

ALL AGE - Praying with Persistence?

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[0 : 00] Well, we're looking this morning at prayer, in case you haven't quite realised the link. And prayer is basically asking God for things, as we've heard from the children's talk.

Of course, we should also thank God and praise God when we pray as well, but prayer technically is asking God for things. Now, as I heard this morning, I'm sure you children are good at asking your parents for things.

Hands up if you've asked your parents for food before. No, some children are starving. Yep, okay. My children ask for food, you can put your hands down.

They also ask for toys and all sorts of things. But we can ask God for things as well, and that's called praying. And so I thought I'd show you some prayers that children have written.

The next slide. Dear God, did you mean for the giraffe to look like that, or was it an accident? Norma. Next one. Dear God, please send Dennis Clark to a different camp this year.

[0 : 58] Peter. Poor Peter's been having a rough time. Next one. Dear God, thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy. Joyce.

Thanks. Now, these prayers raise a couple of questions for us. Like, what should we, what should we be praying for? And what's going on if God doesn't answer my prayer the way I wanted him to answer it, like Joyce and her puppy?

So let's look at the Bible and see how Jesus teaches us about prayer. Now, kids, this talk is mainly for parents, but I'm going to be asking you questions as I go. So you need to be listening as carefully as possible.

Okay. Okay. Well, let's have a look at verse one. It's on following the inserts in your bulletins. Verse one. 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.

Okay, kids. Here's your first question. Who was praying by himself in a certain place one day? Joy? Joy? Do you remember?

[2 : 09] That's the Sunday school answer. Jesus. That's right. Jesus was praying. Even Jesus prayed to his father.

Jesus often spoke to his father and asked him for things as well. Now, by doing so, he gives us a good example to follow. Now, just as an aside for the parents, it's more than just giving us a good example to follow.

Jesus actually gives us an insight into the nature of the Trinity. Did you realize? You see, even though Jesus and the Father are equally God, there is an order in the Trinity.

Jesus submits to the Father and prays to the Father, but it's never the other way around. There's equality but order. But that's just an aside. But the disciples see Jesus praying and so they ask him, Jesus, teach us how to pray.

And the first thing that Jesus teaches them to pray is Father. Point one in your outlines and verse two. Verse two, Jesus said to them, when you pray, say, Father.

[3 : 10] Or in Matthew's gospel, our Father in heaven. Now, does Jesus mean that we can't pray to him then? Well, Jesus is God too, so we can pray to him as well. But we only really see four occurrences in the Bible of that happening.

Far more often, the Bible teaches us to pray to the Father, just like Jesus teaches us here. And what's more, it's an amazing privilege that we can call God our heavenly Father.

And I wonder if we've sometimes forgotten that extraordinary privilege. I was praying, kids, with a friend of mine who's just a bit older than you people.

Well, yeah, maybe about five years older. And we were praying together one day. And my friend prayed like this. He prayed, dear God, thank you that although you're the whopping creator of the universe, we get to call you Dad.

Now, it was the word whopping that caught my attention. I don't know if it caught yours. The word whopping, of course, just means big and great. And my friend knew that God was the great, big, powerful universe, powerful creator of the universe.

[4 : 17] But instead of having to call him Sir or Mr. or Your Majesty, we get to call him Dad, Father, Abba. That's how close we are with God if we believe in Jesus.

If we believe in Jesus who died for us, he brings us into God's family. And we get to call the creator of the universe, Dad. That's an extraordinary privilege.

And why we mustn't forget. Well, the second thing Jesus teaches us to pray is to pray particularly for God's concerns. Point two. Jesus says in the rest of verse two that we're to pray, Hallowed be your name and your kingdom come.

First, Jesus says that we should ask that God's name would be hallowed. Now, to hallow someone's name literally means to make it holy. You know, not just morally holy because God already is, you know, morally perfect.

But holy also means to be set apart as special. Of course, a person's name is also linked to who they are. So, to hallow someone's name means to treat them as special with honour and reverence.

