# Let’s Make a Habit of Prayer

## Week 2 – Sunday 25 February

#### ‘Let us go right into the presence of God …’ (Hebrews 10:22, NLT)

God desires our company far more than our efforts. That’s why our faithful response starts with prayer, because prayer is the simple art of choosing to be with God. We may think of faithfulness as doing our best, working hard, accomplishing things; but those things ring hollow if there isn’t a regular, honest, intimate conversation with God happening right at the heart of our living.

## Sermon Outline

#### Luke 11:1-11

#### ‘So I say to you: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.’ (Luke 11:9)

### Introduction:

This passage from Luke is all about keeping on coming back to God in prayer. The verbs ‘ask’, ‘seek’ and ‘knock’ are all in the present continuous tense: ‘keep asking’, ‘keep seeking’, ‘keep knocking’. Why? Because our Father loves it when we keep on coming to him, over and over and over again. He invites us to form a habit of prayer because he loves our company.

Magnets would be a great way to introduce the idea of a habit of prayer. Put the wrong way round, magnets repel one another. Put the right way round, they draw one another.

When we talk about developing a habit of prayer, it’s easy for feelings of guilt and failure to surface (we’re not doing well enough etc.). But those feelings push us away from prayer – they get in the way and they make us less willing to draw near to God for fear of being judged or told off.

When our prayer is motivated by love – loving God and knowing we’re loved – then it pulls us towards God. It’s like we can’t keep away.

### Let’s keep on asking

Asking, seeking and knocking are three different ways of praying, but it’s important to establish first that we don’t keep on doing them to try and persuade God, to curry favour or win God round. We keep doing them because they are about drawing near to God (see Hebrews 10:22).

Asking is the simplest form of prayer:

* It’s where we often start as children, asking God to look after members of our family etc.
* It’s what we do when we’re at our wits’ end, asking for God’s help.
* It’s what we do when we’re praying on the go, sending ‘arrow prayers’ up to God.
* It’s what people who don’t believe in God do, even when they don’t believe there’s anyone listening.

Just because it’s simple doesn’t make it immature or irrelevant. ‘Ask’ is one of the commands Jesus gave most often to his disciples. Let’s keep on asking; let’s keep coming to God with our requests, big and small, knowing that God loves it when we ask.

### Let’s keep on seeking

Sometimes asking is enough. We make our request, as often as we need to, and leave it with God. But sometimes prayer is more like a treasure hunt; we pray, we wait, we hear something from God, we sense the stirring of the Spirit, we get a response which isn’t quite an answer but which leads us forward in some new way.

To keep on seeking is:

* To make time to talk more deeply with God about a situation
* To listen
* To pray in all sorts of ways – worship, thanksgiving, confession, declaration etc.
* To invite the Spirit to deepen our understanding or even change our perspective
* To pray through something in such a way that we end up knowing God better, even if we don’t get the answer we long for

Let’s keep on seeking, because God doesn’t just want to do things for us; God wants to journey with us through things.

### Let’s keep on knocking

If you take the story of the persistent friend (Luke 11:5-8) at face value, you could be forgiven for thinking that keeping on knocking is about making a nuisance of yourself. But in the culture in which Jesus lived, knocking on someone’s door was the highest of compliments. It was an honour to be visited and an honour to be invited to offer hospitality. In this story, and the one about the persistent widow in Luke 18, Jesus is asking his hearers to imagine the impossible: a judge who doesn’t want to dispense justice and a friend who doesn’t want to welcome a visitor. They seem as ridiculous in Jesus’ time as a pilot who hates heights or a rock star who can’t stand loud noises in our time.

* The one who keeps coming back and knocking on the door is always more than welcome.
* Knocking is about wanting to come into the presence of God.
* Knocking isn’t asking or seeking; it’s bringing ourselves and our prayers and resting in God’s presence.
* Knocking is about knowing that time in God’s company is more precious than answered prayers.

Let’s keep turning up and knocking on the door so God can keep welcoming us in.

