

LESSONS FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - The Parables - Pt 10

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THE JOY OF KNOWING THE GOD WHO PROVIDES

Luke 11:5-10 - “And he said to them, ‘Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, [6] for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; [7] and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? [8] I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. [9] And I tell 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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

The ***placing*** of this parable has significance. Jesus is still responding to the request of one of His disciples in the first verse of this chapter - “**Lord, teach us to pray...**” Verses 2-4 give the most famous response ever given to that question. In those verses Jesus outlines the ***form and content*** of Christian prayer. The ***ingredients*** of prayer are mixed together in rich harmony and simplicity.

But Jesus isn't finished answering the disciple's question regarding prayer. The lesson isn't over. **Knowing how to pray is never enough.** Mechanics aren't enough. Instructions alone won't build the prayer life. Having dealt with the **content** of prayer, Jesus now deals with the **practice** of prayer. Yes, there is a place for learning how to pray. Yes, there are right ways and wrong ways of praying, and the Christian must take the time to learn the difference. Even the apostle James tells us we can ask in such a way as to render the asking useless and fruitless. We must pray properly.

But Jesus is a good teacher. He refuses to let us think that knowing **how** to pray is the same as **praying**. It's not what I **know**. It's what I **do** with what I know that counts.

John Baillie expressed the same truth when he wrote these words in his book "**The Diary of Blessing**" - "**Though one may be a competent art critic without even having handled a brush or a chisel, and may legitimately pass judgement upon a book which one could not have written oneself, in the life of the soul there are no such privileges: there is no knowledge at all unless it is also and equally action, and if it is not that, then it is worse than ignorance.**"

"Worse than ignorance." So it is. In the Christian life, knowledge of spiritual truth that isn't applied is not only **unused**, which would be wasteful enough. It is also **damning**. So, in this little parable following what we call "the Lord's Prayer," Jesus teaches how to go about the business of praying.

One more comment may be necessary. Jesus frequently used **bad examples** to teach **good lessons**. In **Luke 16:1-9** He talked about a crooked servant to teach the importance of planning ahead - using your material goods to lay up benefit in another kingdom after this age is over. In **Luke 18:1-8** He talked about a dishonest judge who had to be talked into giving justice to a poor widow.

Jesus uses a similar technique here to teach the importance of boldness in prayer. Jesus isn't **comparing** God to a person who has to be hounded into finally giving us his attention. Rather, Jesus is **contrasting** God to that kind of person. You **compare** things that are **similar**. You **contrast** things that are very **different**.

When Reni and I went to look at engagement rings, the jeweler would take out the ring and then place it on a black velvet cloth. The **contrast** of the bright diamond against the black background makes the stone look brighter.

That's what Jesus is doing in this parable. He's saying, "Your God isn't like that sleepy neighbor. Your God is a Heavenly Father who anxiously waits to hear from His children. Yours is a Father who tells you to come and ask for daily bread" (**Luke 11:3**).

That's where this parable comes in:

- 1) **THERE IS THE SIMPLE FACT OF HUMAN NEED**

Luke 11:5-6 - “And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, [6] for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.'"

"I have nothing!" Those are the important words. The guest was unexpected. A situation arose that was unplanned. The host simply couldn't handle the demands of this surprise.

I know everyone knows what I'm talking about when I say there come into our lives ***times and situations that leave our cupboards bare.*** How down to earth Jesus is! How He understands our limitations! Who could expect a visitor to come wanting to eat at midnight? Who plans for something like that?

Jesus is saying ***sooner or later, life will be like that for you.*** Sooner or later life demands more than you have. Sooner or later you know the pressure of scraping for resources just to cope. Sickness comes. Bereavement comes. Financial set-back comes.

Also, there are **needs of the soul - spiritual challenges that seem to ask more of us than we can give.** Think back even to the content of the prayer lesson Jesus just gave His disciples in this very chapter. How many of us genuinely put the will of God, being done through our lives each day we live on earth, as high on our agenda as the angels do around the throne of heaven? "**Lord, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**"

How many of us have felt the weight of being called upon - **demanded by God** - to extend forgiveness to our very worst enemy when our own hearts are still freshly aflame with rage and bitterness. Yet we know we must forgive if we want to receive God's forgiveness for our own sin?

