

2 Parables about prayer.

Luke 11:1-10; and 18:1-14 Rev Wendy Carter

Cardinal Basil Hume once said, “Prayer is trying to lift heart and mind to God”. Someone else described it as ‘coming home’ – God invites us to return to where we belong – into relationship with Him

It can be a relief to know that all we have to do initially is place ourselves in His presence. Silence is powerful and helps us listen, but usually words are also part of our prayer.

The friends of Jesus, those trying to follow his way of life and travelling with him, knew he often spent time praying alone, keeping in contact with the Father. [e.g. Mark 1; 35; 6: 46] They asked him to teach them to pray too, to give them some words, as other spiritual leaders taught their followers. Chapter 11:1-4 records Jesus’ answer, Luke’s version of what we know as ‘the Lords prayer.’ It is shorter than the more familiar account in Matthew 6: 9-14, but both give us words to memorise and use and also a formula to follow in our own prayers.

1 Praise God our creator, maker of all things. *Father, hallowed be you name*

2. Pray for Gods kingdom to come on earth to establish justice and peace. *Thy kingdom come.*

3. Ask God to provide for our needs. *Give us each day our daily bread.*

4. Pray in sorrow admitting our faults and failures. *Forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone indebted to us.*

5. Protect us and give us the strength to resist evil. *Do not bring us to the time of trial.*

Some of us may have been taught to follow ACTS as our pattern for prayer
Adoration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, **S**upplication.

Jesus gives them the words and then tells a story, a parable, to illustrate his teaching. A parable often sounds deceptively simple, but it requires thought, as though it has a lid which must be removed to find the treasure inside.

This parable is about a man who has an unexpected visitor at night and nothing to set before him. Hospitality in that culture is almost a sacred duty and he has nothing to give in welcome. What is he to do?

The only answer he can think of is to ask a neighbour for bread, but it is late.

People listening in 1st century Palestine mostly live in one room. They know that at night the whole family put sleeping mats on the floor and settle down together, even the chickens are indoors! It's the only time the door is shut and a shut door is a message of - do not disturb!

Knocking on the door wakes the father, we'll call him Levi, but getting up to find food will disturb everyone else and the chickens, so he says "We're all settled for the night! Go away! I can't help." But after several more knocks at the door, sleep has gone, the family are woken, so Levi wearily opens the door to give his neighbour what he asks for - food for his guest.

Jesus says 'Ask and you will receive'. So is he saying that if we make enough of a noise and a nuisance God will agree to our requests?

The 'lid' to this parable is a comparison; If we human beings will help a neighbour because he is noisy and persistent, how much more will our loving and compassionate Father God hear our need when we ask. We are His and we are loved, he has us in mind and is waiting for us to ask.

We are only human, but still know how to give good things to our children – how much more is it in our God's loving nature to give generously! So, pray in trust and do not loose heart [Luke18:7.]

Jesus told another parable about prayer. Luke says He told this parable '*to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt*'. This time we need to hear it as 1st century Palestinians.

Jesus says two men are praying in the Temple. A tax collector and a Pharisee. Now we know about tax collectors and Pharisees, we have stereotypes in our imaginations, which run like this:

Tax collectors are rich, they are enemies because they work for Rome. They are corrupt, selfish, dishonest and rob their neighbours. They have no thought for God or the community.

The surprise for us is that there is a tax collector *in* the Temple and praying!

Whoever saw a publican purify himself and go into the Temple to confess the way he lives? Calling himself a sinner [which is what we know he is!]. Can his confession be genuine? Is it just an act? Is he trying to fool God?

We know about Pharisees too, they are religious people, righteous, respected.¹ They try to live every minute by the Law of Moses. They pray regularly, gave alms, pay tythes. They walk the walk of their covenant promise to God much more closely than any of us.

This particular Pharisee is thanking God for who he is and what he does. He tells God he does much more than the law requires. He's a super-Pharisee! But we get the feeling he is standing on an island of self-righteousness, secure in his goodness, he does not need God's grace. We are shocked to hear him judge himself as better than the tax collector, who is his neighbour.

The parable traps us if we have side-lined the tax collector as undeserving or judged the Pharisee as supercilious or hypocritical.

The story makes us look at the judgements we make and the stereotypes we embrace; the unconscious bias that affects us all. When the parable began, we thought we knew the Pharisee was good and would be humble and godly. The tax collector was undoubtedly an unprincipled rogue.

Now we know we are in no position to judge.

So who do we regard as Pharisee or Publican in our lives? Which are we?

We try to live as Jesus would have us live but none of us can earn our way to heaven. God offers salvation to all of us, worthy or not and we are all children of the One Father. All are welcome to turn to Him, whatever our lives have been like.

In our prayers we ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and show us when we are being Pharisees, when we need to repent like the tax collector. It is right to joyfully bring to God a job well done, but all we have is gift from Him, abilities, opportunity, resources, experience and none make us better than our neighbour.

So in prayer we approach God humbly remembering our dependence on Him, bringing with us any difficulties we have with others, confessing our judgemental attitudes. We are thankful for all the good things we have, the opportunities to share our bread willingly – by helping and encouraging each other during the worry and restrictions of Covid.

¹ A-J Levine 2004 pg191