

## Prayer and God's Grace

Today's lesson is about prayer, and prayer is simply us talking with God. Prayer is an essential part of Christian life, yet it is often one of the areas we struggle with most. There is much misunderstanding and misinformation about prayer in the world. Often prayer is thought of as an activity only for the super spiritual people, which is wrong.

When we have a wrong understanding of prayer, we can easily become disinterested and disconnected in our hearts towards God. Sometimes, because we do not see immediate answers, or sense God giving us the things we ask for, we become despondent and disbelieving in the God of prayer.

In Luke 11:5-13, we read an extension of Jesus' teaching to His disciples about how to pray (The Lord's Prayer, or the disciple's prayer). Here, Jesus tells a story for the purpose of application. This is a practical story with a splash of humour, to illustrate the nature of prayer which He has just instructed the disciples on.

Jesus tells this story in such a way that **you are to imagine that you are the person Jesus is speaking of in this story,**

and you have a friend. Luke 11:5, *“which of you who has a friend...”*

The Greek New Testament word for friend in this verse is *Philos*, and it refers to anyone you have affection for. Jesus is NOT speaking of 2 strangers in this story or even acquaintances, but friends. They know each other and a relationship exists. As friends, conversations are usually extended, with verbal exchanges and expectations being more advanced than with a stranger. The verbal outworking of the friendship is different from other non-personal acquaintances in your life.

**Luke 11:5-6** A friend of yours comes *to you at midnight and says to you, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’* (This was probably Flatbread, which is a small thing to ask for).

Your friend moved into your space at the most inconvenient time (Midnight), causing you and your family the greatest disturbance and possibly discomfort or anxiety. He’s calling out to you from outside your house. There’s nothing whisper-like about this, he is speaking loud enough to wake you from your sleep. The neighbours would have heard the

whole thing. Likewise, your neighbours will know what sort of a friend's response you give him (**Your testimony is on the line here**). All this friend wants is 3 pieces of bread at midnight. It seems such an insignificant matter to you, but to him it's very important.

You see, your friend has had the same thing done to him (Lk 11:6) by someone else. Your friend has had one of their friends arrive unexpectedly and demand feeding in the middle of the night.

Your friend is obviously so poor that they can not even afford to have a few bits of bread spare in the cupboard, or any other food for that matter. Obviously, your friend is in a worse state than you. They are looking to you and your resources from a place of need and inability to help themselves. They look to you to meet their basic need for 3 small pieces of bread.

**NOTE:**

Often God introduces weakness or needs into our lives to drive us to prayer in desperation – and that's NOT a bad thing! Life often puts our faith to the test. This is not for God's benefit, but for our benefit, so we can learn what we truly believe about God. Our response to life through prayer

is a good thermometer of our spiritual health. When it comes to prayer, your greatest advantage is your weakness. Your spiritual bankruptcy is your greatest wealth in God's eyes. Your awareness of your inability to solve difficulties is your greatest asset. Our weakness creates humble room for God's strength to operate.

Luke 11:7, "*and you will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot (or will not) get up and give you anything?'*"

- You are not willing to go to any inconvenience, other than yelling at your friend from your bed.
- You think that your friend's need is insignificant compared to your comfort, and the comfort of your family.
- Your response is clear and unmistakable. Sadly, your friend now understands precisely what you think of him, and so do your neighbours.

Luke 11:8, Jesus says, *I tell you*, though he is your friend, you *will not get up and give him anything, yet because of his impudence* (Shameless persistence) you *will rise and give him whatever he needs*.

Now comes the crunch, the real point for Jesus telling this story. Your relationship is NOT enough to stir you to serve your friend through the slight discomfort of getting out of bed. Let's face it, your wife and kids would have been awake by now, not to mention your neighbours.

Then your friend takes his request to the next level because his need is real and significant to him. He has no other option; he has no-one else to plead his midnight bread case to except you.

He now starts speaking with *impudence* (Shameless persistence). Relentless and verging on rude. Speaking confrontationally in an attempt to motivate you. Jesus' point is that your friend is right to speak to you this way to motivate you to get out of bed and meet his need.

