

Luke 11:5-13

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[0 : 00] So title tonight, Motivations for Prayer, if you like titles, you don't ignore.! This morning was the model for prayer, Jesus giving out a form of prayer that helps us to! shape our own prayers, to check our prayer life against the priorities that he sets.

Perhaps you're one of those sorts of people who has sticky notes all around your workstation. I know of one man who has this phrase in capital letters above his workstation at home. It's a sign that simply says, pray you fool. Pray you fool. Because prayer is both, on the one hand, natural to us, but on the other hand, very unnatural to us, isn't it? It's natural because you and I were designed to be in relationship with our Creator. So it should be natural that we communicate with him in prayer. But it's unnatural because we're rebels in God's world. And as Isaiah 59 puts it, your sins have separated you from your God. As Isaiah says to the people, God's people.

And so, without God's Spirit changing us, we naturally put up all sorts of barriers to communication with him. Barriers that he's not interested in me, perhaps. That he doesn't have good things for me. That he wants to spoil my fun. And even when someone does become a Christian, many of these uncertainties can remain. Surely he's got better things to do with his time than listen to my witterings and warblings. I'm too busy anyway. I'm serving him. I'm serving him all week. I don't have time to get up early to pray. Surely it's more useful to serve. And of course I'm not really convinced of the usefulness of prayer. Isn't that a big one? Just kind of deep down that we need to really root out. All sorts of things prevent us from praying.

And maybe you're someone here tonight and you've thought about talking to God. But you're not yet a Christian. Perhaps you've nearly tried to. But something has prevented you from doing so. Some sort of expectation, perhaps, of what prayer should be like. It doesn't sound like that person who prays next to me at church, or that person I've heard, who prays so eloquently, it feels fake when I talk. Who am I kidding? Or perhaps your own view of God just gets in the way. You can't help it, but you've got this vision of God from school days or Sunday school or something, and it doesn't help you. And as a result, you're just not even convinced that you want to open up a channel of communication with him. Well this passage has a lot to say to us on all of those things. Jesus knows that we have and that we put up all sorts of barriers to talking to God. And he knows that we very easily give up. It's a section about priorities in Luke's Gospel. So end of chapter 10, as I pointed out this morning, the top priority is to listen to Jesus. There's a big theme in Luke's Gospel. Of course, the voice of the

Transfiguration got Moses, Elijah and Jesus, and the voice says, don't listen specifically to Moses or Elijah. That would have been a shock to Jews like the disciples. Listen to him. Listen to the Lord Jesus. And so Mary is showing in her posture, in her attentiveness to Jesus. What it is to listen to him. And Jesus says, she has the one thing that is necessary, it's the good portion. And it won't be taken away from her. Well, if that's the first priority for God's people, the second one is to speak back in prayer to God. And the basic invitation is there in verse 9. Have a look at verse 9. And I tell you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. We know that's the basic invitation because that's the only verse where there are three commands, three imperatives.

[4 : 27] There aren't any in the other verses. Ask, seek and knock. This is the point of Jesus' teaching here. Everything else is motivation. There's a progression, I think, from asking to seeking, being a bit more intentional about going after something, to knocking, taking action to find out something. Jesus wants us to persevere and to push in prayer. And he wants us to get a glimpse, he wants us to get a glimpse of the nature of God when it comes to hearing our prayers. He wants us to know that we have a Father who is more willing to give than we are to receive. I'll repeat that. I think that's important. We have a Father who is more willing to give than we are to receive. And

Jesus wants us to get away deceiving thinking, I need to pray and I want to pray. I pray that something will happen in our hearts that will give us a motivation to pray so that we want to. Well, either side of that verse 9, that invitation, are two analogies. We'll look at them in turn. First of all, Jesus invites you to pray with confidence, verses 5 through to 8, because of your great need. Jesus invites you to pray with confidence to him because of your great need. This is the analogy of verses 5 to 8. Jesus is painting a picture here.

A friend arrives at midnight for some bread. In verse 5, he's had a friend arrive without warning and he's out of supplies. I'm sure you've had that happen to you. He's all tucked up with his family. In verse 7, there's an initial rebuff. Sorry, can't help. But verse 8, he wants some peace and quiet. And he eventually decides to give this friend what he wants. And you may be thinking, well, what on earth does this tell us about how God listens to us? Is he really like someone who only responds if you pester him hard enough? Well, of course, there's more going on than that. And, of course, we need to make a 2,000 year leap between different societal expectations. In the Eastern culture, there's an expectation and an understanding that lies behind it that we need to understand. Certainly in this Middle Eastern culture, in Jesus' time, hospitality was one of the highest responsibilities that individuals had. And in that culture, because of those expectations of feeding a guest when they came, you would have no shame whatsoever in going to a neighbour and getting help. Because you've got a need. You really need to show hospitality. Otherwise, it's shame on you, literally. Even at midnight. And so if you read Jewish teachings, the theme of hospitality is really big. One writer who lived in the Middle East for 40 years puts it this way. Social behaviour is guided by a community sense of honour and shame, more than by means of an individual sense of loyalty to an abstract principle of right and wrong. So to not be able to offer food to a guest just immediately makes you think, everyone's looking at me and I'm under shame as a result of that. Which is why this man is so bold in verse 8. Notice it uses a word in the ESP, impudence. He'll not get up and give him anything because he's his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him what he needs. You could translate that shamelessness, because of his shamelessness he will rise and give him what he needs. He's got no shame in disturbing his neighbour at midnight because he cannot risk the shame of being seen to be inhospitable.

