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**Sunday 24 July 2022 to Sunday 31 July 2022**

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Sunday 24 July 2022

# Prayer: knowing forgiveness; living abundantly

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Forgive us our sins, as we forgive everyone who has wronged us (Luke 11:4).**

Read Luke 11:1–13

I am not that keen on prayer. I know that as a Lutheran pastor, that might get me labelled a heretic! Oh well. Looking at the devotional readings for this week, they are all about prayer! I had a little chuckle about the irony and God’s sense of humour!

But it got me thinking. What is prayer about? What do we seek when we pray? What do we hear (if we listen at all when praying)? What do we expect?

And I got to the point that perhaps prayer is actually about knowing we are forgiven, living in grace and forgiving others! How often do we pray for forgiveness? Obviously, in this petition of the Lord’s prayer, and if you attend a church with a communal confession, possibly once a week. But that confession time can be sterile and not so meaningful.

So, is praying about forgiveness and living well (or abundantly)? Any psychologist, and hopefully any Christian, will be able to tell you that unforgiveness is not healthy. And that to know you are forgiven by God and able to forgive others enables you to live abundantly (even if God has a different idea to me of what that means!).

Perhaps the answers we receive to prayer – sometimes what we ask for, occasionally being sent in a different direction by God, sometimes a no or a not yet – are about much more than what we are asking for. Perhaps prayer brings us closer to the living God, the cosmic Christ who lives in each one of us, to the reality of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the answers are about knowing we are forgiven, living in the gracious love of our Saviour, being freed to love abundantly and knowing that what God provides and does not provide is sufficient for us.

Don’t get me wrong; I am not downplaying the significance or power of prayer. But perhaps prayer becomes even more meaningful as it is encircled in grace and nurtured in a forgiving spirit.

**Ha! Ha! God of laughter, help us know your forgiveness and live abundantly in your grace. Amen.**

Peter is often out tending his garden – with 83 fruit and nut trees and extensive native bushes, he says there is a lot to do! Other times, he will be walking his dog, reading (too many books at a time), enjoying his family (15 grandchildren!), and occasionally writing – poetry, opinion pieces, devotions! To keep out of mischief, he is currently teaching himself to play the piano and is writing a paraphrase of each psalm. You can read these on his website, *Creative Walking* http://www.creativewalking.com.au/psalm-reflections.html

Monday 25 July 2022

# A generous God

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Ask for whatever you want me to give you (1 Kings 3:5).**

Read 1 Kings 3:5–15

I think we all know this story and what Solomon asked for! Except, despite the heading in my Bible (and I suspect in most), the story is not about what Solomon asked for, as sensible and wise as it was. But it is about how God answered.

By the way, Solomon didn’t actually ask for wisdom: he asked for a discerning heart. A subtle difference perhaps – but significant. When you read this entire passage, to me, what is important is God’s presence and actions. God takes the initiative.

The Lord appears to Solomon, who is a good king, except for allowing other places of worship to flourish (verses 2 and 3). Despite these flaws, God offers Solomon anything. Perhaps showing his wisdom, he takes a humble attitude before God and asks for a discerning heart.

Our generous God then answers his prayer by giving him what he asked for and then much, much more: wisdom, understanding, riches, honour and greatness. God gives and gives and gives.

What do we learn from this? For me, that prayer is not about the words used, the length of the prayer, what is prayed for (although important), or who prays. What we learn is that God provides for our needs and much more. And in reality, I guess we could admit God knows our needs better than we do.

So yes, pray. Pray for whatever you want (although it will help if it aligns with what God wants!). Pray as you can, not as you can’t. Expect God to answer with grace and generosity, despite your flaws, your words or lack of words. And then live expectantly, allowing the Holy Spirit to bless you and equip you to be the best person you can be, living in God’s grace and generosity.

**Generous God, thank you for providing what I need and so much more. Help me to live in your blessing and so be a blessing to others. Amen.**

Tuesday 26 July 2022

# Fullest possible joy

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Ask, and receive, so that your joy will be the fullest possible joy (John 16:24b).**

Read John 16:23–30

The fullest possible joy! Sounds good. As do other translations: your joy may be complete; abundant joy, overflowing. And all we have to do is ask!

So ask, ask and ask again. But interestingly, Jesus does not tell the disciples or us what to ask for. He simply says ask in my name, and the Father will provide.

Ask in Jesus’ name! Don’t just add it to your prayer as if it is a magic formula. But add it to your prayer, knowing who Jesus is and what he has done for each one of us. Broken down barriers (between God and us, between us and others); provided healing (physical, mental and spiritual); changed society totally; invited us to live humbly and practise justice; to have the fullest possible joy.

When we pray, it is not actually about us; it is about being open to God’s working in our lives, living in his forgiveness and grace and blessing, so we can forgive and be gracious and bless. Mmm, prayer is even beginning to sound exciting!

And when our focus is on God and what he wants to do for us, when we pray in Jesus’ name, it is exciting and full of promise, hope and joy. It’s not about getting what we want. It is about opening up to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And looking forward to the fullest possible joy overflowing into all areas of our life.

