded for the name of God to be hallowed or the kingdom of God to come, then I want to say to you, don't be content.

Don't be content today to stay stuck at an immature level of prayer. Don't be content with that. Instead, say in a fresh new way to God, this week, today, this coming week, for the rest of this year,

Father, hallowed be your name in my life and in my prayers for this coming year, for the year to come, change my prayer life so that it becomes God-centered.

[ 10 : 45 ] God's name will be vindicated among the nations as true and glorious. His kingdom will come. But He has decreed that we will have a hand in His triumph through our prayers.

So make the glory of God the center of your prayers. Pray again and again and again with as many different words as you can think of. Father, let your name be hallowed and let your kingdom come. Jesus also teaches us here to pray with a sense of security in the Father's love. Jesus doesn't want us to feel insecure in our prayers.

He shows this mainly by teaching us to call God Father when we pray to Him. Then in verses 11 to 13, if you have a look at that, He unpacks for us some of the security implied in this word.

Father, which of you fathers, if your son asks you for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

[ 11 : 56 ] 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 Him?

The words, how much more, mean that God is much more inclined to hear us and help us when we pray than our earthly fathers are.

Jesus wants us to feel secure in the Father's love when we come to Him in prayer. He does not want us to feel precarious or unsure of our acceptance or fearful that we will find the Father out of sorts or unconcerned with the aspects of my daily life.

This sense of security is utterly crucial in the life of prayer and the life of worship. You cannot sustain a life of prayer if you believe that God is angry with you or you believe that He just does not care.

Prayer is sustained by the confidence that God is our Father and that He is concerned and that His disposition is just what Jesus says it is.

[ 13 : 17 ] He is more inclined to give what we need than the best human father is. That's incredible. That's incredible that God would be that disposed positively towards me.

But we need to remember that if we're going to be people of prayer. It's what I've written on the bulletin blurb on the front of your bulletin this morning about the four points for significant things that Jerry Bridges outlines and one of those things that he says is we need to daily appropriate the gospel to ourselves or as another way I've heard him put it we need to daily preach the gospel to ourselves to remind us to remind us again and again and again God's disposition towards me and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus also teaches us to prevail in prayer without doubting the Father's love. He teaches us to hang in there persevering persisting not giving up keep on asking and seeking and knocking at heaven's door until the answer comes or until God says stop praying it feels inconsistent though doesn't it? I mean if God is more caring than the best heavenly father then why why would he sometimes be so slow to respond to my prayer if he's such a good God?

Jesus tells the story in verses five to eight of the man who goes to his friend's house in the middle of the night to say that a guest has just arrived there isn't enough in the house to feed him could you please give me three loaves of bread the man says the door's locked he must look out of his bedroom window the door's locked children are asleep in his room don't bother me anymore but his friend keeps knocking and keeps asking until the man gets up not because of his friendship notice this it's not because of his friendship but because of the man's prevailing and persisting and persevering in knocking in other words he annoyed him until he got out of his bed and went downstairs and opened the door it seems an unpleasant image of the matter of prayer doesn't it but immediately in verse nine Jesus says there is a lesson for us to learn ask and it will be given you seek and you will find knock and it will be open to you three things here stress the importance of prevailing and not giving up in our prayer life one is that the tension the original language means to keep on asking to keep on seeking to keep on knocking the second is the fact that Jesus commands this continuous action three times and he even repeats it again in verse 10 the third thing that stress is prevailing is that the three words used get increasingly close to the answer and show a pressing in on

[ 16 : 33 ] God ask as it were for the guy in the house seek until you find it and then knock until the door is opened ask it seek until you find it and then knock until the door is open asking is the simplest and requires no movement seeking turns asking into an activity of pursuit knocking on and on and on the door again and again and again signifies utter earnestness and perhaps even a

sense of desperation temptation and so Jesus clearly wants us to be like this friend who just kept knocking he wants us to prevail in our prayers but then he makes a sudden turn in verse 11 and shifts from the image of the grumpy friend to the image of the caring father the point Jesus is getting across is that prevailing prayer persisting persevering in prayer is utterly important for us utterly important for us and he stamps this truth on our memories with a shocking image of a friend who won't help without being bothered enough to help but then

