

Prevailing Prayer

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[0 : 00] We're going to look at that passage. Let me pray, though. Father, I thank you that we can come together now and we can look at one of these, the essentials of those who are your disciples, looking at the issue of prayer.

And, Lord, we acknowledge that we don't always have your priorities in our prayers. Father, we pray that as we come to a passage which is familiar to us, there's certainly words which are familiar to us.

Lord, I pray that you help us to rediscover them afresh and anew and challenge us, we pray, 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 some sort of freak accident had sort of brought together, the wildlife that was there by some random chance, the pristine stream that flowed by because a bunch of molecules come out, collided millions of years ago and ended up with this wonderful beauty, when all of a sudden he was awoken from his godless daydreaming by a grizzly bear which was coming straight at him down the track.

And before he knew it, he was flat on his back. The bear was knelt down beside him, pushed down on his chest with one paw, another paw raised, ready to strike him.

And when he cried out all of a sudden, God save me! Then he realised the inconsistency of living a life as if God doesn't exist and then in the moment of need, decided to call on God.

[1 : 31] And so he had a bit of a moment of brainwave and instead he called out, God make the bear a Christian. He figured if the bear was a Christian, the bear's not going to eat him.

And lo and behold, he couldn't believe it. His prayer was answered. The bear pulled back its paw. It pulled its paw off his chest. It knelt down beside him, closed its eyes, bowed its head, put its paws together and said, for what I'm about to receive, may the Lord make me truly thankful.

When difficulty or danger strikes, it's the immediate response of many people to pray. It's not unusual for people to pray. Prayer is one of those things which is, I would say, almost universal in that I can't obviously answer for six odd billion people, but I'm working on the assumption that most people, nearly everyone at some point in their life will pray.

However, when we pray, we often don't give much thought to what we're praying. Adults often struggle with prayer, whereas kids tend to find prayer sort of simple and easy, certainly in a way that we often don't.

I want to say that as a Christian though, and hear me bearing some of my soul here, I think that my own lack of prayerfulness exposes my ungodliness in a way like nothing else does.

[3 : 02] I want to say that there is nothing like a lack of prayer to make me feel like a hypocrite.

Nothing else like it. It exposes my true heart. That is, if you understand ungodliness as being going about our daily life as if God doesn't exist.

It's getting up in the morning, going about our business, and giving little or no regard to the God who has control of this whole universe.

And so day by day, I give little consideration for his glory, for his will, for his purposes, or even the fact that I am completely dependent upon this God for my very breath, let alone the gifts that I have to do the job that I do, or the studies that I do, or whatever it might be.

If that's what you consider ungodliness, then that exposes my heart more than anything else. And there are many good people, many good people, good, moral, upright, religious people who live day by day in ungodliness because they give little regard to this God and his purposes, his will, or even acknowledgement of our dependency upon him moment by moment.

[4 : 24] Yeah, we may get up and we might, you know, pray a prayer as we get up in the morning or read something from the Bible or maybe close the day with a few words of prayer before we sort of nod off to sleep.

But the bulk of the day in between is lived in ungodliness. And ungodliness is also revealed in the content of our prayers. That is, do we pray for kingdom priorities in our prayers or are they just the usual shopping list of things that are concerning me at the moment?

Now, I'm not saying there's anything wrong with a shopping list. I'm saying, what I am saying though, if that is all that you pray, then that is a significant problem. That is, do your prayers reveal a human-centeredness or a God-centeredness?

Because frankly, I've got a lot of non-Christian friends who will pray and their prayers are always human-centered. You might remember that we are traveling with Jesus.

Jesus has resolutely set his face for Jerusalem. And on the way there to Jerusalem, he is clarifying with his disciples some of their misconceptions of what it means to follow him.

[5 : 44] And today we have his teaching, one of the essentials of discipleship, the life of prayer. We are looking at the most famous of all prayers.

We know it. We have said this prayer again and again and again for centuries as a church. We say it here in this church most weeks and frankly, most services most weeks.

And so I think it's kind of ironic that when Matthew records Jesus teaching on prayer, this same kind of passage that he's referring to here in Luke's gospel, he does it in the context of telling his disciples to not be like the pagans and the hypocrites who go on with their mindless babbling when they pray.

