

## Sermon: LUKE 11:1-4 (The Lord's Prayer) – 24.7.16

11.1 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place.

When he finished, one of his disciples said to him,

'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'

2 He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread.

4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

How is your prayer life? Do you find prayer easy? Most of us aren't good at prayer. We struggle with it. It gets squeezed out by other things, the busy-ness of life - we skimp, or miss prayer altogether.

But it doesn't have to be like that!

Today we're going to take a look at the Lord's prayer - but first, a few words about prayer in general.

### PRAYER

What is prayer? Prayer is the main way we express our faith. When we pray, we're talking to God, we're in communication with God our Father, we're expressing our faith. Prayer is a sort of barometer which shows the state of our Christian faith.

But if prayer is the way we express our faith, it's not surprising we struggle! We're all sinners; by nature we lack faith, so by nature we're pretty rubbish at prayer. But as we struggle in prayer, we grow as Christians. And our appreciation of God grows. Our appreciation of all that God has given and all that God has done for us grows.

Prayer is vital. So if we're rubbish at it, what can help make our prayer life better?

Prayer starts with reading God's word, the bible. Talking to God starts with listening to him - remember Martha and Mary? Jesus tells Martha to stop worrying and listen. God talks to us through his word, and we talk to him through prayer. Reading God's word and talking to him in prayer go hand-in-hand - two sides of the same relationship and communication.

But assuming we do read the bible and pray, what else can help our prayer life?

## MAKE PRAYER A PRIORITY

Firstly, we can make prayer a priority and make time for it. Recognize that it's more important than other things - even other good things. How often do we tell ourselves we don't have time to pray when we get up in the morning?

My old friend VJ was a shipping broker at Lloyd's for decades. He says that in all the years he worked in the City, he never saw anyone turn up for work in their pyjamas!

However late we get up, we always find time to get some clothes on, sometimes even wash or shave or comb our hair! We wouldn't dream of leaving home without getting dressed - so how can we say we haven't got 5 or 10 minutes in the morning to pray?!

Make prayer a priority - the priority we give prayer tells us the state of our spiritual life!

## FOCUS ON GOD OUR FATHER

Secondly, even more important, we can stop thinking about prayer as an activity - as something we have to do, like going to the supermarket or doing the washing up. If we think of prayer like that it becomes boring.

Instead, focus on our Father, the person we're praying to.

Now, prayer is communicating with God our Father. We should be doing this all the time - pray without ceasing, Paul tells the Thessalonians. Being powered by prayer is not like being a diesel train that fills up with fuel and then goes for miles and perhaps days without needing a refill. As if we could 'top up' with prayer then go for days without communicating with God!

No, prayer is like an electric train - as soon as the current stops, the train grinds to a halt. If we stop praying, we grind to a halt as Christians. We should always be in communication with our Father whatever we're doing - even when driving or visiting the doctor - God's always there beside us!

Yet we need quality time with God. Time when we give him our full attention, without distraction or doing anything else. As with any relationship with any person, our relationship with God grows when we spend quality time with him. And God our Father loves it!

When our son Alastair was about three years old, I got home from work one day to see him running down the drive towards me, and he stammered out 'I've got three good newses for you today, Daddy!' It was marvellous - the only thing in the world on his mind at that moment was to tell me about his three good newses - of course I loved it!

And God loves it, when we come to him and tell him our good newses, or our bad newses, or our worries. To God our Father, our prayers are like incense - they're a pleasing fragrance to him, he delights to hear and help us.

So don't think, 'how am I going to squeeze in my prayers today?' - think 'Father, let's have some quality time together!'

## BE NATURAL

And be natural! We can't communicate with our Father if we don't say what's on our hearts, in our own words. If we're praying on our own, or in a prayer group - like the prayer group we have here on Thursday mornings - we can just blurt out what's on our hearts. God knows what we mean. When my son said, 'I've got three good newses for you today, Daddy' I didn't start giving him a lesson on English grammar - I knew what he meant - and it was all the more vivid because it was in his own words. How much more so when we talk to our Father God!

And we have the Holy Spirit to help us! The Spirit works in our hearts and literally inspires our prayers. St Paul, writing to the Romans about prayer, talks of the Spirit working through us with groanings too deep for words. The Spirit speaks through us to God when we pray. It's God speaking to God, through us!

So don't be put off - pray aloud with others naturally and sincerely - your prayers don't need to be impressive!

And with all our praying - whether public or private, let's focus on the glorious God we're praying to.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

Jesus does just that when he teaches the disciples to pray.

When we say the Lord's prayer in public, we usually say it through together from beginning to end without stopping. But it's actually a pattern for how we should pray privately too. The Lord's prayer is a series of headings, like bullet points on a power point slide, or chapter headings at the beginning of a book. So when we pray the Lord's prayer by ourselves, we should take time after each phrase or heading to add things in our own words.