[5 : 27] And so, if we were to hallow someone's name here, for example, Josh, because he did such a great job. If we were to hallow Josh's name, we'd say, Josh is the greatest. He's so good at holding up signs and doing all those sorts of things.

We should listen to Josh and follow Josh. He's the best. It's just an illustration, Josh. Sorry, mate.

Now, that's how we're to hallow God's name. We're to say that he's the greatest. We're to listen to him and do what he says. You see, when we praise him and say how great he is, when we obey him and do what he says, then we are honouring him.

We are treating him as special, holy. And so, we're hallowing his name. That's how it works. And so, to pray that God's name would be hallowed is to pray that we and the rest of the world would treat God as, well, God.

That we would follow him above all else, even above what we want. Of course, this will ultimately happen when Jesus returns and establishes his kingdom fully here on earth, where every knee will bow and every person will honour God and hallow his name.

[6 : 42] But in the meantime, we're to pray that God would help us, who are Christians, to honour him more and more. And we're to pray also that God will make more people Christians who would honour his name as well.

This is similar to the next request where Jesus says to pray, your kingdom come. That is, we're to ask God that he would bring in his kingdom fully, where everyone will honour him.

But the Bible also tells us that this will only happen when all the people God has chosen become Christians. Then Jesus will return and establish God's kingdom fully.

And so to pray your kingdom come is really to pray that God would, again, make more people Christians, so that Jesus will return and then set up his kingdom fully on earth. These are God's concerns.

And now you might have noticed that Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is missing the line, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew has it in his gospel, but why two versions?

[7 : 43] Well, probably because Jesus taught it twice. In Matthew it says that Jesus was teaching the crowds as part of his Sermon on the Mount. But here in Luke it says Jesus was teaching his disciples.

So it seems as though Jesus taught the prayer twice. And when he taught it here in Luke, he left out that line. But why? Well, probably because it's more of the same thing. Praying for God's will to be done is similar to praying for God's name to be hallowed.

I mean, how do we honour God again? Is it not by doing his will here on earth? It's the same thing, you see. But the point is that God is concerned that people treat him for who he is, God.

And that means praying that we might grow as Christians and honour him more and more. And it means praying that others would become Christians so that they would honour God as well. And that Jesus might return and fully establish his kingdom here on earth.

That's what God is concerned about and that's what we ought to be concerned about when we pray. Now kids, you're doing well. Now I heard a few of you, hands up again if you pray at home. Lots of people, that's great.

[8 : 50] Your hands down. Let me tell you a story that I heard about a little boy, about your age, who prayed at home as well. His parents just finished tucking him into bed one night and the dad prayed and then the son said, can I pray too?

And the parents said, of course you can pray. And so the little boy prayed this. He prayed that he wouldn't be scared of the dark. He prayed that he might get a Transformer toy.

But then on his own, he prayed for one of his school friends called Tom. He said this, and please help Tom and Tom's dad to know and love Jesus and that the Holy Spirit will spread all over the world and help people to learn about you.

Amen. True story. Apparently the parents just looked at each other and said, whose kid is this? But here this four-year-old child, he prayed for a Transformer toy, sure.

But he also prayed for what God is concerned about, you see. God's concerns had shaped his prayers and it ought to be the same for us. God is happy for you to pray for anything, but especially he wants you to pray that you would honour God, that your mums and dads would honour him and that your school friends might honour him too.

[10 : 06] So when you pray tonight at home, why don't you pray that your family would honour God more and more and that one of your school friends might come to know Jesus and honour God too, because that's what God is particularly concerned for.

Of course, God is concerned for our needs as well, but notice which needs he's particularly concerned about. Verse 3 and 4, Jesus says, Give us each day our daily bread, forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us and lead us not into temptation.

Jesus says we'd ask for food, forgiveness and help not to sin, which we heard about from Ruth's children's talk a moment ago. These are the things that God thinks are important for us to have and so these are the things we're to particularly pray for.

But I wonder how often these things feature in our prayers. I mean, I often pray for things I need, like food or to get better from a cold that I currently have, and that's all good things to pray for.

