

Text of a message delivered by Aidan Wivell at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 8th March 2026.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.



Teach Us to Pray

Luke 11:1-13

“That sounded like a prayer!! A prayer?! A prayer in a public school!? God has no place within these walls, just like facts have no place within organized religion!”

That was Superintendent Chalmers reaction to hearing fill-in headteacher Ned Flanders “thank the Lord, for another beautiful school day”. The Simpsons episode was aired in the mid 90’s and Chalmers’ contempt for prayer captured the attitude I sensed as a kid growing up in an environment hostile to the things of God.

Thankfully, things seem to have shifted a bit since then. In 2024 Coldplay debuted their a new song at Glastonbury music festival called we pray which features no fewer than 37 references to prayer. In the world of sport, Premier League Footballers and All Black rugby stars are pausing to pray with increasing boldness on the global stage. Ardie Savea, the Moana Pasifika captain, even turned a Super Rugby press conference into a prayer meeting last year when he led the gathered media and all those watching at home in a prayer. In our community I have heard stories of some of you being asked to open “secular” work meetings with karakia.

In his book on prayer, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools*, pastor and US Director of 24-7 Prayer, Tyler Staton says that: “Prayer is the intersection between an out-of-touch Western church and a spiritually curious Western world.” There seems to be an attitude shift toward prayer from *contempt* towards *curiosity*.

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Interestingly another evidence of this was the surge of google searches for “*how to pray*” during lockdown and as we continue today in the gospel according to Luke we find Jesus’ disciples asking him more or less that same question. We rejoin Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem and find him not multiplying bread, casting out demons, or riding a donkey full speed ahead, but in this section, pausing the journey, to pray.

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.” (Luke 11:1)

Before we get into Jesus’ response, it’s worth noting that what prompts the question from the disciples, is seeing Jesus in prayer. They know Jesus, they’re spending everyday with him, they know how busy he is, how many people are vying for his time and attention, and they know they’ve set out resolutely for Jerusalem – but they can see firsthand that He still makes prayer a priority.

And so they ask him – “teach us to pray”. But the lesson before the lesson, is Jesus’ personal prayer life; Jesus pausing his journey to pray what he preaches.

So let’s now look at how Jesus responds, we’ll break it down a few verses at a time:

***He said to them, “When you pray, say:
“Father,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
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.” (Luke 11:2-4)***

Words for Prayer

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The first thing Jesus gives the disciples is words of prayer. So let's talk first about a couple of different types of prayer: Set prayers are those that have been pre-written by others – we sometimes call these **liturgical prayers** as opposed to **extemporaneous prayers** – which are prayers we make up as we go.

As Baptists we have traditionally preferred non-scripted prayers and as a young person I wholeheartedly agreed with this! Spontaneous prayer was more spiritual I thought, more free, more heartfelt! In comparison reading the words of someone else was kind of like prayer plagiarism. It was fake, insincere, and I associated it with dry cultural Christianity which repeated words with no meaning.

However, as I've gotten older, I've learned to love liturgical prayers. Sometimes, perhaps often, we struggle to find the words or energy to communicate with God. In times like this, prayers written by others can be so lifegiving. Along the way I've discovered prayers by Augustine, St. Francis, Mother Teresa, and more close to home, from Strahan Coleman, former worship leader at this church who runs a prayer ministry called Commoners Communion.

There are many throughout the ages who have written prayers for the church, but here in our passage we have a prayer pre-written by Jesus himself. So let's take a look at the **Lord's Prayer**.

What we find in Luke's account is a shorter version of the Lord's Prayer than Matthew recorded, but still very similar. The different versions may be explained by the different contexts: In Matthew Jesus delivers the Lord's prayer to large crowds as part of the Sermon on the Mount, while here in Luke this is a more private interaction with his disciples. While there are some familiar phrases missing, the overall structure is clearly consistent, and they both start with a startling way of addressing God: **"Father"**.

