

Text: Luke 11:5-13

Title: The Lord's School of Prayer: Persistence and a Good Father

Truth: Jesus teaches us persistence and the goodness of God.

Date/Location: June 30, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

In the previous verses, Jesus taught us a model prayer that focused on God and His kingdom, our dependence on God, forgiveness of sin, and avoidance of temptation that leads to more sin.

In today's portion of the Bible, the Lord teaches us again about prayer, particularly about the appropriateness of persistence since God is good.

It is interesting that Jesus tells two parables, one in which we are to imagine ourselves as someone asking for help (needed because of a visiting friend), and the other in which we are to imagine ourselves as the person being asked for help (a father). This is a great methodology for teaching because it appeals to our senses of kindness and decency, senses which God has a thousand times greater and purer than we do. If we would ask with an expectation of help, and if we would receive a request with a decent response, so does God!

I. The Parable of the Persistent Friend, v. 5-8

- A. Suppose you have two friends. Friend 1 suddenly shows up after traveling in the cool of the evening. You do not have any food ready to share with Friend 1. This is a "social emergency" because of the importance of hospitality, and because Friend 1 is in need. But the problem is that it is midnight. To go to the market is impossible. Everyone is asleep because when it is dark, the best thing to do in a non-electricity situation is to sleep. And to bother your Friend 2 at night is rude. You must decide between two unpleasant alternatives: bother Friend 2, or not help Friend 1.
- B. So you get up the nerve to go to Friend 2 and knock loudly on the door and yell out your sad story. He is your friend, and you have a need, and he can supply for the need. But this is a very disturbing situation for Friend 2 and his family. You can imagine if someone

comes to your door at midnight and you are startled awake what you feel like. This is more alarming than a midnight phone call!

- C. It is understandable that Friend 2 does not particularly like the inconvenience of it. This is especially the case in that culture because of the typical structure of the home. Friend 2 probably lives in a one- or two-room house, and everyone is sleeping in a shared area. It may even be that they are sleeping on a platform at one end of their meager home, with some of their livestock sleeping underneath them! He cannot easily “get up.” Moving about and fiddling with a lamp and stepping over the kids and opening the door will disturb the whole family.
- D. But you are persistent because of the urgent situation. The KJV uses the word "importunity" here, which means "shameless persistence." The BDAG Greek dictionary states it this way: "lack of sensitivity to what is proper, carelessness about the good opinion of others..." It is audacity, boldness, evenchutzpah. Your need has driven you to be rude toward your friend. One need has outweighed another, and a friendship is stretched. But Friend 2 will loan you what you need because of your persistence. He has to deal with you, or he will not get any sleep! In the end, you get what you requested.
- E. Notice that the Lord frames most of the account as a rhetorical question. “Which of you shall have a friend...and he will answer... do not trouble me?” Such a thing would not happen—the friend *would* help you if you were in need. If he were mean and would not help, he would not be much of a friend! But then it is not even his status as friend that is the final motivation. Even if the friendship were on shaky ground, the importunity will move him to get up (importunate means troublesomely urgent) and help.

II. The Lesson of the Parable, v. 9-10

- A. Verses 9-10 record how Jesus applied the parable to his audience. For at least one disciple’s quest to learn about prayer, this was valuable information at the time, and it has informed the saints throughout the ages who want to know how to pray. It is an addition to the model prayer of 11:2-4. In it, the Lord emphasizes

that it is expected that we will ask God for help in all kinds of situations and for all kinds of needs.

- B. Jesus tells us to ask, seek, and knock. Seeking and knocking are metaphorical, while asking is not a metaphor at all. You can tell the Lord that you are seeking something from above; you can tell Him that you need Him to open some pathway so you can go through. You can ask whatever is in accord with His will.

The things you are asking and seeking and knocking are not selfish things; they are not things you want to spend on your own pleasures; they are not frivolous things. They are things that would please God and serve Him and show love for others and bring salvation and the like.

