

A visit and a prayer

Luke 10:38 - 11:13

thought for the week

In the account of Mary and Martha we see two different stories describing how people respond to the presence of God. Some like Mary will be of a single mind and heart. Others, like Martha, will be absorbed and caught up in the business of life around them.

Martha was most likely very well meaning but Mary showed true dedication. Jesus speaks about our eyes being the windows into our true intentions (*Matthew 6.22*) - where our focus is upon receiving the light or presence of Jesus then everything else falls into place. Mary seems to have latched onto this. In the parable of the sower Jesus speaks about the plant that withered in the sun as a description of the problem of dealing with distractions. Paul, likewise had a similar picture to that of Martha in his mind when he spoke of serving the Lord "without distraction" (*1 Corinthians 7:35*).

verse for the week

*but few things are needed—or
indeed only one*

Luke 10 verse 42

image for the week



prayer for the week

*Blessed are you Lord God,
who through your Son has
revealed your great love for us and
in his resurrection gave us a Friend
and a Saviour.*

*We rejoice in your presence this
week with the joy and the freedom
of the children of God .*

*Blessed are you , our God, for ever.
Amen.*

reflection for each day

day one

Martha opened her home to him

Like Martha let us open our home to Jesus today. Welcome his presence in and stay with him.

day two

*'Mary has chosen what is better,
and it will not be taken away from
her'*

Reflect on this truth today that when we focus on Jesus with our mind, heart and soul then whatever we receive will never be taken away.

day three

*'Lord, teach us to pray, just as
John taught his disciples.'*

Jesus like his cousin John was a teacher of disciples. He was leading his people and their request this time was 'lead us in prayer'. Why not ask Jesus today to lead you, by his Spirit, in prayer?

day four

*'Forgive us our sins, for we also
forgive everyone who sins against us'*

Reflect on what Jesus reveals about his Father. Forgiveness is measured in the light of our own example of forgiveness. Reflect on who you might need to forgive this week in order to receive the fullness of God's forgiveness.

day five

*'he will surely get up and give you as
much as you need'*

There is no way that the friend at midnight was going to get up and sort some bread out except through persistence. This surprising story reveals the nature of God – His love and desire to love us. So today let us persist in our seeking of God's goodness in our lives.

day six

'For everyone who asks receives'

Let this truth sink deep into your heart and pursue the 'more' that God has in store for you. As with Abraham (*Genesis 15:1*) in your calling, God is your shield and giver?

day seven

*'how much more will your Father in
heaven give the Holy Spirit to those
who ask him'*

Through all these verses God is revealed as the Giver who is ready to give but waiting for a request. What is it that you would like to receive from God today that is in line with 'your Kingdom come'?

for the group

as you gather...

- Share the particular insights which have struck you this week
- Reflect in the group upon how Jesus is discipling you in prayer?
- In the parable of the friend at midnight, the man got up and gave because of his desire to 'avoid shame (v8). How is Jesus using this to reveal the character of God?
- Discuss in the group all the ways that Jesus speaks of the generosity of his Father.
- What does this parable reveal about our foundation for being risk takers for the Kingdom?

prayer for the group

*Heavenly Father,
how we have needed to hear this message ourselves.
Some things we may have just stopped praying about.
It is easy to get discouraged and lazy forgetting that you are a good, good father.
Forgive us.
Fill us afresh with a bold faith filled with visions of the possibilities you desire to
create through our prayers.
We pray for each other as fellow disciples.
Teach us to really pray and incorporate bold, faith-filled praying into our
everyday lives.
For the sake of your Kingdom!
We pray in Jesus' name.
Amen.*



continue the conversation

[here](#)

Apprentice

The demand for a sign

Luke 11:14-26

thought for the week

Jesus teaches on the importance of not being divided. He also hints that unity is not always a good thing as followers of Satan (in Satan's Kingdom) may well be united, but not in a good cause. Jesus also acknowledges that the accuser, Satan, does have power to cast out demons – but he states that this would be an absurd situation. These things cannot mix, like oil and water. Jesus is making it very clear that these views of Jesus partnering with Satan could not be further from the truth and elsewhere he points out that they are making a very serious error of judgement (*Mark 3:28*).