Those are just two of the demands pressed into the ears of the disciples by Jesus in the Lord's Prayer. Surely they must have silently looked at each other and wondered, "**How in the world are we to do these things?**" Those are times when the soul's cupboards are bare indeed.

That's why, only one generation ago, few people left a church service without kneeling at the front of a sanctuary or prayer room to **ask God for strength to do what the Word had just enjoined them to do.**

People understood that spiritual growth wasn't an **academic** issue. It was the igniting of truth in the human will by the Holy Spirit. They were being called into a supernatural realm. Who would be such a fool as to walk out of the sanctuary, or get up from the study of God's Word, merely to think that he had the strength and ability to simply follow the instructions to sainthood?

There is temptation enough to trip up the most astute and clever. There is sin colorful enough to attract the most careful. The devil will quickly spot and devour any who would trust their walk with the Lord to the power of their own wisdom or resolve. The call of true discipleship calls for resources beyond our own possessing.

So Jesus calls us to sense our need and to come in prayer for grace to help. If you don't sense that need, you probably won't pray. At least not very often.

2) **OUR HEAVENLY FATHER SUFFERS NONE OF THE OBSTACLES FELT BY THE BESEECHED HOST IN THE PARABLE**

Look at the neighbor's tired words:

Luke 11:7-8 - “....and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? [8] I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.”

Jesus uses this picture of the reluctant friend to quicken our dull minds to the greatness and readiness of God in contrast. This friend was sound asleep. But God never suffers fatigue - **Psalm 121:3** - “**He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.**”

This friend was reluctant to get up and help. But not so with our God - **Romans 8:32** - “**He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**”

This friend had only limited resources of his own. Our Heavenly Father is never bound by limitations of power or grace - **Philippians 4:19** - “**And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.**”

These are the truths Jesus is making us see. By His carefully chosen words, Jesus forces my own mind to contrast God with this tired friend. ***Sure, this slumbering person needs to be nagged to death to cough up a few loaves of bread. But certainly the creator of the universe isn't like that! And certainly, if we, evil as we are, can be roused to do something good like this for our friends and family, how much more would our own Creator and Redeemer do for His children who call upon Him in need!***

There is such a thing as unanswered prayer. The Bible does address the subject in a few different ways. But, as you study the teaching of Jesus, ***He rarely spoke of it.*** He addressed the need of having a forgiving heart toward others if we wanted God to hear our plea for forgiveness. And He talked on other occasions about the need for faith in our requests, but other than that, He never discussed unanswered prayer.

He seemed to put all of His energies into making God obviously approachable, loving, anxious to hear and answer, attentive to the most feeble cry for help. He made promises that, far from hindering faith and expectancy, almost seemed ***too easy and too big to be true.***

One of those promises is right in today's text:

3) **JESUS STRESSED THE OVERWHELMING SUCCESS OF
CALLING ON FATHER GOD**

You probably know these words without your Bible:

Luke 11:9-10 - “And I tell 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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

How many of you have prayed for something but didn't get it? So what are we going to do with Jesus' words here? He doesn't just say "***some people***" receive when they ask. He says "***everyone who asks receives.***"

Just how does that process work? Let me give you my understanding of Jesus' words in these two verses. I think it's a mistake to interpret Jesus' teaching about ***asking, seeking, and knocking*** as though those were just different ways of repeating the same thought. If that were the case, Jesus would simply be saying "***If you don't get your answer when you first ask, then just ask and ask and ask some more.***"

If that is true, then **asking** is, “Lord, please grant my request.”

Seeking is, “Lord, please, O please, grant my request!” And **knocking** is, “Please, O please, O please, O please, grant my request!”

But remember, Jesus had much to say about people who just kept talking when they prayed, thinking they would be heard if they just piled up words over and over - **Matthew 6:7** - “**And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.**”

Now I **do** think this passage in Luke eleven deals with **persistence** in prayer - just as its similar cousin parable of the persistent widow and the unjust judge in **Luke 18:1-8**. But the persistence being urged is the persistence to never give up in faith and trust and reliance on God, **not** the empty repetition of phrases and words. The whole point of those parables is **God isn't like a tired friend or an unjust judge**. You don't have to beg and beg to get his attention.