- C. Just like Matthew 7:7-8 says, to those who ask, seek, and knock, God will give, will find, and will open. Verse 10 puts it in promise form:

Everyone who asks receives. (from God)
He who seeks finds. (thanks to God)
To him who knocks it will be opened. (by God)

- D. The asking, seeking, and knocking are not just something you do in your prayer time. They are prayer-plus-actions. You ask via prayer. You seek through whatever means God may provide you. You knock on any doors you can find that may hold God's answer. And you keep doing that. If you just sit and pray, and do nothing, then you should not expect an answer from God. If you *cannot* do anything, that is another matter. But if you *can* do something, *do it*. Leave the results to God.
- E. Perhaps you wonder why your prayers are not answered. Are you asking amiss? Are you asking the wrong things or for the wrong reasons? Is your life in a situation with God where you can expect to be heard, or are your prayers hindered because of your relationship with your spouse or because of unconfessed sin you are trying to hide in your heart? Are you unwilling to take the practical steps that would reveal an open door, or that demonstrate you are truly seeking it?

- F. The good news is that God does not sleep, so you need not worry about waking or disturbing Him 😊. More importantly, God is far better than Friend 2. He does not get upset when we ask Him things (James 1:5); He is patient; He has infinite resources; and He delights to help His children. He is never inconvenienced. God is a giving God.
- G. So part of our lesson here is about God's goodness, but it is also that we must be praying people. Jesus specifically draws the truth from this passage that we must ask, seek, and knock (v. 9). Is there something you need? Ask! Is there something you cannot find? Seek! Is there some door that seems closed, and you need it opened? Knock. God will give, will find for you, or help you find, and He will open. Weak prayer without persistence and without trust in the goodness of God, or with vain repetition, indicates that we do not really want the thing for which we ask. The guy in the story really wanted what he needed to help Friend 1.
- H. Verse 10 reiterates the truth. Do you really believe God can and will answer your prayer? If you ask, seek, and knock, He will give, find, and open. Know the certainty of answer to prayer—God's desire to answer your prayers in the best possible way. So, pray with faith. This covers any kind of request you might have. It is a divine promise that we can count on. But also notice that ask, seek, and knock are present tense imperatives. Jesus commands us to "keep on asking...keep on seeking...and continue knocking." Do not give up!

III. The Parable of the Good Father, v. 11-12

- Jesus switches our perspective now, so we think of ourselves as the giver instead of the asker.
- A. Jesus tells the parable in the form of a question. Again, the question is rhetorical, with an obvious answer.
- B. If a child asks for food from you, no right-minded parent will give his son a dangerous or evil thing in response. If the son asks for bread, fish, or an egg, the father will not supply him with a stone, a serpent, or a scorpion. To do so would be beyond ridiculous. For a

father to expose a child to a snake or scorpion that way would be child abuse, not a funny joke.

- C. One implication of this parable is that Jesus believes that a basic requirement of a decent person is to take care of his children. That is, it is expected that a parent will provide for children the things they need: food in His illustration, but other basics are obviously included. A child cannot procure those things because He is dependent. God reminds us this way that we too are dependent on Him. The parent will not give a child dangerous or useless things.

IV. The Lesson of the Parable, v. 13

- A. For this second parable, the meaning is clear. First, Jesus presupposes that **people are evil**. He does not presuppose we are good. Evil persists in us even if we are saved, and it permeates us if we are not a child of God by faith. There is no conceivable way that Jesus would agree to the idea that “people are good.”
- B. Second, despite being evil, **people know how to give good things** to their children. We have enough common grace for that. If parents are evil toward their children, we have remedies for that.
- C. Third, **God is far better than people**. There is no evil in Him. He is not just any old father. He is our *heavenly* Father, without sin or ill motivation. If we ask, He will give good gifts.

This is an easy-to-understand argument from the lesser (us) to the greater (God). Jesus shows us that if we, who are evil by nature, give good gifts to our children, how could we not expect the perfect God and our heavenly Father, to give good gifts to those who ask? We can expect that and should count on it.

