

PRINCIPLES ON PRAYER FROM PARTICULAR PARABLES

LUKE 11:5-8 & 18:2-8

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KIDS & PRAYER

Video – kids talk about prayer - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4sWNlr3zLQ>

A 4-year-old boy who was asked to return thanks before Christmas dinner. The family members bowed their heads in expectation. He began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then he thanked God for Mommy, Daddy, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa, and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for the food. He gave thanks for the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, even the Cool Whip.

Then he paused, and everyone waited--and waited. After a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked, *"If I thank God for the broccoli, won't he know that I'm lying?"*

3-year-old, Reese prayed: *"Our Father, Who does art in heaven, Harold is His name. Amen."*

A mother wrote – *"I had been teaching my three-year old daughter, Caitlin, the Lord's Prayer for several evenings at bedtime, she would repeat after me the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. I listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us some E-mail. Amen."*

I find it interesting that Jesus nowhere gave us a definition of prayer. Prayer is such a central ingredient of the Christian life and yet Jesus never told us what it is. He did however do better than that. He taught us how to pray. He did this in a few different ways:

1/ His Example. Jesus demonstrated how to pray by praying. We have records of how He prayed and what He prayed in the Bible.

2/ His Model Prayer – “The Lord’s Prayer” of Matthew 6 and Luke 11. In response to the request of the disciples in Luke 11 – *“Lord, teach us to pray”* – Jesus gave His model prayer, the Lord’s Prayer.

3/ His Teaching On Prayer. Jesus communicated various principles about prayer – such as “ask ... seek ... knock ...” again in Luke 11.

4/ His Parables on Prayer. We are going to look at 2 of these in particular – in fact 2 of the most unique and hard to understand ones as a matter of fact, but which communicate some essential truths about what Jesus wanted us to know about how to pray. They are found in Luke 11 and Luke 18. You can turn to the first one in Luke 11.

In order to understand these 2 parables we need to see them in a distinct category as “*parables of contrast*”. What do I mean by that? In both of these parables certain features are portrayed which are in sharp contrast with other features. They are part of the “*how much more*” kind of teachings that Jesus often employed. Jesus argues from the familiar to the unfamiliar, from the human to the divine. In other words, Jesus is saying to those who first heard these stories – “*IF this is true on a human level as you already know, THEN how much more is this true with God.*”

LUKE 11:5-8 – “THE GRUMPY NEIGHBOUR”

Before we read the story of Jesus in Luke 11, I want you to notice the context. Jesus’ story about the grumpy neighbor comes right after Jesus’ model prayer – the Lord’s prayer. The Lord’s prayer tells us what to pray. But how should we approach God in prayer? Jesus’ parable tells us the answer.

⁵ Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ ⁷ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity^[a] he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

The people of Jesus’ day would readily relate to this story. It was not uncommon for travelers to come late at night when it was cooler to travel. It was also not uncommon for someone to have no bread in the house. Usually only enough bread was baked for a couple days. It was not uncommon to go to a neighbour for bread. There was a communal atmosphere in the village. Everyone helped one another out. Plus it was probably known who had bread because it was commonly baked in the village ovens in the center of town. And everyone understood that hospitality was almost a sacred duty. The one who had a visitor come to the house at night must put out food for the person and could rely on the community to help. Failure to provide food would bring shame on the host and to some degree the whole village.

Jesus’ original hearers would also understand the setting very well. The house in the story seems to be a typical one from a Galilean village. Houses were usually simple

structures of 1 or 2 rooms. Two thirds of the room was on ground level. At one end of the house was a raised part, like a low platform. On it burned the charcoal stove and around it the whole family slept. Families were often large. No wonder the person in the story was reluctant to get up – he would have woken up the whole family. “No way,” we can hear him saying, “*I’m staying where I am, come back in the morning.*”

The fellow outside the locked door presumably did not take no for an answer. Perhaps he kept on knocking or just quietly repeated his request. We aren’t told those details in Jesus’ story. Eventually the householder in sheer desperation, got up, crawled all over everyone, unbolted the door, and shoved out 3 loaves of bread. He did so, Jesus says in verse 8, not because of friendship, but simply because of “*shameless audacity*”. The word in the original is “*shamelessness*” and carries with it the idea of boldness.

When Jesus started off the parable in verse 5 he says “*suppose*”. The word there carries with it the idea of “*can you imagine?*” “*Can you imagine someone coming to your door at midnight with a request for bread?*” “*Who would have the nerve to do that?*” *Who should have such shamelessness and boldness?*”

The fellow outside the door was shameless or bold for asking for bread at midnight. It is not so much a matter of persistence (which is not really in Jesus’ story), but the fact that he had the boldness to ask in the first place. The friend was relying on the fact that he could ask anything of his neighbor even at such an hour. He felt his friend would do it no matter what, because he had a need. By shamelessness and boldness he got the loaves he desired.

Remember, Jesus is talking about prayer here. What is He suggesting? The householder stands in sharp contrast to God. If even a human friend, however unwilling, can be pressured into getting out of bed at midnight and give help to someone – then HOW MUCH MORE – will God your Heavenly Father, who is good and gracious and loving, not be willing and ready to supply your needs whatever they are and whenever you approach him about these. God delights in and desires our coming to him boldly and with nerve to lay our needs before Him. He is waiting with open arms to respond and give us what we need if we ask.

This is what Jesus says later on in Luke 11 at verses 11-13.

11 “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for^[b] a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

If even a grumpy neighbour will get up and respond to a legitimate request – **HOW MUCH MORE** will God! Therefore - we can come to God with confidence, with boldness and without apology because God hears and answers prayers. Amen?