And so we have taken Jesus teaching in the Lord's prayer and mindlessly babbled it throughout the centuries. What we have done then is we've forgotten that Jesus is revealing to us a model of prayer and instead we've taken his very words and recited and recited and recited it until it virtually has no meaning for us anymore.

I'm not really sure that's what Jesus had in mind. When you look through Luke's gospel, we see very clearly that Jesus is a man of prayer. He was praying when the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove in Luke chapter 3 verse 21.

[7 : 03] He began his ministry after a 40-day fast in chapter 4 verses 1 to 15. Other times he redrew into the wilderness to pray in chapter 5, 16.

He prayed all night before choosing the 12 disciples in chapter 6 verse 12. He was praying alone just before he was asked by, just before he asked Peter, who do you say that I am?

In chapter 9 verse 18. And just before he was transfigured, he was praying with Peter, James and John up on a mountain. And he was praying here again at the beginning of chapter 11.

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

Let me say that I want to be a man of prayer more than anything else. If there's one thing that I really, truly want to desire to develop in my Christian life, it is prayerfulness.

[8 : 07] I think I've kind of got the activity thing kind of worked out, you know, busy in ministry and stuff like that. But it's prayerfulness. It's actually stop the doing and start the being stuff more that I want to be more than anything else.

And so Jesus has taught us to pray. But he's also made some amazing promises to us about prayer.

He lived a life of prayer and he taught a life of prayer. And let me say that it is the will of the Lord Jesus that St. Paul's be a church of prayer. That this building that we're sitting in right now be a house of prayer, that you the people be daily given to prayer, prevailing prayer for our personal needs, for the power of the Spirit, for the progress of the gospel and for the glory of God's name.

That we be given wholeheartedly to those things. And so let's have a look at this. Open up your Bibles, Luke chapter 11. The first thing that Jesus teaches us here is to make our praying God-centered.

That's the first thing. When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, which I think is an amazing thing in and of itself. Here are guys, right? These are Jewish dudes who have grown up all their life praying and then they go to Jesus.

[9 : 35] Now they're following Jesus. They teach us to pray. Like as if you don't know. It's pretty easy. Close your eyes, shut your, you know, pay your head, you know, whatever. Pray, it's really easy. But it's actually not. What they're actually wanting Jesus to teach them is their priorities.

What are the priorities in prayer? And he says this to me in verse 2. When you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Notice that their requests.

In fact, if you look at all of the Lord's prayer, it's actually all requests. It's not thanks, it's not praise. Jesus says our first desire, our first request, should be for God's name to be hallowed, or that is for God's name to be glorified, and that his kingdom be advanced, that his kingdom would come.

That is what I mean when I say about our prayers being God-centered. The glory of God's name, the advancement of his kingdom, is to be the primary concern in our prayers.

The God-centeredness, and this is what I'm meaning when I talk about ungodliness. The God-centeredness of our prayers, or the lack of it, has to be the difference between a mature prayer and an immature prayer.

[10 : 51] The God-centeredness, or the lack of it, is the difference between maturity and immaturity in prayer. Or, you might call godliness and ungodliness in prayer.

The plea here is that we have Jesus' priorities in our praying, namely that God's name, the Father's name be hallowed, and that the kingdom come. If this feels foreign to you, you think about your prayer life at the moment, you think about your prayer life just for today, if this feels foreign to you, then please, plead, plead with God for you not to be content with that.

That you may not stay here, even tonight, even as you move from here, that you may not stay stuck at an immature level of prayer. Instead, say in a fresh way, in a new way to God, tonight, right now, if you have to, this coming week, Father, hallowed be your name in my life, in my praying for this coming week, for the rest of this year, and as we launch into another one in a couple of months.

It's amazing. The reality of it is, God's name will be hallowed. God's kingdom will come. He will be vindicated among all the nations as true and glorious, but He has decreed that we will have a hand in His triumph through our prayer.

It's an amazing thought. So make the glory of God the centre of your prayers. Pray again and again and again in as many words as you can possibly muster in your vocabulary.