Sometimes we believe God is less kind than our earthly friends and fathers. He does not give us everything we want, and prayers seem to go unanswered. But do you believe—really—that God is less than humans? Let us honor God with the true belief that He answers our prayers. We have experienced that, though we may not have noticed as carefully as we could have.

- D. One of the best good gifts that He could give is the ministry of His Spirit. Matthew's parallel passage in 7:7-11 stops at "good gifts."

Luke, recording more detail or describing a separate occasion, adds that God will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. He gives not just things or blessings, but Himself!

- E. This matter of the Holy Spirit is theologically weighty. We must not read this in some kind of charismatic or Pentecostal way—for the original recipients certainly would not have thought that way about Jesus's promise. This refers to the Spirit's basic presence in the life of a believer, like what the modern believer experiences as described in Romans 8:1-17 and 26-27.

We note that all believers after the Pentecost event of Acts 2 are blessed with a tremendous ministry of the Holy Spirit. Believers before Pentecost had most of these as well. After Acts 2, Christians are:

1. Baptized by the Spirit – 1 Cor. 12:13.
2. Indwelt by the Spirit – Romans 8:9.
3. Sealed by the Spirit – Ephesians 4:30.
4. Regenerated by the Spirit – Titus 3:5-6.
5. Guided/anointed/illuminated by the Spirit – 1 John 2:20, 27.
6. Gifted by the Spirit – 1 Cor. 12:7-11.
7. Filled to one extent or another by the Spirit – Eph. 5:18.

The upshot of all this is that there is no need today to ask God for the Holy Spirit separately from salvation. Asking for the Spirit is part of "asking" to be saved. God will answer that prayer upon your true and repentant faith in Jesus Christ.

When reading this passage a few years ago, I noted that the giving of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the context of prayer. If you ask God for not just things but for the Spirit to help in prayer (correlate Romans 8:26), then He will respond, and you will have the help you need to pray. This request is not, as charismatics claim, proof that all Christians must ask for the Holy Spirit to indwell them.

Conclusion

You might not understand how prayer and God's sovereignty work together, but you do not have to. The Bible is clear that God sovereignly commands us to pray; it tells us that God is a giving

God; and it tells us that we must be persistent in prayer. Certainly, we will be imperfect in persistence, but keep at it!

If we pray in the manner of Luke 11:2-4, with persistence and trust in God's goodness (11:5-13), then we are justified in believing that God will hear and answer our prayers. He will answer with the best answer at the time, but He will hear.

Are you struggling in some area of your life or ministry—I mean with spiritual things like maturity or trials or temptations or wisdom or witnessing? Do you think it is possible that you do not have because you do not faithfully ask (James 4:2-3)? Or do you ask with wrong motives? Or you are living in sin (Psalm 66:18)? Or you are asking for the wrong things? Or do you have the wrong priorities? Do you have some ongoing iniquities that are separating you from God (Isaiah 59:1-2)? Are you wavering (James 1:6)? Are you not seriously seeking, knocking, and asking?

If you abide in Christ, ask Him and He will care for you (John 15:7). Ask in His name (John 14:13). Ask according to His will (1 John 5:14-15). If you keep His word, trust Him to send the answer (1 John 3:21-22) that is best for you (Rom. 8:28).

Are you persistent in prayer, or lazy in prayer? Do you truly trust in God's goodness or just pay it lip service?

Note the relationship between the parties in both parables: friend-friend, and father-son. God is the perfect Friend and kindest Father. This relationship forms the basis of the request and answer. If there is no relationship, there is no certainty of receiving an answer. Some random person coming up to you and asking for something cannot expect to receive from you. A person who rejects God must not expect that God will “drop everything” and help them whenever they need it, as if God is a servant or a genie from an oil lamp. For prayer to “work” then like Jesus pictures in this parable, there must be **a relationship, a right relationship, a real need, a genuine motive**. Do you have those things?

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