

Sunday 15 January 2017
Otumoetai Baptist Church
The Truth About Prayer Jesus Style

Luke 11:1-13

Imagine for a moment that the clock has been wound back almost two thousand years and you are sitting by the lake of Galilee with a man called Jesus and some of his disciples.

(SLIDE 1)

You've been following him from the start of his life on earth and there's something different about him.

You've seen him baptized when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as a dove and then you saw him driven out into the wilderness to face real temptation.

You've seen him heal people, cast out unclean spirits and bring wholeness back into people's lives.

You've heard him talk about the Kingdom of God and how He came to seek and save those who are lost and sick.

You've heard Him talk about what it means to follow Him and about each of us picking up our own Crosses on a daily basis.

You've watched Him get up early in the mornings to go by Himself and spend time with his heavenly Father.

You've watched Him calm the wind and the waves.

You've seen Him, heard Him, watched Him, and you follow Him.

After all that you've seen, heard, and watched Him do, what is it that you would most like to ask Him, or that you would most like him to teach you?

(SLIDE 2)

Think about that for a while.

Maybe you would like to ask him to teach you about healing. Or perhaps you would like to ask him to teach you how to preach the gospel with real power and authority. Maybe you want him to teach you more about salvation and how it works, or about the place of suffering in our lives.

As you ponder this, the early disciples were literally in the same boat as you are now. In Jesus they had a captive audience. He had recruited them, trained them, watched them, and made himself fully available to them.

They could have asked him anything they liked, and they most likely did. But I wonder if you realise that in all four of the gospels (which tell the life of Jesus on earth) there is only one request from the disciples for Jesus to teach them something. Anything.

What was this one request? It was this, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

(SLIDE 3)

This disciple, who spoke on behalf of them all, recognised the importance of prayer in one’s life and that Jesus had vital insight into this area.

So this morning we’re going to look at the truth about Prayer Jesus style.

As we focus on the prayer lives of Jesus and his disciples, let’s think of our own prayer lives too, and I’ll share some of my struggles with you along the way.

We’re looking at Luke chapter 11 verses 1 to 13. But before we talk about prayer, let’s actually pray and ask God to speak to us this morning.

(Pray)

(SLIDE 4)

Luke 11:1-13

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

(SLIDE 5)

So He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us day by day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

For we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.”

(SLIDE 6)

And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’?

I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

(SLIDE 7)

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

So today we’re going to break this down and look at the three aspects of Jesus’ answer. The three P’s if you like for Prayer. These are: firstly, the **Principle** of Prayer; secondly, **Persistence** in Prayer; and finally, **Power** through Prayer. Let’s start with the Principle of Prayer.

(SLIDE 8)

Let’s see how observant you are this morning. What was Jesus doing at the start of the passage? He was praying. His disciples were right by Him and they saw Him praying. The Bible says that when he stopped praying, that’s when one of the disciples seized

the opportunity to ask Him to teach them to pray, as John taught his disciples.

It was the custom of the day back then for religious leaders to teach their followers to pray. The pupils would model themselves on their rabbis and in essence seek to become like them in everything they do. And prayer was a big part of this.

So the fact that this disciple is asking Jesus to teach them to pray as John taught his disciples doesn’t mean that they didn’t pray at that time by themselves. It means that they saw the area of prayer as so vital and so necessary that the disciples wanted to soak up everything they could from Jesus on it.

I wonder if we treat prayer in the same way ...

Confession time. I’ve been through waves and cycles with my prayer life. For instance when I first decided to follow Jesus properly in my early twenties I was up every morning at the crack of dawn to spend some quality time with God in prayer.

A lot of the time I would be listening and then responding to what I thought God was saying to me. Sometimes I would be spending minutes with Him, and sometimes hours. I am very fond of these memories.

Now fast forward the clock a few years (Ok maybe more than a few), add in marriage and some children (three and counting!), and my prayer life is not as vibrant or consistent as it once was. In fact to be brutally honest, over the past few months I have found myself praying less and in all honesty I prayed the hardest and most fervent last week when I woke in the early hours of the morning with searing tooth pain! ... So I am no expert in this area, and very much on the journey with you all.

Maybe some people here can relate to this too. I bet the disciples felt a bit like this – and so they said to Jesus, “teach us to pray.”

I love His response to them. Jesus says, “*When you pray ...*” Not if, but when. Jesus’ statement hits two areas – the first is that He knows they pray and affirms this; the second is that He is challenging them on their thoughts on prayer too.

He is teaching them the Principle of Prayer. “Hey guys when you pray, how about praying like this:

(SLIDE 9)

(verses two to four)

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us day by day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

For we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.”

