

Steve Christian 24 May 2020



Good morning. You know it's now the tenth week that we've been meeting like this, so welcome to church online.

I trust that for those of you who are gathering in small groups of up to ten – social distancing of course – you're enjoying being back together today. If any of our small groups – up to ten – would like to meet during the week or perhaps on Sunday, using the church hall, you'd be welcome to do that.

For others, we welcome being able to visit with one another at home now, during the week. At this stage we don't have any plans to recommence our larger groups due to the need for social distancing – it will prove just too difficult until the 1.5m rule no longer applies.

Now, some of you, may have been wondering how the church is going financially, and praise God, we have been going along quite well, so thank you for your faithfulness in giving.

I did just want to remind you to be in prayer for those that we support in mission. They too, like most around the world have also been in lock down. For most of them their movements have been severely restricted, and their communities have not had the kind of government support that we have had. We are so blessed to live in Aust! So, be in prayer for them that God will continue to meet their needs and provide further opportunities to minister for Him.

As I have been contacting folk each week, many of you have expressed that you are coping quite well in these times. And some of you have appreciated the opportunity to spend more time with God – and I want to commend you for doing just that.

We come to an interesting passage this morning from the Gospel of Luke, at the beginning of chapter 11. And the disciples had noticed that Jesus would slip away and spend time alone with God His Father in prayer. Now, one of the disciples is so impressed that he asked Jesus, **“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”**

What's this? Jesus hadn't sat them down already and sought to teach them the importance of prayer, nor how to pray? No, He simply, slipped away, or found a quiet spot and spent time alone with His father in prayer. He set them an example. But, such was the desire of this disciples heart that he too wanted to experience this special time with God. What we do, quietly, unassumingly, can have an impact on others.

This disciple was not driven by a call to subject his life according to the four spiritual laws – Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, and Bible Study – but he just desired to experience what Jesus experienced. Prayer for Jesus was not a chore or a be-grudging discipline, it was sweet communion; sweet conversation with God – His Dad.

Is prayer; meditation; spending time in God's Word; a chore or a delight for you? For us, it might mean that we need to discipline ourselves to spend time with God, but be assured that it will not remain a discipline, but will become a delight.



And so, Jesus said, “When you pray, say: **“Our Father, hallowed be your name. May your kingdom come. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”** Let's join together in prayer...

Worship, God's Sovereign Will, Provision, Forgiveness, Protection, ...

**“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 much as he needs.”**

I’m sure that this story must have provoked smiles and chuckles from his disciples. This was a time when it was not uncommon for a weary traveller to lob up after dark, with nowhere to stay. There was no Macca’s, and no roadhouse; there was no market still open down near the creek.

Kenneth Bailey, was a Presbyterian missionary who lived in Lebanon for forty years. He has shared that for those in the middle east; they use bread as we would use cutlery: they break off bite-sized pieces, dip it into a common dish of meat and veggies, and eat the entire sop. And so, the man with the empty cupboards was more than likely asking his friend, not just for bread, but for a main course as well. Villagers frequently borrowed from each other in hospitality emergencies.

Kenneth Bailey recalled one such instance: “While living in primitive Middle Eastern villages, we discovered to our amazement that this custom of rounding up from the neighbours something adequate for the guest, extended even to us when we were the guests. One time, we accepted an invitation to a meal clear across the other side of the village, and arrived to eat from our own dishes which they had quietly borrowed from our own cook.”



In Jesus’ story, though, the neighbour stubbornly refuses the request from a friend. He has already gone to bed, stretched out with his family on a mat in the one-room house – and, besides, the door is bolted shut. “Don’t bother me,” he calls to his neighbour outside. “I can’t get up and give you anything.”

Jesus disciples would have laughed out loud at this lame excuse. Can you imagine such a neighbour? Jesus was asking. Certainly not! No one in my village would act so rudely. If he did, the entire village would know about it by morning!