Jesus meets desperate opposition that tries to justify their views by any means possible – even attributing an act of goodness to an evil root. This may happen to us who follow Jesus today as our motives are challenged. As we follow the path of Jesus we too can say that if the power behind our action is the 'finger of God' then Kingdom of God has come close, even among our detractors.

verse for the week

*But if it is by the finger of God that
I cast out the demons?*

Luke 11 verse 20

image for the week



prayer for the week

*Bind unto yourself the name,
the strong name of the Trinity;
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One and One in Three.
Of whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
praise the Lord of your salvation,
salvation is of Christ the Lord.
Amen.*

reflection for each day

day one

Now he was casting out a demon that was mute

On this day, let the Spirit of Jesus release you from all that would bind you up. Pray for release from the chains that hold.

day two

Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven

Remind yourself today that you walk by faith and not by sight. Pray for the perseverance to walk with Jesus even when it is easier to doubt.

day three

'When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe.'

Jesus is stronger than the strong man he refers to. Give thanks that you are in safe hands.

day four

'Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters'

Jesus calls for allegiance. Reflect on how important it is for you to have a friend's allegiance God calls on our allegiance and deep within us there is a need for allegiance with God (and with others). Affirm your allegiance in prayer today.

day five

"it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting-place"

When change is brought in us that change looks for a new home. Reflect on the change that God has brought in your life and give thanks to Jesus the strong man for liberating you and keeping you free.

day six

'I will return to my house from which I came.'

This is a warning that whatever held us captive in the past, may well look for an entry point today. Pray that you may stand firm in your resolve to live under the protection that Jesus provides.

day seven

'and the last state of that person is worse than the first'

These words may well be aimed at the Pharisees who have ended up in a bad way even though things may have started off well. Allow a little time for self examination to turn away from any 'Pharisaic' or judgemental, holier than thou elements that may have crept into your life.

for the group

as you gather...

- Why did Jesus have such a hard time with people doubting him ? Share your thoughts
- Reflect in the group what it might mean to be swept clean only for later to welcome even more problems?
- The story of the strong man appears in the other gospels – why do you think it has so much prominence?
- Discuss in the group how these verses disciple you in the way of Jesus and His Kingdom.
- Go around the group and ask each member what has particularly impacted them in this week's 'Apprentice' and why that was?

prayer for the group

Lord Jesus help us to remain in you our friend and saviour.
Lead us when we are in danger from allowing influences outside of your Kingdom to enter in places of privilege that only you deserve to occupy.
May your Kingdom come more fully into our lives as each new day passes.
We give you thanks and praise for the work already completed and trust you to finish the work you have started.

Amen.



continue the conversation

[here](#)

Apprentice

the conflict continues

Luke 11:37-54

thought for the week

Jesus came for the entire world and in the records of the gospels he seems particularly keen to “put straight” the people of God (Israel) who have been privileged to bear the message and practice of salvation. He made every effort to reach those who had been put off by the distortions that had been placed on the Good News of salvation with God. He was the Good Shepherd searching for his lost sheep and re-teaching the art of rearing sheep. For some this message was a little too much to swallow.

verse for the week

For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.

Luke 11 verse 52

image for the week



prayer for the week

God of love,
 source of mercy and compassion,
 weave your dream for the world
 into the fabric of our lives.
 Remove the scales from our eyes
 and lift the indifference from our
 hearts,
 so that we may see your vision
 – a new reign of justice and
 compassion
 that will renew the earth.
 Transform our lives,
 so that we may accomplish your
 purpose.
 Anoint us with your spirit of love
 for this very purpose.
 Amen.

reflection for each day

day one

A Pharisee invited him to dine with him

Hospitality was a regular custom in Jesus' time yet less a part of our own culture today. Who might you show hospitality to in some way this week?

day two

'Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish'

The Pharisees were strong on their doctrine and following the Torah (Jewish Law) but did not recognise the unhealthy state of their inner lives. Pray again in repentance today that the Lord would create in you a clean heart.

day three

'for you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God.'

Jesus teaches about the fragility of merely keeping instruction without recognising the heart behind the instruction. Where might that apply to us today?

day four

'Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too.'

Although we understand that Jesus is the best revelation of God's love available to us yet you might have questions regarding some of Jesus' harsh statements? Ask for Jesus to make things clearer to you so that you might see His light in the darkness.

day five

'For you load people with burdens hard to bear'

Are you finding burdens in your life that are hard to bear? Bring these burdens to Jesus and expect the Lord to bring you His lightness in what you are carrying.

day six

'So you are witnesses and approve of the deeds of your ancestors.'

