

Why Bother Praying?

Reading: Luke 11:1-13

I was tempted to title this sermon... ‘Why I don’t pray?’

But I thought that might be a little bit of a problem since I’m the Pastor here.

But it is a question I think we should all ask ourselves.

‘Why don’t I pray as I ought?’

I grew up in a Christian home...with believing parents.

I went to church almost every Sunday.

We would pray together before every meal.

Through it all, from as early as I can remember,

prayer was a central part of my growing up.

I was taught it was an important part of the Christian life.

So, you would think that when someone would say, ‘How’s your prayer life?’

You would think I would be able to answer...

“Well it’s great, I pray all the time. It’s second nature to me.”

But, while I pray...can I respond truthfully and say I pray all the time?

Don’t hear me wrong...it’s not that I don’t pray...

but there are things that are holding me back from doing it well.

This has led me to do a series on ‘Prayer’ and the place of prayer in the life of the believer.

The starting point for us is the question of ‘Why bother?’

But what are the obstacles...what makes it hard?

We don’t pray because it is boring and hard.

Some things in life are boring...but easy

Like tying your shoelaces, or brushing your teeth.

Easy...so we do them without thinking.

Some things in life are hard...but rewarding to do.

Like learning to play guitar.

You enjoy doing it so you put in the hard work.

But prayer can be both boring and hard...so we avoid it.

Like some young people avoid school.

We don't pray because we don't need to.

We live very self-sufficient lives.

Whether I pray or not...the sun continues to shine.

Whether I pray or not...there is food on the table.

Whether people pray or not...plenty are successful, happy and fulfilled.

We don't pray because of fear.

Fear that our prayers won't get answered.

Fear that God will let us down.

So we become much more comfortable saying...

'I'll work it out on my own.'

Maybe you are afraid of getting too close to God.

If you pray to God it might expose your life and cause you to realise there are things that you might need to change.

So...there are obstacles to prayer...even though we know its importance.

I think it is worth looking at what the Bible says about prayer...

So we will be doing that over the next few weeks.

I pray!!! That it will give you and me a far better understanding of prayer...
and some of these barriers to prayer might be broken down.

We need to find our answers in the Bible when we think about prayer.

There are some themes that appear on multiple occasions in the bible.

And because they keep coming back we think,

*"Hmmm, maybe the Lord wants us to take special notice of this issue.
Maybe it's of special importance to our lives."*

So, murder is mentioned 31x...

the value of human life is obviously great in the eyes of the Creator
so we strive to protect and care for human life.

The Bible speak of Sabbath 117x – the critical need for all human beings to take a regular "time out" and focus on their relationship with God, those around them and creation.

Then there's prayer.

Between yourself and God, consider the following questions:

How often do you pray in a typical week?

Each day has 1440 minutes - for all of us.

Typically we ensure that a certain amount is given to sleep, to work, to eating.

How many of those minutes are put aside for prayer?

What topics do you pray about?

Do you tend to pray alone or with others?

What fills up most of your prayers?

Praising God? Confessing faults? Saying thank you? Asking?

Murder 31x. Sabbath 117x..... important themes.

Prayer..... **350x**.

Wow!

Though you don't want to weigh the importance of everything in scripture through mere statistical frequency, it *does* tell you something, don't you think?

To find some understanding of prayer we need to take a look at what Jesus said about prayer.

Jesus was the master at prayer.

Throughout the gospels we read of Jesus praying all the time, in all different situations.
he was always praying.

Here are some examples in Luke's gospel:

In chapter **three**, while Jesus is being baptised, he is praying.

Later in chapter **five** he goes out in to the wilderness for 40 days and it says that the time he spent there, he spent praying.

Next chapter: Jesus went up to a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer.

In fact, the disciples were like. "Where have you been?"

And he's like, "Don't you know? I've been praying."

In chapter **nine**, Jesus again goes up to a mountain to pray and this time as he is praying, he is transfigured...his appearance is totally changed.

Now, here in **chapter 11** we read together this morning we find the disciples coming to Jesus and saying, "Lord, teach us to pray...."

Now we recognise the prayer Jesus taught as the Lord's Prayer...

Or a stripped down version of the similar prayer found in Matthew.

Today I'm not going to pick apart every part of this prayer...

Maybe in the weeks to come.

But I do want us to think for a moment about this prayer...

We know it so well we miss some of the truths it shows.

Notice how it is a prayer **to** God...not a prayer about God, or even for God.

It is a prayer to God...and not a distant deity that is feared...

But a loving father...personal and simple.

Jesus is lifting an enormous burden from our shoulders.

Burdens that most religions place on the shoulders of their followers.

Coming to the father doesn't require elaborate ritual, endless chanting, or mindless formulas.

It conveys the simple heart of conversation.

Now, this has nothing to do with thinking our God to be small or too insignificant to warrant the appropriate reverence.

But it's just one more way of showing God's amazing, all-encompassing grace.

The fact is that we have no right to approach God at all.

He is the creator and sustainer of all things and as such,

he has powers beyond our comprehension

and he hates the evil and imperfect things in our lives.

It's only through God's grace and Jesus' love and sacrifice that we have any right to speak to God at all.

