

# Pray like Jesus

## Part 1, Luke 11:1-10

### **Luke 11:1-10 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> 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."

<sup>2</sup> He said to them, "When you pray, say: "'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread.

<sup>4</sup> Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

<sup>5</sup> Then he 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,

<sup>6</sup> because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'

<sup>7</sup> "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.'

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> "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.

<sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

**Red text indicates sections that are not preached but contain interesting information**

### **Puzzled about prayer**

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" (Mark 1:35-37)*

**Peter:** Andrew where's Jesus got to? There's a huge crowd waiting for him this morning, and the lepers are getting pushed together with the - umm- well you know – it could get ugly

**Andrew:** (pointing) He's over there

**Peter:** Again?

**Andrew:** Again!

**Peter:** What's he doing?

**Andrew:** (considering) I think he's praying

**Peter:** Which prayer?

- Andrew:** I don't know, I didn't recognise it
- Peter:** What do you mean you didn't recognise it? Is he just saying random words?
- Andrew:** well he ... he seems to be.
- Peter:** What?
- Andrew:** He seems to be praying to his Father
- Peter:** (confused) But his father's dead?
- Andrew:** (concerned) I know!
- Peter:** Well ...let's keep this to ourselves
- Andrew:** might be best
- Peter:** One day I'm going to ask him about this
- Andrew:** But not today
- Peter:** No not today, (shouting in the pointed direction Andrew pointed to) - Hey Jesus everyone's looking for you! - exit

Sometimes studying the Bible is like following the white rabbit down the hole into wonderland. You start out with this particular idea about what it's all about, then as you get into the bible you begin to see something different, and those different things begin to speak to you and the word of God begins to say something fresh to your spirit, I just love that. So this week I was preparing an introduction for a three part series on prayer with a very simple model in my head; let's look at Jesus life of prayer, how he models that life of prayer and hands it on to his disciples and how the disciples then hand it on to us. Simple, except that as I got into the bible's description of Jesus prayer life, I began to see a few odd things, and in those odd things I began to sense God saying something. Out of my bible study four questions arose.

### Prayer puzzles

1. Why does Luke record more of Jesus prayer life than the other three gospels combined?
2. Why did Jesus need to pray at all?
3. Why did the disciples struggle with Jesus prayer practices?
4. Why was Jesus slow to teach the disciples about prayer?

### Question 1 - Why does Luke record more of Jesus prayer life than the other three gospels combined?

#### Jesus prayed:

- Before the day began (Luke 4:42, 5:16)
- Before receiving the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Luke 3:21-22)

- Before choosing his disciples (Luke 6:12-16)
- Before declaring his true identity as Messiah (Luke 9:18)
- Before revealing his divine identity in the transfiguration (Luke 9:28-29)
- After the seventy returned from a successful mission trip (Luke 10:21-22)
- For Peter (Luke 22:31-32)
- Before being arrested (Luke 22:46)
- While dying on the cross (Luke 23:34, 46)

This is the easy question - Luke is the church historian so he particularly focuses on those aspects of Jesus ministry that he saw as essential for the growth and vitality of early Christians. For this reason Luke mentions, far more than the other gospels, Jesus relationship with the Holy Spirit and his prayer life. It's an important point when we are asking the question how important is prayer and Luke's answer is; just about the most important thing of all.

### **Question 2: Why did Jesus need to pray at all?**

This is a question that my memory dredged up from a time I was puzzling over the trinity as a young fellow. The question kind of went; if the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three in one, why does Jesus need to pray to the father, isn't he just praying to himself? I mean, who else has wondered about that? There can be a very long answer to this question but the short version is; in that short period in eternity when the Son of God became fully human, becoming fully human meant being separated from God. As Paul says in Philippians:

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Philippians 2:6-7)*

Recognising Jesus separation from the Father he had been eternally a part of, gives a real poignancy to Jesus prayer life. When Jesus went out early in the morning to pray the disciples did not realise they were watching the worlds very first; "I really, really miss you call". You know those calls? You have been away from the one you love for some time and now all you can think about is that phone call, when you will hear their voice again, re-connect with what's going on in their life, and tell them you love them.

In John 17, we get to eavesdrop on the end of one of these "I really, really miss" you calls from Jesus

*Righteous Father, the world has never known you, But I have known you, and these disciples know that you sent me on this mission. I have made your very being known to them— Who you are and what you do— And continue to make it known, So that your love for me might be in them exactly as I am in them. (John 17:25-26, MSG)*

So there you go, the first "I really, really miss you" call in history – as we eavesdrop on Jesus prayer what we hear is part of an intimate conversation of a shared purpose and a shared love and also something else – in this prayer Jesus reveals that he also

wants his followers to have the same relationship with God that he has - saying - "So that your love for me might be in them ". We'll circle back to this.

