

Well good morning – as you know we’re working our way through Matthew’s gospel. We began in chapter 5 (about 9 months ago) and today we reach chapter 7. *Scholars have estimated that at this rate we’ll reach Chapter 28 somewhere in the next millennium ☺*

This morning we come to a passage about prayer which is right at the end of the Sermon on the Mount on p971.

Prayer is like a reflex of our soul - its like flinching when something threatens to hit us.

When life is knocking 6 bells out of us - we pray.

The passengers going down on the Titanic prayed.

Hostage prisoners, bound and blind-folded – pray.

Those who stand by the hospital bed of loved one – pray.

When the chips are down we instinctively pray.

It is a reflex of the soul.

When we are in trouble we instinctively reach out to God in prayer.

But Jesus tells us “this is not the way we should usually pray”.

If prayer is a reflex – then it should be more like breathing than it is like flinching.

Sure we can command ourselves to breath deeply when we are in trouble

But breathing is also something we need to do all the time – otherwise sustaining life becomes very hard!

Prayer is a reflex, it is like breathing, it is an everyday tool to bring the power of heaven into our lives.

So Jesus says in Matthew 7:

we should pray constantly, repeatedly, shamelessly (even), nagging God

He says we should pray as a child to our father

He says we should pray trusting that God knows what he is doing and he will give us what we need.

In Matthew 7v7 Jesus says 3 things that I want to expand in this morning, that:

we should pray shamelessly,

as child to a Father,

with trust that God has promised (in his word, on his honour) to supply all our need.

So if you haven’t already it would me if you would turn to p971, Matthew chapter 7v7 where

1. Jesus says we should pray repeatedly, constantly, brashly, nagging and bothering God!

Now I know that doesn’t sound right but in v7 Jesus says this

“ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened”.

Hw says the same thing 3 times: ask, seek, knock. He’s making a point.

When we pray to God we should ask and seek and knock? But how?

Are we to ‘knock’ just once?

I don’t know if you’ve ever had Parcel-force deliver a package to you,

But their delivery drivers don’t knock just once <knock>

The postman doesn’t say “hey I’ve knocked once –so I’ll just wait here all day to see if they’ve heard”,

No, what he does is he knocks loudly, rudely almost, about 6,000 times whilst simultaneously jamming the bell 3 inches into the door-frame with his finger!”

The question is “when we pray” are we to knock just once or are we to pray like Parcel-force delivery driver who attempts to wear out the door-knocking?

When Jesus says ‘seek’, does he mean seek the way most men seek?

Now maybe I’m doing my gender a disservice here - but when I seek, I open the cupboard door and unless the sugar jumps out at me or unless it starts dancing the tango on top of the coffee jar – I feel quite at liberty to declare to Amanda ‘hey honey we’ve run out of sugar!?’

are we to ‘seek’ like men or are we to be persistent, thorough, to leave no stone unturned and no coffee jar unmoved?

When Jesus says ‘ask’ does he mean, ask quietly or does he mean badger God trying to nag him to death?

Well actually, we don’t need to guess the answer to this question - because Jesus tells us in Luke 11!

So if you’d keep your finger in Matthew 7, and turn with me to Luke 11, you’ll see exactly the same teaching in v9 where Jesus says “ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened”, but if you look at Luke v5 of chapter 11 Jesus tells us how we should ask.

He says, look,

"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 has come to me, and I have nothing to give 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"*

It’s the middle of the night, a man is in bed, and because it’s a one bed-roomed house the whole family is asleep together.

A man knocks on his door

He knocks and he doesn’t go away.

He knocks because he wants something

He gets what he wants – not because his need is huge (he simply wants to make a sandwich for a hungry friend,

He gets what he wants – not because he is the man’s friend

He gets what he wants because of his boldness v8

But this word “boldness” actually means “shameless impudence”.

He gets what he wants because he has the sheer nerve, to bothers the man and not go away, even though what he wants is trivial

Jesus in the same way this is how you should pray. Ask, seek, knock – with shameless, impudence. Bother God. Don’t give up! Fill his in-box with prayers!

You say “Steve that can’t be right”.

That doesn’t sound right at all.

OK well in Luke 18 Jesus tells another parable

But this time its about an unjust judge who can’t be bothered to give a poor widow Justice.