This was a culture where being hospitable was not only appropriate, it was expected. The idea that someone would be inhospitable was unthought of. A lack of hospitality brought shame upon that person – word would soon get around that Tom couldn’t be bothered to do the right thing by his neighbour. “That was really poor form Tom! Shame on you!” And so this story would have brought a smile to their eyes, as this just sounded ridiculous.

Then Jesus delivers the punch line: **“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 much as he needs.”** Now your Bible might say “persistence or boldness,” but closest to the Greek word would be our word “shamelessness”

Normally, you wouldn’t want to let down your friend so you’d get up and help them out, but Jesus says, even more than that, because he doesn’t want to be put to shame, the man will get up and do all that he can.

This parable is not about us, but about God. It’s not about us coming to God boldly in the middle of the night; it’s not about our persistence in that we keep banging on the door; that we keep asking so that God will eventually get up and give us what we need. It’s not about persistence; it’s not about boldness. It’s not about us tirelessly and determinedly coming to God, asking, seeking, knocking.

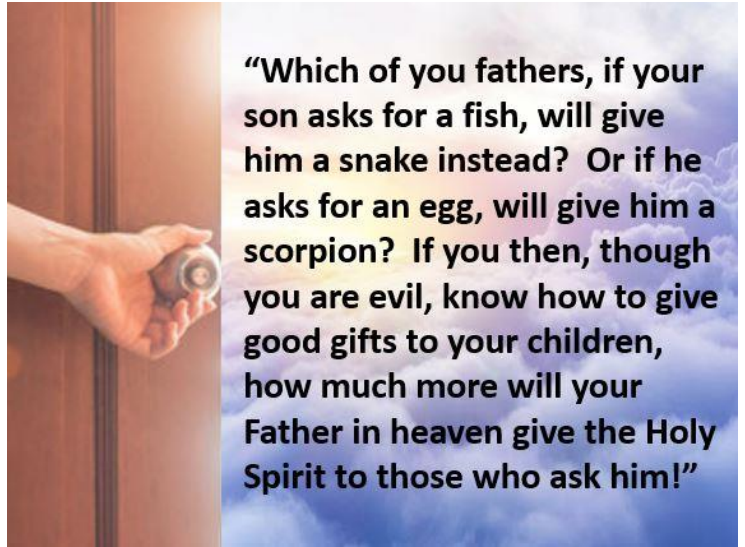
The point that Jesus makes is this, that God is even more ready than the reluctant neighbour. He will not be put to shame by ignoring our requests. God will not allow Himself to be shamed, by not granting to us all that we need. He is not only sovereign, but also faithful – he can be trusted to answer our prayers. He is honourable and consistent in His character, and so, because God will not be shamed, He will meet our needs.

Thus Jesus goes straight in v.9. So, if God will not allow himself to be put to shame by knocking back our requests, then ...Ask! V.9, **“So I say to you, Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”**

The man sought out his neighbour, knocked on his door, asked for his need to be filled, and God is more than ready to open the door and give us what we need. Not necessarily our wants, but God will not be shamed by not granting to us what we need! Not one of us, can rightly say that God has failed to give us what we need.

James 4:2 has often been used out of context suggesting that whatever we want God will give to us, if we just ask. **“You do not have because you do not ask.”** But the context of this verse is within a passage where James is talking about our need for wisdom. We often don't have wisdom because we don't ask for it, and so we often ask God for things from wrong motives and simply to support our own pleasures.

But in Jesus teaching here, He's not only suggesting that God will meet our needs, but that His response and provision is good; and His best gift to us is in the Holy Spirit. V. 11-13. **“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for[a] 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!”**



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So, if a father would want to give good gifts to his son when he asks, then truly the Heavenly Father will give good gifts to those who ask, seek and knock. And what is it that we truly need? The Holy Spirit! Jesus lived His life and taught that God would and does supply all of our daily needs, but our greatest need is in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. **How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!** So, if you knock on the door through prayer, seeking the Lord, asking for the Holy Spirit; for God to reign in your life; for you to know the prompting and comfort and the encouragement of the Lord, then He will give it; for anyone who ask receives.