Let's just say this would have been a shock to the disciples. We're so used to saying the Lord's Prayer that most of us probably don't think about it but to those early disciples this was a game changer. And this is really the theme of Jesus teaching here on prayer. God as Father. We'll come back to it again later. Whilst we could do a whole sermon series on the

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Lord's Prayer, for today we're going to push on with Jesus' teaching because he doesn't just give words with which the disciples could pray, he also gives them the attitude with which they can approach God in prayer.

Attitude for Prayer

Let's continue at verse 5.

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Luke 11:5-9)

I have often struggled with this parable because I failed to realise a key thing about reading parables - so I'm going to tell you that now before we get into it! Are you ready?

The key to understanding a parable is working out who is the **central character**. That doesn't sound that life changing does it? But let me show you why I misunderstood this parable for so long.

When Jesus describes the friend who's locked up in bed and disturbed at midnight and who doesn't want to give his friend anything but, somewhat begrudgingly, does, because they've been so bold – I thought he was describing God!

He's not!

Not every element of the parable has meaning outside of the parable. In this case the central character is the friend who with shameless audacity knocks on his neighbours door at midnight.

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Jesus is **not** using this parable to say anything about **God's attitude** to our prayers (that's coming later).

Jesus **is** using this parable to show what **our attitude** should be in prayer.

That's why in conclusion he says "**so I say to you: ask... seek... knock.**"

So what attitude do we approach God with?

Would the words "**shameless audacity**" fit your prayer life? Other translations use the word "*impudence*" which can even mean rude! Are we that bold in our prayers that it feels shameless, audacious, or even bordering on rude, in what we ask of Him?

If I'm honest I associate more with Tyler Staton's words from the same book I mentioned earlier:

We pray the safest kind of prayers—the ones so passive and vague we'd never be able to tell if God responded to them or not. As a thought experiment, try to recall everything you've prayed for in the last week. If God answered every last one of your prayers, what would happen? With the exception of one or two particularly bold or naive people, the answer is usually very little.

I wonder where that lands for you. If God unleashed everything you prayed for last week what would happen? Would you notice? Would lives change?

The encouragement of this parable is that Jesus tells his followers to **boldly and persistently keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking.**

Why can we have such confidence? Let's continue in the teaching as Jesus concludes this section with the assurance with which we can pray.

Assurance for Prayer

For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will

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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!" (Luke 11:10-13)

Ask, seek, and knock are some of the most well-known words of Jesus when it comes to prayer. What I hadn't always appreciated about these verbs was the **progression of intimacy** they imply.

- **Asking** is bringing our requests before God and this is something scripture encourages. Often this is where our prayers start. Simply asking for what we need like a baby that first communicates by crying out in need.
- **Seeking** takes us more personal, now we are not so much seeking answers but seeking God himself. Not for what he can provide but for his presence.
- The final verb **knock** is the most intimate because the promise is the door will be opened. This image is biblical shorthand for saying let's have dinner together! Listen to this from Revelation 3:20: **Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.**

The assurance Jesus gives is that those who ask - receive, those who seek - find, and those who knock - find they are welcomed in. *Why?* Not because they knew the right formula, located God's hiding spot, or discovered the secret knock for the door! But because the One to whom they pray is a Good Father who loves to give good gifts to his children.

Jesus picks up the bombshell he dropped at the start (remember how he shockingly instructed the disciples to address God as Father!) and he doubles down here comparing God to a generous father. He says even imperfect earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children, and if that is the case, how much more God who is the perfect Heavenly Father.

As an adult son, I get how this changes our assurance in prayer because I know the boldness, perhaps even the shameless way, I can ask things of my parents.

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When we go over to their place I pull up onto the drive without worrying if I'm blocking anyone in.

If I'm peckish, which I usually am, I help myself to the snacks in the pantry. If I feel like a swim and I've forgotten my stuff I'll grab a towel, suncream, and maybe even some of my Dad's shorts, maybe one of mum's books, don't forget the paddleboard, and head down to the beach.

