

Prayer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 September 2024

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Thanks, Mike. I love a dad joke, so I was all up for the amazing. But it is lovely to get together. And I must say it's one of the most thrilling parts of church for me is just seeing how international it is, isn't it?

And just actually what goes on here on a Sunday is just a microcosm of what's true for the church of Jesus around the world, that it is made up of a family of people of every tribe, tongue and nation who gather together to celebrate the unity and diversity that we have as we worship King Jesus.

So that day next Saturday is going to be thrilling, so do make an effort to come along if you can. And if I haven't said hello to you today, my name is Graeme, particularly for those who are new this morning.

It is lovely to welcome you here today, and it's great to gather together as a family. We do this every Sunday, and the purpose is really to fix our eyes on the Jesus who unites us together.

So grab Luke 11 if you've got it there, and we're just going to be in these verses this morning. But let me tell you what we're doing in this little series that Archie kind of flagged up top.

[1 : 11] Here's a typical Edinburgh scene, one that we see on a regular basis. Maybe you met somebody this morning who travelled in on the bus. Imagine many of us travelled in on the bus. We love our buses in Edinburgh, and there's a bus stop that's right outside our front door where we live in the south of the city.

Three buses pass that bus stop many times every single day. And every day I look out and I see people queuing up at this bus stop, and they're gazing at the screen, trying to make out what is happening.

And every so often I pass and somebody stops me and says, excuse me, do you know where this bus goes? For us it's the 7, the 37, the 47. Do you know where this bus goes?

And of course, how do you find out where a bus is going? You look at the number that's on the front, and the number tells you exactly where the bus is going.

And that's what this little series is all about. It's all about familiarising and realigning ourselves with the sign that's on the front of the Bruntsfield Evangelical bus.

[2 : 18] Because the sign will tell you where we're going and what we're all about. And for those of us who are members of this church family, I hope this is a wonderful and a timely reminder of what it is we're seeking to do here.

Every event that we do, every meeting we attend, every gathering that we put on and we have, they all have the same central purpose. And for maybe some of us are new here today, maybe we're even exploring the Christian faith, I hope this introduces you to some of the distinctives and some of the priorities of this local church.

Now, are you ready for the sign on the front of the bus? You seem really enthusiastic. Here's the sign on the front of the bus. It really says, really simply, being disciple making disciples of Jesus Christ.

That's the sign on the front of the bus. What is a disciple? A disciple is someone who is seeking to follow after, learn from, and growing to be like Jesus.

If you like, a disciple is someone who has their L plates on and they're sitting and they're learning in the Jesus classroom of life.

[3 : 31] And in turn, a disciple helps others to do the same. Now, how do we seek to do that here at the church? Well, we devote ourselves as a church to three core things.

Firstly, we devote ourselves to God's words. We're unashamed in our conviction that when we open the pages of the Bible, we hear God speak. Secondly, we devote ourselves to fellowship, which is our love for and our commitment to one another.

Of course, that's what Jesus said, isn't it, to his disciples. That's how the world will know you, by the way that you love one another. And the word fellowship in the Greek doesn't just mean playing happy families. It means coming alongside each other, linking arms out of love with a shared ambition of what you want to do.

And thirdly, we devote ourselves to prayer, which we save to the end because it's going to be the topic for the next 20 minutes or so. And let me ask you, when was the last time that you prayed?

Now, there's an assumption in that question, isn't there? And here's why there's an assumption in that question. There's a famous saying that I think originated from World War I that goes like this.

[4 : 46] There's no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole. Now, a foxhole is just a place where you'd hide from the enemy fire. And here's what that means.

It means that everybody, no matter what you believe, prays in a crisis. Now, according to a recent survey, 51% of people in our country admit to praying on a regular basis.

What's surprising is that our younger generations say that they're more likely to pray than an older generation. You'll hear politicians in the wake of a tragic event talking about how their thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of those who have been caught up in a tragedy.

And our friends of other faiths pray as well. Prayer is something that, despite our secular leanings as a society, we still do. In other words, we are surrounded by prayer.

And if you come to Luke 11, what we need to understand is that the disciples too are living in a world that's saturated in prayer.