*Impudence* (Shameless persistence) is acceptable and even desirable at times of greatest need. Prayer is like that at times. Our desperation motivates strong pleading in order to get the need met.

Shameless persistence in prayer can be seen in Hebrews 4:16, "*Let us then with confidence* (Based on our relationship with God) *draw near to the throne of grace* (We

plead on the basis of the gracious nature of God), *that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*”

We pray according to a different heavenly relationship with a different set of rules than what applies here on earth when making a request of another person. Therefore, we approach God with respectful and courageous prayer in ways that we cannot approach other people.

In our prayerful persistence, we speak forthrightly to God, who will always respond to His children with grace. We plead with confidence, understanding that mercy is the only response our relationship with God can deliver.

In this story its important to recognise that you finally get out of bed and meet your friend’s need. You do NOT supply him with a whole bunch of things he does not require, **but what he needs.**

In Jesus’ story, He explains that God will also rise to His feet, as it were, and meet your needs when you persistently plead with Him. Fear of rejection should NOT stop you pleading your case. We are to reject any wrong thoughts that say God is not interested in our small requests. It is false humility if we say that God has more important things to attend to.

With our gracious and generous God, nothing is an inconvenience to Him. He welcomes our bold requests, and He responds by meeting our needs. Plus, He is even known to lavish some extra comforts on us also.

Your persistent petitions (Detailed requests) are both welcomed and invited by our Heavenly Father. Your prayers will grow you, changing you as you live and explore your relationship with the Lord through circumstances and prayer. God has sovereignly preordained your persistent prayers into the working out of His will. Your prayers have always been integrated into His eternal plans and purposes.

Back to Luke 11 and Jesus' prayer story.

Your friend's shameless persistence succeeded where your friendship with him had failed. His relationship with you failed to get you out of bed, but his persistent requests did get you out of bed. However, with God, both your relationship with Him and your prayers with Him work together to bring about God's desired result in your life. In Jesus' story, your friend got the food he needed, and it was set before his guest. Both your friend, and their friend, shared the blessing of shameless persistence.

Jesus then states the promise for believers who pray courageously. Luke 11:9-10, *“I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”* Then Jesus repeats Himself,<sup>10</sup> *“For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”*

Therefore we are to pray according to God’s will.

1 John 5:14-15 *“this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”*<sup>15</sup> *And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”*

So, what should we think when we do not receive God’s answers to our needs in the way we expected? When this happens, we can be assured of the following:

- ✓ **When we asked**, we **were answered**, but with a different answer than we expected. Or, possibly the answer we received was a “No.”
- ✓ **When we sought**, we **did receive** the thing we were seeking but possibly within different packaging than we expected. Possibly God used a totally different method of answering than what we thought He would.

- ✓ **When we knocked**, the door, or the way, **was opened** to us. However, we were prevented from walking the distance down that path that we had expected. Possibly the door or path that the Lord lead us down took us to a different future than we had expected.

When God answers differently to our expectations, that is His invitation for us to engage in the process of personal evaluation of both our beliefs and our living. This is one reason why we check if we are really praying according to His will, or are we praying to have our will fulfilled?

Do you really believe God is listening and will answer? James 1:6-7 *“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”* <sup>7</sup> *For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.”*

Check your motives for asking. James 4:3, *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”*

You see, God always answers, He always gives, and He always opens. But it is our unfulfilled expectations of God that sometimes deceive us into thinking that God has not answered or even acted.

So, how are we to respond to this problem?

Colossians 4:2 provides an insight. *“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*

We are to pray, and we are to watch. Then we respond accordingly, changing our prayer language and discussion with the Lord to match what we are, or are not, observing.

- We are to keep praying and always with gratitude.
- Remember, prayer is when you have the undivided attention of God, regardless of how you feel, He sets His focus on you, inclining His ear to you (Psa 40:1).
- Prayer challenges us to align our thinking with God’s will as we watch and learn.
- Prayer includes us in God’s means, in God’s mechanism of administering His sovereignty over our lives.
- By praying and watching we are then able to adjust our prayers and pray some more. Then, we watch our lives more to see how God’s responds. This causes us to change the way we think about God and how He answers us.