### Our Father

And the first phrase in verse 2 is "**Father...**" You can't get much more focused on God our Father than that! God is our Father. Isn't this extraordinary?! We're sinful human beings, but once we believe in Jesus as our Saviour, we are born of God, and can call the Creator of the universe "Dad!"

You couldn't invent this, could you? You wouldn't dare! No man-made religion has any conception of the Almighty Creator God as our personal Father. No hollow and deceptive philosophy or human tradition - as Paul put it in today's epistle, read so clearly for us - none of these has any conception of God as our Father. Having God as Father drives the whole of a Christian's life including their prayers.

So whenever we say the Lord's prayer, as we begin let's remember what an extraordinary, privileged thing it is to call God our Father. If praying it by ourselves, why not add our own words to fill in how much it means - for instance, "**Father, you chose us before the foundation of the world, you first loved us, you adopted us as your children...**" and so on?

## Hallowed be your name

But - “**hallowed be your name**” comes next. Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Let’s remember that our Father is Lord of all, the God of the universe. We are to hallow our Father - that means hold him sacred, value him above everything in the universe.

So next time we say “**hallowed be your name,**” let’s remind ourselves just who God is, and how mighty he is, perhaps by saying something like “**hallowed be your name, you laid the foundations of the earth, your right hand spread out the heavens, you stir up the sea so that its waves roar, you form light and create darkness, you bring prosperity and create disaster...**” and so on?

## Your kingdom come

And God will hallow his name. By bringing in his rule, his kingdom – as in the next line, “**Your kingdom come.**”

How will God’s kingdom come? Through the hearts of Christian people as they turn to God, repent and accept Jesus - God’s kingdom lives in them. As more and more people turn to Jesus Christ, God’s kingdom continues to grow on earth.

But when we pray “**your kingdom come**” we’re also praying for Jesus to return and bring the end of the world, judgement for those who oppose him. This is a fearful thing - a frightening thing. Yet we are to pray for it.

So next time we pray, “**your kingdom come,**” let’s remember soberly what an awesome thing it is we’re praying for - perhaps adding something like, “**come, Lord Jesus, and bring the new heavens and new earth you have promised.**”

## Give us each day our daily bread

Next we come to our needs - we see the first in “**Give us each day our daily bread.**” Give us what we need to live for God. Not, ‘give us what we’d like for an easier life!’ Not, please can I have a nice job and a rosy retirement and good health. No! Not for ease that prayer shall be!

Daily bread includes our spiritual needs. We need to ask God to give us his Holy Spirit to help us pray and enjoy the company of God and Jesus, and help us love and obey God and love our neighbours.

When did you last ask God for his Holy Spirit? If we do ask, he’ll say yes - “**how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**”

So next time we pray “Give us each day our daily bread,” let’s think particularly of how much we need God’s Holy Spirit to help us serve God and do his work each day, perhaps adding something like “**give us what we need to serve you well - give us your Holy Spirit to reprove and correct us, help us proclaim the gospel of Jesus, keep us faithful and make us fruitful...**” and so on.

## Forgive us our sins

The world doesn't understand our need for God's forgiveness - and we can forget it. It's like a crippled man crying out to Jesus, "fix the legs, please, Jesus, fix the legs!" And Jesus replying, "your sins are forgiven." And the cripple saying, "what good's that. I need the legs! Fix the legs, Jesus, please fix the legs!" And maybe Jesus says he will fix the legs, but that's not important. What's important is that the cripple's sins are forgiven.

The next time we pray, "Forgive us our sins," let's keep in mind how much we need God's forgiveness, how vital it is for our future, and how much it cost Jesus, on the cross, to obtain it for us, perhaps adding something like, "- and thank you that through our Lord Jesus you made this possible..."

## For we also forgive everyone who sins against us

We can hardly ask God to forgive us if we are not ready to forgive others. If our hearts won't forgive, they're not in a fit state to accept forgiveness from God. And please note it says we forgive **everyone**.

## And lead us not into temptation

Finally, after asking God for forgiveness for what's gone by, we ask for protection in the future, "...lead us not into temptation."

We need to be delivered from the tempting by Satan, who seeks to trap us, overwhelm us. Satan is too strong for us. But Jesus destroyed the works of Satan and defeated him. Satan lost the battle and is doomed - it's just a matter of time before he meets his end. So we pray that God will save us from Satan's hand, and keep us in God's own hand, as he has promised.

## CONCLUSION

So in the Lord's prayer Jesus presents us to his Father and welcomes us into the loving, praying relationship he has always had with the Father and the Holy Spirit - a privilege almost beyond belief. And he expects us to bring our needs to God, in our own words.

When was the last time you asked God for the things you really need? When was the last time you asked God for his Holy Spirit - and for his help in prayer?

If we focus on prayer as an activity - if we think of it as something we have to do - it's boring. But if we focus on the awesome God we're praying to, our Father, our Friend, on whom we depend, who loves to hear from us and give us good things - then our prayer becomes a joy. And we begin to look forward to it. And we grow. And our church grows, as God causes it to grow.