### Conclusion:

These are just three ways to pray. There are many more. Making a habit of prayer doesn’t mean doing everything all at once. It means finding the thing which we sense God drawing us to at this moment in our lives … and remembering that God loves our company.

## Prayer and Worship Ideas

### Explore asking, seeking and knocking

Choose one topic you’d like the corps to pray about. It may be a new project, a problem that needs a solution, or a particular need in your local community.

Create three different prayer stations around the hall. Having explained the thing you’d like people to pray for, invite them to spend five minutes or so at each (in any order):

* Ask: Provide paper and pens and ask people to write their prayers – simple requests, expressing what they’d like to see God do in the situation. These can be written directly on a prayer wall or posted on sticky notes so that others can read them.
* Seek: Print out some Bible passages which have some relevance to the situation you’re asking people to pray for. Invite them to sit and ponder the Scriptures, then provide pens and Post-it Notes for anyone who wants to write a thought, prayer or insight based on what they’ve read.
* Knock: Create an uncluttered space with just a cross, candle or Bible, where people can stop for a while and rest in the presence of God – not making requests or seeking wisdom, just enjoying God’s company.

These ideas could also be used in a prayer meeting, or a series of prayer meetings.

### Inventory your corps prayer-life

What are your prayer rhythms as a corps? Take time to notice all the praying that’s going on … not just in designated prayer meetings, but throughout all the activities you undertake.

Then ask yourself if there’s anywhere in your corps life where prayer has got a bit thin.

What habits of prayer might God be asking you to form?

### Personal prayer habits

Spend time thinking about your daily routines. Is there something you do every day? Could you add prayer to that routine? – praying for your family as you brush your teeth; stopping to pray for nations experiencing drought every time you boil the kettle; praying for your local community as you do the school run … etc.

### Join the new UKI Prayer Rhythm

The Prayer Rhythm is part of a new initiative called ‘UKI Boiler Room’, a new way to connect anyone who has a heart to pray in or for The Salvation Army. There are hundreds of little fires of prayer burning away in hearts, in homes, in corps, in offices and Lifehouses all over the UK and Ireland, and the UKI Boiler Room is about linking us together – a united, co-ordinated energy of prayer at the heart of our mission.

One of the ways you can be part of the UKI Boiler Room is by praying with us in our new Prayer Rhythm. As we pray together, all focusing on the same things at the same time, our hope and prayer is that this new Prayer Rhythm will become a heartbeat of prayer to fire our mission.

Each day of the week has a theme, and the themes are based around our five Mission Priorities:

* Monday: Sharing the good news
* Tuesday: Serving and caring (serve others without discrimination)
* Wednesday: Growing in faith (nurture disciples of Jesus)
* Thursday: International Salvation Army (worldwide prayer meeting)
* Friday: Justice and reconciliation (seek justice and reconciliation)
* Saturday: Care for creation
* Sunday: Sabbath prayer

You can use the themes themselves as a general guide for praying each day, and you can use our monthly *Prayer Matters* resource to find more specific prayers for each day.

You can download it [here](https://www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/discipleship/prayer-matters) or follow ‘[SA UK and Ireland Prayer Page](https://www.facebook.com/saukprayerpage/)’ on Facebook to get the daily requests straight to your feed.

### Shape your own local Prayer Rhythm

Why not take the daily themes from the UKI Prayer Rhythm and use them to pray for your corps and local community. You could approach your town councillors, local charities and businesses and ask how they’d like you to pray for them, then fit the prayers into a monthly calendar that follows the Prayer Rhythm daily themes.

### Start a furnace in your corps

A ‘furnace’ is a group of people who pray together – small or large, in person or online. If you sign up your prayer group to be a Boiler Room Furnace, the UKI Boiler Room Team will keep in touch with you, put useful resources your way, give you creative ideas on how to pray the Prayer Rhythm as a group, and help you stay connected with other furnaces around the territory.

Email us to sign up your prayer group as a UKI Boiler Room Furnace:

saprayernetwork@salvationarmy.org.uk