**Lord Jesus, thank you! Thank you for your gracious love. Thank you for the joy and peace that surpasses understanding. Help our focus to remain on you. In your precious name. Amen.**

Wednesday 27 July 2022

# Praying for others

by Pastor Peter Bean

**I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching (John 17:20).**

Read John 17:11–26

Read verse 20 once more. Note what it says! This is Jesus praying for those who were following him. Understandable. Expected. Perhaps we do the same. Praying for those in our church, the missionaries we support and those spreading the gospel.

But … also praying for those who will believe in Jesus. Now, that’s confidence. Confidence in his followers to spread the word. In unknown people to respond. Can we pray like that? The first part might be easy: for those spreading the word (but read on below!). But what about the second part: to pray for those who will believe in Jesus. Who are they? Does it matter? Or is the challenge to widen our praying: to pray for unknown people who will hear the gospel. You may be able to name people you know who don’t believe, but it is probably pretty hard to name those you don’t know. But we are still called to pray for them!

Yet, there is more: those who will believe in Jesus because of his followers’ teaching! In this whole section, Jesus is talking about leaving his followers, letting them continue his work and allowing them to take over the sharing of his teaching to proclaim the gospel!

And guess what? We are his followers! So Jesus prays for us. But more, he prays for those who will believe because of our teaching, lives, witness and actions. That’s some responsibility Jesus is putting on us! Except, it begins with Jesus praying for us. And prior to this, Jesus promised the Helper (Holy Spirit) to those who follow him (John 16:7–15).

So, Jesus blesses us with forgiveness and grace. And then, living grace-filled lives, we can pray for those (some of whom we know and some we don’t) who will believe because of our grace-filled lives. That’s pretty cool. Let’s go for it!

**Wow Jesus! Thank you for praying for me and enabling me to be your witness. Enable me to live a grace-filled life and to look forward to those who will believe because of your Holy Spirit working in me. Amen.**

Thursday 28 July 2022

# Pray for all people

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Pray for all people, asking God for what they need and being thankful to God (1 Timothy 2:1).**

Read 1 Timothy 2:1–8

Some simple instructions here!

First, pray for all people. Pretty comprehensive. Impossible? Perhaps, but possibly this is where we need to plan or make a list. To pray for all people could seem so vast that you never begin. Perhaps pray for three people each day (or work out your own number). Don’t overburden yourself so that nothing actually happens. Start small. Continue small if that works for you. Keep praying.

Second, pray for what they need. Note that is neither what the person wants nor what I think they need. I don’t know about you, but it is pretty easy to project my deficiencies onto someone else – to decide what they need is humility, a lesson or something else that sounds good to me. No. Ask God for what they need: perhaps simply bring that person before God and ask God to work in their life. Sometimes, leaving it up to God is a wise thing to do!

Third, be thankful. It might even be a good way to begin the prayer. ‘Thank you, God, for [name of the person].’ When we give thanks for someone, it is easier to love them and ask for blessings on them. Be thankful to God for that person and their life. Be grateful to God for awakening you to the possibilities of a relationship with that person. Be glad to God that you can pray!

God wants all people to be saved (verse 4). Perhaps your role in this is simply to give thanks to God and pray for each person as you can.

The added bonus? Well, two, in fact. One, you will be drawn closer to God by your simple prayer. Two, you will look at the person you pray for in a different light, perhaps even meeting your own needs in that action.

**Thank you, God, for life and your presence in me and those around me. Help me to pray as I can, bringing before you those I know and don’t know. Give me what I need: a humble and grateful heart. Amen.**

Friday 29 July 2022

# Pray when happy; pray when troubled

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Anyone who is having troubles should pray. Anyone who is happy should sing praises (James 5:13).**

Read James 5:13–18

That’s it, then. Pray – there is no situation where you can’t. While ‘having troubles’ and being ‘happy’ don’t cover every circumstance, in the context, they get pretty close.

Think about it for a moment. Which one would you say is easier: to pray when in trouble or to pray when happy? I imagine you could make a case for either.

In theory, when you are happy, the praises should flow automatically. But, of course, when we are doing well, whatever form that may take, it is often easier to forget about God or Jesus: to take the credit ourselves, enjoy the moment and live life to the full (our version of full anyway). So, the praises may go missing or stop altogether – until there is a reminder of the Good Giver.

In theory, when you are in trouble, prayer should be the first thing to happen. But again, we can look to other solutions, our own devices and the help of experts. God is forgotten. Until we decide to blame God for our situation! Or recognise that perhaps God may help – often through everyday people, events that we just haven’t noticed, the anointing of oil or the prayers of mature Christians (verse 14).

So James reminds us to pray in every situation. Why? Because it brings us closer to God.

How better to appreciate what we are given: a beautiful sunset, a new child, a restored relationship, a house to live in, food on the table (at home or in a restaurant!), clothes on our back – how better to appreciate these gifts than to praise the Giver, the Creator of all, the one who provides every blessing. And when we sing praises, there is an added blessing: awareness of the Presence of Life.

