

Sermon: HOW TO PRAY

Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-13

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Sermon audio and text available for download at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

III – A Christian man is running through the woods, being chased by a big bear. All of a sudden he trips and falls and breaks his leg. He's stuck in a ditch. The bear towers over him with ferocious teeth, roaring, ready to eat him. And the man puts his hands together and starts praying: "Dear God, I don't know if it's possible, but please let this bear become a Christian". All of a sudden, the bear stops, and puts his paws together and starts to pray! The man is in shock, amazed that his prayer has been answered. And the bear starts talking and prays: "For what I am about to receive, may the Lord make me truly thankful. Amen."

Last week we talked about **why** we pray. We talked about 3 things:

1. **We pray because we can EXPECT God to answer.**
2. **We pray because we can TRUST God's answers.**
3. **And finally, we pray because God calls us to pray and it's part of our life as a Christian.**

Today, we're talking about HOW we pray. Working out HOW to pray is difficult. But it comes down to 2 things:

1. **The relationship we have with God.**
2. **The attitude we have towards God.**

If we understand our relationship with God and have the right attitude towards God, then we will know how to pray.

1. The relationship of prayer – Let's turn to Luke 11

The first thing Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer is that it's a personal relationship.

a. Personal relationship – Luke 11:2

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, the first words he teaches them to say is: "Father". Talking to God is about a PERSONAL relationship with God as our Father. So when we come to him, we don't come as strangers. We come to someone who knows us better than we know ourselves. So we don't have to hide anything from him because there are no secrets! And there is no need to be afraid. We can ask him anything, confess anything, and praise him about anything. We can bring **everything** to God in prayer.

b. Dependent relationship – Luke 11:3-4

And our relationship with God is also a dependent relationship. God is our Father who we **depend** upon. Not only does God know what we really need, he's also the only one who can **provide** all that we really need. So when we say "Hallowed be your name", we're saying that God's name is honoured above all other names. He is sovereign over all and in control over all, and we can completely depend on him for all things in life. So we can come to him and ask for our daily bread – to ask him for all that we need to survive each day.

And, verse 4 – we can ask him for **forgiveness** and for **protection** against evil – because he is the only one who can give us those things. We depend on him for everything that's important in life – from our daily bread to the forgiveness of our sins.

c. Confident relationship – Luke 11:5-12

And our relationship with God is also a **confident** relationship. We can be confident approaching God because he is our Father who loves us, and he is the Lord who is in control over all things. He always hears us and always wants to give us what we need.

Turn with me to the story Jesus tells after the prayer in Luke 11...

• Luke 11:5-8

Imagine you're in first century Palestine. And some friends of yours come to visit in the middle of the night on a journey. You **MUST** offer them something to eat, but you have no food in the house. So you have to go to your neighbour, in the middle of the night, and ask for 3 loaves of bread. Your neighbour's asleep, in his 1 room house, asleep with his wife and children on one mat on the middle of the floor. And you knock on the door and ask for some bread. You wake up your neighbour, his wife, his children, and all his animals. And your neighbour is annoyed! But he can't say NO to you! And he can't ignore you! But he's annoyed. He has to wake up his whole family just to open the door and give you some bread.

If you knew that, if you knew how annoyed he would be and the inconvenience you would cause, would you do it?

And Jesus says: Your neighbour won't give you the bread because you're his friend. He'll give it to you because you had the confidence (and nerve!) to knock on his door in the middle of the night!

I think I would do the same. If my neighbour (from over the road) knocked on my door in the middle of the night for some bread because they had visitors arrive in the middle of the night, and they woke up my whole family, I would be annoyed, but I would probably give it to them. (And then I'd probably do the same to them the next night!!)

What is Jesus saying? **Be confident to ask God!** God is **not** like that neighbour! HE IS VERY HAPPY TO GET UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT TO ANSWER YOUR PRAYERS. Be confident that you can come to God for anything, at anytime and he will answer your prayers. Verse 9. Ask and it will be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. God will not turn you away! Even a grumpy neighbour will give you what you need in the middle of the night. Of COURSE God will! And he won't be grumpy about it!

Now, we can look at those verses and say: As long as I'm bold and confident, God will give me whatever I ask for! But again, look down further. God is our **loving** Father. He will always give us what is best. That's why we can always trust his answers.

Verse 11 – ask for a fish, God will not give you a snake. Ask for an egg, God will not give you a scorpion. **God will give you what is good for you when you ask.** He will **not** ignore you. If you ask for good things, he will not let you down. WE can always ask confidently! As long as we're prepared to trust his answers.

We should never feel like what we want to ask is not important enough. Or that we're bothering God with our small requests. God WANTS us to come to him, at all times, for all things.

So once we have a personal, dependent and confident relationship with God in prayer, what about our attitude?

2. The Attitude of prayer

What should our attitude be towards God when we pray? Let's turn to Matthew 6. First of all...

a. Sincere Prayer – Matthew 6:5-6

Prayer is between you and God. And whether you're in a church building, or in a public place, or in the privacy of your home, prayer must be sincere, from the heart. Even when someone is leading public prayer, or when we're reading a written prayer like the Lord's Prayer or a prayer of confession, we must always have a sincere, open and honest attitude to God. Prayer is not a show. Prayer is between you and God.

b. Simple Prayer – Look at Matthew 6:7-8

Secondly, prayer can be simple. We don't **need** big words. God doesn't care about big words. He doesn't need us to babble on and on and on with long prayers. Like the pagans in verse 7 – they think they will be heard **because** of their many words. Let me ask you – are **you** impressed by long prayers? God isn't. It's amazing, isn't it, that when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, he taught them this very **short** prayer we know as the Lord's Prayer. He doesn't say; "Look, start with this and keep going until you get to say 30 or 40 minutes. Because God isn't impressed by long prayers or big words, or public displays. You can pray as long as you want to, as long as you need to. But whether it's an hour of prayer or a minute of prayer, we don't need to babble.

c. Salvation prayer – Luke 11:13

Finally, prayer is about salvation. When we approach God in prayer, everything comes back to salvation. Heaven. Eternal life. Everything comes back to the whole purpose of our relationship with God – to live forever with him in heaven. Look with me at Luke 11:13 –

- ***Jesus said: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will you Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"***

Jesus says that if anyone asks God for his Holy Spirit, he will give them his Holy Spirit. Why does he mention that in particular? Because the Holy Spirit is the best gift we can receive from God. He's the one gift we **really need**. Because he is the one gift that guarantees salvation and eternal life.

We don't want to treat God like Santa Claus. We don't want to just come to him when we want something. Imagine how you would feel if your best friend only ever came to you when they wanted something? Asking God for his Holy Spirit is asking God to be IN our life every day.

And this can be the biggest challenge in prayer. To simply ask for God's involvement in our life each day. To be focussed on his plans. To ask for his direction. To have the Holy Spirit guiding us in our decisions. And if we are always thinking about our salvation when we pray, **that will change our attitude to prayer**. So we can ask, when we pray: "How does this prayer relate to my salvation?" "How does this affect my faith and the faith of those around me?" "How does this prayer focus on the salvation of other people?"

We can come to God for anything in prayer, because he wants us to have a personal, dependent and confident relationship with him. But our attitude must be sincere, even though our prayers can be simple. And in the end, the most important thing Jesus teaches us in our prayer is that it's all about God's purpose for us in the end – his purpose is our salvation.

So when we pray, the question is simply this: is salvation on our minds?