

The Persistent Friend

Luke 11:5-10

With Study Questions

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And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves;’⁶ for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him;’⁷ and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you?’⁸ I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.⁹ “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Luke 11:5-10).

Introduction

Day after day, week after week, year after year we pray. And if we’re going to be honest we must acknowledge that a very high percentage of the things we pray for do not unfold the way we would like. We pray for healing, jobs, relationships, salvation of souls and it almost appears that the amount of answers (if I can say it this way) *that we like* are the minority.

It doesn’t require keen insight to recognize that every prayer request for healing in every bulletin in every church in the world 150 years ago eventually received some type of negative answer from God. We might even notice in our prayers, as the person we’re praying for grows sicker, a transition from asking for healing to asking for faith and encouragement in the face of the inevitable. Instead of praying, “Lord heal him/her” we might pray “Lord grant him/her peace.”

Religious charlatans and the unlearned, who are easily victimized by charlatans, seize this conundrum by approaching prayer the way people approach the lottery. They find one person who has had their prayer answered *just the way they like* (or someone who is willing to say that) and parade them before the masses as the norm—assuming you can learn the proven methods of successful praying. This is reckless and abusive and these charlatans and their churches should be exposed and avoided.

Mockers also pounce upon the apparent inactivity of God when it comes to prayer. I recall a dialogue with an atheist who was looking for evidence for the existence of God. I asked him what kind of evidence would suffice. His response was, “answered prayer.” It made me wonder if he was, at some point, the victim of foul theology so often surrounding the issue of prayer.

Other, perhaps well meaning people, suggest that prayer just for us. And there is certainly an element of truth in that. A person who spends a great deal of time in prayer might develop a greater appreciation for intimacy for with their heavenly Father and His loving attendance in our lives and hearts. But the Scriptures don’t present our prayers are merely something to grant us peace of mind and contentment. There is a function to prayer in the events of this world.

But it is not uncommon for people to approach prayer as if it’s magic; as if God were a genie rather than a Father. We begin to doubt His existence because we have rubbed the lamp to no avail. The nature of this parable seems to address that very temptation. The call to be “**persistent**” in verse 8 in the light of what appears to be a disinterested neighbor addresses those who feel that their prayers stop at the ceiling—or at a “**door that is now shut.**”

Yet the Scriptures clearly indicate otherwise. The door is very open. The Apostle Paul writes that “**we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him**” (Ephesians 3:12). James informs us that “**the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much**” (James 5:16). Finding passages in the Bible indicating the value is prayer is an easy endeavor. The very point Jesus appears to be making in this parable is summarized in the commonly quoted words: “**ask, seek and knock**” with the promise of a divine response.

The Point of the Parable

Before proceeding further, let us recognize the point of this parable. In a similar message we’re informed:

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1).

The point of this parable can be summed up in that one word from verse 8 “**persistence**” (*anaideia*); a word that can also be translated

impudence, insolence, shamelessness and so on. We all know people like this...we might be this kind of person; the kind of person who isn't afraid to ask over and over without losing heart. My brother-in-law, talking about his dog, mentions how every time the doorbell would ring he would spring up in excitement, bark incessantly and sprint to the door to see who it was. Never once, in ten years, was it for him.

It is in the face of the temptation of give up that Jesus tells this parable. In the same way that Christians should **“not grow weary in doing good” (2 Thessalonians 3:13)** even when it appears the good which is done yields no immediate observable benefits, we should not grow weary in prayer even when it appears that our prayers have no immediate, observable answer. It's been said that God always answers prayer and the answer may be “yes, no or wait.” But we also must realize that the answer may look nothing like the request.

An Impractical Expectation

Is it even practical to expect prayers to be answered as asked? If there is any specificity to our prayers this poses a logically impossible situation. Some people are praying for one candidate while others for another. Some pray for our church to get a building while other are praying for their church to get the same building. Some pray that God would heal while others might pray that God would take the saint home. Some pray that they would get business deal while another Christian is praying he gets the same business deal. The potential conflicts in human prayer in a world of billions are beyond calculation.

And we're not even speaking here of ungodly prayers.

You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (James 4:2, 3).