[12 : 43] Father, let your name be hallowed. Let your kingdom come. Let your name be hallowed. Let your kingdom come. Jesus also teaches in this prayer 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 our Father when we pray to Him. And so in verses 11 to 13, 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? 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. He does not want us to feel unsure of our acceptance or fearful that we will find the Father out of sorts or just unconcerned about our daily issues.

[14 : 11] This sense of security is utterly crucial for us. It is utterly crucial for us in a life of prayer and a life of worship.

You cannot sustain a life of prayer if you think that God is angry with you or you think that He's neutral to the circumstances of your life. Prayer is sustained by the confidence that God is our Father and that He is concerned and that His disposition towards us is, as Jesus says it is, that is, He's more inclined to give what we need than our best human fathers.

That's the promise. And so we are to pray with a sense of the Father's security, the sense of the security, the Father's love for us. Jesus also teaches us here to prevail in prayer without doubting the Father's love in this passage.

He teaches us to hang in there, to persevere, to persist, to keep on and not giving up, to keep on asking and seeking and knocking until, you know, at heaven's door until the answer comes or until God basically says stop praying.

But, isn't that a little bit inconsistent with what I just said? I mean, just a tad little inconsistent. I mean, if God is more caring than the best earthly father, then why would He be so slow to respond to my prayers sometimes?

[15 : 40] Why would He do that? Jesus tells a story in verses 5 to 8 of a bloke who went to his mate's place because he got this guest, came into town pretty late one night, goes to his mate's place, knocks on his door, give me some bread, I need some bread to feed him and his mate's upstairs, you know, lights are out, kids are in bed, he's sort of starting to nod off, here's his rat-a-tat at the door and he looks out the window and says, go away mate, you know, it's all shut up for the night and he goes, no, no, I need some food and then they go away, just go away.

The man says, the door's locked, the children are asleep, don't bother me, but his friend keeps knocking and he keeps asking until the man gets up.

He doesn't get up because of his friendship, he doesn't have a moral conscience all of a sudden and go, oh, well, he is my mate and I did get some bread from him, you know, last week. It's because the man's prevailing, because of his boldness as it says, he's persisting, he's persevering in knocking, he annoyed him so much that he went downstairs and opened the door and gave us a bread.

Take it! But doesn't that seem an unpleasant image when we approach prayer? But immediately in verse 9, Jesus says that there is a lesson to be learned here.

Ask and it will be given you. Seek and you'll find. Knock and it will be open to you. There are three things here that stress the importance of prevailing, not giving up prayer.

[17 : 16] One is a little bit technical. It's the tense in the original language which means an ongoing activity. It means keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.

The second is the fact that Jesus commands this continuous action three times in verse 9 and he repeats the three words again in verse 10.

And the third thing that stress is prevailing is that the three words used get an increasingly close to the answer and show a pressing in on God if you like.

So asking as it were, coming to the house, give me some bread. seeking until we find it and knocking until the door is opened. Asking is the simplest bit.

It requires no movement whatsoever. Seeking turns the activity into a pursuit and knocking on the door again and again and again signifies an earnestness and even a desperation to get an answer to this and I need it.

[18 : 32] So Jesus clearly wants us to be like this friend at his mate's door. He wants us to be like that. He wants us to prevail in prayer and yet all of a sudden he makes this little sudden turn in verse 11 this little twist and he shifts from the grumpy old friend who's just been woken up to the image of a caring father.

The point Jesus is getting across is the prevailing prayer persisting persevering in prayer is utterly important for us. He stamps the truth of it in our memories with a shocking image of a friend who won't get out of his bed to help someone until he's bothered enough to do it.

But then Jesus qualifies the point in verses 11 to 13 and says but God's not like that. God's not like that. He's not like that friend.

He is like the most caring father imaginable. So yes God sometimes gives us what we need only after a long long season of prevailing and persisting in prayer but it's not because he's uncaring and it's not because he's insensitive to our needs.

So why? I think verse 11 gives us a few clues and that is that a good father will not give his son a serpent if he asks for a fish.

[20 : 10] In other words a good father will give their children what is good for them. It's like this morning I got up and brought Isabel downstairs as soon as I put her feet on the floor she makes a beeline straight for the cupboard where she knows where the biscuits are.