LUKE 18:1-8 – THE CALLOUS JUDGE

This story tells a real life story too that the readers could relate to. The scene is a law court. The plaintiff is a poor widow whose opponent has refused to settle a dispute. Regularly the woman kept coming to the judge and crying for justice, regularly he ignored her until he got fed up with her bugging him.

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought.³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

⁴ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

⁶ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

It was common for people in the first century to use bribes to try and bring their case to the forefront of the legal system, and even to win a favourable verdict from the judge. This widow though did not seem to have the means to do this, so she used the resources she had – persistence.

The judge, probably a Roman judge, could care less about honoring God, or pleasing people, yet even he would respond eventually to the plea of the widow – not because he wanted to, or wanted to do what was right, but simply because of the widow’s badgering. It was wearing him out listening to this woman day after day. Just to get rid of her, he heard her case and enacted justice.

What does this say about prayer and God? Does it suggest that if we are to bother and badger God enough that He’ll finally, out of desperation and exasperation, answer our prayers? NO! The point of the parable remember is found in the contrast. Jesus is saying – “**If even** this nagging, irritating, and defenseless widow can finally badger a godless and callous judge into begrudgingly doing what is merely his duty, **HOW MUCH MORE** can those who are loved by the holy and just God of the universe expect Him joyfully to leap to their aid! It is a call to pray persistently, with patience and expectation, and without losing heart.

THE PRINCIPLES ON PRAYER FROM THESE PARABLES

These 2 wonderful stories from the lips of Jesus teach us some important principles on prayer that we so often forget.

1/ BRING ANY CONCERN TO GOD AT ANY TIME

The Jewish people of Jesus' day felt prayer was generally limited to 3 times per day. Jesus taught something new – you can come to God at anytime, anywhere, with any requests.

Whatever concerns us concerns God. I know that, but it is amazing to me how often, even in times of real need I do not turn to God first. This may be true of you too. Sometimes consciously or not I think I don't want to bother God with that right now, or I suppose that I have it under control, or that God wouldn't really care about this problem.

If the man in the story had not bothered his neighbour at midnight he would not have gotten the bread he needed. If the widow had felt her concern was too trivial for the judge to respond to, or felt that the whole thing was hopeless anyway, she would not have had her concern settled.

The old gospel song expresses the same truth – *“Oh what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer.”*

One person said – *“Anything that's big enough to worry about is big enough to pray about.”* Hendriksen, a NT commentator reminds us – *“Nothing is too great for His power to accomplish, nor too small for His love to be concerned about.”*

The more we realize, in contrast to the grumpy neighbour and the callous judge, that God is our heavenly Father who lovingly listens to our prayers and wants to give us the best, the more we will be ready to bring anything to Him anytime, and anywhere with boldness, with nerve, with shamelessness, with confidence in our loving Heavenly Father whose arms are always open to us.

2/ DON'T STOP PRAYING UNTIL YOU GET AN ANSWER

We may need to be persistent at times in our prayers. Why? Not to wear God out, or because He needs our persistence in some way. But because it may be the tool that God wants to use in our lives to make us into the people He desires us to be – people of patient trust, confident faith, committed dependence.

This is what Luke says was the point of the parable in Luke 18 in verse 1:
“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Jesus was instructing his disciples and you and I to not give up, to keep on praying until you get an answer.

Following the story of the grumpy neighbour in Luke 11 Jesus teaches this about prayer –

⁹“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. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

The confidence we can have in our persistent prayers is that God will respond. Perhaps not immediately, perhaps not the way we expect or want, but He will answer because unlike the grumpy neighbour and the callous judge, God is our loving heavenly Father who wants to give us all the good we need in this life.

Bill Hybels wrote in his book – “Too Busy Not to Pray”:

If the request is wrong, God says, "No."

If the timing is wrong, God says, "Slow."

If you are wrong, God says, "Grow."

But if the request is right, the timing is right and you are right, God says, "Go!"

E.M. Bounds, who has written a number of reflective and inspiring books on prayer includes this anonymous quote on persistent prayer in his book – “*The Necessity of Prayer*”. It captures the teaching of Jesus.

“How glibly we talk of praying without ceasing! Yet we are quite apt to quit, if our prayer remained unanswered but one week or month. ... it never seems to dawn on us ... that sometimes He chooses one way, and sometimes another in which to do His work. It takes years, sometimes, to answer a prayer and when it is answered, and we look backward, we can see that it did. But God knows all the time, and it is His will that we pray, and pray, and still pray, and so come to know indeed ... what it is to pray without ceasing.”

3/ EXPECT GOD TO ANSWER

Remember and hold on to prayer promises such as these in the Word of God:

JOHN 15:7 NEW LIVING TRANSLATION (NLT)

7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!

MARK 11:24 NEW LIVING TRANSLATION (NLT)

24 I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours.

JOHN 14:14 NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)

14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

1 JOHN 5:14-15 LIVING BIBLE (TLB)

14 And we are sure of this, that he will listen to us whenever we ask him for anything in line with his will. 15 And if we really know he is listening when we talk to him and make our requests, then we can be sure that he will answer us.

Some person expressed the truth about prayer in this poem:

*Do you think, the skeptic said, That God will hear you call?
Do you think that one so great, Would hark to one so small?
Is it not a bit of pride, When all His plans are made,
To think that He should change things
Because a person prayed?
I would not have the nerve to say
Almighty God would hear me pray!*

*Mine is a heavenly Father, Not cold and far away,
But one who walks beside me, And listens when I pray.
As many as receive Christ, Are children of God I know;
My heart cries, "Abba Father!" And He would have it so.
What grace that I, His child, can say
Almighty God hears me when I pray!*