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Hello and welcome to this episode of the St Andrew's Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. Today we're going to be thinking a little bit about prayer and how we might approach God when we come to him in prayer. Now, if you subscribe to this podcast, you'll know that we've done a few episodes before on the subject of prayer and of course it is such a vast topic that I'm sure that it's something we are going to be coming back to time and time again in the future. But today I just want to think about the story of the blind man who was healed by Jesus. Uh, the story that's told to us by Luke in his gospel in chapter 18 verses 35 to 43 and to think about any lessons there may be for us in how we can approach God in prayer from the attitude and the way in which the blind man approached Jesus.

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Um, it's one of those really simple yet beautiful stories in scripture and it's well worth us spending a bit of time with today because I think there's some really wonderful truths for us to think about, to help us as we develop a deeper life of prayer ourselves. You probably know the story as Luke tells it. Um, it's an event that happens as Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem for the final time. It's the beginning of the last week of Jesus' life and he's heading towards crucifixion. And he knows that. And actually this is the very last miracle that Jesus performs during his life on earth. And Jesus and his disciples were coming near to Jericho, which was about 15 miles away from Jerusalem. And the streets were packed with people, which isn't surprising because everybody was getting ready to make the journey to Jerusalem for the Passover. And here in the midst of all the hustle and bustle sits a blind man, uh, begging for money at the side of the road.

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And I suppose that just as with beggars on our streets today, most of the people were just passing him by. Um, thinking of him as an inconvenience, uh, just getting in the way of their busy day. But here is the blind man, uh, listening to the conversations of the passers by and he hears that Jesus is there and he's desperate to escape from his world of darkness. And he shouts out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" and the crowds are annoyed with him. They are annoyed that he should presume to engage with city life, perhaps in the same way that people today treat the homeless and beggars on our streets as somehow less than human without any rights or dignity. And the crowd tell him to be quiet. Uh, they tell him to just get on with his begging in the anonymity of his marginalized position in society.

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But the blind man has a greater sense of self worth than that, and he keeps calling out. And in the end we read that Jesus stops and he calls the man over. And so his encounter with Jesus begins and the healing is received. So what have we got to learn then from how the blind man approached Jesus? What can we learn about how we should approach God when we come to him with our own prayers and petitions? Well, I think there's four things that we can take from this passage and we're going to unpack these a little bit more as we move through this podcast.

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So firstly from this passage, I think we learn that when we approach God in prayer, uh, we need to be persistent. Uh, there is a persistence at the heart of receiving from God. The truth is that Christian discipleship is hard work. Uh, it demands a life of discipline. And part of that discipline is to come to God in prayer in a consistent and persistent way. Uh, too often I think we are tempted to treat prayer a bit like a lottery ticket. You know, we want to receive something from God, so we pray about it maybe once or twice, and then when we don't receive it, we think, "Oh, well that's that then". And then we just kind of give up praying. But the blind man knew that persistence was at the heart of receiving from Jesus. Uh, he calls out to Jesus, but the crowd tell him to be quiet but we are told, "But he shouted even more loudly

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'Son of David, take pity on me'". Encountering Jesus was no lottery for this blind man. He was persistent until it happened. And I think if we want to receive from God in prayer, uh, we too must develop persistence. Um, that's not because God is unwilling to give things to us. It's not that he somehow needs to be worn down by our prayers so that in the end he says "Oh for goodness sake, if it'll shut you up, I'll give you what it is you're asking me for". I don't think that's the case at all. I think we need to become persistent in prayer, um, because as we develop that persistence, so we develop a stronger spiritual character. Uh, as we develop persistence in prayer, so we grow to spiritual maturity. There's something about persistence in prayer that changes us, that, uh, alters our perception of our situation. It alters our perception of God. It gives us a deeper sense of self understanding. So persistence in prayer is not about wearing God down so much by asking and asking and asking and asking. It's actually about us developing a stronger spiritual character. So firstly then we learn from this blind man that if we want to approach God in prayer and we want to develop maturely and to develop a stronger spiritual character, we must be persistent with God.

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And secondly, I think we learn from this passage that, um, when we approach God in prayer, if we hear him calling us, if we hear him speaking to us in that kind of prayer dialogue that's going on, our response to God has to be immediate. Um, I wonder if there is a, a lack of urgency, uh, sometimes evident in our relationship with God. I know that's certainly the case for me. Uh, you know, I know what God wants for me. Um, but sometimes I put that on a back burner or, um, I know that I should be praying more, but I kinda think to myself, "well I'll start that tomorrow". "I'll develop a stronger spiritual discipline of prayer tomorrow", and I tend to put that on a back burner as well. Um, my life certainly, and perhaps yours too often reflects a lack of urgency when it comes to spirituality. But the blind man in this passage was very different.