But I think I need to be praying more often that I might be forgiven for not living God's way and that I might have God's help not to sin. Those things don't feature as often as they should in my prayers and I wonder if it's the same for you.

[11 : 22] As I said, we can pray for all sorts of things. In fact, the Bible encourages us to pray for anything and everything. Peter says in 1 Peter 5, to cast all your anxieties on him, on God, because he cares for you.

But Jesus is teaching us here that our prayers ought to be particularly shaped by God's concerns for himself and God's concerns for us. Well, Jesus moves from what to pray to how to pray and here Jesus says we ought to pray boldly.

Point 3, verse 8. Then Jesus said to them, Suppose one of you has a friend and he goes to him at midnight and says, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me and I have nothing to set before him.

Then the one inside answers, Don't bother me. The door is already locked and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness, he will get up and give him as twice as he needs.

Now, when I first read that, I didn't quite get what was going on. So, I thought I'd quickly retell it here with a few props. So, I need a few props and oh my goodness, look at all these props right here. That's fantastic. We need, I think we need a visitor.

[12 : 36] So, we can come and be a visitor. Stand up. You're visiting. Now, stand there. Now, we need a host person who wants to be a host. You can come and be a host.

Stand up. Stand here. And then we need someone who's good at sleeping. Who's good at sleeping? You can come and be good at sleeping. Here, sit down and do it. Now, we won't put you on the floor but you can just pretend to sleep.

So, you just put your head down and that's it. Don't snore too loudly. Okay? And so, what happens is the visitor comes to the host person and says, Hi. Hi.

Good work. And then the host realises he's got nothing to eat. So, you can do that. Got nothing to eat. Now, in those days, it was very important to be a good host.

And so, he has two choices. He can either be a bad host and give him nothing and word will spread throughout the community that he doesn't particularly care for his neighbour and that's unloving.

[13 : 34] Or, he can go and knock on his next door neighbour which is a bold move because it's actually midnight and you're not going to just wake up your neighbour. They live close together in those days. You possibly wake up everyone.

But anyway, he chooses a second option. So, you stay there and you walk across to your neighbour and then you knock on the door. That's the door. That's great.

Now, the neighbour kind of... That's it. Well done. Now, in those days, I don't know if you noticed the verse that says, verse 7, Don't bother me.

The door is already locked and my children are in bed with me. In those days, you had one big room and it was all in the bed and the little one said... It was that kind of thing. And so, he says, Look, don't bother me.

The door's locked. I've just got the kids to bed and if you're parents and you've just got the kids to bed and someone wakes them up, you're not a happy camper, are you? And so, he said... Thank you. It's rhetorical, but that's good.

[14 : 34] And so, he says, Don't bother me. Go away. The children are in bed. I can't give you anything. Now, presumably... We're not told this, but presumably, he knocks again because Jesus says, Although the man will not get up to answer his friend because he's his friend, which is not very nice, he will get up because of the host's boldness.

He's bold, you see. He knocks at midnight and presumably, he knocks again after he says, Go away. This guy is really bold because he's waking his neighbour up and he's probably waking other people up.

Okay? That's what's going on here. Now, you can sit down. Well done. Good host. You can go... But don't go back to sleep. You can sit down there. You can sit down there. Okay?

And Jesus' point here is that when we pray, we're to pray boldly. Just as Moses prayed in our first Bible reading, he said to God, Don't wipe out your people. Change your mind, God.

That's what I want you to do. That's a pretty bold prayer. And God did change his mind. You see, Jesus is saying we're to pray with boldness. We're never to think that we'll bother God. In fact, we're never disturbing God when you pray to him because God is not the grumpy guy in bed in the story.

[15 : 50] No, rather, God is the most loving of fathers who gives good gifts as we'll see in a moment. And so the comparison is if an unwilling friend will get up and answer you, then how much more will the willing Father answer you when you pray to him?

And so we're to pray with boldness. We're to pray and pray and pray. See verse 9 and 10 on your sheets? Verse 9, So I say to you, says Jesus, ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. And to him who knocks the door will be opened. And now the words ask, seek and knock, they all mean the same thing, don't they?