Sometimes at church we think about who we can invite to be involved in a service or a project. Many of you will have had me or another team member "shoulder tap" you for an opportunity. I have to admit I often find this fairly uncomfortable, and double check my message a few times, making sure you know there is "no pressure" or "no problem if you can't"... Sometimes however there's something *my mum or dad* might be able to help with. In that case I'll just pick up the phone and ask them. No hesitation. They're my parents and asking them for help is categorically different to asking anyone else!

The intimacy of the relationship means I ask without fear. How much more can I ask anything of my heavenly Father?

Lingering Questions

So we've talked about how Jesus' teaching gives us the words, the attitude, and the assurance with which we can approach God in prayer. As we come toward the end of our time together, I want to address a few lingering questions you might have.

Firstly, I want to acknowledge that we all have different experiences with our parents. For many people, the idea of God as Father is deeply painful because of the ways they have been let down by their father, or father figures in their life. If that is you, I just want to acknowledge that. Jesus in his words also acknowledges earthly parents are imperfect when he says: ***If you then (human fathers), though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children (11:13).***

We, humans, are all a mixture of both good and evil. If you have been wounded, neglected, or rejected by those who were supposed to love and protect you I am so sorry. The good

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news is that our Heavenly Father loves perfectly. In Him there is no hint of shadow or deception.

For some of you, perhaps most of you, your question will be around unanswered prayers. Jesus says ask and we will receive. Yet sometimes we ask for work and there is no employment, we ask for friends and remain lonely, or we ask for healing and there is no improvement.

Such questions are not easy to answer. Truthfully none of us could explain why God seems to answer some prayers and not others. There are some frameworks that can help and maybe we can dig into those in the podcast, but what this passage teaches us is that when God doesn't answer in the way we expect, ***it's not because of a lack of love***. He is our Father who longs to give good gifts to his children and knows how to do that well.

This passage also teaches us to be ***persistent*** in prayer. The original language is best translated as keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. Persistence in prayer is a theme of Scripture and if God answered every prayer instantly - there would be no need for persistence.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. He gave them, and us, the words, attitude, and assurance with which we can approach the Father.

May Jesus continue to teach us all how to pray.

Amen.

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Reflecting on Sunday 1st March 2026: Last week Miko unpacked the story of the Good Samaritan. Have you had an opportunity this week to help someone in need? Or perhaps to be on the receiving end of an act of kindness? What have you learned?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. Do you tend to prefer pre-written (liturgical) prayers or to pray in your own words off the cuff (extemporaneously)? What do you like about praying that way? What might it look like to try another way?
2. Reread verses 11:5-8, what is your gut reaction to the idea of praying with “shameless audacity”? What might that tell you about how you view God or yourself?
3. Jesus teaches us to be persistent in prayer but often we give up when answers don’t come quickly. Why do you think many of us lack stamina in our prayer lives?
4. Sometimes prayers seem to be answered and sometimes they don’t, or at least not in the way we hope for. If a friend asked you “why does God answer some prayers and not others?” how would you respond?

If you’d like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we’re better together and no perfect people are allowed.**

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. I quoted from Tyler Staton's book ***Praying like Monks, Living like Fools*** multiple times in this message - I highly recommend it!
https://www.amazon.com/dp/031036535X?ref=cm_sw_r_cp_ud_dp_CY6W7WW405K91BBS8X3D
2. Jesus gave the disciples what we call **The Lord's Prayer** in this passage. Check out this Bible Project link which has both a video and an article unpacking the prayer in greater detail!
<https://bibleproject.com/guides/the-lords-prayer/>
3. Recently we launched a **Podcast** to dive **Beyond the Message** each week. Give it a listen as we reflect on this message and answer any questions you have on it! We're excited to continue the conversation!
<https://www.windsorpark.org.nz/podcasts>