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As soon as Jesus called him, the man went to him. His response was immediate. Jesus called and the blind man jumped up and ran over to him. And I think if we want to receive from God in prayer, we too need to develop that same sense of immediacy. When we hear God's call on our lives, when we hear him answering our prayers or see him answering our prayers, we need to jump up and run to him. And of course we do know, don't we, that God is calling us in our lives? God calls each one of us into a

deeper relationship with him. Uh, he calls each one of us to love him and serve him for the sake of his kingdom. So when we become aware of God's call on our lives, when we get that sense of his interaction with us through prayer, um, then the right response is to make an immediate response to him and follow wherever he leads.

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So when we approach God in prayer, firstly we must have persistence if we want to receive from God. Secondly, there needs to be a sense of immediacy in our response to him. And thirdly, I think we need to know exactly what we want from God when we pray. If I was with you face to face today, um, and I said to you, "what has God done for you this week?", would you be able to give a reply? We might be tempted to pray on a Monday, "Uh, Lord, help me to have a really good week". But what does that mean? What does it mean for us to have a good week? How do we actually measure that? Because when it gets to Friday, uh, some things will have gone well and some things won't have gone so well. Sometimes throughout the week we'll have been happy. Other times we might have been a bit miserable.

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What does a good week look like? It's a very kind of ambiguous prayer to pray. And then it's impossible for us to know whether or not God has actually answered that prayer. But more tangible prayers are more meaningful. So we might say, "Lord God, uh, I've got a really important meeting on Monday. I'm nervous about it, so please give me the confidence and the words to say". We might say, "Lord God, I want to get into Bible reading more this week. So help me to find 20 minutes each day to read so that this week I can get through the whole of Paul's letter to the Galatians". Now these are tangible prayers. These are more specific prayers. And so then these become a great encouragement to us because we can more easily recognize God's acting in our lives. If we pray tangible, specific prayers, we know when God has answered them and then we can respond with hearts of Thanksgiving.

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And the blind man in this story, he knew that. Uh, Jesus said to him, "what do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said, "Lord, let me see again". Now that's a really tangible request. He was going to leave Jesus' presence, either still blind or seeing again. And so when Jesus healed him and his sight was restored, he knew that Jesus had answered his request and he could leave with a heart full of Thanksgiving. So when you pray to God, I would suggest that you need to be specific in your requests and the more specific you are, then you will know when he's answered your prayer and you can give thanks to him for that. And it also then acts as a great encouragement for us to go on praying.

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So if we want to receive from God in prayer, we've got to be persistent. Uh, we need to respond with immediacy when we feel his call on our life. And we should be specific in our requests. And finally from this passage, and I think this is a really important, uh, point for us to remember and a great

encouragement for us is that when we pray to God, we don't need to wait until we're fully sorted in our faith before we receive from him. God doesn't wait until we are completely sorted before responding to our prayers. We don't need to reach a certain level of holiness or dedication or service or activity in the church before God is willing to give us some of his precious time. God loves each one of us equally and he is equally eager to hear from us all. And God responds to your prayers,

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and he responds to my prayers, uh, with the same eagerness and the same intimacy as he will respond to the prayers of the Pope or the Archbishop of Canterbury or any other, uh, great spiritual leader in the world. And the blind man knew that as well. So how do we know that? Well, it's very interesting that when he calls out to Jesus, he says, "Son of David, Son of David". Now that was a very old Jewish title. It was reserved for the one who would lead Israel to national greatness. And so it was partially true of Jesus, but actually it wasn't the whole truth about who Jesus was and it wasn't even close to being the whole truth about who Jesus was. It was a sort of inadequate idea of Jesus, but you know that didn't matter. It didn't matter that the blind man had a slightly inadequate understanding of who Jesus was. Because the blind man had faith that was enough for Jesus to act on. And none of us fully understand the whole truth about God.

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We are all weak in our understanding. We've all got so much to learn. All of us are beginners in the faith, but you know, that doesn't matter to Jesus. He doesn't expect us to have a certain level of theological knowledge or a certain amount of years under our belt in terms of kind of Christian practice or knowledge or learning. He only wants us to come to him in faith, in simple faith, that he will hear our prayers and that he will answer them. He wants us to be persistent, that we respond to him when we hear his call, and that we ask his involvement in our lives in a direct and tangible way. And if we join the blind man in approaching Christ like that, then like him, through our prayers, we will receive healing and peace and grace and our lives will be transformed as we grow into spiritual maturity with Jesus. So Jesus says to the blind man, "what do you want me to do for you?" And Jesus asks the same question of you today. "What do you want me to do for you?" What do you want Jesus to do for you today?

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Well, I hope you found that a useful podcast and that it's given you some encouragement as you develop in your own prayer life. If you've got any comments or feedback, uh, it's always lovely to hear from you. Please do email me, [steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org](mailto:steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org). And please don't forget to subscribe to this podcast and let other people know about it too, so that we can grow together as a community of learners. So whatever you're doing today, wherever you are, um, I hope that you are encouraged in your walk with God and that you will know him as the God who loves you so much. A God who hears your prayers and answers them all according to his will. So have a great day today, and I look forward to being back with you again, uh, through the next episode of the St Andrew's podcast. Bye.

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