But she doesn't give, she doesn't go away Chapter 18v5 quote she "keep bothering him" – same word! She keeps bugging him, hounding him, worrying him until he gives her what she wants and Luke tells us that v1 "Jesus told this parable to show his disciples that they should always pray and not give up".

So when we pray don't pray when were in trouble

we have the resources of heaven available to us and we need to pray constantly.

Jesus says "you don't **have** because you don't ask"

And when you do ask you ask just once or twice and then give up.

that's not how to do it.

Pray like a Parcel-force delivery man

Pray like a friend ringing the door bell in the middle of the night

Pray like a widow who will not let the system get away with it

Jesus says "give God no peace", "don't give up", "keep asking" "be shameless, be relentless, bother God" ...

ask, seek, knock – big or small – ask anyway

if you think you deserve it or not give it a go!

And it doesn't sound right does it,

But it is and this is the reason.

2. Secondly, we are to pray as little Children to their Father.

Pray shamelessly, impertinently, boldly – why?

Because you are little children in front of your Father.

If you look at v11 of Luke 11, you see that Jesus justifies this shameless approach to prayer by saying "*Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?*"

The reason why we can pray like this is because only children dare do this to their Father and get away with it.

Only a 4 year old can enter their parents room in the middle of the night and say "Daddy I'm, thirsty" and get what they want.

Friends can't do it!

Can you imagine me calling Jeremy up in the middle of the night saying "Hi Jeremy, I wonder if you would get me a drink of water" what would he say? (more to the point what would Fiona say!)

Friendship is no basis for this type of approach in prayer!

Jesus says of the man approaching at midnight – he doesn't get it because he is his friend!

Not even wives can do this ...

A Priest and a Nun were travelling together when their car broke down in the middle of a stormy night. Soaking wet and cold they managed to trek into a nearby village and find the only hotel.

"May we have two rooms for the night please", asked the priest.

The hotelier said I'm sorry but we only have 1 double room left.

There was silence

and then the Nun said : To be sure, Father, do you think the Good Lord would mind if we just took the room this one night ?

And the priest replied: Yes you're right sister - I can sleep on the couch.

*So cold but a lot drier they turned in for the night.
Anyway they hadn't been asleep long when the Nun said
Father I'm awfully cold, would you mind getting me a blanket.
OK a blanket it is said the Priest.*

*A little later on, Father I'm still awfully cold, would you mind getting me another blanket.
OK another blanket it is said the Priest.*

*And then a little later on.
Its no good Father I'm still perishing cold - do you think the good Lord would mind if we acted as just
husband and wife for this one night ?
And then the priest replied: Yes I think you're right sister - get your own blessed blanket*

The only people who can get away with ask audacious requests of us – would be our 4 year old who:
wandering into our bedroom says “Daddy I’m thirsty”!

approach to prayer,

Therefore, when we pray to God the justification for asking (shamelessly, boldly, audaciously) is because we
are little Children talking to our Father “the King of the Universe”.

Its not because were his friend as an equal
Its not because there is anything on earth important enough to warrant his interest
It is because we, and we alone can call him Abba, Papa, Father!

And therefore (says Jesus) go to him, bother him, plead with him, disturb him – **because** he is your father.
And the power of the Universe is open to you.

*When Ellen wanted a camera for her birthday she didn't stop talking about it for weeks. As her birthday
approach she photocopied the page from the Argos catalogue about 20 times and stuck them all over the
house,
she put post-it notes in my sock draw and
pictures of the camera in the fridge.
She was accessing the Wallet of her earthly Father and she used every opportunity to remind me of her
request!*

The day you became a Christian your relationship with God changed.
He became your Father - you became his child by adoption.

Many people believe that if we “commit ourselves to God and try to be as good as we can” then **this** is the
basis for God answering our prayers”.

The reasoning is “if I work hard, if I impress God, if I am good”
then I will ne entitled to get some reward.
but Jesus says this is NOT the basis for prayer.

In fact this is not the basis for being his child.

We are God’s child by adoption – not because of what we can do but because of what Christ has done

We are God's child not because we can save ourselves but because of Jesus' death
We are God's child not because we are good enough but because Christ was good enough!

My friends believing that we can be good enough to impress God,
or that we can earn his favour - will **kill** our prayer life.
for when will we ever be good enough to impress God? and
when will **our cause** ever be large enough to bother the King of the Universe?
Never!