What comfort there is in offering our troubled situation, whatever it is – job loss, relationship breakdown, study struggles, no home to go to, grief – then bringing it to the Lord in prayer. What a friend we have in Jesus, indeed!

Pray and sing praises; live in God’s presence.

**Thank you, Jesus, that you know our every need. Even when we forget you, you are there beside us, carrying us, rejoicing with us and drawing us closer to you. All praise to you. Amen.**

Saturday 30 July 2022

# What (or who) do you put your trust in?

by Pastor Peter Bean

**Truly, no ransom avails for one’s life; there is no price one can give to God for it (Psalm 49:7).**

Read Psalm 49:1–12

This could be considered quite a morbid reading! It reminds me a bit of the Book of Ecclesiastes. But with a second reading, there is wisdom that speaks into our world.

Simply put, the writer is telling us not to put our hope or trust into wealth, riches, money, physical possessions or buying our future life! Because no-one can buy life.

In recent years in Australia, we have elevated Anzac Day and Remembrance Day to almost be the two most religious days of the year. The emphasis on lives given for another takes precedence over anything else. And it is an important emphasis. Except, in these celebrations, we seem to have forgotten that no-one (sacrificing their own life) can buy back the life of another.

The exception, of course, is the divine-human, Christ Jesus. But when was the last time Jesus was mentioned on either of these dates?

I remember, years ago, being at Duntroon on a Year 10 state high school trip to Canberra. We made an unscheduled stop at the Changi War Memorial replica. Equally unscheduled was the senior teacher asking me as chaplain to say a few words. A little bit stunned, I looked around, and the memorial was festooned with (plastic) red poppies, so (inspired by the Holy Spirit, no doubt) I spoke about the sacrifices of many in wars and how the red of the poppies signified the blood laid down for others. I also pointed out this had developed from the sacrifice of Jesus and his blood flowing for us. Just as we have freedom because of the sacrifice of soldiers in war, so we have freedom to live because of Jesus’ death for us. All done and dusted in about two minutes!

Imagine my surprise later when one of the teachers (who I knew to be an atheist) told me that was the best thing he had ever heard! Why was I surprised? The power of the gospel was at work in an unexpected situation. Similar comments have sometimes been made at funerals and weddings by those who don't know Jesus when the gospel is proclaimed. The Holy Spirit at work.

No-one can pay God for their own life. But Jesus did for you, me and all who hear the gospel. It’s time to sing his praises.

**Thank you, Jesus, for your death and resurrection. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for unexpected opportunities to speak the good news. Give us the courage to do so when asked. Amen.**

Sunday 31 July 2022

# True wealth

by Pauline Simonsen

**Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15).**

Read Luke 12:13–21

We look at the rich man in Jesus’ parable and think, ‘Tsk, tsk – such greed!’ But actually, Jesus is simply describing our normal human aspirations in this modern world: work hard, increase your wealth, achieve a comfortable lifestyle and then retire and enjoy yourself! Isn’t that what many of us are doing? Working hard now so that in due course, we hope we’ll have a nice house and the mortgage paid off; the kids all grown up and safely established in their own lives; a decent superannuation fund and enough wealth now to retire and take it easy. Or like the rich man thinks, ‘And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry”’ (Luke 12:19).

Ah. Suddenly Jesus’ parable strikes a bit too close to home. What we took to be his exposure of those rich people out there has become an indictment of our society’s faith in endless acquisition and consumption. And of my personal complicity in that faith. ‘Be on your guard against all kinds of greed’ – including my own personal wealth plan.

But note what Jesus warns about here. He reminds us how precarious our hard-earned wealth and comfort are. ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ All my careful wealth planning, hard work, savings and retirement packages mean nothing to me if I die tomorrow.

Jesus reminds us that ‘life does not consist in an abundance of possessions’ (Luke 12:15). We are much more than our wealth status; our lives are much more than our possessions. If everything I have today is taken away tomorrow, then what is left to me?

How are you answering that question right now? Close your eyes and imagine that.

And now imagine Jesus standing before you, offering to be your Saviour and friend. Hear your Heavenly Father saying, ‘Your wealth matters nothing to me. You are my child, claimed by me in your baptism. I have given you all my riches, dear child’. How will you respond to this?

Jesus finishes his parable with an invitation to be ‘rich toward God’. I wonder what he means by that?

**Father, thank you for all the good things you have given us in our lives, including our wealth and possessions. Help us to realise that you are the giver and the taker, and our true wealth lies in being your child. Show us how to be ‘rich’ towards you. Amen.**

Pauline is a Bible college teacher and spiritual director in Palmerston North, New Zealand. She’s married to Roger – who is recently retired – and she says she enjoys having him home a bit more! When she gets some free time, Pauline loves cooking and reading and likes nothing better than sitting with a cat on her lap and watching the birds in her garden.