

Learn how to pray

Luke 11:1-13

I'd like you to imagine that later today I send out an email to everyone here and say that I have recently been given a substantial financial gift that is for the benefit of everyone who has come to Trinity Church today. I've decided that everyone who responds to me by the end of the day will get £500 paid in their bank account. I know we are all busy/ I know there are countless people who are asking us for our time and energy. But how many people who read this email do you think would reply by the end of the day? All of them!

Suppose I send a rather different email. This time I don't mention the prospect of an increased bank balance. No, this time I'm asking for prayer requests. My promise is that I'll pray for anyone who replies by the end of the day. How do you think the response rate will compare with my money email?

It reveals something of our attitude to prayer. We often don't see the pleasure of prayer, the priority of prayer and the privilege of prayer. Because of Jesus we have access to a generous and good Father who has infinite provisions. And yet the facts on the ground, our half-hearted

prayerlessness reveals that we don't really believe this.

My aim today is not to pour on the guilt. We recognise our prayerlessness. We rejoice that our salvation is not based on how much we pray. Now secure in this confidence, my aim is to motivate us to enjoy the privilege of prayer.

I'm going to do that by answering **three** questions.

- Who should we pray to?
- What should we pray about?
- What response can we expect?

First, who should we pray to? (Vs 1-2)

Look at verse 1. **Read verses 1-2.**

Notice **two** things.

First, we speak to a person. The Christian God is not an impersonal power but a powerful person. Or more accurately, the Christian God is a perfect, united community of three infinitely powerful persons.

This means our focus is not on *techniques* but on *talking*.

God speaks to us through the Bible. We speak to him in prayer. It's that simple. This is stunning.

Prayer is not about mastering a technique or about sitting waiting for God to speak. No prayer is talking to God. Thanking him. Praising him. Asking him.

Who should we pray to? We *could* pray to any member of the Trinity. Depending on your church tradition you might favour one of the three. But we shouldn't choose based on our our previous experience or our current hunch. Not we decide on the basis of what the bible teaches.

What does Jesus say? **Verse 2**. When you pray, say, Father.

Our normal practice is to pray to the Father, because of the work of Jesus, with the help of the Spirit. That's how God wants it.

Be careful of taking short cuts, especially with children. Either speaking of a general God or starting out praying to Jesus, as if that will be easier.

No, use the language of the three united as one. Teach the next generation to pray to their Father as his beloved children united to Jesus their perfect older brother.

Second, what should we pray about? (Vs 2-4)

There are **five** requests.

I want to focus on the **two big categories**.

- God's honour
- Our needs

What are your prayers like? What do you pray for? If someone asks you if you have any prayer needs, what do you instinctively think about? For many of us, we often want prayer for a certain type of person and a certain type of need. Ourselves, our family and friends. Material needs. Health, job, stress.

Is that wrong? Short answer, yes. Let me give you my longer answer so you don't misunderstand me. It's not wrong to pray about these things but it is if this is all we ever pray about or if material concerns form the majority of our prayer requests.

One of the major humbling but delightful truths that we need to get our heads round is this: the world doesn't revolve around us. It revolves around God.

Have you heard of someone called **Nicolaus Copernicus**? He was the one who discovered that the sun didn't revolve around the earth. It was the other way round.

We need the same sort of revolution as we think about life. It's all about God and not about us. That's not a bad thing. As we live for God our lives are infinitely happier.

One of the ways of achieving this shift is by adjusting what we pray about.

What comes first in Jesus' model prayer? Not our needs but God's honour.

We are to pray, "Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come."

God's name and his character. This is to be truly known, accepted and loved. This is done perfectly in heaven but not on earth.

We should want people to honour the God of the bible.

One of the ways we do this is by surrendering to his loving rule. That's one of the ways the kingdom of God comes. Ultimately when Jesus returns. But here and now as people become Christians and as Christians increasingly trust that God's ways are best and so do what he says.

How does this happen? As we spread the gospel.

If we had to expand this prayer, we could ask for more people to come to church to hear about Jesus. For us to encounter more unbelievers on the streets as we go out. As Christians hear the gospel and live out the ways of Jesus.

What is a good motivation for evangelism? Yes compassion for the destiny of those we love. But a burning concern for the honour of God's name. I want my Father's true character to be unknown and him to be honoured by those he generously provides for. When I don't see that, it bothers me.

Make God's honour one of our top prayer priorities.

We don't need to forget our needs. We must pray for these. It's one of the ways we honour God. We must allow the Bible to define what these are.

What are these? **Look at verse 3. Read verses 3-4.**

- Daily provision
- Regular forgiveness
- Spiritual protection

Brief comments on each of these.

Daily provision

Our family are better at thanking God for his provision rather than asking God for his provision? Say grace at meals. In the home and wherever you are.

It might seem weird. No one wants to be the odd one out. We will be. The only question is where we will be the odd one out. In this world or in heaven? Heaven is full of gratitude and trust. Let's show that this is where we belong.

Regular forgiveness

There is no condemnation in Jesus. We will still sin. We should ask for forgiveness regularly.

We can have confidence if we are the type of people who forgive others. If we don't then that may be a sign that we aren't really children of our heavenly Father.

Spiritual protection

Lead us not into temptation. Another way of saying – keep us from falling. He will certainly test us but he will never tease us or trip us.

Third, what response can we expect? (Vs 5-13)

This is important because even though we might be very clear on who we should pray to. And what we should pray about. Still that doesn't mean we will pray. We need the right expectations as we pray. For that, we need the right view of God.

This is the point of Jesus' story about the friend who arrives at midnight. **Picture the scene.** A friend arrives. You have no bread. You must be

hospitality. That's the culture. You go and wake another bread and ask for friend. He is grumpy. But he doesn't want to shame the village so because you have boldly gone you will get what you want.

What is Jesus' point? Look at how Jesus applies this in **verse 9. Read verses 9-10.**

God is not a bigger version of your irritable friend. No it's what we call a how much more argument. If that's what happens what that kind of friend, how much more will God who is not irritated by our prayers, long to give us what we ask for. This means we need to be bold in our prayers, not nervous.

Does God always answer your prayers? Yes. He has three answers. Yes, no, later. But whatever his answer to our specific request, his answer is always for our good and better than what we asked for.

This is the point of what Jesus says at the end of our section. Verse 11. **Read verses 11-13.**

We need to trust God to give us the best gifts. Ultimately for us now that will involve the Holy

Spirit changing us to be more like Jesus and strengthening us to speak for Jesus.

In conclusion

What does all this mean for us?

Let's pray to our loving Father in Heaven. He is good and powerful. He can hear and he can act.

Let's be consumed with his priorities. On Sundays, Growth Groups, 121s.

And as we pray his priorities let's be confident that God always answers our prayers, he does this in the way that is for his greatest glory and our greatness good.

Let's pray.