[5 : 53] They are accustomed to the religious prayers of their contemporaries, who in the Gospels are these people called the Pharisees, whose prayers are very public, whose prayers are full of many long and many impressive words.

So they get religious prayer. And they also get the prayers of the peoples of the nations round about them who are praying to all sorts of God and praying all sorts of things.

And those prayers are noisy. Those prayers are loud. Those prayers are powerful. So the disciples understand prayer. But notice, if you've got the text there, what Luke, who is this first century doctor-come historian, is telling us at verse 1, don't skip over it.

What's he telling us? Look at it there. That Jesus has been what? He's been praying. Now this isn't the first time in this Gospel of Luke where Jesus prays.

Where Jesus retreats to a solitary place, gets up early for a time of undistracted prayer. In fact, I counted them, and if you count them up until chapter 11, three times Jesus has said to be praying.

[7 : 10] So when Jesus talks about prayer here, we need to understand that this is not a spur-of-the-moment inclination to go to Facebook and post his thoughts on prayer.

He's living this. And the disciples think to themselves, we get religious prayer, we know what Gentile prayer sounds like, but Jesus, we see in you something that's radically and refreshingly different.

Because the religious people who pray, the Gentile people who pray, they do it for the praise of other people. Particularly the religious people who are praying in our day.

They want the Instagram snap. They want the retweets on Twitter. They live for the praise of men. But you don't seem to live for the praise of men. I must say it's one of the most endearing things about Jesus that you read about in the Gospels, is just how unstrategic he is when it comes to the people who he both hangs out with and loves.

There's nothing in it for him. There really is nothing in it for him when it comes to the people that you read about him hanging out with. It's one of the most endearing things about Jesus.

[8 : 26] One of the things that drew me to him. And the disciples think on that. And they say, Jesus, you don't want praise of people.

You want God. And that's what we want. That is what is attractive to us. You commune with God in a way like we've never seen before.

And so do you see what they say to him? They say, teach us. And notice they say not teach us how to pray.

They say, teach us to pray. They don't want a method. They don't want a technique. They want to enter into this thing that Jesus is doing called prayer.

Jesus, we want in on it too. Show us how. Teach us how. And what is verse 9? As Jesus says, ask, seek and knock.

[9 : 26] But Jesus saying to his disciples and to his disciples ever since, I want you in on this as well. Jesus, teach us to pray.

And so what Jesus gives the disciples firstly, if you want to think about this, verses 1 to 4, is a pattern to follow. Now, you up for a little nursery rhyme?

It's kind of my life at the minute. You up for a nursery rhyme? See, if I sing you the first line, would someone be brave enough to tell me the second line? Yeah? Don't leave me dying up here, okay?

Here it is. Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been? Look to the boomers in the room. London to visit the Queen.

You up for another line? Pussy cat, pussy cat, what did you do there? Under the chair. So here's the thing about that nursery rhyme.

[10 : 28] The cat is in the presence of the Queen and chooses to look at the mouse, not the person on the throne. Here's the thing about prayer.

Prayer is not about the eloquence of our words. It's not even really about the affection of our hearts, because that will dip in and dip out. What prayer is about is the magnificence of the one on the throne.

See what Jesus says there, the first word of the Lord's Prayer. As he gets his disciples not to look at the other things, but to gaze their eyes at the one on the throne. What's the word? It's the word Father.

See how that's the first word that he says? Father. Now here's a thought for you. Whoever you are here today, whatever you think about this God, it is only by coming to know this God that you will truly come to know yourself.

Knowing God as our Father, says Jesus, is the key to getting started and keeping going in prayer. Having an awareness of the Father's commitment to us. Having an awareness of his love for us.

[11 : 37] Having a knowledge that he's for us. We've been thinking about that in Romans 8 the last few weeks. Having an appreciation that he knows us and that he wants us to seek him in prayer. We'll see more of that in a few moments.

The key to praying is knowing the one that we're praying to. And Jesus, from that starting point, he outlines five things that he wants his disciples to go to this Father and ask.

Right? We can only name them because of the time constraints this morning. But just take these in. If you're a note taker, just write these five things down. Here's what Jesus is saying. You can go to the Father.