But this access that we have been granted is not partial access.

And that makes prayer all the more wonderful and mysterious.

Because of this access, we have the opportunity to connect with the heart of God as our Father.

So Jesus teaches us about the simplicity of prayer...

But the question remains... 'Why Bother?'

The first answer is *God requires it.*

He requires his children to pray.

Prayer is spending personal time with our Maker and Redeemer, who gave the deepest part of His person, the life of His Son, for us.

As we pray, we give thanks to God. We praise God. We worship God.

Please understand, God isn't first of all concerned with our money or our church attendance or our involvement in this or that church work...

though they are all very commendable and even necessary things.

God, who gave His very life for us wants..... US..... OUR LIVES.

He wants us to give Him the very best that we have...

our passion, our love, our attention, our joy, our praise, our thanks.

Why?

Well, look at family relationships.

Children aren't first of all concerned with what their parents buy for them or do for them.....

They, first of all, want to *be with* their parents.

And generally parents - they aren't first of all interested in how well the children do at school or what kind of a job they manage to hold down - though those are important things.

What matters most is that they have time with their children – sharing their love, showing their affection, conversing with them.

And as much as that is the case between human parents and children *even more* is that the case between our Heavenly Father and His children on earth!

So prayer brings us closer to God.

There's more, though.

The **second** reason why we bother to pray...

because you need help to live, and God is willing to give it!

"Ask and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Lk 11.9ff)

God challenges us to storm the very gates of heaven, calling on His providential aid, seeking His power, pleading for His goodness.

Prayer turns our attention to away from ourselves and to God.

It helps to focus our faith.

It prepares us to hear from God.

"The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth." (Ps 145:18)

Does that mean God ever went away?

No. He has always been present.

It is *we* that wander.

It is *we* that need to return.

And it is *prayer* that brings us back.

Prayer prepares us to handle the response of God.

Does this mean that God will *never* respond when our prayers are weak, or non-existent?

No.

God promises that he never slumbers nor sleeps.

He also says that however unlikely it is that a mother would forget about her baby - *even* if that should happen, God will *never* forget His people (Is 49:15).

"See," says God, "*I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; [your concerns] are ever before me.*" (Is 49:16)

There's a **third** reason why we bother to pray.

God wants us to ask Him for what we need, and to ask –

– deliberately

– regularly

– constantly

The Bible says, "*You miss [God's gifts] because you do not ask God....*" [Ja 4.2]

Jesus is saying, "*tell me exactly what is on your mind. Talk to me. Ask me.*"

That is why Jesus said: "*...how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to.....those who ask Him.*" (Luke 11.11-13)

And so after Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray,

he tells them two parables to encourage them to pray these prayers.

The ***first parable*** encourages them to boldly seek God's heart.

A man boldly asks his sleeping neighbour for some food.

But this neighbour doesn't want to be bothered...he's settled for the night.

In the end it's not because of their friendship that he gets up and gives what the neighbour wants, but because of his boldness.

I don't know if any of you have been in this situation where you have to ask someone's help at a really inappropriate time.

You think really hard about the importance of the request.

You wonder how they will receive it.

Will they stop being a friend?

You are stuck...you need help...but don't really want to ask for it.

In the same way, I think prayer causes us to feel that way about God.

We want to be close to God...yet wonder about the importance of our request.

So we sometimes back out and don't ask God.

Jesus' point here isn't that God is a grumpy neighbour who helps out reluctantly simply because we are bold enough to ask.

He is saying, "If even your grumpy neighbour will help you out, even though he is all tucked in bed, how much more will your Heavenly Father, who's neither grumpy nor in bed, be willing to help you when you ask - particularly about the things that are close to his heart?"

In the *second parable*, Jesus is encouraging us that when we go to God for these things, we can trust that he will give us what's truly best.

"Which of you fathers," he says, "if your son asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead?"

Anyone?

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?"

Jesus is addressing his disciples here, and he calls them "evil!"

That seems kind of harsh.

I think his point is that compared to the Father, they are evil, self-centred, sinful, prideful, and yet they still know how to give good things to their children.

Jesus reminds us that God is a better father than we could imagine and we need not be afraid that he is withholding anything from us.

God's giving

and our asking

are inseparably linked.

Conclusion

Prayer is not hard...Jesus presents it simply...a conversation with our Father.

Prayer is not boring...it is exciting when we see God at work.

We have an amazing part to play through our prayers, in God's redemptive work. Prayer is not unnecessary...central to the things God is doing in our lives and the world. Prayer is not a fearful thing...Jesus says, 'Pray boldly.'

So, 'Why should we bother praying?'

It is the means by which we enjoy a deepening relationship with our Father God,
As Jesus taught us.

It is the means by which we gain access, through Jesus, to God's heart.

It is the key that opens the door to the help of God in our weakness;

Where we leave our worry at his feet and we find a friend in loneliness.

To not pray is to walk away from a satisfying and enriching relationship.

To not pray is to withhold thanks from the author of life and the giver of every good gift.

To not pray is to reject the only one who can lift us up and send us into the world.

Will you join in that praying community where God's power is released?