What's a reaction might he get in our culture? Well, go away, I'm getting a train at 6am in the morning, there's a 24 hour shop down the road and if it's shut, well you should have thought about that before. And, you know, of course we're in a society we don't even know on here most of the time.

And yet I think we can start to understand what's going on here, if we think about it differently. So one modern day example of this is perhaps if somebody is seriously unwell in your home. [9 : 04] Imagine somebody suddenly is in need of a doctor of serious medical attention. Let's make it really black and white. Imagine somebody has a heart attack at night. Now, you'd have no shame, would you, in doing whatever it took to make sure that person got the help they needed. I know what I'm like if I took my daughter into hospital, she's one of those kids who always needs to be glued up. It's amazing, they use glue nowadays, don't they, to your cuss. She's that sort of girl. If I take her in, and you're a parent, you'll be able to relate to this, you don't kind of sit there in a corner, it's, excuse me, my daughter needs seeing to, she needs seeing to now. That's just for a little cut. Imagine it's a heart attack or something like that.

There would be no shame in saying I need medical help and I need it now. Your knowledge of your need would make you completely shameless in asking. That's what's going on here. When we think that, actually, in hospitality terms, there was a huge need, if you needed to provide for a guest, then you would be shameless in asking somewhere else. That helps us know what's going on here. Well, so what? How does that help and what's the point? Jesus' point is this, when you really, really know that you need something, you ask for it and you persist until you get it. And if even a neighbour who loves his bed would be willing to respond, how much more would God, who in verse 13, gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. So Jesus' invitation is to pray, to keep pushing in prayer, to do so with confidence, with shamelessness, because you and I have a truly great need and only he can meet it.

Which leads to the question, well, what is your need and mine? There's nothing less than life itself. It's something no hospital can provide. It's even greater than that. Verse 13 tells us what our need is and what we should be asking him for. It's the Holy Spirit. That might sound a little bit odd.

Maybe you're here tonight and you're not even sure who this Holy Spirit is. But the Holy Spirit, the Bible says, is essentially God living in you when you become a Christian.

[11:43] Through you, in a way which takes your old self with all of its brokenness and confusion and meaninglessness and separation from God and infuses you, the real you, infuses you with life so you become the person God intended you to be. That's God's Holy Spirit. It's essentially becoming a Christian.

And if you're not a Christian yet, Jesus is saying in these verses that the Holy Spirit is your greatest need. You may not have realised that yet.

But without the Holy Spirit, we're like a toy without batteries or like a bulb without electricity flowing through it. It wouldn't be light in here, as Chris said it was.

Obviously, you've got improved bulbs or something? Great. If we didn't have the power, we wouldn't have the light. Same with the Holy Spirit. We'd be like bulbs without power.

And if you're a Christian, of course, it's different for you. You have the Holy Spirit already. So you might be thinking, well, how's this relevant for me to ask for the Holy Spirit?

[12:54] But actually, the same basic need is for the Christian as well, isn't it? We need the Holy Spirit every day. Romans 8.5, we need to walk in accordance with the Spirit.

Don't you need to ask God for more of that day by day? Because I know with my sinful nature, I don't walk in accordance with the Spirit. I do need to keep praying for that.

I need to ask for God's Holy Spirit more and more, so that I can put the sinful nature behind me. So that first analogy, Jesus invites you to pray with confidence, first of all, because of your great needs. That's verses 5 to 8, the first analogy, that comes before that invitation of verse 9. And the second analogy, which comes after the invitation, is in verses 11 to 13.

And here I'm summarising it in this way. Jesus invites you to pray with confidence because of your generous Father. Because of your generous Father. So Walter Raleigh is said to have had the following dialogue with Queen Elizabeth I.

[14:05] To her question, when will you leave off begging? He replies, when your Majesty leaves off giving. That's a good answer, isn't it?

A generous Queen led to somebody who kept asking. And a generous Father should lead, Jesus says, to children who ask and ask freely.

Now of course we're not to lower our Heavenly Father to the level of our earthly standards. And yet Jesus does take the earthly sinful examples to illustrate God's character.

And to show that we have a Father more willing to give than we are to receive. He appeals to fathers, Jesus says in verse 11, what father among you? I guess there were perhaps more fathers around as he spoke to the crowds.