They mean pray. And so kids, Jesus is saying we're to pray, pray, pray. We're to keep praying persistently, which is part of what it means to pray boldly.

Part of being bold is to keep knocking. We're to be boldly keep knocking on God's door, so to speak. For then we will be given, we will find, and the door will be opened.

[16 : 52] In other words, God will answer our prayer. But, God does not always answer the way we want him to, does he?

So why does he sometimes give us a no answer or a not yet answer when we pray? Well, there's a few reasons, but let me just give you two quick ones. At first, so that we'll grow in our trust and dependence on him.

See, if God gave us everything we wanted straight away, our relationship with God would become like a vending machine. We kind of insert our prayer and presto, we've got what we wanted.

And we never learn to grow in our trust or dependence on God. But if he answers no or not yet to our prayer, he encourages us to keep trusting him.

It's as though he says, just hang on, trust me, I've got it under control. And so that's the first reason. The second reason why he sometimes answers no or not yet to our prayers is because he can see the bigger picture and he knows what's best for us.

[17 : 54] Now kids, hands up if you like McDonald's. Now hopefully that wasn't more people who put their hands up about praying. But anyway, you guys like McDonald's, my kids like McDonald's, you can put your hands down now.

And our children asked us to have McDonald's. They said, can we have McDonald's for dinner tonight? And we said no because we knew they were going to a party tomorrow at a McDonald's.

And McDonald's twice in two days wouldn't be terribly healthy for them and certainly not appealing for us. You see, we could see the bigger picture and we wanted what was best for them and so we said no to their request.

And it's the same with God. God may sometimes say no or not yet to our prayers because he can see the bigger picture and he knows what's best for us. And what's more, he only gives us good gifts which brings us to our last point that we're to pray remembering God only gives good gifts.

See verse 11? He says, which of you fathers if your son asks for a fish will give him a snake instead or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion? If you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

[19 : 07] You can kind of imagine Jesus. Can you picture Jesus? He looks up to the crowd of his disciples around him and he says to them, now which of you out here are dads or granddads? Now let me ask you if your son asked for an apple would you give him an apple or a rock?

Would you give him something to drink or detergent? Would you give him an egg or a scorpion? And the point's clear. He says, verse 13, if you then though we are still sinful as human fathers and grandfathers if we still know how to give good gifts then how much more does our perfect heavenly Father know how to give good gifts?

gifts like the Holy Spirit that Jesus mentioned in verse 13. So for example, children, if I pray for a Ferrari, a red Ferrari, God's answer will probably be no.

Why? Well, because I would end up serving it rather than God. It would take me away from God, you see, and that's not a good thing. And so in the end it's not a good gift.

After all the enjoyment I get from it will only last a lifetime. But gifts like the Holy Spirit mentioned in verse 13 or strength to persevere as Christians, they're great gifts because they will help us hallow God's name now and help us to heaven later where we will have enjoyment that will last for eternity.

[20 : 30] So when we pray we're to pray knowing that God is a loving Father who only gives good gifts. He only does what is in our best interest even if it doesn't seem like it at the time.

Well, let me finish. When we pray we're to pray as Jesus taught we're to pray Father remembering the great privilege we have. We're to pray particularly for God's concerns for himself and for the world and we have to pray particularly boldly, boldly, knowing that God is not the grumpy guy but a loving Father who willingly gives.

And when our prayers don't seem to be working we're to remember that God only gives good gifts and he can see the bigger picture. So let's keep trusting him and keep praying.

Let's do that now. Boys and girls we're going to pray. Close our eyes let's pray. Dear God thank you that although you created the universe we get to call you Father.

Help us to pray the way that you want us to pray. Help us to pray boldly and help us to always remember that you see the bigger picture and that you will give us only good gifts.

[21 : 37] And we thank you for these things in Jesus name. Amen. We're going to sing a song that captures some of the ideas of the Lord's prayer.

It's called Let Your Kingdom Come and during this song the children might like to make their way back to your seat. So just wait kids when everyone stands up and the music starts that's your cue to head back.