

### **I**ntroduction:

Today we are here to explore the gift of prayer. We are also here to remember the gift that people of the Armed Forces past and present, and those who have fought on the frontline during the pandemic, have given us - the gift of themselves.

Over the last month I have been on a bit of a mission.

I have been going around the churches beating the prayer drum.

We've looked at a number of key ideas:

1. Prayer is among the highest of the spiritual gifts
2. Prayer calls down spiritual blessings
3. Prayer is a pilgrimage into the heart of God.

### Opening Hymn:

### Prayer:

Father God, we thank you that you offer us the gift of prayer.

Sometimes praying is easy, and sometimes it's hard to pray. Help us as we take a journey of discovery, seeking to find out its importance in the grand

scheme of things.

Father God, we also thank you for the gift that our armed services have offered us - seeking to establish and keep the peace around the world.

When any of us feel lonely or isolated, may we remember the words of Psalm 56: "When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid." (vs 3-4).

Amen.

### Quiz:

As we are starting to think about

Christmas, I want to ask a few questions:

1. What sort of Christmas presents would you give your children or grand-children? (Something ornate, useful, money?) **or** If you are a child, what sort of present would you like for Christmas?
2. What sort of attitude do you have when you give presents? **Or**, if you are a child, what sort of attitude do you have when you receive a present?
3. Imagine soldiers who were, or still are, stationed around the world. If they were to write an email, make a phone call, or write a letter, what would they say to their loved ones? (Could these very words be considered a gift?)



### Bible Reading:

#### Matthew 7.7-11

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 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!"

## Heaven's Storehouse



### **Thought 1:**

Today I want to explore the following question: Is prayer hard work? This sounds like a simple question.

On the one hand, one of the simplest prayers passed down to us is the Jesus Prayer which simply says, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner".

Its simplicity has helped it to survive over 1500 years and explains its continued popularity around the world today.

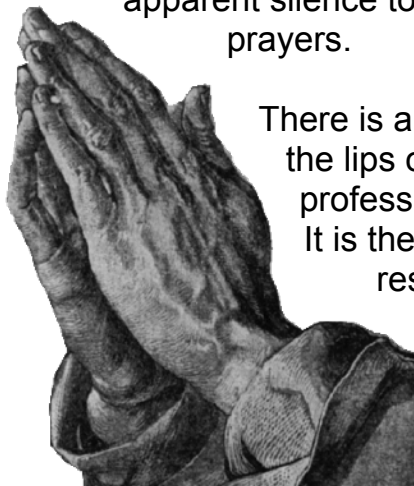
We all shoot up what are called "arrow prayers" to heaven; short and simple prayers, reflecting something on our heart, quickly shot off during the business of our everyday lives.

When we initially consider today's Scripture, we may get the impression that praying is easy. Prayer is like an Amazon wish-list. Write down what you want, pray for it, and (KERCHING!) it arrives the next day!

But as we all know, prayer is not so easy.

Prayer can be hard work.

Our prayers can trigger a myriad of related questions regarding issues of suffering, injustice and heaven's apparent silence to some of our prayers.



There is a new word on the lips of many professions. It is the word resilience.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back when things

seem to go wrong. How resilient are we?

So when we consider the effort required in prayer, we discover that its not just quick and easy, but that it also requires perseverance.

Resilience certainly seems to be a quality required to help work through some of the harder aspects of prayer.

Let's consider today's Bible reading - Matthew 7.7-11.

On the surface, the parable describes heaven a storehouse of God's blessing. That seems easy enough. These resources are distributed through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is the appointed means of drawing down these heavenly blessings. Jesus uses the imagery of a parent who desires to give good gifts to their children. God is looking for people who can draw these resources down in prayer. All we have to do, it seems, is to ask.

It is also worth recognising that there is a connection between God's generosity and our own. As we become aware of God's generosity to ourselves, in theory, this should encourage us to be more generous to others.

But this leads us to a big **but**.

We are not always generous.

But Jesus goes further.

He says parents are **evil**.

That's the really hard bit.

Hold those thoughts. We will come back to them in a moment.

**Song: Still Waters by Steph MacLeod. (This song can be found on YouTube)**

We are now going to watch the song "Still Waters" by Steph MacLeod. Steph

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had suffered from PTSD, a condition that is experienced both on the battlefield and in civvy street. He wasn't honest about his struggles, and lapsed into addiction. He wrote this song while in hospital. This song remind us that soldiers can come back from the frontline with both visible and invisible scars. It reminds us that we can have visible and invisible scars. Steph's hope is that this song encouraged all of us to be transparent about our physical, mental and spiritual state. It encourages us to show compassion - compassion to others, and to ourselves.



### **Thought 2:**

We have been considering if prayer is easy or hard. We have heard that heaven is like a storehouse, with spiritual resources just

waiting to be called down in prayer. That sounds easy. But we got to the bit where Jesus described parents as evil. That is hard to hear.