I think it's safe to assume, that in Jesus' Luke 11 story, when your friend realised that friendship was not enough to motivate you out of bed, he then adapted his language and ramped up his words to forcefully make his case to you. Obviously, his change of language is what motivated you to get out of bed. And just in case Jesus' disciples had not understood the point Jesus was teaching, He explained the following. Luke 11:11-12 *"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; <sup>12</sup> or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?"*

God never gives inappropriate or wrong answers. But He does give different answers to what we may have expected. According to His sovereign purposes, He often answers outside of our expectations.

God's motive for answering your prayer may be different to your motive for asking Him for a thing in prayer. Hebrews 12:5-6 offers insights on this subject. *"Do not regard lightly the discipline (Training) of the Lord... <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises (Corrects) every son whom he receives."*

The Lord may answer your prayers differently to how you expected because He is providing spiritual training for you. Or, possibly He is correcting something within you, an area of sin, or an area of immaturity that needs to grow.

Possibly, your prayers do not seek His glory correctly, so He answers in a way which will bring Him glory in the way that He wants.

Check that your expectations of God match the character of God. Look again at Jesus' story in Luke 11.

Luke 11:13, *"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

You may be thinking, this doesn't sound right. Is Jesus speaking about salvation or prayer? What has receiving the Holy Spirit got to do with my prayer life as a believer who already has the Holy Spirit?

- ~ First, verse 13 explains the generous nature of God who is our Heavenly Father as compared to our earthly fathers who have many faults and sins.
- ~ In this story the Holy Spirit is not given because the person asked to be given the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Holy Spirit is activated, or set to work, in response to those who simply ask the Father for something in faith.

The Father answers by supplying the activity of His Spirit in our lives to ensure that the prayer is answered according to His will and for His glory.

- ~ This has nothing to do with salvation, spiritual gifts, second blessings, tongues, or any other thing that our imaginations may think of.

**John MacArthur explains:**

*To those who ask for a gift, He gives the giver; to those who ask for an effect, He gives the cause; to those who ask for a product He gives the source; to those seeking comfort He gives the comforter (Acts 9:31); to those seeking power He gives the source of power (Acts 1:8); to those seeking help He gives the helper (John 14:26); to those seeking truth He gives the Spirit of truth (John 16:13); to those seeking “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23) He gives the producer of all those things. The indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:14) is the source of every good thing in the Christian’s life (Eph. 3:20).*

(MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Luke 11:13)

When we understand Jesus’ teaching in Luke 11, we are equipped to respond to God as the Apostle Paul says in

Ephesians 3:20-21. *“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*

Often, when we pray, God's answer to us includes far more than we intended when we asked. He uses our prayers and our lives as a launching pad for Him to express His power in ways we never imagined. In this way God is glorified through the people of His Church in ways that they would never have thought of.

#### Things to remember about God when we pray:

- ✓ God favours the underdog (1Sa 17 David & Goliath).
- ✓ He prefers the last people compared to the first one (Mt 19:30).
- ✓ He takes sides with small and insignificant people by this world's evaluation (Mk 8:7; 12:41-44; Lk 19:3).
- ✓ He shares His strength with the weak (1Co 15:43).
- ✓ He is attracted to the humble and repulsed by the proud and self-reliant (1Pe 5:5).
- ✓ He is compassionate towards the broken-hearted and repels the self-righteous and legalistic (Jas 5:11).

- ✓ He provides comfort for those who mourn, food for the hungry, clothing for the naked, resources for the poor, peace for the anxious, contentment for the dissatisfied, joy for the depressed, and hope for the downcast (Job 22:29; 2Co 7:6).
- ✓ **He is the God who listens to you!** (1Jn 5:14-15).

### **Conclusion:**

- ~ Pray with bold confidence.
- ~ Pray expectantly with open and watching eyes.
- ~ Pray gratefully as the recipient of God's mercy.
- ~ Pray with an open and soft heart attitude.
- ~ Pray as one who is being listened to and answered.