Boldness and persistence are encouraged by Jesus because ***there are many forces at work in this world and in our own minds that tend to keep us from coming and asking.*** Imagine how that poor individual would feel going to wake up his neighbor for bread in the middle of the night. That's a very humbling experience. Or, imagine how hard it would be to trust God in prayer once you allowed the idea to be planted in your mind that He's not fair or just or compassionate in his dealings with you - like an ***unjust judge.***

In this parable Jesus is shouting, "***Don't think like that! Don't be lulled to sleep in your practice of prayer!***"

Then what do the asking, seeking and knocking verbs mean? Why does Jesus use three terms instead of just one? Here's my opinion: I think those terms refer to ***three elements of prayer.*** I think Jesus is trying to show ***what must be involved in coming to Father God in the first place.*** And when these three terms are kept in mind, everyone who asks receives.

- a) **Asking** is simply ***bringing the request to God.*** Nothing gets off the ground without this step. The reason Jesus actually has to ***tell*** us to ask is ***asking can sometimes be the last thing we really want to do.*** It can feel like waking up a neighbor at midnight.

Proud, self-reliant people won't ask. ***Only people who trust God more than they trust themselves will truly ask in prayer.*** The natural habit of ***not*** praying grows in our hearts like dust under the bed. The Apostle James reminds us that many believers have not simply because they ask not.

But while asking is vitally important, there is more to prayer than just asking.

- b) **Seeking is relentlessly pursuing God's will above my own desires.** Jesus had just taught these same disciples to pray for the accomplishment of God's will on earth (that is, in ***their lives and circumstances***) just as it was constantly being perfectly fulfilled in heaven. I take that to mean prayer is to be the ultimate form of ***seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.***

John 15:7 - “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

I take that verse to mean that the very words I utter in prayer are words **baked** in the oven of God's Word - **shaped** by the imprint and press of His will in my life. **His words shape my will.** I want His will more than I want my own way. I want His purposes accomplished in my life more than I desire my own comfort or happiness. I'm more interested in my soul prospering than my bank account.

So as I **pray**, I **seek**. And that word "**seek**" is so fitting and descriptive. It means I'm not just looking at the **surface** of things. I'm not **rushing to conclusions**. I'm not forming judgements about God's fairness or goodness. I'm watching for areas where I need to **change my attitude**. I'm looking for times of apparent silence where God wants to gift my life with patience and endurance. I'm watching out for these things.

- c) **Knocking means I am ready to move - to go through the door of His will, especially in the area I am bringing to God in prayer.**

This is so important I want to stay with it for a minute. There are all sorts of people who pray for revival who aren't interested in revival at all. They don't want to give God any more time.

They're maxed out in terms of what they feel God could reasonably expect of them. They don't want to give up any of the attachments they have to the world around them. They just pray for revival.

There are people who ask God to purify their lives. But they don't really want God to take the pruning shears to something they hold dear. The greatest joy of their life is their pride in not being legalistic. And they're going to prove it.

There are people who pray for God to keep their children strong in the Lord who never bother to get out of bed and bring them to Sunday School. To all those people, Jesus says prayer is like ***knocking on a door.***

We used to play a game when we were kids. We would go out when it got a little dark, run up and down the street knocking on doors. When someone would come to open the door, we would take off and hide. Somehow we thought that whole process was very clever.

Lots of people pray like that. And it shows they never really meant business in their praying. Later on they might crab that God doesn't care, or prayer is hard work, but really, the problem was totally different. ***Prayer is more than your words. It's the direction of your life.*** It's like coming to a ***doorway***. Doorways - ***all*** doorways - are designed to ***take*** you somewhere. Why else would anyone ***knock*** on a door in the first place?

This final step is Jesus' simple way of saying God takes our prayers more seriously than we do. He ***assumes*** when we pray we want to be ***on the move***. And if we don't want to ***move*** but we still want to ***knock*** it shouldn't surprise us that our prayers are sometimes unanswered. But (and I think this is Jesus' point) they're not unanswered because God is hard and unwilling. They were unanswered because, for all our asking, we weren't really interested in ***cooperating*** with the unfolding vision God had for our lives and circumstances.

Never be embarrassed to bring your request to God. He's never tired or asleep. Seek His will above your own plans. Seek to make sure your asking is **informed by and in response to His words abiding and ruling all aspects of your life.** Make sure your life is consistent with your request. Watch for what He might want to do in your soul as you bring Him your request. When that is fully and faithfully done, Jesus said nobody leaves the throne empty handed.