And says, if his son asks for a fish, what father among you will give, instead of a fish, give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

[15:08] If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Simon Cowell is a pretty well-known figure, isn't he? Pop idol, ex-factor, Britain's got talent. And of course gave birth to his first son.

Not his wife, but whoever. Gave birth to his first son, Eric, in February. And, um, now I don't know, I, for most parents a McLaren buggy or pram or something normally does the trick.

Um, but not for Simon Cowell. He had to go for a Silver Cross surf, um, buggy, which is modelled on an Aston Martin 177.

Um, most buggy's aren't modelled on Aston Martin's. Um, you can get it from, from Harrods for a couple of thousands. Um, if you're interested in that. Now, what's the point?

[16:14] It's a father. It, there's something natural in parents. If you're a parent here tonight, you'll, you'll know that instinctively. If you're a father or a mother, you will know that it, there's a natural thing.

You just want to lavish something. Now, of course, this is not about spoiling your child. Um, this is about having their best interests at heart. Um, and yet, even in, even in the Simon Cowell example, there's a sense in which that's his way of giving the best that he can in that area.

And, um, you know, as parents, if you're a parent, then you, you know that instinctively, as I say.

My, when I look at my children, I, I just want, I don't want to withhold anything that is bad from them.

Jim Packer, who wrote that little book, *Knowing God*, that so many people have found so helpful, says this, as he comments on these verses. We need not hesitate to imitate the sublime cheek of the child, who is not afraid to ask his parents for anything, because he knows he can count completely on their love.

And then he quotes verse 9, Ask, and it will be given you, and so on. Now, of course, it doesn't mean for a minute that God just answers our prayers in the form that we offer them.

[17:37] We often ask for the wrong things, or with the wrong motives, and his prerogative, of course, is to give good things, as Jesus says. And so he reserves the right, like any good parent, to say, no, that is not good for you.

Don't have that. Trust me. And, of course, we see that even in the Apostle Paul, don't we? He'll ask for three times for his thorn in the flesh to be taken away from him.

And yet God says, no, that's for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness. And every father wants the best, and even those who go against this rule and give their children things that aren't good, well, they're exceptions, aren't they, that prove the rule.

It's worth saying, probably, at this point, in case it's not clear, that God is not the Father to all people.

So as we think, as we hear these words from Jesus, he's talking about God's children, those who relate to him in love and trust. But we must remember also that the Bible's message is, OK, maybe God is our Father in the sense that he's the creator of mankind, as everyone is.

[18:53] And yet, John chapter 1, what do we read there? We see that actually it's those who receive his Son. He gives the right to become children of God.

So we mustn't say that this God is the Father of everyone. There is a sense in which we are only children of our Heavenly Father when we have received his Son and received the Lord Jesus.

I like the fact that this second analogy is the Father analogy. Otherwise we'd end on this friend or the neighbour who sort of says, don't bother me at first, and then eventually gives.

I like the fact that we're not meant to, we can't misunderstand that first one, because the second one rams home the fact that he's our Heavenly Father. It's not about putting pressure on.

It's about a relationship. And it's about his willingness and desire to give us good things. Now just before I close, before we come to the table in a moment, I asked right at the start, what are the things that stop us talking to God?

[20:07] He's not interested in me. Well actually, he invites you. He's the one who seeks to open up communications with you.

Maybe you think, well he doesn't have good things for me. Actually, he has the one truly great thing that you and I need.

He has the Holy Spirit, without which none of us can truly live, none of us will live. He has life itself for you.

He has the ultimate good for you. He wants to spoil my fun. Well no, he wants us to enjoy the relationship that we were designed for, to enter into this relationship that would define as fun, but far more than that.

Wonderful. He's got better things to do than listen to my witterings. Well, no. He invites every child to bring everything to him.

[21:11] We're going to sing about that in a moment. You know, children might believe that Father Christmas can deliver to all the chimneys around the world. We believe, I won't comment on that, whether it's true or not, just in case. We believe that God is fully able to hear all the prayers of his people, whatever those prayers might be.

We hear them all, his shoulders are big enough to cope with, with all of them as well. We thought about having some sort of expectation of how to pray.

I don't sound as eloquent as that other person who prays. Well, Jesus gives us this model of how to pray. And actually, isn't it the prayers that sound the least religious?

Aren't they usually the most honest and therefore the best? Jesus invites you to talk to him in that way. Or perhaps your view of God, that's the thing that gets in the way.

You just can't help it that you've got this image from your past. Well, let it be informed by what Jesus says. He invites this father-child relationship where the father is not interested in giving anything bad to his child.

[22 : 24] He filters all of that so that only the good comes through. Jesus wants us to go away thinking, I need to pray because we have a need for his life-giving spirit.

He wants us to go away from this passage thinking, I want to pray because of his nature and who he is. Let's pray.