For Jesus, prayer was and is a relationship, a dialogue, a communication, a personal contact with God, with God himself in the Holy Spirit. Jesus begins speaking about a nightly visitor, about bread, about common things, he ends up speaking of the gift of most worth, God himself through His Spirit. What more could we hope and dream for, but to have the spirit of God dwelling in our hearts; impacting our lives.

Prayer according to Jesus in this parable is more than a list of demands, it is more than communicating ones hurts, pains and problems to God. Prayer is a relationship with God himself. Prayer is in personal contact with God. Prayer is a matter of continuous interaction with God. Prayer is a constant dialogue with the Spirit of God in our hearts.

For, it is the Holy Spirit who comforts and encourages, guides and prompts. It is the Holy Spirit who strengthens and sustains so that we may cope with our daily circumstances. It is the Holy Spirit working within us that produces such Godly fruit as peace, love, joy, patience, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Don't we need the Holy Spirit!

And the final contrast that I'd like us to see in this reading is this. Our God “who watches over you will not slumber.” He's not asleep like the neighbour, but waits eagerly for us to come to Him in prayer. So, ask, seek, knock; come to God and your request for the Holy Spirit's enabling and power in your life will never be rejected. He will gladly give the greatest of gifts to meet our greatest of needs.

Isn't God incredible? He's not a grumpy God; busy at the wheel managing all of the world's affairs; annoyed by our interruptions. He's waiting to commune with us and give us what we need. His heart is such that he longs to meet with us and He wants to fulfil our needs through the indwelling of His Spirit.

And so we come to Him just as we are and by His grace and mercy we are forgiven and transformed. Can we sing together...

**Song TN286 Just as I am**



## Communion

Just as I am, before knowing salvation through Jesus Christ, I would be lost. Just as we are, we come to the table of mercy. We come guilty, and we are pardoned; we are forgiven. We come acknowledging our sin, and we leave in peace and filled with hope. We are welcomed to the table by the loving and open arms of our Father. Like the parable of the prodigal son, our Father longs to commune with us around the table.

As we take of the bread let us remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the Cross, so that we would be rescued, healed, mended, pardoned and filled – by the blood of Christ the Lamb.

“Father, as we are about to take this bread, we do so as Jesus asked us to do, in remembrance of Him. We are so grateful for our salvation – you have saved us from the penalty of our sin; forgiving us and setting us free to experience victory in our daily lives over sin and death. All praise to you; we glorify your name. Amen.”

As we take the cup, let us again pray... “Father, this cup reminds us of the blood of the Lamb of God; Jesus – dying for us. Thank you that you fill us with peace and joy, hope and your Holy Spirit. Thank you for meeting all of our needs in Jesus Christ. We praise you, Amen.”

Paul wrote, in Eph 5:18 that we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit and go on being filled; to be controlled by, and empowered with the Holy Spirit. If we are to be transformed into the image of God’s Son, then we need the presence of the Holy Spirit to enable that. So, as Jesus prompted His disciples, let us ask, seek and knock – asking the Lord for what we need.

As we begin each new day, as we interact with family, or work colleagues; as we face varying situations that may cause heightened levels of stress; as we enter into circumstances that we’d rather not have to face; we should pray to be filled with the Spirit of God.

“Lord, would you take control of my day today; my week; my life. Would you prompt me by your Spirit; comfort me and encourage me, and grant me your wisdom. Let your will and purposes be done through me. Please fill me with your Spirit so that I can do everything you have asked me to do, and so that I can be the kind of loving person that you created me to be. Amen!”

May you know God’s blessing; His peace, and His presence with you this week and forever more. Amen.