Jesus qualifies his point in verses 11 to 13 by saying that God is not like that friend God is not like that friend he's like the most caring father imaginable so yes God sometimes gives us what we need only after a long season of prevailing and persisting in prayer but no it's not because he's uncaring it's not because he's insensitive it's not because he's unable so why why does he postpone it for so long I think Jesus gives us some clues indirectly in verses 11 to 13 it says in verse 11 that a good father will not give his son a serpent if he asks for a fish in other words the good father only gives his children what is good for them he only gives them what is good for them so this morning 6.30

Isabel gets up take her downstairs she heads straight for where she knows the biscuit tin is and goes biscuit biscuit biscuit biscuit and if Natalie wasn't there maybe I might have given in but but no we have breakfast first and then she doesn't want the biscuit anymore I didn't give in and give it to her because I know it's not good for her right there and right then it doesn't mean I never give her biscuits but not first thing in the morning it's not what I have for breakfast it's the only answer that Jesus gives to our question in this text when the father in heaven gives us a slow answer when he wills that we prevail for a season it is because he is giving us a fish and not a serpent he is giving us what is good for us there is something in the prevailing there is something in the asking the seeking the knocking that we frankly need as his disciples we need that prevailing it is good for us he knows what's best the promise that will encourage us in prevailing in prayer is verse 10

I'll read it with a little bit of a twist based on the original language everyone who goes on asking receives and he who goes on seeking finds and to him who goes on knocking it will be opened God is not unresponsive to prevailing prayer the final teaching that Jesus gives us on prayer is in it's if you like a circling back to the very beginning to the first point of God centeredness in our prayer and if I understand Jesus here he means for us that the prevailing heartbeat of our life here as a church he means for us to be prevailing in our prayer in Jesus teaches in verse 13 that our prevailing in prayer should be prevailing for the Holy Spirit if you then even though you are evil know how much how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your

Father in heaven give you the Holy Spirit to those who ask him it's a prevailing prevailing asking seeking knocking that we might receive the Spirit it is no accident that Luke tells us in chapter 3 verse 21 that while Jesus was praying the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove or that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost came at the climax of 10 day prayer vigil or in Acts chapter 4 verse 31 that when the church had prayed the place where they gathered was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit prevailing prayer is the pathway to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit when you prevail in prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit more is happening in your life through this prevailing prayer than you could ever ever imagine God waits because our prevailing is good for us and so may the

[ 22 : 31 ] Lord prevent us friends from losing heart and failing in the very thing we need mighty prevailing prayer so let us enter this week let us enter this week with God centered prayer with a sense of security in the fatherly care of God with a new resolve to prevail and persist in prayer without doubting God's love and let us prevail specifically in praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit amongst us here his power his gifts his full blessing all the while rejoicing that the prevailing itself is a great work of the indwelling Spirit of the living God and so let us pray let us pray and take the words of the Lord's prayer and put them in my language let's pray our gracious

God and loving heavenly father we long to see you honored more and more in our church and in our city cause your name to be hallowed and glorified amongst us magnify your worth and your glory here in our lives we pray that your kingdom rule would come in each one of these hearts that are here right now that your kingdom will come and it will rule we also pray Lord that your kingdom will be established here on earth we pray for the speedy coming of the Lord Jesus Christ we ask Lord that your kingly rule would be taken up here more and more fully over our church over our lives our families our city over our ministries speed the day we pray of Christ's final appearing we ask Lord that you would meet our physical needs so that we can press on with joy in the work you've

called us to for your namesake forgive us oh Lord where we have sinned and fallen short of your glory where we have gone day by day in ungodliness without reference to you your purposes your name keep us

Lord as well from entangling temptations that are in this world that are designed to trip us up and that will bring criticism to your name and your people and we ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord  
Amen