We might know this as the Lord’s Prayer. It’s called this because it comes from the Lord, but here’s a secret: it’s really the disciples’ prayer, expressing their common needs and sense of togetherness. Here is a community dependent on God and united in prayer before Him for even the most basic needs of life. Commentator Daryl Bock writes, “Disciples in touch with God take nothing for granted from him.”

I don’t know about you, but I find a lot of comfort in this prayer. Even though this is a communal prayer, I find that praying it in the mornings to start my day has been a good way to focus myself on Jesus and allowing him to guide my day.

Last year I read through a great little book by Max Lucado called ‘Before Amen’ and in it he simplifies this prayer to the following:

(SLIDE 10)

*Father,
You are good.
I need help. Heal me and forgive me.
They need help.
Thank you.
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

He calls this the Pocket Prayer. And I think it's gold for us, especially those of us who struggle in this area of prayer.

Max continues, "Let this prayer punctuate your day. As you begin your morning, *'Father you are good'*. As you commute to work or walk the hallways at school, *I need help*. As you wait in the grocery line or are stuck in traffic (I added that one!), *They need help*. Keep this prayer in your pocket as you pass through the day. Prayer, for most of us, is not a matter of a month-long retreat or even an hour of meditation. Prayer is conversation with God while driving to work or awaiting an appointment or before interacting with a client. Prayer can be the internal voice that directs the external action. This much is sure: God will teach you to pray."

The disciples were ready for Jesus to teach them to pray. And Jesus did in a humble and also simple yet profound way. Start with your Father, move to the earth, request what you need,

think of others, ask for protection from the evil one.

I believe in this exchange Jesus was showing his disciples that prayer is not this big mystical thing, it's an intimate communion with our heavenly Father.

Lucado writes: "We speak. He listens. He speaks. We listen. This is prayer in its purest form. God changes his people through such moments."

Disciples of Jesus are called to a childlike trust if you like, and not a shallow childish intimacy. See, real intimacy with God is not built on feelings or what He can do for you, but on an appreciation of the true nature of the believer's relationship to God. Believers turn to Him for protection, comfort and care. And even though God is a unique and marvellous figure, He is not unapproachable or distant. He's waiting for us.

Daryl Bock writes:

(SLIDE 11)

"The (Lord's) Prayer as a whole reflects a disciple's total reliance on God and his care. Whether it be in the circumstances that lead to his control of history, the provision of basic needs like food, or spiritual protection, the disciple knows that God's presence is an absolute necessity.

That recognition is at the heart of this prayer. Thus the prayer bonds the disciple to God, recognizing that the affairs of life are often a matter in which we walk alone or walk with our hand in his hand.” (Bock, 310)

That is what Jesus is teaching his disciples about the principle of prayer. God can be and desires to be approached in prayer.

So the next question becomes, how should we then approach Him in prayer? Since God is holy and the Creator of the universe, should he only be approached in moments of dire need, at the eleventh hour, tooth ache? Such thinking is dead wrong. And the parable Jesus tells his disciples next emphasizes that God is approachable, gracious, generous, and ready to hear from us.

Let’s move onto Jesus teaching his disciples **persistence** in prayer, verses five to eight:

(SLIDE 12)

And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend,

yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

In order to understand this parable, or story, we need to look at what was happening in the culture of the time.

The first thing to note is that food was not as easily available as it is today with our 24 hour supermarkets and petrol stations. Today if you need a pie or snacks, you just hop in your car or walk down to the nearest convenience store. Want some bread? No need to bake it, just pop into Countdown and get what you need.

Back in their times, it was entirely different. No convenience stores, no deliveries. Bread was baked on a daily basis to meet daily needs. And it was hard work.

The second thing to note is that hospitality was held in an extremely high regard back then. A visitor was to be welcomed and embraced into someone’s place regardless of the time of day.

So here we have a dilemma in Jesus’ parable. The visitor arrives at midnight and there is no food in the house. The host is breadless. This is a social nightmare!

So he dashes to his friend's house and pounds on the door. "I need some bread for my friend. Three loaves actually!"

You can imagine the wife rousing and giving her husband a nudge between the blankets. "Honey get up, someone is at the door. Go see what's up."

The husband sleepily gets up, comes to the door in his boxer shorts. Opens the door, "What on earth are you doing here? Don't you know we're all sleeping. The kids are just down in bed. Do you know how long it took for them to go to sleep?"

(Honestly, I can relate to this ... there are times I think that my three boys don't know the difference between sleep and wake time. Bed time routines seem to get later and later – I'm waiting for the day when they are teenagers and then they are staying up later than my wife and I!)

Anyway, I digress, back to the story. The man is persistent in asking his friend for bread to feed his visitor.

The home owner grumbles and mumbles and complains, but the man insists. Finally, he invites his friend in, shows him the pantry and says "Go for it, take some bread for your friend."

And here Jesus comes to the main point of the parable. The neighbour does not respond because he is a friend, but it's because the man is **persistent** in his request. If we were to choose two words to describe his actions, they would be "boldness" and "shameless". Maybe even audacious! The man is willing to wake up the entire house, actually the entire neighbourhood (!) to get what he requires. Food for his guest. Because of his boldness and shamelessness, in other words his persistence, his friend honours the request.

The lesson is clear for us. Jesus is teaching his disciples to be persistent in prayer. It's not that God is unwilling to answer the request or that He needs to be talked into it, in fact He is very eager to give to his children as we will soon see. It's that He desires us to have persistence in coming to him with our prayers.

This is our part in prayer. We can't take God's part, but we can perform ours. The take home: be persistent in prayer and seeking God.

This parable on persistence in prayer leads quite naturally into the way God gives to those who seek Him.

(SLIDE 13)

Verses nine to thirteen:

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

Here, Jesus is referring to **Power through Prayer**, the last part of his answer that we’re looking at this morning. And what might not seem immediately obvious to his disciples is that in teaching them to ask, seek and knock, Jesus is not saying that this is a one-time thing, but rather a continuous kind of lifestyle. He is speaking in a similar way to how he spoke of the parable, about persistence in asking, seeking and knocking.

Jesus starts with us and then moves onto our heavenly Father. It’s our role to ask, seek and knock continuously. It’s God’s role to respond. In his time.

I’m a father and would never dream of giving one of my sons something that is harmful to them. And as sinful as I am, and know how to give good gifts to my children, even more so will

our heavenly Father give of Himself to those who ask Him.

He will give His Holy Spirit. The One who will guide us, empower us, enable us, counsel us, comfort us, protect us, and lead us into all truth.

For Luke, the author of this book, this is man’s highest good. God at work in us and through us and for us.

And herein is Power through Prayer.

God delights to be involved in the lives of his people. Jesus in teaching his disciples was in effect saying this to them, “Here’s *how* I want you to pray; here’s *why* I want you to pray; and Here’s what is going to *happen* as a result of you praying.”

The disciples were praying people. But they realised their deep need for an ongoing intimate relationship with their God through ongoing intimate prayer.

(SLIDE 14)

So as we come to a close this morning, we’ve seen that in this exchange between Jesus and his disciples, they wanted him to teach them to pray and Jesus is only too happy to oblige. He teaches them about the **principle of prayer; persistence in prayer; and power through prayer.**

I want to finish this morning with a story and challenge for us today and this year.

It's a story by Hugh Price Hughes called the "City of Everywhere", in which a man arrived in a city one cold morning. As he got off the train, the station was like any other station with the crowds of people, except that everybody was barefooted.

"Pardon me", he asked the driver, "I was just wondering why you don't wear shoes. Don't you believe in shoes?"

"Sure we do," said the driver.

"Why don't you wear them?"

"Ah, that's the question," came the reply. "Why don't we wear shoes? Why don't we?"

At the hotel it was the same. The clerk, bell boys, everybody was barefooted. In the coffee shop he noticed a nice-looking fellow at a table opposite him who was also barefooted. He said, "I notice you aren't wearing any shoes. I wonder why. Do you know about shoes?"

The man replied, "Of course I know about shoes."

"Then why don't you wear them?"

"Ah, that's the question. Why don't we? Why don't we?"

After breakfast he walked out on the street in the snow but

every person he saw was barefooted. He asked another man about it, and pointed out how shoes protect the feet from the cold.

The man said, "We know about shoes. See that building yonder? That is a shoe factory. We are proud of that plant and every week we gather there to hear the man in charge tell about shoes and how wonderful they are."

"Then, why don't you wear shoes?"

"Ah, that's the question."

Don't we believe in prayer? Don't we know what it could mean in our lives? Then why don't we pray? I mean, really pray. In principle, persistence and in power.

Ah, that's the question ... Why don't we?

Lord, teach **us** to pray ...

So that's the truth about prayer Jesus style and I think it's only fitting this morning to finish by praying The Lord's Prayer together ... And I encourage you if you are struggling in your prayer life, start tomorrow by praying this the first thing in the morning, do it for two, three days, even a week, use it as a means to get your head and heart right before God. And know that He's waiting for you.

Let's pray together:

(SLIDE 15)

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us day by day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

For we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

*For yours is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory now and
forevermore.*

Amen.