And remember, that's a blood-bought privilege that Jesus has won for his people on the cross through his resurrection. He's at the right hand of the Father. We can pray to the Father because he's there.

We can know him as Father because of Christ. He says, first pray, Father, would your name be honoured? Your name be honoured. In a world that doesn't recognise you, in a world that doesn't want to know you, in a world that dishonours your name, how different then are Jesus' people who love your name?

[12 : 52] Second, pray that his kingdom would come, that his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. And of course, what have you got just before Luke 11? I hadn't seen this before.

You've got the parable that Jesus tells of the Good Samaritan. Something of the kingdom and the values of above breaking in through the hearts of God's people to how they love the world.

Third, that this Father would provide all that we need. Notice the plural there. We're going to come back to that. Fourth, Father, that you would forgive our sins.

And fifth, that you would deliver us from temptation. And do you notice in Luke 11, you can have this for free, how Luke has put it together just before in Luke 10.

You've got the parable of the Good Samaritan. And just in case you came away from that, thinking it's all about do, do, do. What's right next? It is Mary and Martha. Mary picks the good portion.

[13 : 52] When Martha is serving, Mary is there at Jesus' feet saying, I want to learn. And it's both, isn't it? Both action and devotion.

That is the heart of Christ's people. How often we can talk about prayer like it's wishing on a star or like it's requesting wishes from a genie in a bottle or treating God like he's some kind of fortune cookie.

You know, we had a takeaway last night. I got mine. Apparently, I'll receive no parking tickets in the next year. But how different does Jesus talk about prayer here?

And when you think about it, all that we could ever ask is his people. All that we could ever need comes under one of those five headings. And what struck me this week is that Jesus could have just easily left it there and said, on you go, see how you get on.

There's what to pray. But isn't it interesting that he doesn't stop there? But he wants to draw his disciples' hearts deeper into the character and the heart of the Father that they're praying to.

[15 : 08] Do you see? And what follows, if we consider it, is truly marvelous. He moves from this pattern to follow verses 5 to 13.

He gives them a reason to seek. And Jesus gets them, and I think this is a magnificent bit of first century genius storytelling.

He gets them to picture themselves in a story. So they're in this story. They're not watching on. They're in this story. Do you see? I love how Jesus does that. He lifts us out of our stories and our self-absorption so often and he places us in his.

And he says, imagine that you have a friend that turns up at your door unannounced at midnight. Now I'm freaking out at that. Are you not? Those words, unannounced at midnight, they do not go together.

I can maybe handle one, but I cannot handle both. If my doorbell goes at midnight, I've got my phone in my hand and I'm dialing 999. Who turns up at midnight at a friend's house?

[16:17] Have they not heard about the travel lodge down the road? Who does this? But we've got to understand in this culture, not of sprawling city suburbs, but of small rural villages, a desperate friend who finds themselves in your neighborhood in darkness has nowhere else to go.

That's the point of the story, right? No one else to go. And you would welcome them. You would inconvenience yourself because if you fail to do that, you would, in this culture, you would bring shame on you, you would bring shame on your family name, and you would bring shame on your village because you couldn't provide for someone who turned up and needed help.

You couldn't do it. But given the late hour of the day and the days before fridge freezers and stockpiling, your bread for the day would likely be all gone.

So you'd have no other choice in this moment of need to go and chap up your neighbor, another person in your village, and ask them to help you in this emergency.

You tracking with me? Yeah? So picture the scene. Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. Can you help me? And the way that Jesus tells the story, and it's genius really, isn't it?

[17:38] You don't get the impression that this neighbor is all too impressed. Right? It's not, way good to see you. It's been way too long. No, this neighbor has bolted the door.

The kids are finally off to bed. The horlicks has been drunk. The jammies are on. I would be not opening the door if I was this neighbor. And yet, despite the neighbor thinking, you've got to be kidding me, because he too doesn't want to bring shame on himself, on his family name, nor on his village, he will put on his dressing gown and go to the cupboards and rummage through them to see what he can find.

Now, what is the point of this? Here is Jesus' point, I think. How much more, and hear this today, how much more is your father willing to listen and to answer in his perfect way your cries and your petitions whenever you come to him in prayer?

It's a how much more story. Do you know what this demonstrates? It demonstrates the father's wonderful willingness.