This is like at 6.30 in the morning. This is breakfast in her mind and she goes to the cupboard door. She can't quite reach the handles thank God at this stage. But she goes to the cupboard door and goes and then you're like what?

And then she goes which is tiny teddies. And if it wasn't for the fact that maybe Nat was hot on my heels I might have sort of given her that moment.

But she persisted in her asking but she got a no because it's not good for her to have biscuits for breakfast not unless you're camping or something like that. See God is giving us what is good for us.

There is something in the prevailing in the asking the seeking the knocking that we need. It's something in it that is good for us and he knows best. The promise that will encourage us in prevailing prayer is verse 10.

[21 : 32] And I'll read it with a bit of a twist based on the original language. Everyone who goes on asking receives and he who goes on seeking will find and to him who goes on knocking it will be opened.

God is not unresponsive to our prevailing prayer. The difficulties in prevailing prayer is that we are in the instant generation. We live in a culture where satisfaction is now where 30 seconds on a microwave is just I don't know if you notice how slow that is nowadays.

Once upon a time you want a steak you know you've got to go and catch the cow nowadays it's out of the freezer into the microwave and even then you know five minutes to defrost the thing for goodness sake.

I mean is there anything faster than a microwave? I hope someone's working on it. And that's what makes prevailing prayer so difficult for us because we want the answer we want it now but it's not good for us.

The final teaching that God gives on prayer is if you like a circling back to the original point and that is the God centredness of prayer and if I understand Jesus here he means for it to be the prevailing heartbeat of the prayer life of our church.

[22 : 53] This is the main point. If I understand what Jesus is saying here he means for this prayer to be the prevailing heartbeat of the life of our church.

Jesus teaches in verse 13 that our prevailing in prayer should be a prevailing for the Holy Spirit. 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.

He's saying if you know how to give good gifts then God the gracious Father giver who knows all good things will give you not your new car not your health he will give you the Holy Spirit.

There is nothing greater than that. And so it's no accident that Luke tells us in chapter 3 verse 21 that while Jesus was praying the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove or that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost came at the climax of a 10 day prayer vigil or in Acts 4 31 that when the church had prayed the place where they were gathered was shaken and was filled with the Holy Spirit prevailing prayer is the pathway to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

And my hope is for us as a church as we've mentioned and we've been bleating on about it for a while our vision our next stage of ministry for this church launching into 2020 for the next 11 years is coming up very soon and that we might be a church that prevails in prayer and asking for God to pour out his spirit amongst us.

[24 : 47] And as I've said before in a previous sermon to pour out his spirit amongst us another my way of saying that is for God to invade our lives that we might prevail in that prayer that there might be truly a revival amongst us here because when we prevail in prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit more is happening in our life through that prevailing prayer than we could ever imagine.

God waits because our prevailing is good for us. May the Lord prevent us from losing heart and failing in the very thing we need mighty prevailing prayer for the outpouring of the spirit.

So let's this week as we enter even into this evening and enter this week with God centred prayer. with a sense of security and the fatherly care of God with a new resolve to prevail and to persist in prayer without doubting God's love for us and let us prevail specifically in praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit amongst us for his power his gifts his full blessing and get this all the while rejoicing that the prevailing in itself for that prayer is a great work of the indwelling spirit of the living God in and of itself.

So let's pray the Lord's prayer. I'm going to pray the Lord's prayer for us as a model and picking up the intention of Jesus' words.

Let's bow and let's pray. Our gracious God, loving Heavenly Father, we long to see you honoured more and more in our church and in our city.

[27 : 03] Cause your name to be hallowed among us. Magnify your worth and your glory amongst us and let your kingdom come.

Take up your kingly rule more and more fully over our church, over our lives, over our families, over Chatswood, over this city, over this country and speed the day of Christ's final appearing, we pray.

Meet our physical needs, we pray, Lord, not for our own comfort but so that we can press on with joy in the work you called us to do for your namesake.

Forgive us, O Lord, where we have sinned, where we have fallen short of your glory, where we have lived each day in ungodliness revealed in the lack of prayerfulness or in the human centredness of our prayer.

And Father, we ask that you might keep us from the entangling temptations that would want to trip us up as your people and bring criticism to your name and to your church.

[28 : 22] And we ask it through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.