### **Question 3: Why did the disciples struggle with Jesus prayer practices?**

You were probably struck in our Oscar winning drama of Mark 1:35-37, by the fact that, particularly in the early days, Jesus disciples were quite baffled by Jesus intimate prayer life. You see, while Jewish men prayed, they almost always prayed words from the Torah, from the bible. Because what words could possibly be acceptable to a holy God, other than God's own words. (Mostly sections out of Deuteronomy (6:4-9, 11:13-21) and Numbers (15:37-41) (called the Shema which means "Hear" and is the first word of the prayer – "hear O Israel, and the Shemonēh-esray which means the eighteen.). Because of this, Jesus habit of going off by himself and personally chatting with God baffled and alarmed his disciples. However what we are witnessing in the biblical record is one of the great changes in spiritual practices in the history of the world and of course no dramatic change comes easily, which brings us to:

### **Question 4: Why was Jesus slow to teach the disciples about prayer?**

That Jesus was practicing a new and fresh way to pray and that it was freaking out his disciples makes it a little odd that he was slow to talk about it. In our passage in Luke 11, Jesus only talks about it because his disciples ask him flat out to teach them to pray – but – and this is the other puzzling thing - they ask him to teach them to pray like "John the Baptist". What is puzzling about that is that John the Baptist did not pray like Jesus at all, John the Baptist was old school, and he prayed traditional Torah prayers like the Pharisees. We see this in Luke 5;

*They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking." (Luke 5:33)*

So in essence Jesus disciples were asking Jesus to do the following – teach us about prayer – but not that weird freeform stuff that you do - we want some proper Torah prayers like John teaches. We don't want to be the weird disciples anymore, we don't want to be the ones that people point at and say those guys, they don't pray like proper Jews. So what is going on here?

In human culture what we do and the way that we do it, is fused with our identity, and when what we do and the way that we do it is threatened it feels like our very life is threatened. For example, Monday is my day off and over the years I have developed a very particular routine. Now, from time to time, Deb suggests to me that I might do something different on my day off, these suggestions are usually modest and sensible. Now while on the outside I appear to be seriously considering the suggestion, on the inside something very different is going on, certain feelings are rising up in me and internally I am thinking; *I see, so you are asking me to cut my arm off, you really want me cut my arm off, and I bet you want me to use a butter knife while I'm at it because it is blunt and it will hurt more.* (Right now there is a whole lot of woman making the mental note – must pray for Deb.) Now I know -

those feelings that I have - are more than a little ridiculous, but in different ways, that's how change makes us all feel – fearful and threatened.

The way that the disciples had been taught to pray, was part of their identity, part of who they were. Seeing their beloved master praying in a completely different way was deeply disturbing for them and partly for this reason Jesus is not pushing the issue. He is not demanding that they make sudden changes to the way they pray. But make no mistake, whether they like it or not Jesus is gradually leading them into a tremendous change in the way they relate to God.

Which brings us to a thorny question, why should anyone change at all if change is so painful? Why can't the disciples go on praying in the tradition of their fathers, hasn't it served them well? - Well the answer is no, it hasn't served them well. While they love their faith tradition more than life, the last third of the Jewish bible catalogues multiple failures in Jewish practices that have brought them almost to brink of extinction and the worse thing is that they don't get it and they don't see it. Isaiah calls them a people *that are ever hearing but never understanding, and ever seeing but never perceiving* (Isaiah 6:9). My take is that the problem is that the comfort which comes from the familiarity of a tradition almost always disguises its weaknesses.

This is what had happened with the prayer life of the Jewish people, its comforting familiarity disguised the fact that it had become quite empty, so much so that someone like Jesus who had an intimate, passionate, relationship with God, looked like a bit of a weirdo in comparison.

This is also what has happened with congregations all around Australia who knew they were getting old, who knew they were shrinking in numbers, who knew they had to change, but who wouldn't change, who died and took their church with them because they could not lay down the comfort of their tradition to ensure there would be new life in the future. In the same way it will be the demise of our church if we stop at the gates of God's new things for fear of losing the comfort of the familiar. The future of the Christian Church is not located in its past but in its spiritual vitality and authenticity, right here and right now.

*<sup>18</sup> "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.*

*<sup>19</sup> See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:18-19)*

*<sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,*

*<sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)*

So our question must be what are the new things for us, for our church? What are the streams in the wasteland for us? What is the prize for us? Part of that answer has always been about the reality of prayer.

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, (Hebrews 10:19-20)*

The writer of the Hebrews explains that the death and Resurrection of Jesus changes the prayer relationship that people can have with God. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul reminds the people that the height of intimacy Israel had with God was watching Moses disappear up a mountain to spend time with God and that when he returned they had to put a veil over his face because they could not bear watching God's glory fading away. But in the death and Resurrection of Jesus there is a new living way,.

*<sup>16</sup> But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*

*<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*

*<sup>18</sup> And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:16-18)*

So what do I think God is saying to us through his word this morning? Jesus legacy to us through his death and resurrection is for an unprecedented intimate relationship with God that transforms church from some mumblings about God to rich engagement with God - and people want that - people are looking for that - they are looking for God - they are looking for authenticity - and the question is will they find it in us? Will you find it in you? The other thing the bible is saying is that change is coming but just as the disciples struggled with spiritual change so will we, and with that I will close with two final thoughts.

**Thought number one:** Get over it, stop making excuses and go after intimacy with God. Like the parable in Luke 11 says, bang on that door, seek that intimacy and just get into it with God.

**Thought number two:** Start where Jesus tells you to start, Jesus said, *when you pray, say: "Father"*, which is not beginning with the Father you have but with the father you need. Don't ever let the imperfections of the father you have, rob you of the wonder of the father you need. Because when we cry out in prayer "Father", we are seeking our heavenly father, the Father who always has time for us, the father who always understands, the father who always protects, always shelters, always seeks the best for us and unconditionally loves and accepts us. When we pray reaching out to that kind of Father we are opening a spiritual doorway because the biblical principle is that what you seek you find (Luke 11:9), like attracts like. I have found that as I seek my heavenly father, that as I locate in my Spirit all my yearnings for a relationship with my loving heavenly father, it's like a homing beacon that helps me find my way to the heart of God. So *when you pray, say: "Father"*

So let us pray.

**To want to be close to God ... is to pray.**