Isn't that not amazing that the God, when we go to him in prayer, doesn't just say, oh, not them again. They prayed to me yesterday and they're at it again.

[19:07] Do they not know that I'm up to my eyeballs here? I'm trying to answer all sorts of other different people's prayers. You ever seen that, was it Bruce Almighty or was it Evan Almighty?

I forget what that 90s film, which one it was, where you get the thing where he's answering all the prayers, yes, and he's getting overwhelmed on his computer by all these prayers when he's trying to act like God.

It's that kind of thing. The father doesn't put us on hold saying, your call is very important to me, you're number 18 in the queue and while you wait, here's some lovely background music.

Here's what you need to understand. Here's what we need to understand. In Christ, we have our father's ear, no matter what hour it is and no matter what state we come to him in prayer.

The father's wonderful willingness to listen and to answer the cries of his people. And what complements that story so well in what I think is a little bit of first century humour is Jesus tells the story about an earthly father.

[20 : 14] Now, if you're a parent here that you'll get this, probably not for reasons that you think. Honestly, as a parent and other parents in the room, you tell me this.

We feel our weakness. Right? And we know the mistakes that we've made and yet, deep down, despite our failings, we will only ever give good things to our children.

But Jesus says, picture the scene, it's dinner time and you're feeding your child who's opened their mouth for a bit of fish or egg. You wouldn't, at the last minute, do a switcheroo and put into their mouth a scorpion or snake in their mouth instead.

Right? Can you imagine the scene on Christmas Day if you were to do that? They opened a gift thinking it was one thing and out jumps a scorpion. And remember the scorpions and snakes in this day aren't plastic toys.

These are things that will kill you. Again, what's the logic? It's a how much more then? If that's the heart of an imperfect yet loving father towards his children, how much greater then is the heart of the perfect father towards his children.

[21 : 26] Do you know what that celebrates? It celebrates his perfect ability towards his children to give us what is good for us. So you've got these two things, think like a gymnast holding the bars.

You have the father's wonderful willingness, says Jesus, and you have his perfect ability. And together that is something that you can hold on to and run to him with. If we come to God with those two things in mind, that is an absolute game changer for our prayer lives both personally and as we'll come on to see in a minute, corporately.

And what's surprising in this passage though is the what that Jesus is talking about here isn't stuff. You see that in the text? He names the good thing. And the good thing is a person.

The good thing is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. Now you might read that and you think to yourselves, well that, okay I get that that's not a scorpion, but I still don't understand how that's better than all the stuff that I think I need for my life.

And I've been thinking about that all this week. First of all, I think I've been convicted how often I overrate my own ability to know what the best thing is for my life and for your life.

[22 : 52] But as more as I've been chewing on it this week, the Holy Spirit sent to dwell in the heart of every believer. What is it that the Spirit does? I take it, if you've got the text there, that the Spirit loops us back round to the top and further in and deeper in to the heart of the Lord's prayer.

and here's what I mean, track with me, the Spirit helps us to know God as our Father. The Spirit helps us to have a heart for the glory of God in the world.

Of course, that is a missionary cry, isn't it? The Spirit helps us to know the forgiveness that is ours in Christ when we just don't think it's true when the accusations of the devil are coming at us.

The Spirit helps us forgive other people. Friends, the Spirit is the greatest gift that God could have possibly given his people.

And so, verse 9, Jesus says, ask, seek, and knock. And as true as what Jesus is saying here has got so much to teach us in terms of our own prayer lives and that's because we live in this individualistic culture, that is where our minds will straight away have gone to.

[24 : 10] we need to see the emphasis all the way through the prayer, did you notice it, is corporate. Right?

It's our Father. It's give us this day our daily bread. Have you thought about that when we're praying that God would give us our daily bread?

Actually, you're praying for other people that God would, out of his wonderful willingness and his perfect ability would provide for their needs. Great thing to do off the back of this today, go towards someone you love and say, how can I pray for you this week?

What are your, what is your daily bread if you like in this context? Forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us. It's a prayer for God's people to pray, not primarily as isolated Christians, but as part of a family who are journeying together through this pilgrim world?