One couple spoke of the particular and specific Mercedes Benz they had claimed before God in prayer. At best, as the Apostle Paul teaches, **“we do not know what to pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26).**

Our First Prayer

And there is not merely conflict between the prayers of different people and ungodly prayers; there is conflict within our own prayers. What is our first prayer? Either first in order or first in priority is that God would save us and sanctify us. We are to **“seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33)**. We must be careful not to presume to tell God how to do this and then frustrated that He is not doing it the way we desire.

I wasn't a great athlete but I was good enough to be on the field with great athletes and I had great coaches. My first request was always that they would be willing to coach me. The last thing appropriate for me to do would be to start telling him how to coach me. That doesn't mean that he doesn't ask me things and tell me to ask him things; it's just a matter of recognizing the nature of the relationship and what is the desired goal.

A Disastrous, Best Answer

And one thing we need to be willing to recognize (and this may be a hard pill to swallow) is the possibility that an answer that appears disastrous is the best answer?

We respond to each other's requests (and certainly prayer is more than just requesting things, but that seems to be the context of this parable) within the boundaries of our ability. My children might make a request and I'll seek to give them something superior to the request in my efforts to meet their physical needs, edify their character, help shape their hearts, consider the needs of their siblings and mother etc. But I am limited in every way. I am limited in wisdom, resources, power and so on.

But God has no limits when it comes to wisdom, resources and power. The holy, wise and sovereign answers of God extend to the grave itself. For a human being to take another human beings life (assuming we're not talking about a convicted criminal) in order for lessons to be learned would be unthinkable (And here lies one greater problem when we think of God in purely human terms), but for God to do this is within the reasonable boundaries of that which He would ordain and bring to pass.

Death itself figures into the calculations of a God who has the power and inclination to work all things **“for good to those who love (Him) God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28)**. I am sure that cavilers would growl at this but death is something appointed for every man (Hebrews 9:27). It is simply part of the reality we all observe. How glorious that God has a His own just, holy and glorious

design, even for that. So much so that He watches, as it were, from heaven with a disposition of a parent watching his child sleep, as conveyed by the words:

**Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints
(Psalm 116:15).**

The Prayer Just Given

As I write this I wonder if this will spur us to pray more or dissuade from praying at all. If God is so vast, wise and powerful and my prayers so full of conflict, sin and confusion maybe I should just keep my mouth shut. But we're not called to keep our mouths shut. We're called to ask, seek and knock. Someone might respond, "But God doesn't need my prayers. He's fully capable." That answer is true. God has no need of His creatures. God doesn't need angels; but He certainly uses angels and they are swift and powerful in His service.

And God has determined that the prayers of men will be a powerful and effective instrument in His work of redemption. God is doing a redemptive work in history which includes the prayers of men and women. We do not know how to pray but just prior to this parable Jesus taught His disciples to pray.

The prayer He taught them would be that the name of God would be hallowed, or recognized as holy, unique throughout the earth. We are to pray that Christ's kingdom would continue to grow and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are to pray for sustenance (bread) that we might continue to be nourished toward that end (the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom). We are to live with an awareness of our need of forgiveness and a willingness to forgive others, while at the same time praying that temptations are far removed from our lives and the enemy would have no sway in our hearts, minds and actions.

As we mature we can expect our prayers to be in greater conformity with God's gracious plan of redemption. And we must not be discouraged because we don't see the answers we like knowing that when our eyes are fully opened the answers will have been immeasurably superior to the requests.

In the same way it is with great difficulty (if not impossible at times) to know why God has ordained certain events, it is equally impossible to isolate the particular answer God has given to a particular prayer. We

trust, nonetheless, that God is accomplishing glorious things and has called us to participate to persevere with a dogged determination and not lose heart.

Questions for Study

1. Discuss the various errors, misuses and criticisms surrounding the issue of prayer (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is the main point of this parable (pages 3, 4)?
3. Is it practical to expect all prayers to be answered as asked? Explain (pages 4, 5).
4. What is our first prayer? What assumptions are we making with that first prayer (page 5)?
5. Is it possible that the best answer to our prayer might appear to be disastrous? Explain (pages 5, 6).
6. Does God need our prayers (page 6)?
7. What is the purpose of prayer (pages 6, 7)?