So Jesus is saying to you and me
The only basis for prayer is because you are his child and
therefore because you are his child
pray – pray constantly, pray badgeringly, pray joyously, pray unselfconsciously. Bother God. Stick your
prayer requests in God's sock draw, flood his in-box with ideas, stick reminder notes in his fridge, be bold,
be courageous, give him no rest
not because of how good you are or how urgent your need is
but on the basis – that only you as a child of God can get away with it.

Do you see?
Jesus is saying: Bother God, Pray as his child
And finally

3. Trust in his Love.

If you turn back to Matthew chapter 7, in v11 Jesus says *“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 good gifts to those who ask him!”*.

Fathers, if your child asks for a fish will you give him a scorpion? No.
In fact, if your child asks for a **scorpion** would you give him a scorpion! No.
Father you know what your children need – so does God
So when you ask, and when you seek and when you knock: trust him.

Children ask for the most outrageous things and sometimes they have no idea what it is they are asking for:
“Daddy can we go to the moon for our Summer holiday? It sounds reasonable to them!”

When we pray sometimes and we have no idea what it is we are asking for!
*A man was walking along the beach, when he stumbles across an old lamp.
He rubs it and out pops a Genie.
The Genie tells him he's been stuck in there for donkey's years, so he will grant him one wish.
The man thinks and says that he'd like to go to America,
but he's too scared to fly and too scared to sail,
so could the Genie build a motor way across the Atlantic.
The Genie laughs and tells the guy that's a really big request, apart the logistics, how would the bridge be supported? Think about the amount of concrete that would be needed? Does he have any idea of what he as asked! Think of another wish!" he tells the man.
The man thinks and says "I know, there is something else I'd like to understand my wife" to which the Genie replies,
"so do you want four lanes or six on this motorway!"*

When we pray we have no idea what it is we are asking for, but ask anyway, says Jesus because God knows what you need –

You see the key to understanding how God **answers** our prayers is found in the final verse of our passage v12.

“so in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you”.

Now at first sight, this seems to bear no relation with what has gone before.

What has that got to do with prayer?

Well, actually it's the key.

The secret to seeing how God answers our prayers is to know that He does to us, what he would have us do to him.

Our Father gives us what we would have asked for if we knew everything he knows.

If we ask for a Scorpion he will give us an egg.

Because he knows what's best

If we who are evil and can give good things – how much more will our lovingly heavenly Father give us good things!

In prayer: “we ask for things to make us feel more secure” – God offers us eternal life, which will make us secure forever. What better answer can there be?

In prayer: “we ask for success – God says “I think you are brilliant” what more success do you need? know that your value doesn't depend upon your looks, or your body shape, or your qualifications, or your competence – let this liberate you – this is what we need!

In prayer “we ask not to be alone” and God says “I will never leave you or forsake you”.

God doesn't always give us what we ask for, but he always gives us what we need.

Jesus says: we must ask God for everything and anything,
ask repeatedly, ask shamelessly, ask confidently,
ask because we are his child,
and when we have asked, trust that he knows how to answer

Trust that his answer, his silence, his refusal even, is calling us
to love him more, trust him more, be more secure in him – for only then can he give us all things.

In Matthew 6:33, there is this important principle.

Jesus says: “seek first his kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you as well”

In other words

If our **job** is our security, then wouldn't it be madness for God to give a promotion until we have made God our rock? Wouldn't that promotion just be a scorpion to us?

If **our love** is for another person then does God really do us any favours by giving them to us if we have not learnt yet to love and be content in him?

If **money** is the way we value ourselves then should God give us more? Would that snake poison us?

But seek first his Kingdom,
be hungry for his presence,
be thirsty for his Spirit
be relentless about knowing him
be discontent with our experience of him,
bother him until his Spirit ignites our soul

And then Jesus says and “all these things will be given to you as well”
He can give these other things to us because we will know their true value and place in our life
He can give them to us because we won't make an idol out of them
He can give them to us because he is our delight and passion.

God doesn't always give us what we ask for, but he always gives us what we need.
God always gives us what we would have asked for if we had known everything he knows.

Prayer is so powerful,
It is the greatest weapon we have to change our life,
So don't give up
don't ask just once
don't wait until you have something big to ask for
don't hold off until you are good enough to be granted a favour

Ask as a child
and the love that you need,
and the security that you need,
and the purpose that you need,
and the hope that you need, will be yours
and all these other things? –
well don't be surprised if they are given to you as well!