And so here's two challenges just as we begin to wrap this up this morning, as we think about our corporate life together. Here's the first one. Let's allow this to affect our diaries.

[25 : 24] Will we prioritize meeting together to pray? You know, our corporate prayer life is really very much on our hearts as elders that we would love to see it continue to flourish, that more people would join the corporate prayer life of our church.

You know, we've got two prayer meetings that happen on a regular basis. We've got one that happens on Zoom every Monday evening at 8pm for 30 minutes. And it's amazing how that's just, that actually started during COVID and we prayed every night since that lockdown started.

and we went through the whole Psalms and then we went through, I think, John's Gospel as well. We did all, we just, every night we were praying and that still continued, that we pray every single Monday for the things of this church, for the things of this world.

And we have an in-person one that happens on the first Sunday of the month and we even throw in pizza for dinner as well to get people to come. And that's next Sunday evening. And listen, if you come to the Vision evening tonight, a good 20 minutes of that time together is given over to us praying.

And that really is one of the highlights of the year. Let's meet together to pray. Let's pray big prayers for our world. Let's pray big prayers for our city.

[26 : 45] Let's pray big prayers for our community. Let's pray big prayers for each other. To this God who is able to do way more than we ask or even imagine is possible. Let's allow what Jesus is saying there to affect our diaries.

And second, let's allow this to impact our community. I mean, wouldn't it be great to recreate a culture where asking how we can pray for each other and then maybe on the spur praying for each other was just a normal thing that we did.

Praying together should be the most natural thing that we do together as Christians. And so here's a challenge for you. Why not ask one person today? Just ask one person.

If you can manage more than that, go for it. But ask one person how you can pray for them this week. And then maybe if you feel like it, if you feel comfortable, why not pray together on the spot?

You know, just as we close, let me tell you how this has impacted me this week. And then we're done. When we first moved to Edinburgh, we lived in the part of the city known as the Newtown, beautiful part of the city.

[27 : 55] One of the things about that part of the city is that there's cobbled streets everywhere. So every time I used to take our car, our little car, it was a wee silver VW Fox, I don't even know if they're still going, this tiny little tin machine.

Every time I used to take it for an MOT, they said the same thing. They said, you need to have your wheels realigned. And the thing was that all the knocks, all the bumps, all the cobbles, all the potholes in the roads, as they collectively took their toll in the car, had totally knocked this thing out of sync.

So you weren't driving the steering wheel like that, you were driving at it like that to get it to go straight, the kind of thing. And every time they would say the same thing. Do you want us to realign this car? You need to realign this car.

Now thinking about that this week, because so often in my life, I know that it's true that all the worries, the concerns, the people, all these things come along. The bills that need paid, the things that need done, the trash needs taken, all these things that come along in life, they can knock us.

They can knock us from remembering the thing that Jesus has called us to. What does this prayer do? It realigns us. It realigns us. It lifts us out of our world of self-absorption and it throws us by God's grace on the priorities and the heart of the Father.

[29 : 21] And so listen, I'd love us to finish and I hope I've got this slide right. Yeah. Just by saying the words of the Lord's Prayer together, it's really short, just those words on the screen on my cue and then we're just going to pray to close.

And listen, we don't do this token, this is never token, this is a commitment that we're making to make Jesus' priorities in the heart of the Father the thing that we're seeking. So you ready for this? If you feel comfortable on my cue.

I can't even read that right. Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who sins against us and lead us not into temptation. And so Father, we do pray this morning.

hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us today our daily bread. Would you forgive our sins?

[30 : 26] Would you help us to forgive those who have sinned against us? And Lord, would you guide us? Heavenly Father, we thank you for the privilege today that we can call you Father. And I ask that maybe for some of us here today, maybe we're doubting that.

Maybe we don't know what that means. Lord, may today be the day by your spirit where we come to appreciate your love for us and sending your son for us just that little bit more.

Would you fill us afresh with a passion to see your name hallowed in our land and in our lives? Father, we long to see your name put in lights.

Help us, Father, to be a people who come together to seek your face in prayer. And Lord, we thank you that you hear us, not because we pray eloquent words or because of any righteousness that we have, but we come to you knowing that you hear us confidently because we pray in the precious and in the loving name of Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen.