20250727 Luke 11.1-13 Honest Prayer

I searched prayer books into Eden.co.uk, a Christian Shop.

The search came up with 8671 options[[1]](#footnote-1). There has been wealth of words written on the topic of prayer.

Jesus offers his friends a simple template and this has served Jesus’ disciples for the centuries since. However, the passage begins with Jesus praying in a certain place and we know, Jesus frequently took himself up to a mountain to pray, to get away from the intense busyness of his ministry. I’m sure he wasn’t just praying the Lord’s Prayer, as we call it, for hours, was he?

There was once a woman who had no privacy in her house to pray. So, she created her own little prayer space by throwing her apron over her head. Her children learnt, when they saw this, she wasn’t to be disturbed. Not going up a mountain but creating a tent space.

Jesus is certainly inviting his friends to fully communicate with God as Father, to be fully invested and immersed in this close, loving relationship and to grow in faith, trust and reliance on Him.

Amen to that!

In The Pirates of the Caribbean film Dead Man’s Chest, Captain Jack Sparrow searches out the mysterious Tia Dalma for help and guidance in his quest to overcome Davy Jones. She hands him a jar of dirt, he takes it, looking both perplexed and underwhelmed, saying,

*"...Dirt. This is a jar of dirt."  
"Yes."  
"Is the jar of dirt going to help?"  
"If you don't want it, give it back."  
"No."  
"Then it helps.*"[[2]](#footnote-2)

Prayer is a gift yet often, we’re not sure what to do with it, holding it like the jar of dirt, but equally, we wouldn’t want to give it up.

I think it is vital to acknowledge that most of us, if not all of us have struggled with prayer at some point. It is also important to acknowledge that we may be praying without any struggle, but we seem to be facing silence, no answers, no change in circumstances, is God impotent? Is this proof that God does not exist?

These questions we may have worried over ourselves but too embarrassed to share with anyone, we may have had other people ask us, c’mon Christians, you must know the answer? I have certainly witnessed in the same room, one person thankfully sharing an answer to prayer of a specific health issue whilst another is still living with the exact same illness. What then? Does God not care?

Jesus didn’t just give us the Lord’s prayer as the only go-to prayer, he showed us how hard it is to be human.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Jesus asked, ‘take this cup from me’[[4]](#footnote-4) when what was ahead of him was too awful to comprehend. Jesus lived just like us with loss, frustration, fear and suffering. Yet in this teaching from Luke, he stresses the need for persistence which requires discipline and courage. We are not born, trusting God, it needs to be continually practised and learnt. [[5]](#footnote-5)

Jesus also faced silence, ‘my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’[[6]](#footnote-6) in his moment of deepest despair on the cross.

Author, and church planter Pete Greig, talks of how he his prayer life really took off the day he became an atheist. As a 17 year old, a catalogue of bad grades, getting dumped by his girlfriend, his friend who he had been planning on embarking on a two-man mission into local schools with, this friend moves away, then along with other friends all going to university, left Pete in a world that in his words ‘was turning grey.’[[7]](#footnote-7) Because of the impending gloom, his prayers though to begin with were ‘like a drunk mumbling at the mirror, and many of my words to God were self-pitying, disjointed and insolent.’ He writes ‘I’d given up on trying to impress Him, and, as a result, my prayers were becoming more honest than they had been in years.’[[8]](#footnote-8)

Honesty matters to God. Jesus’ was starkly honesty to God, ‘why have you forsaken me?’

We all too often attempt to soften our words as if we are going to offend God or in our rudeness, or pretend it’s not happening. But often, we either want to control the outcome or not admit to ourselves just how out of control our situation is. That’s vulnerability.

In a moment of hilarious self-awareness, a member of my wider family shared with us how she’d recently come across her teenage diaries. On reading them, she realised how she perceived herself to be the main character in the film all about her, and everyone else, family and friends, were the supporting actors.

This too, is something we wrestle with. How often are our prayers treating God as our Genie, to grant us our wishes. We might be so focussed on our situation; we forget the wider situation. Though, some of those prayers aren’t purely selfish, I say that with all compassion, I have prayers like that too.

It is a discipline living with some silence. It really is.

And in this passage, this is what happens. The friend being woken up at midnight is initially unresponsive, and Jesus’ analogy is that sometimes only because of human persistence will God eventually wake up, come down, and answer the door on which we have been knocking.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Some of the unanswered prayer is pretty awful, our lack of control or outcome, it isn’t easy at all. Like you, no doubt, I hear situations that are heartbreaking, and I don’t have an answer to why or the unfairness of it all.

But regardless, like the man in Jesus’ story, the man who goes to his neighbour in the night to ask for bread, well, somehow, he didn’t have his own supplies. In our mixed motives, we are invited to be utterly honest, I’ve not got any food, and to be persistent.

The woman with the apron over her head. She was persistent and this is how.

She endured a difficult marriage to a penniless preacher who was imprisoned twice. Their home was burnt down twice. And tragically, nine of their nineteen children died in infancy.

This woman took education seriously, home-schooling all her children including her daughters. When her Rector husband was imprisoned for financial mismanagement and when his replacement failed in his priestly duties, she took matters into her own hands. She launched a Sunday School in her kitchen that attracted so many that they had to find a bigger space to gather. Before long, 200 people were gathering to worship, pray and listen to her reading sermons.

This woman died on the 23rd July 1742, Susannah Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism.

This woman lived with loss and tragedy, more than I can imagine yet she persisted with prayer under her apron. No doubt, she poured out her heart to God mourning her babies, interceding for her infuriating husband and praying for each of her children by name. [[10]](#footnote-10)

Take inspiration from Susannah and pour out your hearts to God even though we cannot know the outcome. Susannah Wesley would not have known two of her sons would found the Methodist Church, that she would be known as the mother of some eighty million Methodists in more than 130 nations today.

Ultimately, we are invited by Jesus, to talk to the Father, honestly, simply and persistently. For Susannah it was under her apron. Where, how and when, that is our individual response.

Pray, honestly and persistently.

1. https://www.eden.co.uk/shop/search.php?products%5Bquery%5D=prayer%20books [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://pirates.fandom.com/wiki/Jar\_of\_dirt [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 3, p.290 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mark 14.36 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Reflections for Sundays Year C, p.203 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Matthew 27.46 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Pete Greig, God on Mute, p.89-93 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. p.93. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 3, p.288 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. App Lectio 365, 23rd July 2025 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)