Jesus reminds the Pharisees about some of the darker history of God's people. However, God has now revealed His hand more fully in the person of Jesus. Give thanks today although we live in darkness, God has revealed His light in Jesus.

day seven

lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

Jesus suffered terrible rejection at the hands of the authorities. Consider that Jesus' suffering went well beyond the cross to the rejection of those who he had brought to life. Give thanks that he suffered for each of us motivated by His love.

for the group

as you gather...

- Reflect on some of Jesus' more "aggressive" statements. Discuss how you can reconcile them with our understanding of God's love revealed in Jesus?
- Reflect in the group on Jesus' remarks concerning the importance of the inner life?
- What 'outer' methods do you exercise in order to develop a strong inner life?
- Is there a danger of those outer exercises becoming more important than the inner lives they are supposed to strengthen?
- In your groups discuss (as you feel able) the last time you behaved a little like the Pharisees as criticised by Jesus in this section.

prayer for the group

Lord Jesus

help us to remain in you - our Friend and Saviour.

*Let us know when we are in danger from allowing influences
outside of your Kingdom to enter in places of privilege
that only you deserve to occupy.*

*May your Kingdom come more fully into our lives
as each new day passes.*

*We give you thanks and praise for the work already completed
and trust you to finish the work you have started.*

AMEN.



continue the conversation

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Apprentice



an alternative perspective

Luke 12:1-59

thought for the week

In this section, Jesus is not attempting to release us from worry so that we will be healthier and happier. This is never Jesus' main concern, even though it can be the main concern of most people today. As a result, some preachers will present Jesus as the guru of health and happiness with things like "5 tips on being healthier and happy." Painting Jesus as a modern self-help guru misses the profound nature of His message. The concern of Jesus in this passage – and in His teaching generally – is to make us **authentic Kingdom people**.

Jesus is telling us to make living under the reign of God our first priority, to trust Him for all that we need, and we'll have a joy and peace we would otherwise never have. Alternatively, if we first seek to meet our own needs and to acquire health and happiness for our own sake, then we'll miss out on the Kingdom and the joy and peace that it brings.

verse for the week

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap,... and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!

Luke 12 verse 24

prayer for the week

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God"

(Philippians 4:6).

image for the week



reflection for each day

day one

'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.'

Jesus warns his followers to maintain an integrity between what is professed in word and deed. Confess where this has been an issue for you and call upon the Holy Spirit to empower you into a new life holding word and deed together.

day two

'But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.'

Give thanks for how precious you are in God's sight and pray that this truth will allow you to live in the freedom that God's love gives us.

day three

'So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

Give thanks to God for your 'treasures' and pray that you might be guided in being 'rich towards God'

day four

'Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them'

Spend five minutes pondering on the rich truth of God's provision in your life. Give thanks as each area of provision is revealed to you.

day five

'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom'

The Kingdom is not earned but is given through the Holy Spirit – today accept the Kingdom once more as a gift - receive it with trust and faith in its power for change.

day six

'Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes'

Consider how ready you are – how awake you are to God's presence in your life. Are you a little sleepy? Then ask the Lord to awaken you to his presence and call.

day seven

'When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"'

Many of us are good at seeing the signs present in our world. Jesus calls us to be aware of the 'other signs' God is bringing to us. Pray for your eyes to be opened.

for the group

as you gather...

- This has been an extended reading this week – what has struck you in particular from these 60 verses?
- Reflect in the group on Jesus comments about interpreting the times - can you find a common agreement on interpreting the present time?
- Ravens die of hunger and lilies can be burned - believing in God does not promise an easy life – what do you think Jesus is saying through the comparison of ravens and lilies?
- How might your answer to the previous questions begin to change your life?
- Why do you worry ?

prayer for the group

*Heavenly Father,
replace our fear with strong faith.
Replace my worry with hope in you.
Replace my despair with unspeakable joy.
Lead me to that inner peace that can only be found in You,
my Lord and Saviour.
Help me to rest in trust of your provision and gifting.
Please break the chains that would prevent this trust maturing in my life.
We ask for these things in Jesus' name.
Amen.*



continue the conversation

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