I am a parent, and I don't want my kids to be thinking that Daddy's evil. So we need to explore this a bit more. So, I want to tell a story.

A few days ago I went on a retreat to pray. I didn't go to a cathedral, but went for a long hike on the West Pennine Moors behind Peel Tower. I walked a few miles. As midday approached I decided to stop for a cup of coffee by a stream. It was an isolated spot with no telephone signal. A great place to pray because no-one can interrupt you!

While sitting there, taking in the scenery, my mind started to wander. My dad died a few years ago, and I miss him.

"My dad would be proud of me right now," I thought to myself.

(As parents and grand parents, it's our job to let our kids know that we are proud of them.)

This thought warmed my heart.

And then my mind started to entertain that idea further

"Is God proud of me? Is God the Father, who is in charge of Heaven's storehouse, proud of me?"

Then my heart started to grow cold and my thoughts went dark.

"God can't be proud of me," I thought. I felt a bit sad.

And then this scripture came to mind. Parents give gifts to their kids because they love them.

God is like this - *only more so!*

He's proud of *all* of us - even me.

That's what the Bible says.

It's in black and white.

So I stayed with the thought.

The thought became a prayer of thanksgiving.

It warmed my heart.

And then the sun appeared and shone on the area that I was sitting at.

God is proud of me - he wants to give me good gifts - his love, a purpose in life, freedom from fear and anxiety.

It is here that the **but** butts in.

In the parable we are described as evil. What's going on?

Remember my initial reaction to the idea of God being proud of me, or God being proud of any of us.

I initially rejected it.

I started to beat myself up.

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I was being cruel to myself; evil, you might say.  
I can also hold back generosity to others.

It is too easy to find ourselves believing that we don't deserve the good gifts that God wants to give us from his storehouse in heaven.  
We can also convince ourselves that other people are not deserving of God's generosity.

*This* is that hard bit that Jesus puts his finger on.  
It's that dark part of humanity, a part of us that is broken.

He wants to help us - to *heal* us, even - to get to a place where we can confidently receive the good gifts that God the Father wants to give us.  
He wants us to be in a place where we can share God's generosity with others.

To summarise:  
Heaven is a storehouse of resources that are needed to live the Christian life.  
This is called down by prayer. (That's the easy bit).  
The hard bit is that there is something within us that gets in the way - a roadblock of sorts. We are hard on ourselves. This gets in the way of us receiving the gifts that God wants to offer us.  
God wants to take us to a place where we can confidently and thankfully receive the gifts that God wants to give us.  
The first gift may be the presence and love of God himself to our hearts.  
May this be so in our lives.

### **Prayers:**

Father God, we thank you that you want to open the storehouse of heaven and encourage us to become involved through prayer.  
Jesus Christ, thank you that you have mercy on us and rescue us from our sin.  
Holy Spirit, thank you that you empower us to a life of prayer, praying to God the Father to open up the storehouse of heaven. Sometimes it is easy, and sometimes it is hard. But by God's grace, we can receive strength to persevere.

### **Prayer leading to the Act of Remembrance:**

*When I say "We will remember them", please repeat "We will remember them" followed by two minutes silence.*

We meet in the presence of God.  
We commit ourselves to work in penitence and faith for reconciliation between the nations, that all people may, together, live in freedom, justice and peace.

We pray for all who in bereavement, disability and pain continue to suffer the consequences of fighting and terror.

We remember with thanksgiving and sorrow those whose lives, in world wars and conflicts past and present, have been given and taken away.

They shall grow not old,  
as we that are left grow old;  
age shall not weary them,  
nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun

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and in the morning,  
we will remember them.

### **All affirm:**

*We will remember them.*

### **THE SILENCE**

The beginning of the two-minute  
silence will be signalled by playing The  
Last Post

Silence for 2 minutes.

The completion of the silence will be  
signalled by playing Reveille

### **Hymn: God, Our Help in Ages Past.**

### **Summary / Blessing.**

We have followed from the idea of  
prayer being a greater gift than  
preaching.

Prayer is at the root of the spiritual life  
and power of the church.

Prayer can open Heaven's storehouse  
providing us with the resources we  
need.

But it can be hard opening up hard  
questions.

It calls on us to persevere in prayer.  
The Holy Spirit is with us; when words  
fail us, the Spirit even prays on our  
behalf.

Through this we open up Heaven's  
storehouse.

On this day of Remembrance, we  
remember those who have, and still  
are, giving the gift of themselves as  
they work for peace around the world.

### **Benediction:**

May the Lord bless you and keep you;  
May the Lord make his face to  
shine upon you and be gracious to  
you;

May the Lord lift up his  
countenance upon you and give you  
peace.

Amen.



This sounds easy.